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Understanding Teacher Morale

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UNDERSTANDING
TEACHER
MORALE

DECEMBER 2016

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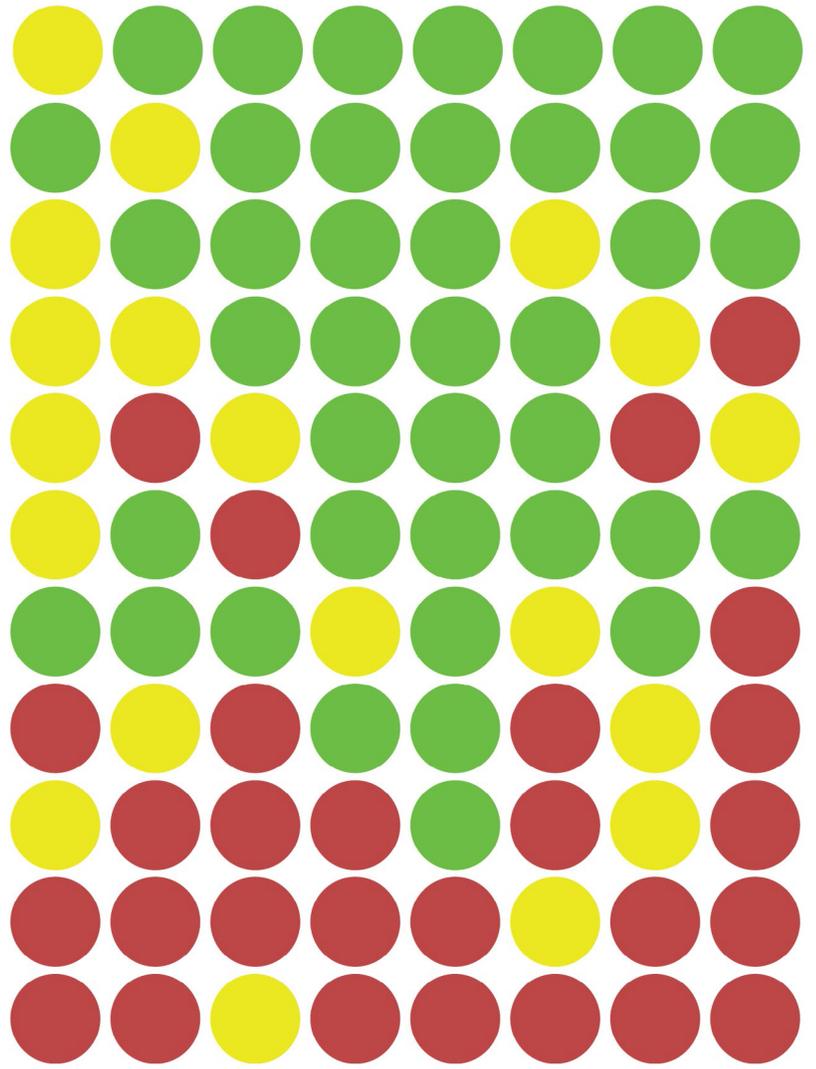
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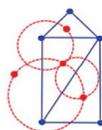
Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium
Chesterfield | Colonial Heights | Goochland | Hanover | Henrico | Powhatan | Richmond | VCU

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Teacher Morale

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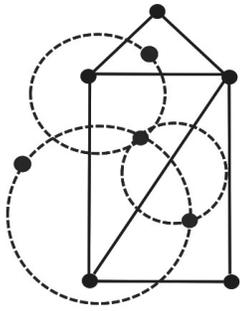
Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium

About MERC

In 1991, Dr. John Pisapia established the Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium (MERC) at Virginia Commonwealth University. As the Head of the Division of Educational Studies at VCU, Dr. Pisapia and fellow faculty members established the consortium as a mutually beneficial research partnership between the School of Education at VCU and seven local school divisions. The idea was that a pooling of resources between the university and the local school divisions presented the opportunity to raise the relevance and enhance the impact of educational research across the region. This proposal gained support from the Dean of the School of Education, Dr. John Oehler, and the University President, Dr. Eugene Trani. 25 years later MERC continues to develop this model of research partnership between PK12 practitioners, policymakers and VCU faculty and students.

Our Team

Jesse Senechal, Interim Director
David Naff, Assistant Director
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Our Mission

As a partnership between Richmond-area school divisions and Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Education, the Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium leads research that addresses enduring and emerging issues in PK12 education with the goal of informing policy, building the professional knowledge and skills of key stakeholders, contributing to the body of scholarly knowledge, and ultimately impacting outcomes relevant to students, schools, and communities.

Our Principles

Relevance: Our work addresses topics in ways that are relevant to those engaged in PK12 policymaking and practice.
Impact: The knowledge generated through our work is focused on its use and impact on policy and practice.
Rigor: Our work is conducted in ways that reflect rigor and quality in design and implementation.
*Multiple Perspectives*: The relevance, impact, and rigor of our work is enhanced by engaging stakeholders that represent a range of experiences, perspectives, and knowledge bases.
Relationships: The strength of our partnership relies on strong relationships between individual, organizations, and communities that are characterized by communication and trust.

Our Goals

1. Conduct and disseminate community-engaged research that has direct and indirect impacts on critical youth, school, and community outcomes.
2. Develop the research knowledge and research capacity of school division personnel and university research partners through collaborations involving professional development.
3. Build community and social networks between VCU units, school divisions, researchers, policy makers and practitioners.
4. Contribute to the local, state and national policy and scholarly dialogue on education.
5. Secure funding that supports the work of the partnership and builds the capacity of MERC to fulfill its mission.

The MERC REGION
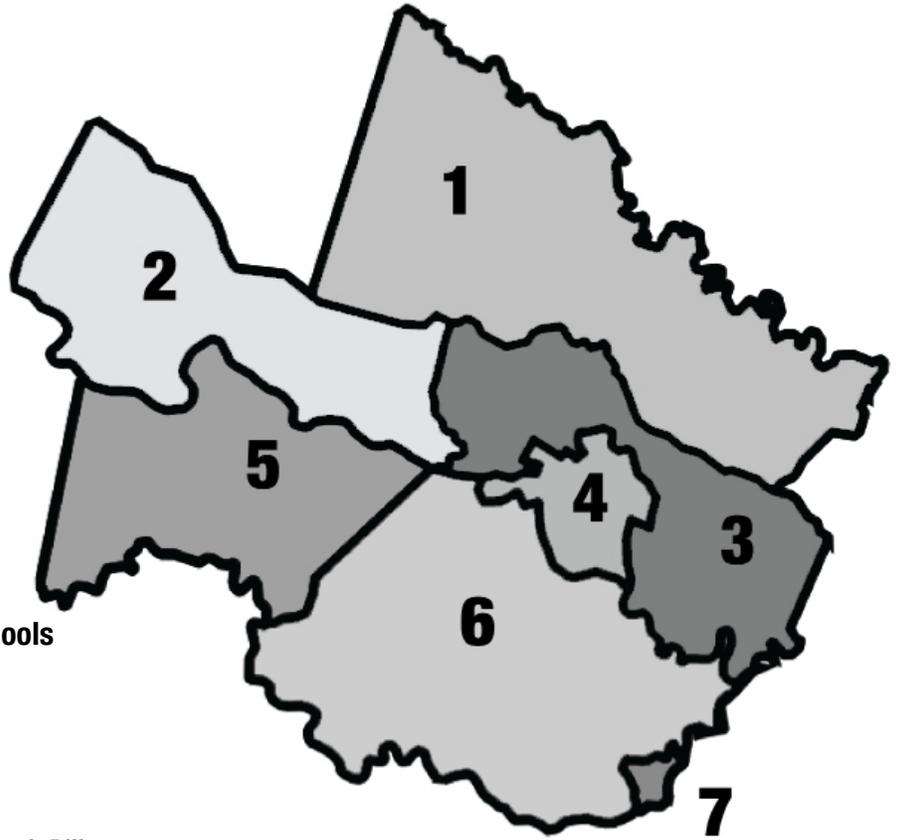
1 Hanover County Public Schools
High Schools: 4
Middle Schools: 4
Elementary Schools: 15
Teachers: 1,340
Total Enrollment: 18,039
Superintendent: Dr. Michael Gill

2 Goochland County Public Schools
High Schools: 1
Middle Schools: 1
Elementary Schools: 3
Teachers: 202
Total Enrollment: 2,594
Superintendent: Dr. Jeremy Raley

3 Henrico County Public Schools
High Schools: 9
Middle Schools: 12
Elementary Schools: 46
Teachers: 3,443
Total Enrollment: 51,425
Superintendent: Dr. Patrick Kinlaw

4 Richmond Public Schools
High Schools: 7
Middle Schools: 7
Elementary Schools: 25
Teachers: 2,058
Total Enrollment: 24,868
Superintendent: Thomas Kranz

5 Powhatan County Public Schools
High Schools: 1
Middle Schools: 1
Elementary Schools: 3
Teachers: 326
Total Enrollment: 4,276
Superintendent: Dr. Eric Jones

6 Chesterfield County Public Schools
High Schools: 11
Middle Schools: 12
Elementary Schools: 38
Teachers: 3,840
Total Enrollment: 60,103
Superintendent: Dr. James Lane

7 Colonial Heights Public Schools
High Schools: 1
Middle Schools: 1
Elementary Schools: 3
Teachers: 248
Total Enrollment: 2,837
Superintendent: Dr. Joseph Cox

Contents

5 - Reflections and Recommendations

iv

1 WHY TEACHER MORALE MATTERS

According to the most recent data from the National Center for Educational Statistics, across our fifty states, there are approximately 14,000 school districts overseeing approximately 98,000 schools, which serve over 50 million students in grades kindergarten through 12.[1] Support for this massive system comes from over 600 billion dollars annually in local, state, and federal tax dollars.[2] Considering these numbers it is fair to say that our system of public education represents one of our country's largest collective investments.

There is a good reason for this. Public schools are important to our country's economic, political and social goals. Since the inception of public education in our country, advocates have argued that schools are critical to the success of our national economy, are the central mechanism for individual social and economic mobility, and provide the foundational knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary for informed citizenship within a multicultural democracy.[3] Considering the state of our nation in the wake of the 2016 presidential election, we can see that the stakes are high. Schools are essential to preparing our future workforce as well as the future citizens and political leaders that will make the critical decisions essential to our country's progress.

Our massive investment in the public education system is truly an investment in our nation's basic social and economic order.

At the heart of this system is the daily work of three and half million public school teachers.[4] It is the teachers that design the lessons, deliver the instruction, assess learning, and work collaboratively with colleagues, school leaders and parents. They also build the critical relationships with students and create communities within classrooms and schools. It is ultimately the teachers that are charged with the task of achieving the broad goals of public education.

Unfortunately, the current state of the teaching workforce does not provide an encouraging picture. The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher found that teacher job satisfaction nationally fell 23 percent between 2008 and 2012 – its lowest level in 25 years.[5] The survey also found that over half of teachers felt "under great stress several days a week"- an increase of 15 percent since the mid-1980s.[6] Dissatisfaction among teachers is also evident through news and social media, where it has become common for teachers to speak out publicly about their struggles with the direction

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1   Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016

2   Kena, Hussar, McFarland, de Brey, Musu-Gillette, Wang, & Dunlop Velez, 2016

3   Labaree, 1997; Tyack, 1974

4   Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016

5   MetLife Survey

6   Santos, 2012

of the profession.[7] Further evidence of teacher dissatisfaction is found in a recent resurgence of teacher strikes and "sickouts" in cities such as Chicago and Detroit.[8] Taken together, there is a rising tide of dissatisfaction among the nation's teaching force. If, as argued above, teachers are the foundation of our educational system designed to achieve goals of critical social importance, this rising tide of dissatisfaction is troubling. Several lines of research on teachers and their work provide strong evidence supporting this point.

First, there is an extensive body of literature documenting disaffected and demoralized teachers experiencing various forms of job withdrawal which has a range of negative effects.[9] Disaffected teachers distance themselves emotionally from their students and have lower expectations.[10] They also have higher rates of absenteeism, which disrupts daily routines, is correlated with student absenteeism, and undermines school climate.[11] Ultimately, there is evidence that teacher disengagement has negative effects on student achievement and growth.[12]

3,500,000
K12 public school teachers in the United States

935,000
city school teachers

1,100,900
suburban

393,800
town

948,100
rural

Problems with teacher dissatisfaction have also been closely tied to the documented challenges of teacher retention.[13] Teaching has higher attrition rates than most professions including nursing, architecture, engineering, law, and academia.[14] Retention of new teachers is of special concern, with over half of new teachers choosing to leave their school placements within the first five years.[15]

Studies have documented that one of the primary causes of teacher attrition is a set of factors related to teachers' experiences and satisfaction with work.[16] Teacher turnover, like teacher dissatisfaction, has been shown to have a number of negative effects. When teachers leave, expertise is lost, the coherence of instructional programming suffers, the workloads of remaining teachers increase, and school climate erodes.[17] Studies have also shown that teacher turnover is associated with increased levels of student discipline problems and lower student achievement.[18]

The significance of this problem cannot be

7   Bowers, 2016; Turner 2013; Borowski, 2014; Kingkade, 2013; "Pasco County Teacher," 2016; Reeves, 2015; Strauss, 2012, 2014; "I Quit You," 2013; Weicker, 2015.

8   Hilgendorf, 2013; Perez-Pena, 2016; Pearson & Berlinger, 2016

9   Chang, 2009; Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001

10   Chang, 2009; Farber, 1984; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011

11   Bowers, 2001; Bruno, 2002; Jacobs & Kritsonis, 2007; Kronholz, 2013; Miller, Murnane, & Willett, 2008

12   Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007; Damle, 2009; Woods & Montagno, 1997

13   Ingersoll & Perda, 2009; Ingersoll, 2001

14   Ingersoll & Perda, 2009

15   Ingersoll, 2001

16   Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001; Rhodes, Nevill, & Allan, 2004

17   Guin, 2004; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013; Kraft, Marinell, & Yee, 2016

18   Ingersoll, 2001, 2002; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013

Effects of Low Teacher Job Satisfaction and Morale

Kraft, M. A., Marinell, W. H., & Yee, D. (2016). School Organizational Contexts, Teacher Turnover, and Student Achievement: Evidence from Panel Data. Working Paper from The Research Alliance for New York City Schools.

Using the results of a longitudinal survey of New York City Schools, this study examined the relationship between school organizational contexts, teacher turnover, and student achievement. The analysis was based on four dimensions of school context-- (1) leadership and professional development, (2) high academic expectations for students, (3) teacher relationships and collaboration, and (4) school safety and order. Their findings suggest that teacher retention and student achievement on standardized tests increases at a faster rate when school context is strengthened. In an era of education reform highly focused on teacher quality this study demonstrates the need for both individual and organizational solutions to improve student achievement. Placing high-quality teachers amidst organizational dysfunction has little chance for successful school turnaround. The study also suggests that policy reform agendas aimed at measuring and strengthening school context should be informed by reliable data on the strengths and weaknesses of school organizations as a whole. The authors include suggestions for gathering and using this data with a caution against expecting any singular organizational reform strategy to sufficiently turn around failing schools.

Ronfeldt, M., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2013). How teacher turnover harms student achievement. American Educational Research Journal, 50(1), 4–36.

Ronfeldt, Loeb and Wyckoff present some of the first empirical evidence for the direct effects of teacher turnover on student achievement. This study used data collected over an eight-year time period consisting of 850,000 observations of fourth and fifth grade students. The analysis linked student test scores in math and English language arts to student, class, school, and teacher characteristics. The study found that teachers' prior effectiveness compared to the teachers that replace them does not fully explain the harmful effects of turnover on student achievement in lower-achieving schools. This leads the researchers to ask, what else might account for these harmful effects? Their results suggest that teacher turnover has a disruptive impact on school culture that negatively affects students in classrooms of teachers who choose to remain in the same school from one year to the next. They suggest one explanation for these disruptive effects on student achievement is that turnover negatively affects collegiality or relational trust among faculty, and it may also result in the loss of institutional knowledge among faculty, a key component for supporting student learning.

Ingersoll, R. M. (2001). Teacher turnover and teacher shortages: An organizational analysis. American Educational Research Journal, 38(3), 499–534.

This analysis of teacher survey data from the national Schools and Staffing Survey revealed that the largest factor influencing the inability to put qualified teachers in the classroom is teacher job dissatisfaction, rather than an insufficient supply of qualified teachers. The data indicated that school staffing problems were primarily due to excess demand resulting from a "revolving door" where large numbers of qualified teachers left teaching for reasons other than retirement. Teacher dissatisfaction accounted for a large amount of turnover, leading Ingersoll to claim that staffing problems could not be solved through teacher recruitment if the organizational sources of low teacher retention were not addressed.

understated as fewer people are choosing to enter the profession.[19] Although retaining teachers is recognized as a far larger problem than training new ones, relying on new teachers to fill vacancies will become more difficult as fewer people are choosing a teaching career.[20] Enrollment in some of the nation's largest teacher education programs is down significantly. For example, California has experienced a 53% drop in enrollment in teacher preparation programs over the past five years.[21] Nationwide enrollments in traditional and alternative preparation and certification routes dropped by 20% in 2013-14 alone.[22] Over half of college students surveyed believe the teaching profession has become less prestigious, and only five percent of high school students reported that they intended to pursue a teaching career, a percentage that has dropped steadily since 2010.[23]

All of this puts a financial burden on school divisions. The total costs for teacher absences nationwide in 2004 were estimated to be approximately $25 billion dollars.[24] A pattern of continual teacher turnover exacts financial and organizational costs, with teacher attrition costing the United States as much as $2.2 billion a year.[25] Associated costs of teacher turnover include new teacher hiring, training and professional development.[26]

Finally, it is important to note that the negative effects of teacher dissatisfaction and withdrawal are experienced with more frequency and more intensity in the schools with the most academic and socioeconomic challenges. Teacher dissatisfaction, teacher absenteeism, and teacher turnover are all higher in these schools, exacerbating the achievement gap and sustaining patterns of inequality.[27]

Purpose of the Study

This study emerged from discussions within the Policy and Planning Council of the Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium (MERC), a research alliance between Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Education and seven surrounding school divisions.[28] The project has two goals. The first goal is to develop an understanding of the factors that impact teachers' experience of their work in the current PK-12 public school context. Although this topic could be, and has been, investigated through a number of lenses (e.g., burnout, trust, motivation),[29] this project focuses on the idea of teacher morale, a choice that will be discussed in detail in the next section of the report. The study addresses the following three questions:

1. How do teachers experience job satisfaction and morale?
2. What are the dynamics between a teacher's job related ideal and the professional culture of the school that support or hin-

19   Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001, 2002; "Where have all," 2015; US Department of Education, 2015

20   Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001, 2002

21   "Where Have All," 2015

22   U.S. Department of Education, 2015

23   Third Way, 2014; ACT Inc., 2014

24   District Management Council, 2004

25   Guin, 2004; Ingersoll, 2001; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013; Simon & Johnson, 2013; Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014

26   Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007; Kraft, Marinell, & Yee, 2016; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013

27   Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007; Allensworth, Ponisciak, & Mazzeo, 2009; Marinell & Coca, 2013; Barnes et al., 2007; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013; Ingersoll, 2001

28   School *division* is Virginia's designation for Local Education Agencies (LEAs). In most states the term school *district* is used.

29   Examples include teachers' experiences of school culture and change (Fullan, 2007), on relational trust within schools (Bryk & Schneider, 2002), on teachers' experience of control over their work (Ingersoll, 2003), on the emotional life of teachers (Hargreaves, 1998, 2001, 2004) and on teacher burnout (Blase, 1982, 1986; Maslach & Leiter, 1997)

der the experience of job satisfaction and morale?

3. How do differences between schools related to policy context and social context affect the dynamics of job satisfaction and morale?

To answer these questions MERC assembled a research team comprised of a university researcher, graduate students, and a team of school personnel from the MERC school divisions. Over the course of two years, the team developed a conceptual framework for understanding teacher morale, designed a research study that involved observing and interviewing teachers (*n* = 44) across three purposefully selected middle schools in the Richmond region, and then collected and analyzed the data. This report shares both the process and the findings of this collaborative research effort.

The second goal of this research project is to support action by local policy makers, school division leaders, central office personnel, principals, and teachers. The study was commissioned by local school leaders not just to document and reflect on teacher morale, but more importantly to do something about it. As argued above, teachers and the conditions of teachers' work matters for our students, our schools, and the wellbeing of our communities and society. In this regard, this report is only one piece of this project's action and impact plan. While the report does contain a series of recommendations based on findings and how they can be used, the release of the report is tied to additional dissemination and professional development efforts designed to effect change. For more information about the dissemination/impact plan connected to this report, visit the MERC website.

Structure of the Report

Section 2, titled "Teacher Morale and Professionalism," presents a reflection on the concept of teacher morale through a synthesis of several bodies of literature. A key piece of this section is a conceptual framework we adapted from the work of Linda Evans that illustrates the factors that drive teacher morale.[30] This framework was important to the design of this study. It led to the development of our research questions, and then guided our research method. In this section, we also discuss the relationship between teacher morale and the contested nature of teacher professionalism in the current PK12 school policy context.

In Section 3, we describe and justify the method we used to answer our research questions. This includes information about our research design, our school and teacher participant selection, our approach to data collection, our data analysis process, and our strategies for ensuring validity. This section also includes a discussion of measures we took to ensure that ethical standards of social science research were met.

Section 4 of the report presents the findings of our research. The findings are presented in two forms: (1) a thematic overview of findings organized by research question and (2) a collection of teacher profiles. The thematic overview presents a series of claims about teacher job satisfaction and morale as well as how it is developed within school contexts. The teacher profiles provide interview excerpts from a sample of our participants (*n* = 11) that connect to claims in the overview. These two components of the findings are designed to work together to provide a full picture of what was learned through the study, but are also intended to engage the

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30   Evans, 1997, 1998, 2001, 2008

reader with the voices of teachers and encourage reflection.

Finally, in section 5, we present a discussion of the study's findings from two perspectives. First, we will consider how our findings contribute to the current scholarly literature on teachers' experiences of their work. Second, we will provide a list of practical recommendations for school and system-level leaders. These recommendations are directly aligned with the findings.

In addition to these five sections, there are also several features that are included to add greater insights on the topic and improve the usability of the report for a broad range of stakeholders. These include two annotated bibliographies of selected research and, in section 5, the perspectives on the research shared by our study team members. The report also includes a link to an online survey to gauge reader response to both its form and content. The results of this survey will be used to help measure the study impact and to plan additional dissemination efforts.

2 TEACHER MORALE AND PROFESSIONALISM

> *MORALE*
> The mental or emotional state (with regard to confidence, hope, enthusiasm, etc.) of a person or group engaged in some activity; degree of contentment with one's lot or situation.
> * 1813 F. S. LARPENT Jrnl. 31 Oct. (1853) II. v. 138 It must be allowed that they are industrious at least, but the morale of the old soldiers is shaken very much.
> * 1842 T. P. THOMPSON Exercises I. 342 But the greatest advantage of all, on the side of the people, is the morale. Every soldier knows in his heart.. that he was not made to fire upon the citizens.
> * 1866 A. CRUMP Pract. Treat. Banking ii. 71 To improve the morale of the entire mercantile community.
> * 1870 Times 8 Aug. 5/3 The morale of the troops is excellent.

The opening of this report presented two claims: (1) there is an increased level of job dissatisfaction within the teaching force, and (2) this has significant negative effects on the success of our students and our schools. In this section, we will examine the possible causes of teacher job dissatisfaction through the lens of teacher morale. We will begin by defining teacher morale and presenting a model of how morale works in schools. This model - based largely on the work of Linda Evans[1] - was used throughout the study to guide our research process. Next, we will argue why teacher morale is worth studying. As discussed below, teacher morale does not have a rich research base, however we will consider why developing a deeper understanding of morale might contribute to the scholarly conversations about teachers' work lives and have practical implications for policy and practice. Finally, this section of the report connects the current challenges around teacher morale with the shifting nature of teacher professionalism. In this section, we will consider the work of teachers in relation to the idea of professionalism, and then suggest possible challenges to teacher professionalism that might exist in the current PK12 school policy context.

What is Morale?

This study examines the morale of public school teachers. While the word morale is familiar to most people and used with some frequency, for

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1   Evans, 1997, 1998, 2001

the purpose of this study, it is worth reflecting on its specific meaning. Common use definitions are a good place to start. For example, the definition above from the Oxford English Dictionary provides three key characteristics of morale: it is (1) a "mental or emotional state," (2) held by a "person or group," (3) that is "engaged in an activity." The definition also associates morale with other mental states: "confidence, hope, enthusiasm." While useful, this definition also reveals some of the ambiguity that exists in the term. For example, what does it mean that morale can be the experience of either "a person or group?" While we may regularly use the word both ways, does it hold the same general meaning individually and collectively? The definition also leads us to wonder about the level of control the individual or group has over morale. While the first part of the definition connects morale with a sense of efficacy ("confidence"), the second half (i.e. "degree of contentment with one's lot or situation") appears to diminish agency; it is about the luck of the draw.

This ambiguity might have to do with the evolution of the word's use. As illustrated above, the earliest uses of morale were primarily in reference to soldiers' feelings about military activity. Although the word morale is still regularly used to discuss the experiences of soldiers and armies (we certainly hear about the morale of the troops in Afghanistan), the word was also embraced in the early to mid-twentieth century by organizational scientists interested in improving workforce productivity in businesses, corporations and public sector organizations. Their idea was that improving the efficiency and effectiveness of an organization was best achieved not through harsh enforcement of rules and control of work, but rather through developing positive dispositions among the workers. In this period, morale – along with associated ideas

such as job satisfaction, employee engagement, and wellbeing – became of interest to human resources departments and managers. By the 1950s, this philosophy of improving employee disposition had gained some traction and strategies for measuring morale were developed and implemented in both the private and public sector.[2] This management approach to morale and worker satisfaction is still very popular as evidenced by the widespread use of employee engagement scales in corporate settings.[3]

The adoption of the idea of morale as a lever of organizational improvement might account for some of the flexibility in the definition above. It is fair to say that morale has different meanings across different types of activity or work. The morale of soldiers engaged in battle will be experienced differently than the morale of a paramedic, an architect, a computer programmer, a sales manager, or a social worker. Considering this point, there are several ways that we might think about the differences in morale across activity type. First, it seems that the goals of the activity might influence the experience. Is the activity defending the safety of a country, or about meeting sales goals? The stakes are different in the two cases. This is likely to affect the intensity of the emotional state. Second, how challenging is the activity? In some cases published definitions include the suggestion that morale is experienced in situations characterized by "opposition or hardship."[4] This would certainly be true of the soldier, but maybe less so with the sales manager. Third, what is the group or organizational context in relation to which morale is developed? Morale may mean something different in jobs that require interaction and engagement with teams (e.g., paramedics), than for jobs that are generally

2   Bowles & Cooper, 2009

3   For example, Gallup Poll of Employee Engagement.

4   Morale, 2016, Dictionary.com

engaged in individually (e.g., social worker). Finally, what is the level of skill required to engage in the activity? Highly skilled professional work that requires ongoing decision-making might be characterized by a different type of morale than a job that involves following highly structured protocols and procedures. These differences in meaning of morale across activity type are important because they suggest different influencing factors. For example, pay bonuses may be the primary method of boosting morale in some occupations, while increasing worker autonomy may be better for others. Bringing this discussion back to the current study, we can now ask, what does morale mean in the context of teachers' work?

What is Teacher Morale?

It is common to hear about teacher morale in public discussions of schools and within the media, however, it is a concept that has not gained attention among educational researchers. When searching for scholarly peer reviewed studies on teachers' work experiences, it is much more common to find articles on teacher burnout or job satisfaction. For example, a search of peer reviewed publications in Academic Search Complete between 1996 and 2016 yielded 238 hits for articles with "teacher" and "burnout" in the title, 255 hits for "teacher" and "satisfaction" in the title, but only 8 hits for "teacher" and "morale." The research literature that does exist on teacher morale is not only sparse, but tends to be older (pre-2000), and conducted in settings outside of the current US educational policy context.[5] What is more, the literature on teacher morale - reflecting the general ambiguity surrounding the word - never resolved on a consensus definition.[6] For example, morale has

been defined as a phenomenon, a process, a perception, a disposition, and a state of mind. It has also been framed by some as a school-wide (group) experience, and by others as an individual teacher experience. There is also variation in the characteristics associated with morale. Some see it as related to collegiality and cohesion, others to wellbeing and satisfaction, others to enthusiasm and energy, others to anticipation and hope, and others to persistence and agency. Finally, it is common in the scholarly literature to find examples of the concept of teacher morale being used interchangeably with related terms such as stress, motivation, engagement, organizational cohesiveness, organizational commitment, job involvement, and depression.[7]

This leads to two questions. First, why is the scholarly work on teacher morale so thin? Has it simply been overlooked, or is there a good reason for studying teacher "burnout" or "job satisfaction" instead? There is no clear answer to this question, however later in this section we will present several arguments why we believe teacher morale is worth studying. Second, in the absence of a solid research base, how do we define teacher morale? Fortunately, in this case, there is some strong conceptual work on which to build. In particular, our review of literature led us to the research of Linda Evans, who through the 1990s conducted a series of qualitative case studies of teachers within several school contexts in the United Kingdom.[8] Through this work, Evans developed what we found in our review of literature to be the most robust definition and model of teacher morale to date. She defines morale as "*a state of mind determined by the individual's anticipation of the extent of satisfaction of those needs which s/he perceives as significantly*

5   See Doherty, 1988; Hart, Wearing, Conn & Dingle, 2000; Meany & Smith, 1988; Smith, 1966, 1976

6   Hart et al., 2000; Evans, 1997, 2001

7   For examples of these definitional debates see the work of Smith, 1976; Santoro, 2011; Hart, et al. 2000; Guba, 1958; Evans, 1997; Doherty 1988; Farber, 1984

8   Evans, 1997, 1998, 2001

affecting her/his total work situation."[9]

Considering the reflections on the popular definition of morale presented above, there are several important points to make about Evans' framing of the concept. First, Evans establishes morale as an individual rather than group phenomenon. This suggests that there are high and low morale teachers, but not necessarily high or low morale schools. However, as you will see, Evans' model of morale also accounts for group experiences such as collegiality. Second, although teacher morale is closely related to job satisfaction, it is distinct in its future orientation. Morale is about the anticipation of future job satisfaction rather than the present condition. Finally, Evans' definition is based on a person/organization fit model[10] which suggests that morale is about the fit between the individual and the "total work situation" in which she/he works. For this reason, Evans argues that when thinking about factors that drive individual teacher morale it is important to consider not just the individual disposition of the teacher, but also the school environment in which she/he works.

Evans' research led not only to a definition, but also to a model that explains what drives teacher morale. This model suggests that morale is influenced by two sets of factors: (1) individual teacher characteristics, dispositions and perspectives on schools and teaching; and (2) the professional culture of the school which may be influenced by system policy, the social/community context of the school, and school leadership's ability to negotiate these two factors. *Figure 1* presents a visual model we developed based on Evans' theory. Below is a discussion of the components of the model and how it works.

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9   Evans, 1997, p.832
10   Vancouver & Schmitt, 1991

The teacher and the job-related ideal

According to Evans, each individual brings a *job-related ideal* to her/his work that contributes to job-related attitudes. The job-related ideal reflects an individual's current values, needs, and expectations about what it means to be a teacher. While teachers may not necessarily be aware of having a job-related ideal, a general sense of it can be gleaned from discussions of priorities and preferences in work. A teacher's job-related ideal is influenced by three factors. The first factor is the teacher's perspective on the work in relation to comparable situations, called *relative perspective.* This perspective could come from prior work experiences in other occupations, at other schools, or even within the same school under different administrations. Relative perspective also includes thoughts about work in relation to personal life and priorities. Relative perspective is related to age and experience as well. For example, a veteran teacher is more likely to have prior work and life experiences against which the current work situation can be evaluated.

The second factor, *realistic expectations,* is influenced by relative perspective. Realistic expectations do not necessarily reflect individuals' ideals. Instead, they reflect what the individual realistically expects from her/his work-related situation. For example a new teacher may enthusiastically enter the teaching profession and work 60 hours a week during her/his first year of teaching. During the second year she/he may begin to realize that a workload of that nature is unsustainable and unrealistic, and therefore the teacher's realistic expectations begin to influence her/his job related ideal.

The third factor influencing the job related ideal is what Evans calls the *teachers' professionality orientation*, which both influences and is influenced by relative perspective and realistic expectations. Professionality

Figure 1. Evans' Model of Teacher Morale
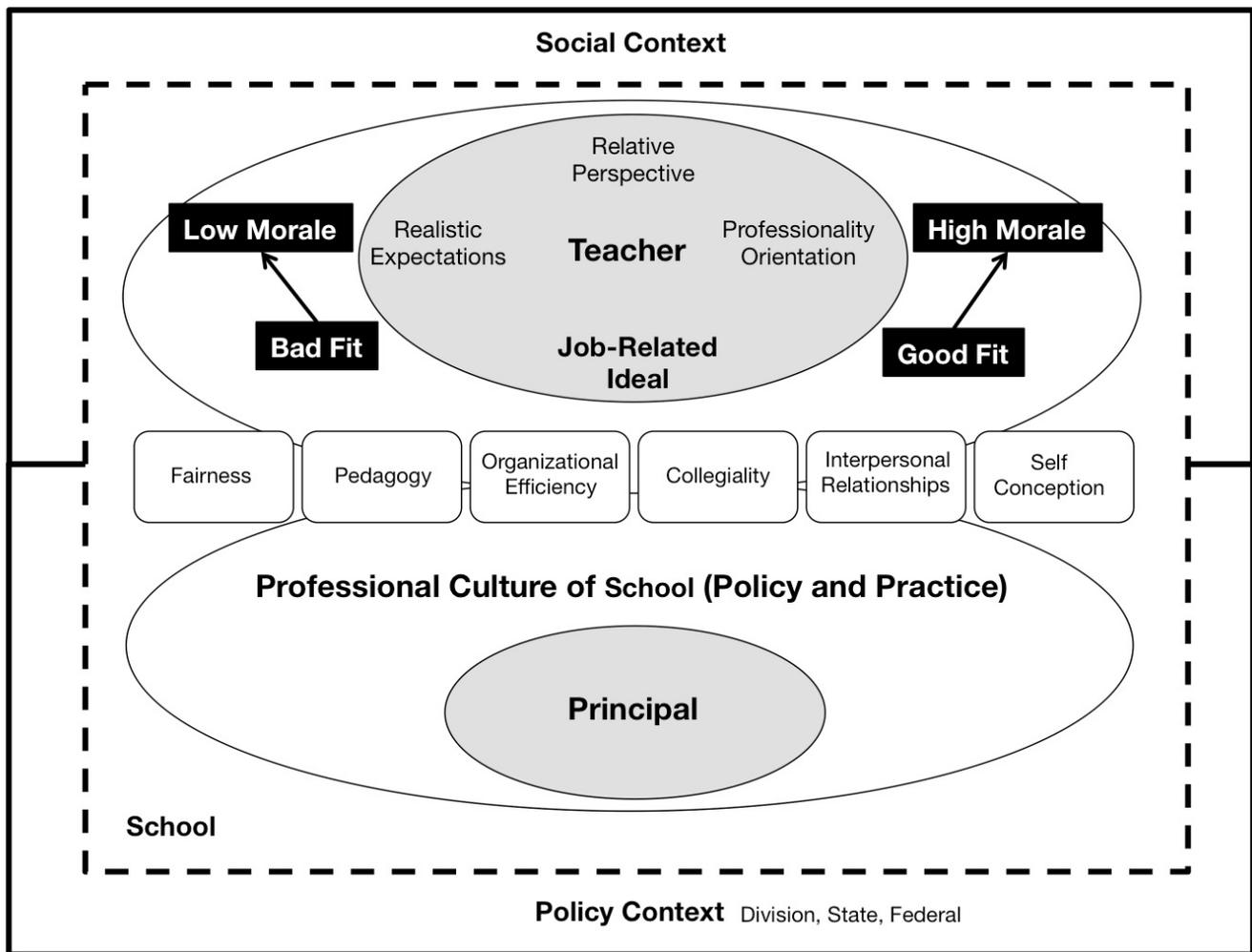
orientation is the set of ideas that a teacher holds about the profession of teaching that may influence her/his practice.[11] Evans provides a continuum of professionality ranging from restricted to extended. The restricted professional uses an intuitive approach to her/his work that is generally confined to the day-to-day routines of classroom practice. An extended professional, on the other hand, sees the professional role of the teacher through a broader lens that may include engagement with the theories underpinning classroom practice and school culture. In basic terms, the restricted professional is one that is happy just closing the door and teaching, while

the extended professional seeks to engage with the professional community of teachers and possibly take on professional leadership roles.

It is important to note that because job-related ideals vary from teacher to teacher, what satisfies one teacher does not necessarily satisfy another; consequently, a school that may be a good fit for one teacher may not be good for another. Also, job-related ideals are not static. They are likely to change over time as a teacher gains new perspectives, and develops new ideas about what it means to be a teacher through professional development and practice.

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11   This is a concept that Evans borrowed from Hoyle (1975).

The professional culture of the school

As stated above, Evans' model of morale is based on the idea of person/organization fit.[12] In this case, the fit is between the teacher's job-related ideal and the *professional culture of the school.* Professional culture includes the policies and practices that define roles and responsibilities and govern the work of all school personnel. It also includes the professional norms and practices of the professional community. Evans points to several factors influencing the professional culture of the school. The first is the division, state, and federal *policy context* under which the school operates. The second is the *social context* that surrounds the school. That is the community served by the school especially in relation to issues of socioeconomic class and racial/ethnic diversity. Finally, Evans recognizes the critical role that school leadership - most importantly the *principal* - plays in navigating and negotiating the policy and social contexts.

The dimensions of fit

Evans identifies six critical categories of teacher/professional culture fit. While each of the categories represents a distinct idea, there are many instances where categories overlap. The six areas are:

- *Fairness.* A teacher's perceptions of unmerited advantages, uneven workloads, or unfair compensation given to some might impact fit with the school's professional culture
- *Pedagogy.* A teacher's conception of good teaching and learning may be aligned or in conflict with school and system expectations. For example, a tension may exist between a teacher's wish to use inquiry-based strategies and strict pacing guides mandated by the system.
- *Organizational efficiency.* A teacher's

expectations around the efficiency and effectiveness of the systems within a school may be a point of alignment or conflict. For example, inconsistent discipline policies might impact fit for some teachers.

- *Interpersonal relations.* A teacher's expectations about the nature and quality of personal relationships within schools may impact fit. Important to this are issues of care, trust, and respect within and between all stakeholder groups within the school (i.e., teachers, students, parents, administration, non-instructional staff).
- *Collegiality.* A teacher's expectations about the nature and quality of professional relations that are directly related to workplace productivity are important to fit. For example, a teacher that values collaboration may not find fit in a school that does not create opportunities for grade-level teaming.
- *Self-conception.* A teacher's personal and professional self-concept may or may not match the roles she/he is expected to perform within the school. For example, a teacher may ask, is my motivation to teach and are my personal and professional goals in line with those of the school? Conflicting goals may impact fit.

Evans proposes that when there is a lack of fit along any of the six areas, the teacher is put into a *compromising context*, where she/he is required to work within a school culture that is not aligned with personal beliefs about the professional role of teachers. Evans is careful to point out that it is not realistic to expect perfect matches between teacher and school characteristics, but rather to consider the degree of fit that exists. A compromised context in one or two areas may be fine if there is strong match in others. Evans also stresses that when there is fit, it must be based on genuine acceptance, rather than strategic compliance.

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12   Vancouver & Schmitt, 1991

Teacher job satisfaction and morale

Good matches between a teacher's job-related ideals and a school's professional culture lead to job satisfaction. In these cases, the teachers' values and expectations about their work are in line with the institutional expectations. Bad matches, on the other hand, lead to job dissatisfaction and are characterized by disengagement and dissension with school policy and practice.

Anticipation of a good or bad match is at the root of a teacher's experience of morale. A high morale teacher might say: "I am hopeful about my ability to find professional satisfaction within this school environment in the days ahead." A low morale teacher might say: "I am not hopeful about finding satisfaction."

Propositions

As you will see in the method section of the report, Evans' theoretical model guided much of our research process. For example, it was used to help select our schools and teachers, to develop our interview questions, and served as a starting point for our data analysis process. To support this research, we developed a set of theoretical propositions related to the framework. These propositions describe, in a concise fashion, the relationships between the factors identified in the model. These propositions, in certain respects, served as working hypotheses during the research process.[13] The five propositions are:

1. Each teacher has a job-related ideal influenced by her/his relative perspective (prior experience), realistic expectations, and her/his professional orientation toward teaching (restricted or extended).
2. The professional culture of a school is influenced by the school-level leadership, the policy context, and the social context of the school.

3. The fit between a teacher and the professional culture of a school occurs along six dimensions: fairness, pedagogy, organizational efficiency, collegiality, interpersonal relationships, and self-conception.
4. The fit or lack of fit between an individual teacher's job related ideal and the professional culture of a school determines her/his job satisfaction.
5. An individual teacher's anticipation of future satisfaction in work within a school influences her/his morale.

Why Study Teacher Morale?

As noted earlier, while there is a broad interest from the scholarly community in understanding teachers' experiences of their work, teacher morale is an under-studied concept. Below we present several reasons why morale is worth studying.

First, although morale is conceptually aligned with the other popular concepts that are used to understand teachers' work experience, such as burnout and job satisfaction, it is distinct. This suggests the potential of morale research to contribute to our understanding of teachers' work lives. One strength in this regard is that it moves beyond overly simplistic explanations of job-related attitudes that often equate job satisfaction with conditions of service, such as compensation.[14]

Second, morale is connected to the idea of job fit and the decision to stay or leave a position. Low morale teachers that are not hopeful about their future in the classroom are more likely to leave. In this regard it is useful for understanding the factors and processes that support teacher retention. Therefore our study has the potential to inform policy and practice because it reveals concrete, specific practices that foster or inhibit

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13   Yin, 2014

14   Evans, 1997, p. 843

TEACHERS' EXPERIENCE OF WORK

Bryk, A., & Schneider, B. (2002). *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement.* **Russell Sage Foundation.**
In the mixed method study of Chicago Public Schools, Bryk and Schneider examine the relationship between school success and relational trust in schools. Building trust within a school seems like an obvious and simple suggestion. Yet why does trust exist in some schools and not others? How does the absence of trust impact students, teachers, and school success, and how can trust be built and maintained? Bryk and Schneider found that when schools operate only on contractual trust related to material results (e.g., test scores, accountability), it weakens the moral dimension of teaching and can create internal conflicts. However, they also argue that these effects are mitigated with relational trust. Relational trust moderates the uncertainty and vulnerability that often occurs with school change efforts. Trust can undergird an efficient system that minimizes the need for extensive supervisory oversight of teachers' work. In schools with strong trust, an ethical obligation is created among stakeholders to advance children's best interests.

Ingersoll, R. M. (2003). *Who controls teachers' work?* **Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.**
Using national survey data and qualitative interviewing, Ingersoll examines conflicting views of teacher autonomy as he seeks to understand how schools can harness the skills and expertise of teachers while still ensuring organizational accountability and employee commitment. Successful schools must hold individual teachers accountable, but they are also dependent on the cooperation and expertise of those same teachers. Ingersoll asserts that too much "centralized control of teachers' work may undermine good teaching and demotivate...and ultimately drive out teachers…..[While] too much decentralization may result in a lack of order, coherence, and accountability" (p. 218). This book examines the reasons schools have difficulty achieving balance between control and autonomy. Ingersoll's prescription? "Accountability and power must go hand in hand" (p. 244). Increases in one must be accompanied by increases in the other or imbalances result in problems for teachers, schools and ultimately for students.

Maslach, C., Schaufeli, W. B., & Leiter, M. P. (2001). Job burnout. *Annual review of psychology,* **52(1), 397-422.**
Burnout is defined as "a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job... defined by the three dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy"(p. 397). Teaching is a profession noted for high levels of burnout and emotional exhaustion. Cited over 9,800 times, *Job Burnout* is a comprehensive review of the burnout construct. It includes an overview of the development of the Maslach Burnout Inventory, a scale originally designed for human service occupations, and revised for use with educational occupations. The authors note that burnout has been associated with various forms of job withdrawal — absenteeism, intention to leave the job, and actual turnover. For people who remain on the job, burnout leads to lower productivity and effectiveness and is associated with decreased job satisfaction and a reduced commitment to the organization. Burnout is effectively the opposite of engagement. They write that for the burned out employee, "What started out as important, meaningful, and challenging work becomes unpleasant, unfulfilling, and meaningless. Energy turns into exhaustion, involvement turns into cynicism, and efficacy turns into ineffectiveness" (p. 416). This work also finds that burnout among individuals in an organization can negatively impact colleagues and overall organizational climate.

high morale.[15]

Third, morale is a neutral rather than negative construct. Morale can be either high or low. While there is significant interest in the scholarly literature on teacher burnout,[16] the term does not suggest an alternative. Are we striving for a non-burned out teaching workforce?

Finally, Evans' model suggests that morale is malleable. While the model rests on the premise that the most influential determinants of job satisfaction and morale are individuals' need fulfillment, expectation fulfillment or value congruence,[17] it also builds on an understanding that job satisfaction and morale are strongly influenced by school-level factors. As a person/organization fit model, it tends to demphasize system-level factors,[18] however these system-level factors are accounted for in this study and create an opportunity to consider possible policy levers for effecting change.

Teacher Morale and Professionalism

As discussed earlier in this section, the concept of morale is shaped by the nature of the activity to which it refers. This includes differences in activity goals, stakes, and levels of complexity. For example, while a foot soldier engaged in a drawn out war and a sales clerk during the holiday rush may both have swings in morale, we expect the experience of morale and the set of factors

that drive it will be different between these two individuals.

Teacher work is generally understood within the category of profession, positioning it alongside the work of of physicians, nurses, lawyers, engineers, architects, clergy, and social workers to name a few. Lee Shulman, in an article on models for teacher professional preparation, presents six key characteristics of professions.[19]

1. ***Scholarly knowledge.*** The work of professions requires some grounding in a shared body of knowledge that is connected to lines of research and scholarship. For this reason, the training of professionals typically involves some form of university-based preparation and credentialing. A profession's scholarly knowledge, which is housed within the texts and curricula of the university, tends to be theoretical in nature. Professional licensure depends to a large extent on the ability to exhibit a general knowledge of the field as well as mastery in certain specialities that are relevant to future practice. Shulman also argues that the scholarly knowledge base of a profession is important to the legitimacy of a profession in the public eye.

2. ***Field of practice.*** Although the scholarly knowledge that grounds professions is essential to our definition, we would not call someone a professional until she/he has entered a field of practice. Courts, operating rooms, design studios, classrooms - this is where the work of professionals happen.

3. ***Professional judgment.*** The first two points suggest a third critical characteristic of professions - the importance of exercising professional judgment. We know that the work of professionals is not simply a matter of applying scholarly knowledge to the field. While the theories learned through university

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15   Evans, 1997

16   See Brouwers & Tomic, 1999; Chang 2009; Farber, 1984; Farber & Miller, 1981; Friedman & Farber, 1992; Grayson & Alvarez, 2008; Hakanen, Bakker & Schaufeli, 2006; Kokkinos, 2007; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Peeters & Rutte, 2005; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007, 2009, 2010, and 2011

17   Evans, 2001

18   Evans, 1997. This is consistent with other organizational literature, see Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Ingersoll, 2003.

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19   Shulman, 1998

preparation are powerful tools by virtue of their utility in describing and explaining phenomena across settings, populations, and times, this generalizability comes at the expense of utility within particular contexts. The field of practice is complex, non-routine, and full of uncertainty. The work of professionals requires the exercise of judgment about when and how to use theories to solve the problems of practice. Professional work is about adaptation rather than application of theory. This is the reason that professional preparation programs generally have a practice-based component.

4. *Professional learning through reflective practice.* While the foundation of professional knowledge is provided within the university, the expertise of professionals develops over time in ongoing reflection on practice and its relationship to theory. Each day of practice presents new cases that become opportunities for testing theories, for reflecting on the outcomes, and ultimately learning. The learning that occurs through reflective practice allows professionals to approach future cases more adeptly, even in the face of changing and uncertain contexts.[20]

5. *Professional community.* Professionals exist within professional communities. These communities are not only important for professional identity, but they also serve a formal role in establishing the legitimacy of the profession, in advancing the knowledge base, and in setting guidelines for standards

and accountability. Because expert professional knowledge can only be acquired through engagement with practice, leadership within the community of professionals must come from within.

6. *Moral and ethical commitments.* Through time, the professions have emerged to address issues of great social importance (e.g., human health, the rule of law, education). We rely on professionals to solve important social problems that we confront as individuals, as communities, and as a society. We also trust that professionals will conduct their work with good intention. This suggests that the work of the professional must be guided not only by theory and professional experience, but also by moral and ethical commitments. In some cases these moral commitments become part of the established standards within the field.[21]

To those that are teachers, or have a good understanding of the work of teachers, Shulman's definition of profession should resonate on many levels. Teachers are trained within professional preparation programs that involve theoretical grounding in the field (e.g., human development, educational psychology, social foundations of education, content methods classes) as well as practicum and fieldwork experiences (e.g., student teaching). Teachers work within a field of practice, classrooms and schools, that is complex and unpredictable. This requires high levels of organization and planning as well as flexibility and adaptability when professional judgment suggests that plans need to be altered. Those that know teaching would also understand the idea that experience matters. Expertise in teaching – having a high level of confidence in how to adapt teaching to an ever changing teaching context – is developed over years through a process of ongoing reflection. Those that know teaching would also

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20   This idea is explored in detail in Donald Schon's 1983 book, The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action. Within education, the idea of reflective practice has been influential to current models of inquiry-based collaborative curriculum teams (e.g., Professional Learning Communities and Lesson Study), and has gained some traction in theoretical and empirical education literature on teacher development and teacher quality (Hayden, 2013; Shulman & Shulman, 2004; Berliner, 2001)

21   A popular example of this would be physician's Hippocratic Oath.

understand the critical role that professional community plays in the support of teaching. This is especially true at the school level, where the success of teachers is highly dependent on the nature and the quality of the professional relationships established. Finally, those that know teaching would also understand the importance of the moral commitments that are at the center of teaching. For most teachers, the idea of making a difference in the lives of students is the central motivation.

And yet this model of professional work may also raise questions to those that know teaching. Essentially, they may ask, 'Is this model of professionalism reflected in the current context of schools?' This is a point raised by John Bransford, Linda Darling-Hammond and Pamela LePage in the introduction to *Preparing teachers for a changing world: What teachers should learn and be able to do.*[22] This volume, which was sponsored by the National Academy of Education, attempts to define the broad range of knowledge and skills that teachers should carry into the field of practice. Within Shulman's framework, it is meant to outline the body of professional scholarly knowledge for teachers. In this respect it is presented as a comprehensive guide for teacher preparation programs and teacher professional development. However, in the introduction, the editors also recognize that professional preparation is not enough. They write,

> If improvement in education is the goal, it is not enough to prepare good teachers and send them out to the schools. If teachers are to be effective, they must work in settings where they can use what they know …. Unfortunately, given the patchwork of policies and, the plethora of competing decision makers, and the fragmented design of factory-model

schools, these conditions are not present in many, perhaps most, U.S. schools … Given the challenges of contemporary schooling, it would be naive to suggest that merely producing more highly skilled teachers can, by itself, dramatically change the outcomes of education. We must attend simultaneously to both sides of the reform coin: better teachers and better systems. Schools will need to continue to change to create the conditions within which powerful teaching and learning can occur, and teachers will need to be prepared to be part of the change process.[23]

This brings us back to the issue of teacher morale. Like Evans' model, the passage above suggests a person/orgnaization fit. A teacher brings expectations about professional work (i.e., the job-related ideal), and a school system provides a policy and practice structure - a professional culture - in which those expectations are met or not. If there is a good fit, we might say that the visions of professionalism are aligned. If there is not a good fit, it is likely to be a problem of conflicting visions of professionalism. A high morale teacher is one that is hopeful about being able to realize her/his vision of professional practice within the school context. A low morale teacher is not hopeful.

Finally, when considering the relationships between teacher morale and professionalism, it is also important to note that there are two "sides of the reform coin." That is to say when thinking about individual cases of teacher morale, we need to keep open the idea that low morale, due to lack of alignment in visions of professionalism, may highlight the need for building the professional quality of the teaching workforce, or it may point to the need for transforming our school work environments in ways that support the ability of teachers to fulfill their professional roles.

22   Darling-Hammond, Bransford, & LePage, 2007
23   Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007, pp. 4-5
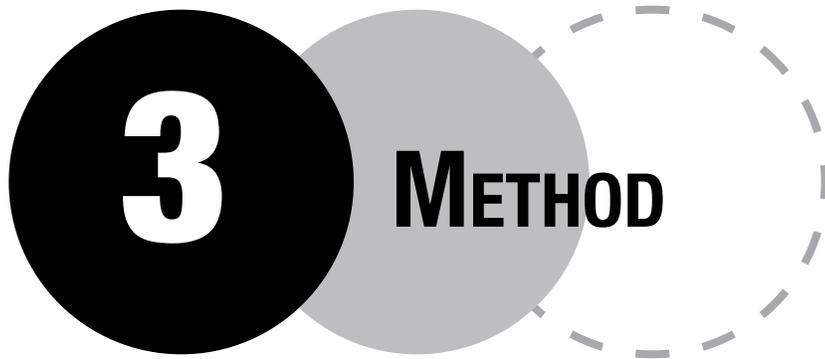
3 METHOD

Building off Linda Evans' teacher morale framework outlined in the previous section, our team developed three research questions:

1. How do teachers experience job satisfaction and morale?
2. What are the dynamics between a teacher's job related ideal and the professional culture of the school that support or hinder the experience of job satisfaction and morale?
3. How do differences between schools related to policy context and social context affect the dynamics of job satisfaction and morale?

In this section, we describe the method we used to answer these questions and the rationale for our approach. This includes information about our community-engaged case study design, the process of school and teacher selection, data collection and analysis methods, and our strategies related to research ethics. Conducting research involves making a series of decisions in each of these areas. In sharing our methodological decisions and the rationale behind them, the goal is to document the rigor in the work and establish the validity of the findings. We want those who read the study to have confidence that the claims made about teacher morale are a credible reflection of the experiences of the teachers selected for this study, and that the findings have some relevance to teachers and schools outside of the cases we studied.

Design

In social science, there is a wide range of research designs. Research designs are developed in relation to the purpose of the study and the proposed research questions. Designs are important because they serve as a framework for making methodological decisions. For this study there were two primary design frameworks guiding our work: multi-case study and community-engaged research. We discuss each below.

Multi-case study

Case study involves in-depth investigation of a phenomenon (e.g., morale) as it occurs in context. Case study is an appropriate method of research "especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident."[1] As suggested in the previous sections of this report, individual teacher morale is a complex phenomenon influenced by a wide range of factors which cannot be understood without attention to the school context within which it is developed. Our morale framework also suggests that there is variation between schools related to policy context and social context that have

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1   Yin, 2014, p.19

Figure 2. Multi-case Study Design
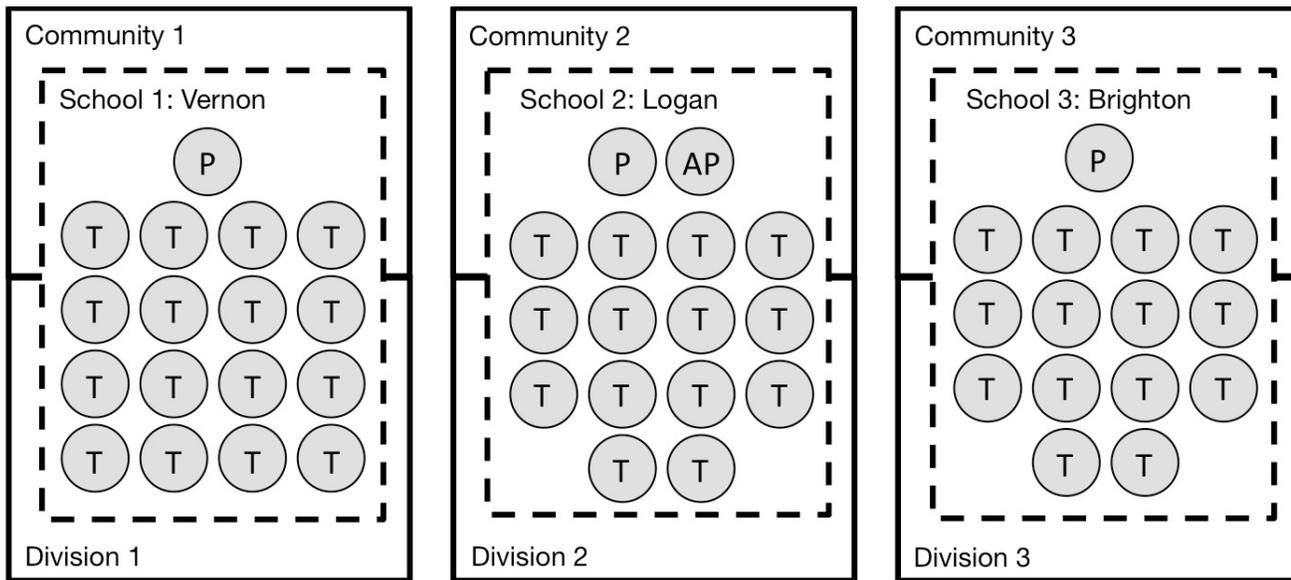
meaningful influence of the school-level factors. For this reason, we chose a multi-case study design, illustrated in Figure 2. In this design, our primary unit of analysis - our case - was the individual teacher. However, we were also interested in how the leadership style and the policy and social context of the school play a role in the development of individual teacher morale. To understand this, we decided to select teachers across three school cases.

In Figure 2, the T's represent the teacher interviews we conducted, the P's represent the principal interviews, and AP represents an assistant principal that we interviewed at one of the schools. Note also that the schools exist with three different school division policy contexts and community contexts.

It is also worth emphasizing that case study is particularly useful for testing theories.[2] The idea is that if we have a theory about how

something works (e.g., teacher morale), it is possible to carefully select cases that test the strength of the theory and examine the extent to which the theory holds in different environments. Essentially we ask, does our theory effectively explain the complex real-world example that we selected? Following Yin's case study method, we developed a set of theoretical propositions to guide the research.[3] These propositions, which function to some extent like research hypotheses, are grounded in Evans' model of teacher morale and were used to focus our attention as we planned our study and collected and analyzed data. While this type of inquiry could lead to simple confirmation, when done with rigor, the process is likely to lead to a deeper understanding and a refinement of the theory. As with all research, selection of cases is critical. The strategy in case study is to purposefully – rather than randomly – select cases with the goal of theory testing in mind. This means selecting cases that illuminate and potentially challenge the relationships and assumptions embedded in

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2   Yin (2014) recognizes that using case study for theory testing is a stance that is not accepted by some researchers, especially those that rely primarily on quantitative experimental designs. He makes a strong argument for its use in this way. Bent Flyvbjerg (2006) also makes a strong argument for the rigor of case studies for both theory development and theory testing.

3   Presented in section 2.

your theory. This type of purposeful case selection requires the development of theory-driven selection criteria. In one of the subsections below we discuss the selection process in this study used for both schools and teachers.

Community-engaged research

MERC, as a research alliance, has a mission to conduct research in ways that are relevant to policy and practice, and that ultimately impact youth, school and community outcomes. This mission has led our consortium to approach our studies from the perspective of community-engaged research.[4] Although almost all social science research engages stakeholders on some level, community-engaged research seeks to enhance stakeholder engagement in various phases of the research process with the goal of improving both the relevance and the rigor of the study.

This study is community-engaged in several ways. First, the research focus for this study – teacher morale – emerged out of conversations among regional school leaders and university faculty. While the topic of teacher morale certainly has relevance to the scholarly discussions on teacher work life and professionalism, the intent of our study is equally focused on the possible use of the research findings to affect changes in policy and practice.

This study was also community engaged in its use of a Teacher Morale Study Team recruited from the seven MERC school divisions. The study team included teachers, teacher leaders, principals, and central office personnel. The team met on a regular basis over the two-year course of the study, and meetings were used to support the various phases of the research. For example, the team played an important role in the review of the conceptual framework, in the development and

review of interview questions, and in certain data analysis activities. In addition, a number of the study team members were also engaged in data collection activities during the school site visits. Study team members involved with the site visits participated in research training to prepare for data collection activities. This training included the completion of a certification module on human subjects protection. Following the release of this report, the study team will also support the dissemination of findings within their schools, school divisions and across the region.

Selection

There are a range of strategies used by social scientists to select (or sample) cases when conducting research. These strategies fall into two basic categories, probability selection and purposeful selection. Probability selection, or random sampling, is used in some studies to control for differences between research participants and to improve the generalizability of research findings from smaller study samples to larger populations. Purposeful selection strategies, on the other hand, are better suited for exploring theory and testing theory in complex cases.[5] As mentioned above, this study uses purposeful selection.

Our research design required two levels of selection: (1) case school selection, and (2) teacher selection within case schools. Below is a description of our selection process at each level.

Case school selection

Our case school selection process started with the development of three selection criteria based on the teacher morale framework and propositions presented in section 2 of the report. These criteria are hypothesized to have a potential influence on teacher morale. These criteria were:

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4   Dubb, McKinley & Howard, 2013; Votruba, Bailey, Bergland, Gonzalez, Haynes, et al., 2002

5   Maxwell, 2013

1. ***Variation in policy context.*** Our theory suggests that the division and state level policy context is likely to have an influence on the professional culture within a school. For this reason there was interest in: (a) selecting schools from three different school divisions, and (b) choosing schools that have some range related to accreditation status. This includes selecting a school that may be under state accountability mandates (due to failure or risk of failure to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)) and those that are exempt from these mandates.
2. ***Variation in social context.*** Our theory suggests that the social context surrounding a school has an influence on the professional culture of a school. Along these lines, there was an interest in selecting schools that vary according to the Socioeconomic Status (SES) and racial/ethnic makeup of the school population.
3. ***Variation in leadership.*** School-level leadership is believed to have an important influence on the professional culture of the school. Thus, there was interest in selecting schools that vary in leadership style.

In addition to these criteria, two other factors were considered when selecting schools. First, it was determined by the MERC Policy and Planning Council to focus the study on middle schools (grades six through eight). This was based on the fact that there is a regional focus on middle schools, as well as the idea that middle schools combine elements of elementary and high schools, thus becoming the best representation of PK-12 schools broadly. Second, it was important to select schools with which productive research relationships were possible. The case study method requires a school administration and staff that is open to participation in the research activities (e.g., interviews, observation, local

document analysis). This is especially true in relation to a study of a potentially sensitive topic such as teacher morale.

After determining the case school selection criteria, communication was made with leaders in each of the seven MERC school divisions sharing the criteria and requesting nominations for possible participation in the study. Ultimately six schools were identified as potential sites for the study. For each school nominated, the research team developed a brief school profile that

Table 1. Case School Comparison

School	Non-White	FRL	Academic Standing
Vernon	70%	40%	Fully Accredited Significant Concerns
Logan	20%	20%	Fully Accredited Some Concerns
Brighton	25%	15%	Fully Accredited No Concerns

included school demographics and information related to academic standing.

Selection of the three case schools was done with the goal of achieving variation between the cases across the aforementioned selection criteria. Table 1 presents a comparison on some basic demographic and academic factors of the selected schools. This is followed by brief descriptions of the schools. It should be noted that in an effort to protect the identity of the teachers and school communities, details and demographics are presented in general terms. Pseudonyms for school names are also used. However, in the presentation, we attempt to highlight the relative differences between the schools.

*   ***Vernon Middle School (VMS)***. VMS has an enrollment of approximately 1500 students.

Over the past ten years, the percentage of students identified as economically disadvantaged has increased by over 100%, with significant growth in the Latino and limited English proficiency populations. These demographic changes far exceed the school division's growth in these areas. VMS occupies an older building, and the increase in student population has led to the use of some mobile classrooms.

- *Logan Middle School (LMS).* Suburbs and strip malls have grown up around LMS in area that was recently farmland. The building is older than other schools in the division. The school serves approximately 1000 students. The school is diverse socioeconomically with community housing that ranges from subsidized apartments, to rural communities, to multi-million dollar homes. One of the most significant demographic shifts for LMS is their 75% growth in the economically disadvantaged student population since 2005.

- *Brighton Middle School (BMS).* Brighton Middle School (BMS) serves approximately 1000 students in an affluent part of the school division and region. An active Parent Teacher Association notes significant community partnership donations ranging from $75 to $2,000 dollars. However, BMS has also experienced meaningful growth in their economically disadvantaged population over the past ten years. The non-white population in the school includes significant populations of Black, Hispanic and Asian Students.

A fair amount of variability was achieved in our case school selection. Between the three case schools there was a 25% variation in the socio-economic status of the student populations, based on free and reduced lunch. As shown in Table 1, there was also a substantial variation in the racial and ethnic composition across the schools. While we sought variability in accreditation status, all three schools were fully accredited. However, we did find variation in the extent to which this status was secure. For example, VMS had some concerns about possibly losing accreditation status, and as a consequence implemented targeted school improvement efforts. LMS also struggled with borderline scores in particular subject areas. The BMS student population excelled on standardized tests and presented no formal concerns regarding accreditation. These variations became more clear after data analysis revealed teacher discussion of pressures related to accreditation status during the interviews.

Although we sought variation in the leadership style, we did not have data points or information for this criteria to take into consideration during case school selection. Division-level school climate data, which may have been useful in this regard, was not consistently available across the three divisions. Regardless, our findings revealed significant variation in leadership style. These differences will be presented in section 4 of the report.

Teacher selection

According to Evans' model, teachers' experience of their work is influenced by individual teacher characteristics as well as the roles and responsibilities they hold within schools.[6] A primary purpose of this study is to gain a greater understanding of the many interrelated factors that drive teacher morale. To achieve variability, the selection of teachers from the school cases was guided by a list of selection criteria. The five selection criteria for teachers were informed by a discussion among the Study Team about the morale framework and the study propositions.

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6   Evans, 1997

Table 2. Participants

	Vernon	Logan	Brighton
Number of Participants	17	16	15
Subject/Role			
English	5	2	5
Math	2	3	2
Social Studies	3	2	2
Science	3	2	1
Administration	1	2	1
Other *	3	5	4
Subject Level Taught **			
Special Education ***	3	6	1
Primarily Regular	4	3	2
Primarily Advanced	4	0	1
Mixed Schedule	5	4	7
Experience			
Years of Teaching Experience	15 Range: 2 to 30+	12 Range: 4 to 25+	13 Range: 1 to 30+
Years at Case School	7 Range: 1 to 20+	8 Range: 1 to 15+	7 Range: 1 to 15+
Career Switchers	4	4	5
Contract Status			
# of Probationary	1	2	5
Race / Ethnicity / Gender			
Race/Ethnicity	25% Non-White	0% Non-White	14% Non-White
Gender	88% Female	93% Female	73% Female

* This category includes elective teachers (e.g., arts or PE) and instructional support staff (e.g., counselors, librarians etc)

** The student level taught does not add up to total participants. Not all participants have caseloads.

*** Teachers with special education caseloads; inclusion and self-contained classes taught.

1. *Variation in teaching experience.* Years and type of teaching experience were predicted to influence individual teachers' perspectives. We sought participants with a range of teaching experience both within the field of teaching and at the case school. We also sought participants with variation in prior work experience (i.e., teachers who have and have not worked at other schools and those who are career switchers).

2. *Variation in contract status.* Contract status (continuing or probationary) was believed to have an influence on teachers' perspectives of their work. We sought participants with variation in contract status.

3. *Variation in subject and level taught.* It was predicted that teachers' perspectives would vary in relation to teaching core versus non-core subjects, tested versus non-tested subjects, and honors or advanced placement

versus regular level or inclusion classes. We sought participants with variation in subject and level taught.

4. ***Variation in teaching load.*** It was predicted that the number of classes, the number of preparations, and collaborative versus non-collaborative assignments provide different experiences that likely influence teachers' perspectives. We sought participants with diversity in teaching load.

5. ***Variation in extended responsibilities.*** Teachers' level of participation in extracurricular activities and their engagement in school leadership roles were predicted to influence their perspective. We sought teacher participants who were highly involved in extracurricular and leadership activity and those that were not.

Although our framework does not address the role of gender or racial/ethnic identity in the development of teacher morale, we also sought representation in these two categories that mirrored each school's teacher demographics.

After the identification of schools, contact was made with the principal and an initial meeting was set up to discuss the study and review the logistics of teacher recruitment and data collection. Teachers were informed about the study through announcements at faculty meetings (at two schools) and flyers distributed through the school. Interested teachers completed an opt-in survey that collected information about teaching experience, subjects taught, course loads, etc. The research team reviewed the data from the opt-in survey and then identified a participant pool that reflected maximum variation along the selection criteria. This list of possible participants was then brought to the principal for approval. It is important to note that in no cases did the principal make changes to the participant pool suggested by the research team. After the list of participants was finalized, the research team reached out to the participants to share more details about the study, review the consent process, and schedule the school data collection visit. Teachers' decisions to participate in the study were voluntary. Table 2 reports the demographics of the selected teachers at the three case schools. Similar to the school profiles, demographics and details are, in some cases, presented in general terms with the intent of protecting the identities of the participants.

As illustrated in Table 2, we achieved good variation in participants' years of teaching experience, variation in prior work experience, subjects taught (both electives and core subjects with mandated end-of-course tests), and advanced, regular and inclusion classes. We also achieved variation in teaching load and other responsibilities, such as extracurricular and leadership roles. Variation in race and gender diversity was reflective of the regional teacher population, but not necessarily of the teacher demographics at each school. Finally, we achieved variation in contract status that is somewhat reflective of the teaching population but not necessarily reflective of the percentage of probationary status teachers at each of the case schools.

Other participant selection
In addition to teachers, we conducted interviews with the principals at all three schools, an assistant principal at one of the schools, and a split teacher/administrator. Collecting data from these participants allowed us to develop a richer understanding of the school culture and context.

Data Collection
One of the core strategies of the case study method is the collection of multiple sources of evidence.[7] Multiple sources not only allow for

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7   Yin, 2014

understanding the complexity of the context surrounding the phenomena of interest, but also for the triangulation of findings, an approach that has the potential to strengthen the quality of the inferences made from the data. Data collection for this study occurred in two distinct phases.

Phase 1: Developing a preliminary school profile

The first phase of data collection began directly after the final selection of the three case schools. The goal was to develop a preliminary profile of each school based on a review of existing documents and secondary data. The data collected included school-level data from the U.S. Department of Education Civil Rights Data, the Virginia Department of Education, publicly-available community data, division and state level policy documents, and district and school websites. Each school profile told the story of the school with a particular interest in how the policy environment and community context shaped the professional culture of the school over time. These profiles were shared with the principal at each school for review and editing prior to the beginning of the site visits. These profiles were also shared with the Study Team and used for the training of the research team prior to data collection at the school sites.

Phase 2: Case-by-case site visits

The second phase of data collection involved site visits at each of the case study schools. Each visit occurred on four consecutive days over the course of a week. The site visits at each school were spaced at intervals through the fall and winter of the 2015-2016 school year. Each site visit was conducted by a research team that included the principal investigator (Senechal), two MERC graduate research assistants (Sober and Johnson), and two Study Team members

that rotated through the course of the study (Burkhalter, Castelow, Gilfillan, Jackson, Nabors, Neuman, Robinson, Sargeant, and Stanford). The site visit involved the collection of data through participant shadowing and individual semi-structured interviews.[8] Both the shadowing and the interviews were designed to answer a set of guiding questions informed by the morale framework and propositions. Below are descriptions of the various components of the site visit.

- *Morning research team meetings.* Each morning of the site visit the research team convened in a school conference room to discuss the schedule for the day and review the morale framework in preparation for taking observation field notes.

- *Observation/shadowing.* Each day of the site visit, each research team member was paired with a school participant. After the morning meeting, the team member shadowed the school participant through the day. These shadowing observations varied between participants, but overall covered a range of activities including teaching, planning duties, lunch, school meetings (e.g., department, faculty) and professional development experiences. During the shadowing, the research team member took open field notes on the experiences, with the teacher morale framework in mind.

- *Afternoon research team meeting.* After finishing the shadowing observation time the research team reconvened. During this time, each team member reviewed his/her field notes and wrote up a summary based on a set of guiding observation questions aligned with the framework (Appendix A). These extended field notes were one of the primary data sources for the study.

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8   McDonald, 2005

- *Semi-structured interviews.* Following the afternoon team meeting, each research team member conducted a semi-structured interview with the paired school participant. Appendix B is the list of interview questions used. In certain cases interview questions were altered slightly for participants in non-teaching roles. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Administrator data collection followed a slightly different procedure. The principal investigator met with each of the school principals prior to the recruitment process in order to establish and build a relationship and a communication protocol for the research process. The principals were not shadowed, with the exception of the one assistant principal participant. Formal semi-structured interviews were conducted with each principal following the site visit using an adapted set of questions. See Appendix C.

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis started following the first site visit and continued through the completion of this report. The bulk of the analysis was completed by the principal investigator (Senechal) and the graduate research assistant (Sober), however the research Study Team contributed to the analysis at the study team meetings as well.

The goal of the data analysis was to identify the patterns that emerged from the data and through this, develop claims that served as answers to the research questions. The data analysis included a range of activities focused on coding and categorizing the data from the interviews and field notes, as well as strategies for pulling the data back together by establishing relationships between the core themes.

Below is a description of our data analysis activities. While the order of the activities below reflects the general flow of data analysis from early to later stages, much of this work was iterative. For example, memo writing in later stages of the analysis would often lead us back into coding practices.

1. *Coding strategies.* After data collection, interview transcripts and field notes were entered into Atlas.ti, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis program. Coding started with a preliminary set of codes based on the morale framework, but also involved open coding to account for emerging categories and themes. As coding progressed, individual codes were defined and organized into large overarching categories.[9] As we got further into the analysis and gained a sense of the core themes, key quotes from the transcripts were identified and sent to appropriate memos.

2. *Visualization strategies.* At various stages through the data analysis process, we used data visualization strategies to understand the relationships between quotes, codes, and categories. This primarily involved the development of matrices that allowed us, for example, to compare perspectives or themes across participants. Data visualizations supported the writing of analytic memos.

3. *Analytic memos.* As the analysis progressed, we began to develop a series of analytic memos for exploring emerging ideas. These memos presented tentative claims and supporting evidence (i.e., key quotes from the data). The memos served as a tool for drafting the emerging findings, and also facilitated the testing of the claims against the data as analysis progressed. The analytic memos were organized and drafted into the findings overview in section 4 of this report.

4. *Teacher profile memos.* Toward the end of

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9   Strauss & Corbin, 1990

the data analysis process, we also developed a set memos, each of which profiled a teacher participant. Teachers selected for the teacher profile memos were chosen to represent a range of morale levels and to illustrate the range of the themes that emerged in the analysis. A smaller sample of these memos were then drafted into the teacher profiles shared in section 4 of the report.

5. *Discussion strategies.* This project involved a team-based collaborative analysis. For this reason, it was important to engage in ongoing discussion about the data and emerging findings. Regular team meetings were held throughout the course of the study to review data, to discuss analysis strategies, to explore emerging ideas, and to develop common perspectives. Much of this work happened between the two person analysis team, but at points, the study team was included in this work as well.

Ethics

One of the core principles that guides ethical research practice is that the benefits of the research should outweigh the risks. In section 1 of this report, we present an argument of why teacher morale matters. In section 5 of the report we provide a list of recommendations designed to address the problems that exist related to teacher job satisfaction and morale. We hope this establishes the importance of this issue and the potential benefits of this study.

At the same time there are associated risks. The primary risk is a breach of confidentiality. Because the topic of this research elicited critical perspectives on work conditions, leadership practices, and system policy, there is the potential that identification of the participants or the schools involved could lead to loss of status or reputation for individuals. For this reason, we took special care to secure our collected data,

and to mask the identities of the schools and participants in all published reports. The masking included the use of pseudonyms for teachers and schools, but also involved altering some details about the cases and people involved so that positive identification of individuals would be very difficult.

In the study's recruitment process, we were also careful to avoid the potential for coercion to participation. Schools and participants voluntarily chose to participate in the study.

We also used an informed consent process, approved by VCU's Internal Review Board, that informed participants about the purpose of the study, the risks, and the provisions for ensuring privacy and confidentiality.

Validity

In social science research, the term validity refers to the quality of inferences that are made based on the research process. Essentially validity poses two questions: (1) Are the inferences made from the data credible? and (2) How useful are the inferences to broader populations and across settings? Within traditional research, the legitimacy of research is discussed through well-established notions of internal validity, construct validity, reliability and generalizability.[10] For studies that rely primarily on qualitative methods, the notion of validity is often reframed to account for the difference in method (e.g., purposeful sampling, qualitative data, etc.).[11] There are two features of qualitative research that inform the approach to validity.

First, qualitative methods require a significant level of subjective decision making and interpretation by the researcher(s). For example, in our study, the selection of schools and teachers was based on purposeful decisions by the research team. During interviews, our interviewers made

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10   Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002

11   For a discussion of this point see Lincoln & Guba, 1985

decisions about when and if to ask follow-up questions. Data analysis involved the research team reading through transcripts, identifying key passages and interpreting the meaning. While the subjectivity of the researcher provides certain benefits to a study (e.g., the ability to explore emergent ideas in the course of the research), it also raises the concern that the findings of the research may only reflect the subjective perspectives of the researcher(s).

The second feature of qualitative research that is important to validity is the context specific nature of the research. In our study we learned a lot about the teachers we observed and interviewed, and about the schools we visited. Although this allowed us to understand in some depth the relationship between the individual morale of the teacher and the school culture, what we learned is not generalizable to the larger population of teachers or schools. To strengthen the validity of our study, we incorporated a number of established strategies.[12]

- **Researcher reflexivity.** In the initial stages of our research, we spent time documenting our personal perspectives on teacher morale and its possible causes. This allowed us to account for some of the subjectivity we brought to the study, and to look for opportunities to challenge our initial assumptions.
- **Prolonged engagement.** Spending more time in a research site and understanding the context allows a researcher to think in more sophisticated ways about the data. Knowing the context makes it less likely that unwarranted inferences will be made. The decision to conduct observations in addition to interviewing helped us think about the interview data in the relation to the context of the school.
- **Member checking.** Because our research focused on the perceptions of teachers,

part of assessing the accuracy of the data involved asking the participants if what we recorded is what they meant. Transcriptions of interviews were sent to participants for their review to ensure that their ideas were accurately represented.
- **Triangulation of data.** Collecting data from multiple sources strengthened our understanding of the phenomenon. For example, our understanding of the professional culture of the school was enhanced through our observations and interviews with teachers that experienced the culture from multiple roles.
- **Testing alternative hypotheses.** One way of increasing the rigor of the analysis is to conduct tests of alternative theories and competing claims. While in our analysis, we documented claims and provided evidence in our memos, we also went back into the data to look for evidence that disproved or complicated our claims.
- **Triangulation of perspectives.** Through our study, we regularly engaged the perspectives of the study team. In this regard it is worth noting that all members of the study team (i.e., the Principal Investigator, the VCU Graduate Assistants, and all of the school division personnel) were either current or former public school teachers. We believe that the extent to which the findings of research resonated with their experiences within schools is a test of the validity of the findings.
- **Maintaining a trail of evidence.** Although, in this published report we do not provide direct citations back to the data that support the claims we make, we have kept a full draft of the findings sections that includes data citations. This draft would allow for independent auditing of the report to ensure the legitimacy of the claims.

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12   Lincoln & Guba, 1985

4 WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT TEACHER MORALE

Three research questions guided this study: (1) How do teachers experience job satisfaction and morale? (2) What are the dynamics between a teacher's job related ideal and the professional culture of the school that support or hinder the experience of job satisfaction and morale? and (3)How do differences between schools related to policy context and social context affect the dynamics of job satisfaction and morale?

In the previous section we explained and justified the process we used to answer these questions. In this section we share what we learned. The findings in this section are presented in two forms: (1) an overview of findings and (2) a collection of teacher profiles. The overview begins with a presentation of the new model of teacher morale that emerged from our study. This model - shared in both a visual and narrative form - is an elaboration of the Evans' morale model. It illustrates the key factors that influence teacher job satisfaction and morale. This model is followed by subsections - organized by research question - that present a series of claims about teacher morale supported by evidence from the interview data. The second component of the findings is a series of 11 teacher profiles grouped into three sections. These profiles represent a sample of the full set of teachers (n = 44).

Each teacher profile includes some background information on the teacher as well as the teacher's self-reported level of morale. The main part of each profile is a short edited passage from the interview. The profiled teachers and interview passages were selected to represent a range of morale levels and teacher perspectives, but also as illustrations of the range of factors that drive morale.

Before beginning the presentation of findings, there are several additional points to make. First, the direct quotes from interview passages have been edited. Part of the editing was for readability. It is often the case that natural speech includes incomplete starts and stops and may be interrupted by tangents. In certain cases, we tightened up the quotes by deleting some of this transitional and tangential speech, taking care not to alter the meaning of the expressed ideas. Also, as mentioned in the method section, some of the details in the profiles are changed or obscured to protect the identity of the participants. This involves not only the use of pseudonyms, but also changes to certain demographic and/or work role details that we determined would not affect the meaning.

The second point is that the ideas expressed in the section are the perspectives of

individual teachers. This was captured in an interview with a participant at one of the schools. When asked what impacts teacher morale, he stated, "probably the greatest impact is going to be their level of support that they feel is present, whether it may be true or not.....because I think there are some teachers who don't think that they have support when they actually do." This point about perspective was evident in our study. Through our interviews, we saw multiple instances of teachers at the same school expressing very different perspectives on the professional culture and conditions of work. Whether or not the individual perspectives of teachers reflect the "truth" of the school's professional culture, however, is a complicated question. What we can say is that a teacher's perspective on her/his work culture, whether "true or not," influences morale and, therefore, is of high interest to this study.

Finally, we want to recognize that teaching is a profession that is highly demanding both intellectually and emotionally. This becomes very clear in this section of the report. As teachers talk about their work, they share thoughtful reflections and analyses of their experiences in their classrooms and schools. They also often share the emotions that come along with teachers' work. For example, a number of the interviews included moments of teachers crying. Although, in some cases this was related to feelings of stress, frustration, or anxiety, there were other times when it was connected to the joy experienced in the work. For example, one interview ended with a veteran teacher in tears. She explained, "I'm proud of our school. I'm sorry. I tend to be the emotional person. But really, it's everything that I really wanted at a school." While in this section we present teachers' reasoned perspectives on teaching, we also attempt to capture the emotions that came through in the interviews. Again, in a study of teacher morale, it is a critical component in building our understanding of the topic.

Our Model of Teacher Morale

As discussed in sections 2 and 3 of this report, this study was guided by the work of Linda Evans.[1] As expected, our research served as both a confirmation and an opportunity for the elaboration of her ideas. On the one hand, many of the key dynamics of Evans' model held. For example, we found evidence to support the overall person/organization fit structure. We also found that the development of morale was influenced by the individual characteristics of teachers (relative perspective, realistic expectations, and professionality orientation), as well as the professional cultures in which they worked. We also found that Evans' inclusion of social and policy contexts as influencing factors was useful for making sense of the data. Finally, Evans' definition of morale as the anticipation of future job satisfaction held true in the cases we studied. Teachers that experienced a sense of fit with their school contexts found high levels of job satisfaction and were more likely to have high morale. Teachers that were frustrated with their work were not optimistic about things getting better, and were looking for ways out.

However, themes emerged through the analysis of the data that led us to elaborate the morale model in significant ways. Much of this elaboration involved rethinking Evans' ideas about the factors and process that influenced a teacher's fit into a school. At the center of Evans' model (see figure 1) are six categories of fit: fairness, pedagogy, organizational efficiency, collegiality, interpersonal relationships, and self conception. While these were useful categories for understanding teachers' discussions of work, our analysis led us to restructure the dynamics of the model in several important ways.

First, we found that teachers discussed their experience of job satisfaction and morale in

1   Evans, 1997, 1998, 2001, 2008

Figure 3. Our Model of Teacher Morale
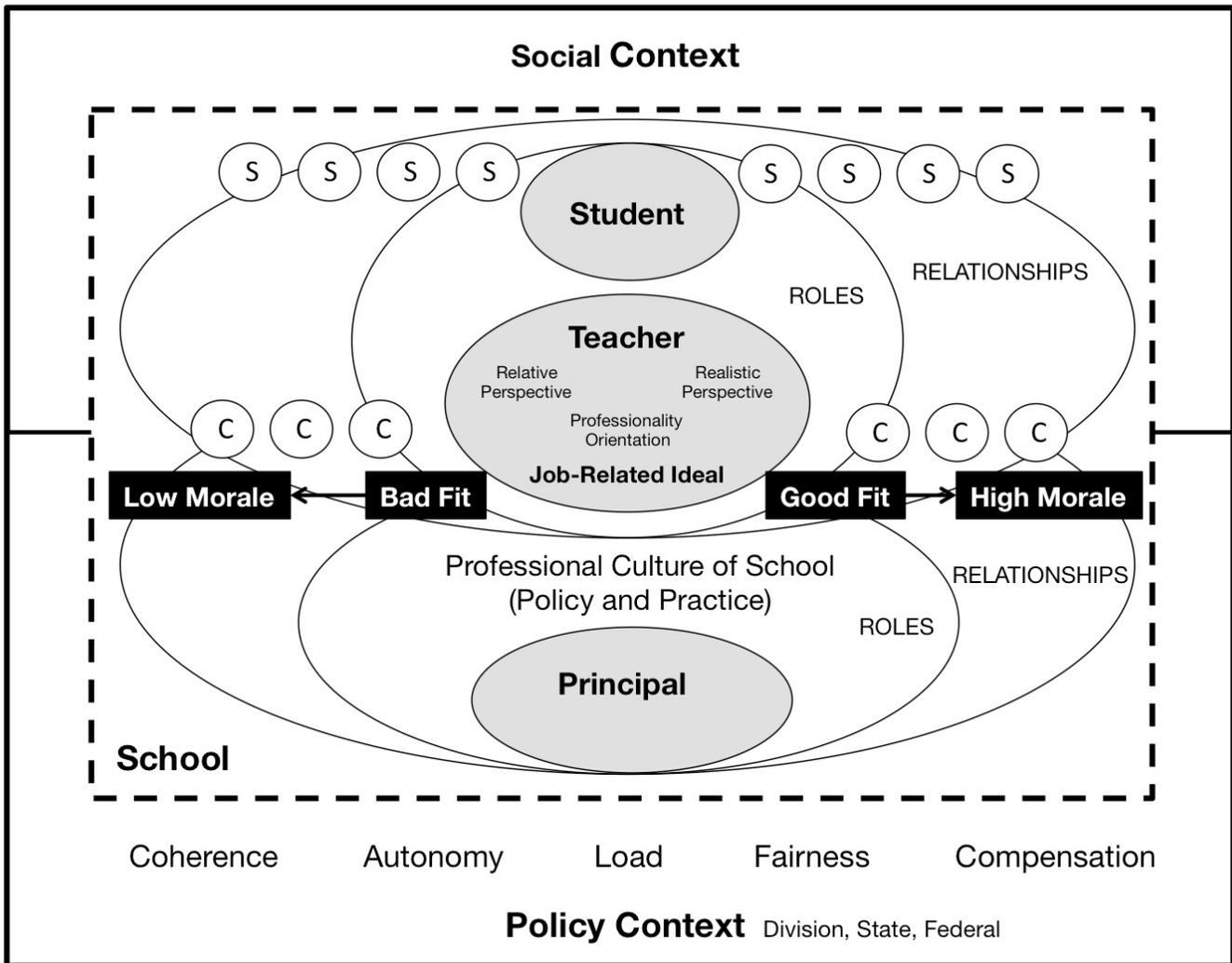
terms of their ability to fulfill the **roles** of teaching as well as the quality of the **relationships** through which the roles were enacted. In this regard, the primary role/relationship dynamic was with students. That is to say, teachers found satisfaction in fulfilling the formal role responsibilities of teaching students (e.g., planning lessons, delivering instruction, assessing student growth), but also emphasized the importance of the personal relationships they established with students, both as a foundation for successful role fulfillment and a valued outcome in itself. The importance of the engagement with students to job satisfaction and morale led us to include **students** on the model and depict the roles and relationships of student engagement with concentric circles (see figure 3). A similar dynamic existed between the teacher and her/his **colleagues** (represented by "c" on the model). Teachers found satisfaction through engagement with colleagues in formal role relationships (e.g., participation on grade-level teams) as well as interpersonal relationships.

The second significant shift from the Evans' model of morale was the development of a framework that categorizes teachers' perspectives on the policies that structure their work. Our study found that most, if not all, dimensions of

teacher work roles are defined, to varying extents, by division and school-level policies. For example, lesson planning might involve adherence to lesson plan formats; many assessments are standardized; professional collaboration may require structured protocols and reporting mechanisms. Because these policies influenced - supported or hindered - a teacher's ability to fulfill her/his roles, they were a major point of discussion in the interviews. We found that teachers' discussions of policies focused on six qualities: (1) **Coherence**. Does this policy make sense to me? (2) **Autonomy**. How much freedom does this policy allow for my professional judgment? (3) **Burden**. How much work is this? (4) **Fairness**. Is this policy designed to treat all of the teachers in a fair way? (5) **Compensation**. Am I being appropriately compensated for my work? Because the majority of the policies affecting teacher work originate at the state and division level, the five qualities of policy are included on the figure of our new model of morale within the box of policy context that exists outside of the school. However, the role of the principal in the implementation of these policies was also critical. This leads to our final point about our new morale model.

As with Evans' model, the principal plays a critical role in establishing the professional culture of the school. Similar to the teachers, the work of the principal was discussed in terms of roles and relationships. Principals were responsible not only with the implementation of the policies that structure the work of teachers, but they also needed to build trusting relationships and communicate with the teachers in ways that led to understanding and support for the policies. The new model we developed also shows the concentric circles of roles and responsibilities surrounding the principal.

Considering this new model, the idea of fit that is central to job satisfaction and morale is framed somewhat differently than in Evans' model. In our new model, a teacher experiences fit within a school work situation if she/he feels that the professional culture of the school supports the ability to fulfill role responsibilities and maintain the relationships through which the roles were enacted. A low morale teacher on the other hand would feel that the structures within the professional culture of the school and system were interfering with role fulfillment and relationships.

In the sections below, the ideas presented about this new model will be elaborated and supported with evidence from the interviews. This section also includes a series of teacher profiles that allow us to consider some of the ways the dynamics of this new model play out through the experiences and perspectives of individual teachers.

The Experience of Job Satisfaction and Morale: Roles and Relationships
RQ1: How do teachers experience job satisfaction and morale?

All of our interviews started by asking teachers to discuss their entry into teaching. Through this we learned that there are a number of paths into the classroom. While some saw it as a calling and may have known from an early age that they would be a teacher, others came to it later, some even suggesting that they had "stumbled into it." Regardless of the path, the motivations for teaching were relatively consistent across all participants. When asked about motivation for teaching, one teacher captures many of the key themes: "So I guess what inspired me to become a teacher was … having a love of knowledge and a love of children, and just wanting to have a job where you could impact someone's life every day." This reflects goals related to personal interests and growth, but also a commitment to "making a difference." This explicit expression of altruism was common among the teachers interviewed. The sense of calling and altruism attached to teaching also led some to declare that it was "more than a job." Along with understanding the motivation for entering the profession, the interview protocol was also designed to get teachers to talk about the types of satisfaction they found in their work. Through this subsection of the report we will present and support three claims about teachers' experience of satisfaction and morale.

***Claim 1:** A teacher's job satisfaction is derived from a sense of her/his ability to fulfill the roles and responsibilities of the work, as well as the quality of the relationships with students and colleagues through which the work is enacted.*

We found that teacher job satisfaction is developed through the interplay between the teacher's specific role responsibilities (e.g., planning lessons, teaching the content, assessing the content, etc.) and the personal relationships that are critical to this work. It is important to recognize that these dimensions of the work (i.e., role fulfillment and relationship development) are distinct. For example, teachers can teach without developing strong relationships with students; conversely, relationships can form without delivering instruction. However, we found that when teachers discussed their satisfaction in work, the ideas of role fulfillment and relationship development were closely connected.

We also found this dynamic between role and relationship in teachers' descriptions of job satisfaction occurred primarily in two spheres: (1) in their classroom work with students, and (2) in their work with colleagues. However, while all teachers discussed the work with students as a source of satisfaction, satisfaction through collegial interaction was less consistent. It is also important to note, that this finding does not include teachers' engagement with two other critical stakeholder groups: administrators and

parents. While these relationships are both very important to teachers' experience of work, we found that they operated under a different dynamic. The importance of these relationships will be examined later in the findings.

Below we elaborate this dynamic between roles and relationship as they occur in the two spheres of teacher work: engagement with students, and engagement with colleagues.

Roles and relationships with students

When asked about the source of their job satisfaction, teachers inevitably went first to their work with students. Teachers talked about the satisfaction they derived from having students engaged with class content and developing new levels of understanding – the "a-ha moment" was often mentioned. There was also satisfaction in helping students achieve success. For example one teacher stated, "My favorite are kids that don't necessarily like math, or don't know that they like math, or think they are bad at math, and I can help them over a problem solving hump. And then all the sudden they are like, 'Oh my goodness, this is my favorite thing ever.' I mean those kinds of things, where … I can see what I did directly impacted and helped a student. That's always really exciting."

While the teachers' satisfaction in these instances was about feeling success in the ability to do the work of teaching, the conversations also focused on the qualities of the relationships developed with students. In many cases, teachers spoke directly about the importance of connecting on a more personal level. One teacher stated, "My idea of being a teacher in the perfect world is more about developing relationships with students than actually teaching them the content. I think that the content is taught best when you develop a relationship." The discussions of successful teaching experiences also revealed

the strength of the emotional connection between teacher and student. One teacher told a story of success she experienced with a struggling student and how meaningful it was to her: "He took a quiz and he actually got all of them right. When I told him, 'You got 100 on this quiz!' he looked at me and he goes, 'My mom is going to be so excited!' Well, I have a kid that struggles in school. I try to be that teacher that would be my son's teacher – don't make me cry. That little kid is happy. That's how I want my son to be" Throughout the observations and the interviews it was clear that the work of teaching was about the relationships with students, almost as a prerequisite to the successful delivery of instruction. Satisfaction in the practice of teaching was also related through stories about the success of former students, and the times they returned to express thanks.

Roles and relationships with colleagues

Many teachers referenced relationships with colleagues as a key source of satisfaction. On a professional level, collegial relationships were structured around subject and grade level collaborative teams as well as through other leadership and service roles. The level of collegial engagement varied between teachers depending on their role. For example, in some cases elective teachers had less opportunity to engage in collaborative planning – e.g., there may be only one German teacher in a school. Collegial engagement also varied by a teacher's level of interest. Some teachers actively sought out opportunities to engage professionally with colleagues, while others chose – for a variety of reasons – to work independently as much as possible.

Some teachers described the honest professional conversations with colleagues as beneficial to their professional growth. One

teacher stated, "I have been surprised at how many teachers in this building in particular are so willing to say, 'I don't get it,' and ask for help … So I feel as a teacher that I'm engaged with students but also with the staff, which is cool." Some teachers also perceived collegiality as a source of professional growth: "I call my school the master teaching academy because the focus is on curriculum and good teaching … If you were an artist and you got to work in this great community of artists and you learn from them, and maybe you come in a little rough, but you're inspired by the people you work with." Some teachers also valued the collaborative conversations among colleagues as an opportunity for professional recognition. One teacher stated, "I do get satisfaction when I feel like others consider me good at what I do … I like to feel like people value what I'm doing."

Collegial relationships were also described as providing emotional support and promoting positive attitudes about the work. One early career teacher stated, "I think that constant sense of support and enthusiasm from each other helps make us more enthusiastic … it makes you feel better about what you're doing and where you are, and knowing that you have someone to turn to when you're stressed out." Describing her relationship with colleagues, another teacher stated, "It's just amazing working with them and being on a team, because I feel like together we are such a powerful positive force in these students' lives. And that gives me a lot of job satisfaction." Others expressed a different rationale for appreciation of collegial support. A mid-career teacher stated, "as far as the teachers that I work with, I really feel like we have a close bond and it's almost like I feel like we are all kind of going through hell together."

Claim 2: *A teacher's assessment of overall job satisfaction is connected to the degree of fit she/he has within the work environment.*

Through the 44 interviews we conducted across the three case schools, all teachers shared experiences of satisfaction in their work. Even the handful of teachers who described their morale as very low found job satisfaction in some aspects of their work. Conversely, there were no teachers among the 44 that were completely satisfied. There were always frustrations, even when teachers presented them as "nit-picky" points. This suggests that a teacher's overall job satisfaction is assessed not in yes or no terms, but along a range of satisfaction. When determining overall job satisfaction, a teacher asks, "How satisfied or dissatisfied am I with my work?"

Accompanying the idea of overall job satisfaction is the idea of *fit*. A teacher that finds a significant level of job satisfaction in her/his work, is more likely to feel a fit within the school context. Some teachers expressed this as having found the "perfect role" or of being in the place "where I'm meant to be." The idea of fit was also shared through teachers' expression of love for their work. For example, when asked about morale, one teacher stated, "I love my job. I love what I do … Even when there are days when I hate my job, I still love my job." In many cases, this love of job came with a recognition that not all roles within schools would be a good fit. Some of the good fit teachers talked of feeling fortunate or lucky for finding their current teaching spot. For example, one teacher in a non-core class stated, "It is an elective. [The students] are choosing it and it is for high school credit … So I have those luxuries and on top of that I don't teach an SOL course. So while they have an exam, I make the exam. And I do have a lot more autonomy because of that, and I feel like I am in

the perfect position to be a teacher."

As argued above, teacher job satisfaction is not just about role quality but also relationship quality. The idea of job fit is the same. Teachers' assessment of fit often referenced connections they felt with the community of students and colleagues. For example, one teacher stated that his school was, "One of the best schools I've ever seen. Teachers want to be here. Students want to be here. Parents want their kids to be here." The idea of fit with community was also reinforced by discussions of the school as family. One teacher stated, "I feel like I can go to anyone in this building and talk to them about something and be like, 'Okay, look, I need your support,' or, 'I am having this problem, can I just talk to you about this?' So it's very much a family." Along these lines, one teacher described her school as "my second home." This sentiment of connection also came with the idea that fit with community was not guaranteed. For example one teacher discussing the community of her school stated, "we all love being here, but ... if you're not really cut out for it, you're going to leave. The people that are here are the people that want to be here."

Claim 3: *A teacher's morale is related to her/his anticipation of future fit within the work environment, which is closely associated with the intent to stay or leave.*

In our interviews we found that teachers who expressed having high morale talked about their morale in terms of fit. Conversely, teachers who discussed having lower levels of morale consistently did not feel a job fit. This was a problem related to both role fulfillment and relationship quality. Low morale teachers felt as if they lacked efficacy in their teaching. One teacher lamented, "I can't help [the students] in the way I would like to help them. I don't really feel that

I can." Low morale teachers were also more likely to feel disconnected from the community of the school.

Teachers expressed low morale as a lack of hope about achieving fit or a meaningful level of satisfaction in the future. A clear distinction emerged between low and high morale teachers related to their intent to remain in their position, or in some cases in the profession. One teacher who self-identified as low morale and was struggling in her work shared, "I don't want to just stop teaching. … I think I would regret it. I really like what I do. I really like being around the kids. I can't imagine myself doing anything else, but when you leave here in tears there is a problem … I just don't know if some of the things that I feel frustration toward are going to change anytime soon. I would like to be the teacher that has been like, 'I have been at this school for 30 years.' I think there is something really cool and neat in that. But, it depends on what day you ask me. I just don't want to get burned out. I am trying really hard not to get burned out."

Teacher Profiles 1

The following set of teacher profiles contain reflections from both high and low morale teachers. The teachers profiled experience job satisfaction and morale in different ways. As you read the profiles, consider how various elements, such as social context, relationships, and school leadership shape a teacher's job satisfaction and morale.

Samantha

Samantha is an early career teacher who teaches both regular and advanced social studies classes. When asked about her morale she explains, "Today probably a nine, maybe an eight … In terms of the year, I would say I'm probably at about a five or a six. The bright side to that is I have a lot to look forward to, and I know that, and so it's just kind of knowing it comes in waves, knowing it's just the day, it's the week, it's the time of year." This is Samantha's second year of teaching and her first year teaching full time at this school. She was inspired to teach by her kindergarten teacher who she recounts "let me shine in the classroom and found ways for me to be me without squelching who I was, and that made a big difference in my life." She feels that being a young teacher helps her build relationships and make strong cultural connections with her students. She is technology savvy and she enjoys the extra work she does to support the school's technology needs. Although Samantha describes her situation as close to ideal, she cites her biggest stressors as class size and a lack of

If we're going to make a student-based decision, then we need to make the decision in a way that the staff can implement and be pleased and happy and willing and successful in implementing

time. She attributes some of her frustrations to her own inexperience and feels confident that those frustrations will diminish as she becomes more experienced. Prior to coming to her current school, Samantha worked in another middle school with very similar student demographics. This prior experience significantly shapes her perspective on her current work context. In the following interview excerpts Samantha articulates the complexity and efficiency of the systems in her school.

How do you feel about working at this school?

I love it 100 percent. I hope that's evident through all of this. Having worked at two schools, I feel really, really blessed – and I mean, I don't say that lightly or to be cheesy – to have seen the way two schools really do it, and when I say do it, I mean, everything from taking attendance, from collaborating with other teachers, from lunch duty, from hall duty, from homework assignments, from test policies, classroom practices, discipline. And the two schools that I worked at last year did it 100 percent different from one another. And I have my opinions about who did it better. I think my school probably does most everything better, which is one of the reasons I'm so excited to be here … One of the biggest differences that

makes an impact on my day to day success and happiness is just the staff. We are 100 percent committed to each other, to this school, to the students, to our professions ... There's not a single person who is just waiting to retire, and I can't say the same at the school that I worked at previously, and even in my student teaching experiences. It seems like this school is kind of the exception here, and to my knowledge even people who are close to retirement, they are still in love with this profession ... Everyone here loves being here, is happy to be here, will be here tomorrow with bells on, gladly.

How would you describe the school to someone who was unfamiliar with it?

My mom knows nothing about school except what she reads in books or in newspaper articles and the snippets she got from us growing up as kids. And so I actually had her, shadow me for a day, because I wanted her to understand exactly what goes into this place, and it's just so much that truly not all of it can be put into words. It is 100 percent a feeling of what happens in this building, and there are lots of components that go into that, but to really take it all in, I think you really have to spend a day in our shoes … because it can be very hard to quantify ... It's very much a web, an interconnected web – and I don't want to say spider web, because that implies confusion, and there's certainly parts that are confusing, however, the web would, in my mind, kind of fall apart if any one piece or component was suddenly just dropped, because it all makes sense related to the next thing that goes with it. It really is a web of connectedness ... I think it starts at the top…with the administration, because their expectations are the same across the board, and everything they do is for the students, but they recognize that they have to have their staff on board, and so if we're going to make a

student-based decision, then we need to make the decision in a way that the staff can implement and be pleased and happy and willing and successful in implementing whatever it is so that students ultimately succeed ... There's this level of trust and understanding in the system that everybody upholds the system.
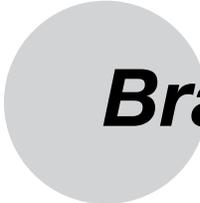
Brandon

Brandon, an English teacher with over ten years of experience working at his school, offers the following response when asked to rate his morale. "I'm a happy person. My morale is a lot higher than two-thirds of the staff in this building and that's perspective. I've worked an assembly line job where I was ID number whatever, whatever, whatever and if I didn't fulfill the quota then it was game over." Brandon is currently teaching exclusively honors level classes. Brandon has also taken on numerous teacher leadership positions in his building and within the school division. He is motivated by a desire to make a difference and give back, noting that several influential teachers took a personal interest in helping him succeed. Brandon's job satisfaction is influenced by his prior work experience outside the education field, as noted in the above quote, but it also stems from witnessing his students experience success. Furthermore he acknowledges the privileges of his specific teaching assignment – teaching advanced curriculum to advanced students – and the autonomy of that context combined with a supportive administrator who seeks and welcomes his input, as conditions that afford him the opportunity to exercise judgment and use his expertise to meet students' needs. In the following

interview excerpts Brandon describes himself as a teacher and then reflects on his frustrations with the larger system.

So if you had to describe your ideal teaching situation what would it be?

I think I'm really close to a perfect situation because I have an extremely trusting administrator that gives me the room to be a leader and try some of the things that I am doing now…And just be a part of the conversation, not only administratively, within the curriculum, but also with the kids as well, listening to what they need and providing that forum, in a place where I can provide that for them….so I am really hoping they don't fire me (chuckles).

There are different types of teachers. How would you describe yourself as a teacher?

So it's splitting hairs a bit but I will tell you something I tell my student teachers. You have teachers and you have educators. Teachers write lesson plans, educators teach people how to think. So some days I'm a teacher I think, some days I'm an educator. So what kind of teacher am I? I really like sailing. So put it in the context of the ship. I would say I'm the guy behind the wheel and all I do is direct while the rest of the class makes sure that there is enough wind in the sails to get us to where we need to go. Just the physical juxtaposition of the room, I'm in the back of the room. The ship's wheel is always in the back. Because the crew is always the most important… they are doing the work. And I guess that to me teaching is letting go so that I can let them learn.

I think I'm really close to a perfect situation because I have an extremely trusting administrator that gives me the room to be a leader and try some of the things that I am doing now

So what part of your job frustrates you the most?

This is an obvious answer, one I think you will already know, but it's the bureaucratic piece. You know. It's a very personal profession and sometimes when you have to collect impersonal data it's a really hard thing to internalize that. So all of the goals we have to write, all the data we have to collect are disheartening because a lot of the times we are just following mandates and the people that are supposed to lead us don't even have the full picture of what it's used for… I see the business world coming into teaching…These kids have fingerprints, it's not a footprint of a machine sitting in a shop. It's the fingerprint of a child that was made by God's grace…that's so hard to attach a number to and it kills me sometimes when we have to do that. And it kills me when I watch teachers get stifled a bit from their ideas because they are so stressed about paperwork, so stressed about this or that and the support system just isn't there. I think it's getting better, but it's just hey, go try this … Like there's an observation that can happen, the principal can come in here and observe you, write everything down, go back and send it to you digitally and you have to sign off that it's ok, and you never had a conversation with that person…And that's that impersonal piece again, that 'I'm here to fulfill this and I can check these boxes and I can walk away from you.' There's no relationship there. It's a disconnect really. Our job is to build relationships with students to get them to grow, but there's no relationship opportunity there in the growth of the teacher … That's the big frustration for me.

42

Tracy

Tracy, a teacher with over 10 years of experience, rates her current morale: "I'd probably say a seven or an eight, just because I put a high expectation on myself, and so I do a lot of work outside of school, and with two young kids and a family, that's harder than what it used to be. I've tried to scale back with that, but to me, lowering my expectation, what I feel is 100 percent of my effort, doesn't sit well with me, so I just work a lot and sleep less. So in that sense, my morale is lower…But everything else is good, it's just the deadlines, meaning the forms and the data that have to be turned in on top of coming up with interesting lessons and grading papers. All that stuff really is time-consuming…and it cuts into my time at home. I don't have that break where I am able to leave it here. I know a lot of teachers do that, and I can't. I work on it, I've tried, but that's just me, and I have to work on that."

Tracy, who teaches regular and advanced English courses, became motivated to teach after working with middle school students during a college summer internship. Her desire is to help guide students through a difficult time in their lives along with teaching them important content for life. She describes herself as a very structured, organized, and on-task teacher. She says this is a necessity if she wants to cover the content and stay on pace. Although she is strict about student expectations she incorporates games, activities, and hands-on group work, stating "I believe in not just having them listen to me, but the more they talk about it with each other, the more they'll remember it and understand it." In the following interview excerpts Tracy provides her thoughts on the school's students and the leadership. She also she shares the aspects of her job that bring her the most satisfaction and the most frustration.

How would you describe the students at this school?

I feel like they're respectful, and you don't always get that in every school. Parents, they're supportive and helpful. If there's something that can be worked on at home they usually help to kind of get it moving. If a student is taking too long to get something done, or hasn't turned something in, or needs to work on a certain issue, like not talking so much in class, just bringing that up with a parent usually helps the situation. So when parents and students and teachers all work together I think that's really what allows them to do well in school. If they don't have the parent support, then no one's really checking up on how they're doing, or whether they're doing their homework or studying or other things like that. I feel it's kind of like you meet a dead end at one point, and you can only do but so much at school.

What are your thoughts on the leadership at this school?

I appreciate that our current principal has taken away extra duties I used to have. With the earlier principals I used to have lunch duty during my planning, or bus duty after school if I had afternoon planning. So that's been great that they hear us. They really listen to us, if we overall have concerns with certain things. We weren't happy with a new school-division teacher observation process. It was very lengthy. Our administration really listened to us and they changed it. So it made sense and it was not, 'this is how it's going to be, like it or not,' and I like that they are willing to listen.

What aspects of your job bring you the most satisfaction?

Seeing the kids get something that they struggled with, and then seeing their confidence grow in the subject matter, because they walk in a lot of times with that mentality that, for example, they aren't good at writing, and it's trying to break that and help them realize they can do it, just a different way to approach it and tackle that issue to get over that hurdle, and then it's really rewarding to see their confidence grow throughout the year.

What parts of your job frustrate you the most?

Just all the data. It's so much data to keep track of and I guess it's not necessarily the school, but it's just the county and the state requiring this certain thing that we fill out for lesson plans. I feel like if a teacher is showing that they're doing well then it just seems monotonous, like busywork. If I've shown that my kids are getting it, they're performing well on the SOLs, it doesn't make sense for me to go and fill that out if I'm already using the SOLs to make my lessons. I know that the whole plan is to make sure teachers are using the SOLs and the breakdown, the verbiage of it, so that they're teaching everything that they need to teach, but if you're a teacher like most all of us here, we are doing that already, so I feel like sometimes it's just a lot of data for the sake of data, and it has just become so time-consuming that it takes away my time of coming up with fun, inventive projects because I'm busy filling out this and that form, and I have to remember this and that deadline, and in addition to having to tutor kids, pull them out at certain times during study hall and I feel

like there's not enough time to do everything that's required, and that part is draining. It's just taking us away from why we're here, and that's the kids and teaching them.

Has this gotten worse over the course of your teaching career?

Yes....It is the impression that people outside of education that are making these laws and rules feel that they can't trust teachers. It's as though our expertise is not really trusted – like, we're not experts in what we do, and I feel like teachers don't really have the respect that they used to have, and that's diminished through the years, and that we have to be followed up and checked up on by doing all these data sheets and filling in forms. In the past I would do these really great real life lessons, I had time to do them, where for example, I'd have them create an advertising campaign, where they'd meet with local businesses, and we'd work with the art teacher, and they would learn to use grammar and writing for real-life application. We did all these great things, but because of so many SOLs we have to cover now there's no time to do fun stuff that gets them excited about the subject. And I have really had to limit a lot of that stuff. I really had to scale it back because of the expectation of what kids should get in such a short amount of time. The pacing is intense. I mean, it's down to a T of how many weeks each topic should be, and sometimes, if my kids, for example, aren't getting hyperbole or metaphor...I'm not moving on until the majority of them get it, and if that means I'm slightly off the pacing guide, then I have to cut and figure

> *It is the impression that people outside of education that are making these laws and rules feel that they can't trust teachers. It's as though our expertise is not really trusted – like, we're not experts in what we do.*

it out somewhere. But those real life application lessons and activities are what they end up liking and changing their mind about writing and I really had to scale back on that through the years, and that's disappointing.

What would you say about the morale of the overall school?
It just depends who you talk to…There's been quite a bit of turnover through the years. In my opinion the grass is not always greener. There's always something that you don't like in a school, there's not going to be a perfect school out there, so it's just seeing what is it that you have here and whether you would regret going somewhere else. That's why I have no desire to really change and move anywhere, because I have more positives here than negatives, and I know if I go somewhere else, it will be a different issue that I may have, maybe with the kids, and I prefer inside my four walls, if that's good, I can work with it.

Jonathan

When asked to rate his current morale, Jonathan, an early career science teacher, responds: "It is a tough word to define … Low. I don't feel like I have the ability to do what I think I need to do. Given the constraints of time, resources and the mix of students, the number of students. The time spent with students… The organization of the system. I feel sometimes that I am doing a disservice to them." As a career switcher Jonathan relays that he wanted to find a job where he could "sleep at night." The professions that stood out to him were the "teacher, firefighter types." When asked about

his teaching style, he says that he starts by considering the ends – explaining that he views his students as the adults that they are becoming. "I want to be a support network for my students … a compass …not an answer."

Jonathan has a positive assessment of the school leadership team, stating that they foster an atmosphere of communication and openness, and he juxtaposes this against his work experiences with managers outside the field of public education. He says the collegiality in the building is overwhelmingly positive, crediting both the leadership and his co-workers as one of the reasons he has not been quicker to change his current situation. He feels respected and trusted by his administration and describes the atmosphere as an "ask for forgiveness rather than permission culture."

Jonathan describes himself as a person who accepts conditions as they are relaying that he doesn't believe the grass is always greener on the other side. He believes that all teachers have their own set of challenges and rewards regardless of their teaching situation. In the following passages Jonathan shares his source of satisfaction and fulfillment as well as his frustrations.

What parts of the job bring you the most satisfaction and fulfillment?
Most of my fulfillment comes after the fact… upon the realization, when I get a little bit of perspective … And knowing that what I am ultimately doing is trying to empower and build happiness for young adults … Frequently there are moments when it's just fun to be up there teaching. More often my frustrations are immediate, but I think that is par for the course in middle school and for teaching in general. So I wash off those types of frustrations. But most of my satisfaction comes after the fact. It's when I leave about now and get home just in time to ride

my bike to pick my kid. The fact that I have a job that I can pick my kid from school is wonderful. And I am not stuck in a suit. I try to dress decently. I took my tie off today because my kids were making fun of me. I try to dress decently well, but I still don't feel bad when I am wearing tennis shoes. And generally I am not supposed to be anyone aside from who I am… which I think is a lot better of a thing than most would admit.

The flipside of that question is what parts of the job frustrate you the most?

I want to be very careful not to throw anyone under the bus. Because I don't think there is anyone to throw under the bus. But, we have somehow come to a culture of helplessness. And in order for the schools to fix it so many things are being asked of them from so many people in so many different ways. There is a lot of inefficiency that I don't think that there is anyway to truly address without just radical upheaval of the system itself. And being within that and knowing that in some way I am propagating a system that is in many ways broken, that's a downer.

There is a lot of inefficiency that I don't think that there is anyway to truly address without just radical upheaval of the system itself. And being within that and knowing that in some way I am propagating a system that is in many ways broken, that's a downer.

Do you see a path out of that?

Not without making a personal jump that I am just unwilling to make. As in putting myself professionally in a position that is untenable outside of my professional world self. I couldn't devote enough of myself to feel like I was doing what I should be doing. I know that's slightly vague. I think I would have trouble being concrete on it.

Has your morale changed over the course of your years of teaching?

Yeah. I think so. I think as you see kind of repetitions and similar things happen over and over again. I am a little more pessimistic toward new ideas and a little more dismissive of things that come my way. I have always tried to take an attitude of take the good. I mean even something that is bad there is something good from it. And I try to keep that attitude. And I will admit that a lot more sarcasm toward new ideas has crept in as I have seen some things that were, from my opinion a pretty obvious teacher zeitgeist opinion, not able to be taken seriously. And then you start viewing it a little quicker from that lens. So in that sense, I think I was a lot more open-minded a few years ago.

And you equate that open-mindedness with higher morale?

In some way, absolutely. Because you are seeing new people or new ideas and new things as truly new ideas…things to try out. And then it slowly switches for things you have to do. The difference between 'can' and 'have to'… If someone says 'I can do this' or someone says 'I have to do this,' I certainly think there is a morale button there.

Emma

Emma is a mid-career special education English teacher who teaches in both collaborative and self-contained environments. She offers the following details to describe her current morale. "On a scale of 1 to 10, this year in particular I'm hugging a 2 or 3. It's been a tough year. This particular year I feel like has been more stressful than any and it is partly just this group, you know. There are groups that come through and they have been tough since kindergarten and they will be tough until they graduate and this year I just feel like I am so defeated. I took a personal day yesterday just because I thought I am not going to make it. And we just had a break, but I'm like, I'm not going to make it. I'm just completely frazzled. It is exhausting. This is the first year that I have actually gone home on the weekends and looked at other careers. I told my husband if I was close to retirement I would finish out, but if education keeps going the way it is going, and I keep getting this sense of not being supported by the administration and not supported by the parents, I can't do this for 20 more years. Everybody says, yeah you get June, July and August. It's not even worth it at this point. My stress level, my blood pressure is through the roof, and it's like yeah, I get a few holidays off but is it worth it in the end? I'm starting to think maybe not. I feel like there are times I go home and I think, I don't even know why I bother."

Emma comes from a family of teachers and didn't plan to teach, but fell in love with it while substituting in college. She describes herself as a teacher who has a good rapport with her students. She is straightforward and they

know what to expect, but she is also flexible when necessary. She points out the close bond she has with her colleagues in terms of sharing resources and supporting one another, explaining that they lean on each other to pull through the stressful times. Throughout her interview Emma emphasizes the huge changes that have occurred in the student population during her time there. "I feel like the population of the school has really changed." In the passages below Emma shares her perspective on the rewards and frustrations of teaching.

In what aspects of your job do you find the most satisfaction?

When I have those kids, the few little shining stars that say, 'Thanks so much for helping me,' and 'I really get it now,' and 'you are my favorite teacher.' Not that I need to be their friend…but it is very rewarding when those kids that you didn't think were going to get it, get it. Unfortunately the moments are few and far between but they are very satisfying. And then I go home and think maybe I can do this for a little bit longer. I really try to make a big deal about it because I don't think the kids understand that sometimes it's so hard to be here. The moments that they are appreciative, it's like 'oh, thank you.' I'm here from 7:15 to 5 every day and I don't think they have any clue how much work we put into it, so it is very satisfying when they say, 'Oh, I totally get what you mean now' or 'Oh, that was awesome, thanks for helping me.'

What are the parts of your job that frustrate you the most?

So part of it is time, which I am sure everybody says. We just don't have the time. I have two little ones and I get here by 7:15 in the morning and the kids don't come on the bus until 8:30, but that's the only time that I can get anything done.

So it's either come in at the crack of dawn or stay late. Well, with my kids being in daycare I kind of have to come in early. But just trying to get the paperwork done and the expectation is not only are you their teacher, you need to be their mother, their guidance counselor, their therapist, their social worker and everything else. There's never enough time to do everything that I need to do and that's expected of me. It's expected that with the kids on your caseload that you keep up with their grades, and that you contact the parents every time a grade drops. And you need to do interim progress and report card progress and then by the way, we have 3 eligibilities that we scheduled for you, and can you give up your planning today to go to this child study meeting. It just feels like the plate is getting fuller and fuller and fuller and there's no give. We haven't had a raise in 8 years and it's like you want me put on my happy face and give you my all and you haven't given me anything? The amount of paperwork, especially in the Special Education Department…keeping up with the IEPs, the constant contact, updating the grading system that's expected once a week minimum, putting announcements on your blackboard page…when I first started teaching I used to take work home every night and then after my first one was born I tried to cut back on it and then once I had my 2nd child I just said it gets done or it doesn't, but it's not coming home. Of course then what will I do? I'll come in even earlier the next morning because eventually it does have to get done. But I have gotten to the point where I refuse to take anything home because like I said I am dropping my kids off at 6:45 in the morning,

staying until 4:30, 5 and its like I go home and I'm just exhausted and it's mentally and physically draining…and I told my husband I feel like the worst Mom because I'm so on edge that by the time I get home I snap at everything my kids do and they are like what did we do? And I say it's nothing, it really wasn't you, it's the 18 million things that happened today and my husband says, 'Oh just leave it at work' and I'm like, yeah, you don't get it, I can't leave it at work, it's emotionally attached to me all the time.

It is very rewarding when those kids that you didn't think were going to get it, get it. Unfortunately the moments are few and far between but they are very satisfying. And then I go home and think maybe I can do this for a little bit longer.

Drivers of Morale: Teachers, Policies, and Principals

RQ2: What are the dynamics between a teacher's job related ideal and the professional culture of the school that support or hinder the experience of job satisfaction and morale?

The dramatic contrast in perspectives evident between high and low morale teachers raises the question about cause. If, as we argue above, morale is determined by the experience of job fit, a lack of fit might lead us to one of two explanations. Either lack of fit is caused by some characteristic of the individual teacher or by factors within the school context. Each explanation suggests a different response. The solution to lack of fit based on individual teacher characteristics is to seek better teacher/school context matches. The solution to lack of fit based on school context factors is to adjust the school context to better match the needs of teachers. Based on the data we collected, there is evidence to support both positions. Below, we will explore these two sets of factors (i.e., teacher characteristics and work context characteristics), and draw connections between them.

Claim 1: *A teacher's fit in a school work context is determined in part by characteristics of the individual teacher including personal disposition, teaching ability, and individual expectations.*

One of the strengths of qualitative interviewing is that it provides insight into the unique personalities and perspectives of the people being interviewed. While there were many points of commonality across our participants, we learned through our research that no two teachers are alike. They have different personalities, experiences, abilities, philosophies, and expectations about their professional roles. While we did not find any evidence that there is a particular type of teacher that is more likely to be high or low morale, there were several ways in which individual characteristics of teachers became factors in the development of individual attitudes toward work.

Teacher disposition

An idea that emerged in several of the interviews was that teacher morale was a product of individual teacher disposition, with some even claiming that high morale individuals are just "naturally happy" people. This was also framed as an issue of optimism versus pessimism. One participant stated, "I think a lot of it is just general personality … If you go in looking for a good situation, that's what you're going to get. So definitely some of it is just internal chemistry." This perspective generally came from administrators and high morale teachers. There was also a tendency among these groups to characterize certain teachers as "naturally" negative. One teacher stated, "I think that there is just something innate about being negative or complaining." In certain cases, this perspective was expanded beyond the idea of morale as a natural condition, when it was recognized that life experiences might impact the happiness level of a teacher. For example, one administrator stated, "With the financial downfall, I know… that year was a harder year for morale … It wasn't just about school. It was about, rising gas prices. It

was about transportation. It was about childcare issues."

Many teachers also talked about the importance of staying positive. Rather than being a natural condition, keeping a positive disposition was a personal strategy for keeping morale up. One teacher stated, "I am positive, and I want to stay positive." One of the administrators reflected on this idea: "Sometimes I think it's a personality type to complain more or swap more negative stuff … I mean everyone needs someone to vent to, but … sometimes it can be more than venting when it spreads or it becomes too negative." Along these lines, an idea raised regularly was the importance of staying away from the "Negative Nellies." One teacher stated, "I am a sponge and if I get around a lot of negativity I start taking it on myself which is why I don't eat in the teacher's lounge." The opposite was discussed as well. Some teachers sought out colleagues whose positivity supported their morale.

Teacher ability

Although teaching is emotionally demanding in both effort and time, it also requires a high level of skill and expertise to achieve success. In this regard, the failure to find satisfaction and ultimately fit within a school context might be due to an individual teacher's lack of ability to fulfill the role. For example, one school leader reflecting on teacher morale highlighted the importance of teachers having problem solving skills: "I think some of it has to do with their problem solving. How they look at certain situations. Some people will always look for answers … and other people are just going to say, 'Nope, can't do anything about it,' and they're just going to give up … maybe people are not acknowledging the fact that there are 30 different variables with their students."

The idea that skill in teaching is a based on cumulative experiences that over time build into expertise was also apparent as certain teachers talked about the challenges of inexperience. One early career teacher stated, "I feel confident that, as the years go by I will get faster at that and better at that and know what will work and what won't, but sometimes that's really frustrating to plan out a lesson … and have it flop."

Teacher expectations

Finally, differences in individual's professional expectations were a factor. One administrator reflected on possible reasons that a teacher may not find satisfaction in her/his work, "maybe it was because teaching wasn't what they thought it was going to be … When teachers come in, letting them know the reality of teaching … let them know that there are going to be tough days and that not every kid is going to listen and you're not necessarily going to reach every single student as much as you may want to try."

This gap in expectation was closely connected to prior work experiences. One administrator captured this idea stating, "Maybe working in different places brings more perspective or makes you happier when you're in a place where you realize there are less challenges. Sometimes, I think if people have only worked here, it could be hard to see that. You could only just see some of the frustrations." A teacher, when asked if she would be at the same school in three years, stated, "Yeah. I'll be here. I can't imagine going anywhere … I know what other schools are like and I'm happy here, so I'm like, why move."

Years of teaching experience was also a factor in the development of expectations. An experienced teacher is more likely to have worked at other schools. In terms of morale and satisfaction, this could be a good thing or a bad thing, depending on the qualities of the prior experiences. There was also evidence that

some experienced teachers no longer felt like the expectations were what they had originally signed up for. Part of this was a recognition of societal changes that were impacting the role of teachers. For example, one respondent shared that her school was experiencing a spike in behavior issues among students, and then followed with, "That's a new reality that we're dealing with. So I just … think it's probably more society's changing and I'm not willing to change with it." Some teachers also expressed frustration with changing expectations around teaching and learning. The use of technology was a good example of this. One teacher stated, "I'm sorry I'm getting emotional about it, but it's the truth. It's very difficult to figure out how to mix all of these modern things and 21st Century technology that you know continually gets pushed down on us." As the methods of teaching evolve, and the demands of society change, expectations change as well. In this case, more experienced teachers who have refined their craft and developed a style over time, may be more likely to feel a disconnect related to expectations.

Claim 2: *A teacher's fit in a school work context is determined in part by her/his perception of the design and qualities of the professional culture that govern teacher work. This includes the coherence of the system, the level of autonomy afforded the teacher, the burden of the system on teacher work, the fairness of the system, and the level of compensation.*

Through the interviews, we found that practically every aspect of teachers' discussions of their work roles referenced the systems of policy and procedures that structured the professional culture of their schools and the system at large. For example, system and school-level policy determines how material resources are allocated within schools (e.g., classrooms, books, desks, technology, etc.), the size of teachers' workload (i.e., number of students, number of course preparations, the time available to complete the tasks required), and how much teachers are paid for their work. The system policies and procedures also define many of the practices of teaching and learning. The curriculum standards establish the learning goals for a content area, pacing guides define the sequence and emphasis of the curriculum, lesson plan formats establish a protocol for planning instruction, and various forms of standardized assessment provide the teacher with a framework for measuring growth. Teacher collaboration is also structured by the system - for example, through Professional Learning Communities - and professional development is generally a system-designed initiative. On top of this, schools employ various accountability systems to ensure compliance and monitor the effectiveness of these systems. Often this involves the reporting of activities (e.g., submitting lesson plans) and outcomes (e.g., submitting student growth reports).

While the purpose of the system policies is to support the achievement of school goals - primarily student success - we found that there was potential for disconnect between the teachers' expectations of their work and the expectations of the professional culture that governed their work. Going back to an earlier point, the expectations of the professional culture facilitated teacher satisfaction and morale when it supported a teacher's ability to fulfill personal expectations of professional practice and develop strong relationships through this work. However, when the professional culture inhibited role fulfillment or relationship development, it had a negative effect on teacher satisfaction, fit, and morale.

In our analysis, we organized teachers'

perspectives on system policy into five categories. Each is captured in a question. (1) *Coherence*. Does this policy make sense to me? (2) *Autonomy*. How much freedom does this policy allow for my professional judgment? (3) *Burden*. How much work is this? (4) *Fairness*. Is this policy designed to treat all of the teachers in a fair way? (5) *Compensation*. Am I being appropriately compensated for my work? As illustrated below there are multiple points of overlap between these categories.

Coherence

When asked about frustrations with work, many teachers focused on policies that, from their perspective, did not make sense. Often teachers expressed a feeling of confusion in relation to policies. One teacher stated, "They were having us do stuff a year or two ago, that really had nothing to do with our job. And I was like, 'Why are we wasting time on this?' … It made no sense." Often this type of critique was leveled in relation to policies that involved the reporting of data. One teacher reflected on her frustrations with data reporting: "We have to do the data, sure, but the only time it's looked at is at the end of the year when I go and do my end of year evaluations. 'Do you have your data?' 'Yes, it's right here.' 'Looks good, okay.' But nobody else at our building has ever looked at it. So what's the purpose? Like, nobody's ever gone through and said, 'Oh yeah, this child has learned something.' It's just more paperwork."

One of the primary frustrations with incoherent policies was that teachers perceived them as not meeting the intended goals. Consider this special education teacher's analysis of the assessment system she is required to use: "You send in a binder and each sheet has to be labeled a certain way. If it's not labeled correctly, if we get a number or letter wrong on that label, the

entire piece of evidence is an 'F,' so that kid gets an 'F' if we write the wrong label. We're graded basically on how well we can gather things and give it to them." Discussing lesson planning requirements, one teacher stated, "I think a lot of people felt that it was just a waste of your time, that ultimately, … it really wasn't helping the kids in the end."

Autonomy

Policies were also critiqued for not giving teachers the freedom to exercise professional judgment. A good example of this was found in the frustrations of special education teachers. One teacher, talking about one of her students stated, "I know exactly what he needs but that can't be provided in a collab classroom … So that's frustrating because I can't really modify things for what he needs … But the push is to put as many kids as possible in general education, and I don't know if that is always appropriate." Another teacher stated, "I can't help them in the way I would like to help them. I don't really feel that I can. All the ways I would like to teach them, they don't want me to teach that way. I am very restricted."

Burden

Most teachers felt overwhelmed with the volume of work expected. This overload related to having too many students and too many responsibilities. The feeling of overload was often described in very physical terms. For example, one teacher stated, "When I came on 10 years ago … we didn't have all this extra stuff to do. And so now … I can hardly breathe in a day. I can hardly breathe." Another teacher described, "I'm constantly being pulled here and here and here during planning."

Overload led many teachers to question their ability to do the work well. For example, one teacher stated, "It just seems like every time you

feel like you get a handle on one thing they turn around and say you have to do something else … I'm sorry, I don't care how good you are. If you are working on six different things they are not going to be the best ... but if you were working on two things they could be superb." Overload of students impeded the development of personal relationships with the students and put a strain on collegial relationships as well. One teacher stated, "All my time is spent on data … and I notice that we get frustrated easily with each other, and take it out on each other. We have to bottle it up and be good with parents, administration, students, but when we're with each other we're snappy, and that's because we feel so stressed because we don't have time to do all these things."

For most teachers, the overload of work put them in a situation where they had to make difficult decisions that created internal conflict. This conflict was compounded by the pressures of accountability. The teachers felt pressure to meet certain system determined work expectations – that may be enforced with accountability and tied to reporting mandates – but they also held the perception that these expectations pulled them away from what they should be doing – teaching and meeting the needs of the students. One teacher stated, "They just keep saying 'Okay, now do this, now do this, and now do this.' And I don't know how I can do everything that they want me to do and get it all done and do right by my kids at the same time." One early career teacher stated, "I'm putting in at least 80 to 90 hours a week, probably 100 sometimes. You know, that's frustrating, and I don't know if that's ever going to change. I don't know if the only way that changes is if you stop caring."

Due to the workload, teachers expressed needing to exert effort to maintain work life balance. For example, one teacher shared, "There truly is not anything about my job that I don't like, it just about balancing everything, and with a child at home and making sure that I am putting him first." We saw that often teaching load created a lack of work life balance that makes people stressed and unhappy.

Fairness
A third factor was teachers' perception of the fairness of system policy. In some cases this was about differences in accountability pressures between teachers teaching different subject levels. This point was expressed by teachers who felt especially burdened by the policy pressures, as well as those that were free from it, who felt "lucky" that they didn't have to deal with those pressures. One teacher stated, "I am not an SOL course. I think there is more pressure on people that teach a course that is going to be measured by an SOL, because that determines whether the school is a failing school or a passing school….I don't have that particular pressure."

The issue of the fairness was also related to perceptions of unfair distribution of workload across the system. In some cases there was a sense that other schools did not have as much to do. One teacher stated, "I would say probably the work that we do here is probably more than what they do at other schools, and we've known that for years and years and years." This feeling was also discussed in relation to differences between subjects. One teacher stated, "It seems unreasonable to me to have teachers in other subjects teaching half the number of students and yet we are paid the same exact amount. It's not that I want more money, but I want to equalize the work a little." Other fairness issues arose over inequity in resources among schools within the same division. One teacher stated, "I feel like we have to fight for anything that we get, whereas other schools don't have to. They get what they want and know there's no issue with money."

Issues of fairness were not always perceived as problems of how the system was designed. In certain cases, they were thought to be related to how policy was implemented, especially by the principal. This will be addressed in a later section.

Compensation

When asked about job satisfaction, most teachers made a point to say that they weren't in it for the money, and generally did not list pay as a primary source of satisfaction or frustration. However, discussions of job satisfaction and morale regularly came back to issues of pay. Some mentioned how the failure to raise pay when workload increased led to a feeling of being undervalued. One teacher stated, "You're expected to do all this stuff but you're not getting anything, to encourage you or to make sure that you're doing it." In some cases, perspectives on compensation were viewed through the lens of fairness. One teacher stated, "I'm not one of those people that's really hung up on the pay. I get there is only so much in the budget. But somebody who is a brand new first year teacher that is making a couple thousand dollars less than me and I've been here 13 years … I feel like there should be more." A number of teachers also mentioned how teacher pay made it difficult to achieve financial stability. One teacher stated, "I don't even know how some people do it. I'm single … I don't even have big bills and sometimes stuff comes up … So I don't know how people with several children or other stuff going on or student loans every month, I don't know how they make it, I really don't." Going back to the issue of personal disposition, we see how issues of inadequate compensation could create economic hardships that increase stress.

One teacher's analysis of the issue raised the point that although pay may not be a primary driver of morale within the profession, it had the potential to become one. She stated, "They can keep on taking money away from us because they know that we are not in it for the money. They know that we are here because we love kids and we love education and we love what we do and we are passionate about it. And so we are going to stay through thick and thin. It's just after a while some people are not going to stay and people are going to go when it just gets too thin, and they are like, 'I just can't do this.'"

Taken as a whole, it is clear that many of the policy systems with which teachers engage have the potential to hinder their ability to find satisfaction and fit in work. However, this does not have to be the case. There were also cases of teachers having positive experiences of the policies and systems governing their work. For example, one teacher, although feeling overwhelmed, reflected on the quality of the systems within her school. She stated, "when you stop and look at the bigger picture of how incredible all the things that we do in this building are, how can we compromise? How can we take these things off our plate when it's doing such a wonderful service for the students? Sometimes we mumble and grumble 'I don't want to do this,' but at the same time, it's all about them, it's all about the kids and their experience … So I feel really good about it." In cases like this, it was typically the principal that was responsible for taking the system and making it work for the teachers, and ultimately for the students. In the next section we will explore the role of school leaders in more depth.

Claim 3: *A teacher's sense of fit within a school work context is related to the teacher's perception of the principal's ability to implement policy and communicate in ways that are supportive.*

As would be expected, school-level administrators, namely principals, play an important role in the development of teacher morale. It is the school administration that is tasked not only with developing and overseeing implementation of the policies that structure the work of teachers, but also communicating with the teachers in ways that build understanding and support for the policies. From teachers' perspectives, principals were perceived as supportive when they implemented system policies with coherence, fairness, and an aim of maximum professional autonomy, effectively lessening the burden on teachers. From the teachers' perspective, principals were also most successful when their leadership reflected a strong understanding of the work lives of teachers.

It is important to note that, as with teachers, there were meaningful individual differences between the three school leaders in our study. Although there were core principles of leadership that appeared across the cases, each principal had a distinctive personality and style of leading. As with the teachers, each principal's vision of leadership related to prior teaching and leadership experiences and the personal expectations brought to the job.

In this section we will consider the role of principals in the development of teacher job satisfaction and morale. We will do this first by looking at teacher perspectives on how policy was designed and implemented by the principal at the school level, and then we will consider the role that principal communication played in the creation of the school's professional culture.

Policy design and implementation

Schools are complex, and school leaders are in charge of managing the complexity in ways that promote the goals of the school. This involves organizing, implementing and monitoring all of the critical systems. Principals also have to do this work in community and policy contexts that are constantly changing. The challenge of school leadership was captured by one of the case school principals who compared her school to a living cell: "things need to change for cells. They have to adapt to their environment….But if they change too rapidly the cell bursts and dies. And so managing an organization is just about how it is that you lead for change without making people's heads explode." A principal at one of the other schools discussed her vision of managing complex systems in a similar way: "Everything has become so enmeshed in who we are and our identity that I can't talk about one thing without talking about this, without talking about this, without talking about this, because globally we have built in so many supports not only for staff and for kids – that I just can't pluck one thing out and talk about it."

When teachers discussed the role of the principal in structuring the policies governing the school's professional culture, they focused on several factors: (1) effectiveness and efficiency, (2) fairness, and (3) the effect on autonomy.

Effectiveness and efficiency. In the interviews, teachers would often focus on the ability of the building administration to manage the complexity of schools in ways that were effective and efficient. For example, one teacher painted a portrait of the system efficiency created by her administration: "There is kind of a rule or a process for everything. … It's great, because as a teacher you never have to go, 'Oh, I wonder what I'm supposed to do about such and such'…It's a well-run machine, and when there's a blip, the administration jumps in and fixes it." Another teacher described how her school administration had developed a system for teacher observation that also involved a support and recognition

program for students. She reflected, "they try really hard to combine things together to minimize the load. So it's like, they're equally as important, they both need to get done, but how can we join them together … I feel like they try to do that as often as they can. Work smarter, not harder, you know? I like that whole concept and I think they definitely help us do that." On the other hand, a principal's failure to implement systems effectively can have negative outcomes. One teacher discussed how a principal's system of scheduling effectively isolates teachers: "The way the schedule is set up doesn't really help because the teams are all on the same schedule but if you're not on that team with them, you don't really see your co-workers."

When teachers critiqued the effectiveness and efficiency of the system, the issue of consistency also arose. Asked about the school administration, one teacher stated, "Inconsistent is the key word. The principal, the assistant principals, some will handle situations one way, when others will handle it a completely different way."-School discipline was a significant concern in this regard. One teacher stated, "I feel like we are asked to be really strict and then they are really frustrated when the staff is not upholding the rules, but they are not really being upheld there. So … it's kind of like, 'I want you to enforce these rules, but I don't want to be the bad guy.' That sets a bad example."

Fairness. Teachers also considered the degree to which the principal's implementation of policies within the school was fair. A popular concern in this regard was the assignment of non-teaching related duties (e.g., bus duty, lunchroom monitoring). While some teachers appreciated the idea of having "all hands on deck" for certain duties and activities, they also appreciated being protected from the burden at other times. For example, one teacher stated, "At my last job, I would spend about 40 minutes on duties, which is fine, you want to be a team player. But every time you start a duty, then that takes you away from the curriculum. And here we have no duties, and the focus is really on the curriculum." Another teacher, after reviewing the list of her teaching and school leadership responsibilities, recalled a conversation with her principal about the issue of fairness in the assignment of duties: "'I don't have time to sit down and plan anything, grade anything. I don't have time. Why do I have a duty? Is there anyway that I can not have that duty? This is not fair.' And I was told, 'Well I know it is not fair, but if I don't give you a duty then somebody else will inevitably ask why does she not have a duty when I do?' I'm like, 'Then tell them, it is because I have this and this and this and this and this.'" This story reveals some of the challenges of leadership. Accommodating the situation of one teacher, may lead to the resentment of others.

Fairness in the implementation of policy was also related to classload. The principal at one of the case schools recognized this as a primary factor in morale. She stated, "I think class loads are a big deal … If you've got one teacher that's got five accelerated classes and they don't have any classes of struggling learners, next to the teacher that's got all the struggling learners … that's frustrating because of the sheer amount of physical energy it takes to manage a different type of learner." This led the principal to implement a policy where almost all teachers at the school have classloads of varying ability levels.

Autonomy. One the biggest challenges that principals face in the implementation of policy is achieving the balance between structure and autonomy in defining teachers' work. On the one hand, consistent structures and protocols may improve the overall quality and consistency of the organization's work. However, individual teacher's

autonomy and judgment is often compromised. One teacher talked appreciatively of her principal in this regard: "We're not micro-managed. Our principal sets her expectations and she communicates with us if she needs to … There's a lot of trust put in us, and the fact that you're doing your own thing as long as you're following the curriculum. If you need help, ask for it, but I don't feel like anybody's breathing down my neck."

The interview with one principal reflected the tension that school leaders face in this regard. Reflecting on what she identified as the key factors in morale, she cited the importance of teachers having control over work. Considering her own situation she stated, "If I have control and know that I can structure things and make things improve then my morale is high. If I have people emailing me and saying now give me this, now give me this, now go in this direction, now we are doing it this way, then my morale goes down because I have less control over what is going on." At the same time, this principal also discussed policies she had implemented that impacted teacher autonomy for the sake of the greater good of the school: "If there is something that we know that works, we should all be doing it … And so…it is not that they've lost autonomy, they have lost absolute autonomy. They are not doing as they pleased anymore."

Teachers also experienced conflict around this issue. Discussing the administrative policy at her school, one teacher stated, "From a teacher's perspective, there is a lot of micromanagement. There's a lot of, 'You need to do this and I'm going to check back behind you and make sure that it's done,' … There's a lot of nit-picky things that sometimes become very overwhelming and it's like, 'Can't you just trust us to do this stuff?' But then if I put myself in the administration's shoes. The accountability piece is knowing that someone is going to go back and check and make sure that you did it and you did it correctly … But I have to say, I love this school, and I wonder if it would be like it is if the administration was more relaxed. Like, maybe the ship wouldn't sail quite so smoothly."

Principal communication

In the first section of the findings the point was made that teachers' work involved fulfilling roles and responsibilities, as well as maintaining the relationships through which the work occurred. A similar dynamic exists in the work of the principal. Principals are tasked with role responsibilities that involve implementing policies and procedures and monitoring the effects, however, all of this work involves engaging in relationships with teachers, staff, students and parents. And, as is the case in teaching, the ability to achieve the goals of the role depends to a large extent on the quality of the relationships that are developed. For this reason, teachers' discussions of leadership quality often focused on the administration's ability to effectively communicate. In a general sense, teachers appreciated leaders that were open to communication. Having an "open door" was a symbol of this willingness to communicate. General visibility in the school was another. In this regard, a perceived absence of openness and visibility was seen as stifling communication and relationships. One teacher stated, "I knew we were in trouble when our principal made the comment, 'I don't want to see you if there is something you can tell me by email.'"

Communication of policy rationale. As we saw in an earlier section, frustration with policy often related to the perceived incoherence of the policy. Teachers would ask, "why are we doing this?" Another question teachers often asked is "where is this coming from?" One

teacher stated with uncertainty, "I think some of the changes come down from outside of the school." A principal's ability to communicate the expectations and rationale of policy to her/his staff addresses this potential problem. One principal stated, "People want to know why. They may not want to know who and what and when. They want to know the why, and if you give them that, they will absolutely make sure that it happens." One of the teachers at the same school, appreciated this quality of communication by the administration: "I feel like all the things that they make us do, … they're very clear on why we have to do it. It's not like, oh, you have to do this random assignment … because the county needs it. We get some justifications … It's very clear."

Recognition. A second critical form of principal communication is recognition. Teachers valued principal communication that demonstrated appreciation for both the quality and the effort put forward in teacher work. At one of the schools, a system of teacher recognition was established for rewarding the completion of the less fulfilling tasks such as paperwork. Discussing this form of recognition, one teacher stated, "It doesn't matter what profession you're in. Paperwork can be a nuisance. But the fact that they acknowledge that and reward us in some way is really nice." The principal at this school admitted that the "recognition piece takes an enormous amount of time," but saw its benefit in its effect of building staff cohesion: "It makes you not only want to do more, but it makes you proud of where you are and where you work." When teachers expressed frustration at administration, it was, in certain cases, due to a lack of recognition. For example, a non-core teacher at one of the schools stated, "So it's kind of like we get the feeling that we're just kind of the castoffs … We feel a little like we're not important, we don't really matter."

Responsiveness to teacher voice. As discussed above, much of teachers' work is governed by system policies and procedures. Being subject to policy, many teachers develop opinions about how these systems are working or not working. When there is frustration, some teachers voice concerns or critical perspectives about the conditions of work. The way that a principal responded to teacher voice was an important factor in teachers' assessment of leadership quality. Some teachers appreciated that their principals gave them opportunity to voice their concerns. For example, one teacher, talking about her principal, stated, "If you need to go in and shut the door and say, I need to complain about something real quick, she's very approachable … I think that makes a difference."

There was also an appreciation among teachers for administrators that did not just listen to teachers' perspectives, but also regularly incorporated them into the process of decision making. One teacher stated, "We've had several workshops, and our administration is constantly asking for our feedback, asking what teachers are getting or not getting about how to do something, and they're making adjustments."

Another shared about her school's administration, "If I've got a complaint about something, [the principal] always likes us to come with a solution, you know? If I don't like the schedule because of this, well, here's my suggestion." Another teacher, expressed frustration at the failure of administration to be responsive to teacher ideas, "I think it's difficult for a lot of teachers to discuss what they want because they know it's going to be told no here. Pretty much that is the overwhelming perspective. Now, it may not be true, but that's what teachers think, and they say perspective is reality. I wish there was a situation where we could just see evidence of, once in awhile, if a teacher brings something up,

it's actually changed or listened to."

This point was also evident as some of the participants discussed their motivation for participating in the study. At the very end of an interview, one teacher stated, "I don't exactly know what you all are looking for with this or what impact it's going to have, but I do hope that people take the information seriously. It would be great if it could make some incremental changes … I hope it's not dismissed."

Teacher Profiles 2

This group of teacher profiles contains teacher perceptions of how their job-related ideals affect their morale. As you read the profiles, think about how policies and practices hinder or support the teacher's job related ideals.

Carolyn

Carolyn, an early-career school counselor, describes her morale as "Very high. Very high. I realized in September of this year, more than anything, that I have zero room for having a low morale. I didn't have low morale anyway, but I have zero room in my role for coming to school in a bad mood or not liking to come to school, because the students that need me the way they need me – the emotional need – I can't help them if I'm not in that positive frame of mind. That has changed my outlook a lot. I've always been a positive person. In fact, when I was working at a trauma center years ago, I had a student say to me, are you always this positive? Like will you just let me be negative? And I have tried to do that with teachers. There are many teachers – many people in life – that will commiserate with you: oh, this was such a bad day. Oh my gosh, I can't believe you had to do that either. And then that doesn't get anywhere. So I tried it here and it's almost like pain to them. Any time I hear a teacher

> *I was frustrated because I didn't feel like I was serving the students. I had students that I was responsible for that needed me. Their parents thought they were getting taken care of and they weren't. I was not effective for those students that year. And that made me sad.*

say something negative, I'm always finding that interjection of positive. And know these are my friends….I'm not doing it in a mean way, but you can see them walk away from the conversation saying, you know, you're right, that's true. So my morale is very high, and I think probably if teachers would describe me, they would say that I am pretty much always positive. I would like to think that. And I'm very patient."

As a career switcher, Carolyn brings the perspective of having previously worked in the corporate sector and for a government agency. She was drawn to public education after volunteering several years at her children's schools as they progressed through preschool and into grade school. Although she has her teaching license Carolyn prefers her current role as a counselor, in particular because of the importance she places on relationships with her students. She is primarily motivated by the idea of making a difference in students' lives. Carolyn has taken on additional leadership roles in her school and she tutors students after school. She feels extremely positive about her school administrators, describing them as "Awesome, a great team…Love working with them. They're available. They are willing to listen. They're willing to do whatever you need to do….I really feel supported." In the

passages below Carolyn shares what brings her satisfaction in her current position, she relays details of a time when her morale was low, and she provides her perspective on the school morale.

In what aspects of your job do you find the most satisfaction?

Knowing that a student knows that I am there for them. Good times, bad times. That's the number one thing, that I know that I can help a student. Honestly, I have zero time in my schedule to help the student that I'm dealing with after school. My family's schedule has had to change. People are having to pick up my children, family supports, just to help another student. But I'm glad to do that because I know my kids are in good shape. So I do have kids and I do have a family, but not everybody has the ability to help their students…. These students, their parents, some of them are at wit's end and they don't know what else to do. And maybe if I can help them, I can just help one student. When I wrote my philosophy of education, I wrote that I don't want to change the world, I just want to change a student. And I don't need the student to come back and say you were my all. I need to know in my heart that I helped change a student's life. If I can do that every year, pick one student every year that will make me happy. It'd be great if I could touch 100 students, but that is really what it's all about, you know, when you look back and you say, 'Wow, I really could've fallen between the cracks, and that teacher didn't let me fall between the cracks.' So that's the number one satisfaction that I get from this role.

Over the course of your education career, has your morale changed?

Yes. When I first started a few years ago, and actually in a paid teaching position, my morale was very low. I was in a different school division and I was in a situation where there was not a lot of support. There was not a lot of collaboration between the teachers. And I would not want to repeat that setting at all. I just thought it was wrong. If you're going to ask me to do all of these things and you really want me to do my best, then it really needs to be at that level…you need to appreciate what you're doing to me. It wasn't that I needed the recognition of it. I was frustrated because I didn't feel like I was serving the students. I had students that I was responsible for that needed me. Their parents thought they were getting taken care of and they weren't. I was not effective for those students that year. And that made me sad I could not be effective but yet, I was giving it 110% and I still had another part-time job. When I left the teaching job, I went to another part-time job, a non-teaching job. So I wasn't slacking and I put the extra time in as much as I had. I was just really frustrated with not being able to do that job in that amount of time. It was not realistic or possible. That was the worst.

How would you rate the overall morale of the school, if you have a sense of that?

I don't know if it's a mixture of personalities. I think so many things have to go into satisfaction of life: your personal home life, your personality, the cards you're dealt. You know, some teachers, they just get a trying deck of students that year. But I'm amazed at how many teachers are done. You know, we're early in the school year and when I say done, I mean done. Like done as in June done. Like what did you think you were signing up for? How can you be done? I think the morale is pretty low. I hear people complaining and moaning. And you know, again, I seriously try to put a positive spin on everything. I don't think that people do.

Linda

An eleven-year veteran music teacher, Linda responds to the question asking her to rate her current morale as follows: "It depends on the day. Today is pretty good. But there are days that I leave here in tears and don't want to teach." Linda was inspired to be a teacher by her love of music. She recounts the excitement she felt the first time she contemplated teaching and the thought of getting paid to do something she loves so much. She began her music education program with the goal of helping students realize the importance of using the creative and performative part of their brain for problem solving and working things through, regardless of their career path. She sees value in the arts as a counter to the pacing and standardization of our current academic curriculum. Linda also values the strong, personal relationships she develops with her students. She brings the relative perspective of having taught for two and half years in a private school, that she described as a conflict-ridden climate, prior to moving to public education where she is much happier. She feels supported in terms of her financial requests for programmatic needs and she appreciates her curricular autonomy. When asked about her ideal teaching situation Linda's response results in a discussion of her discontent with large class sizes and the extra duties that occupy time she could use to prepare lessons. She offers that despite her

The best use of time for me, what is going to impact my students the most, is getting together with other music teachers and sharing ideas and hashing out solutions to problems that we have. All of that stuff I do on my own time.

colleagues' reference to the family atmosphere at her school she feels somewhat isolated from other teachers. In the excerpts below she begins by discussing her frustrations

What are the parts of your job that frustrate you the most?

I have friends that teach in other counties and they don't have to do nearly the amount of work that we do….Like we have to go extra days in the summer of required training…And when the county first came up with the teacher evaluation system, we had to go to two full eight-hour days of training ... But the amount of paperwork that you have to do for that, it sucks up so much time. And then nobody ever really looks at it. It is very frustrating ... And then what is the value of the data that you are collecting? ... My first year that I did it, the data that I collected didn't show growth with my students, because it was my first year figuring it all out. That's part of the reason I received proficient instead of exemplary…If you don't show numerical growth in your students, you can't get exemplary, even if you are trying everything that you can, which doesn't make sense to me. It makes me weary of setting a goal at the beginning of the year where I actually want to try something different. It makes me want to pick something that I know is going to be safe. I know they are going to be horrible at some things prior to being exposed to the content ... But to me…isn't that part of the thing about teaching, taking risks and trying new things and figuring out better ways to do things? And it makes you just so scared to do it. Because you are going to be judged on it ... I

spent an hour coming up with a pre-assessment and a pre-assessment rubric with all these little boxes when I could grade something in ten minutes, but I needed to show the person that is looking at it that each one of these numerical values means this. So I had to type up this whole big form and then this huge rubric, and then I had to grade them, and then I had to find the numerical values and then I had to come up with a percentage that students were going to grow. Six hours I spent on this and I submitted it and it was approved in two minutes. I don't even think they looked at it. It's just frustrating.

What is your sense of teacher collaboration in this school?

I am constantly at home researching and going on websites and going on blogs and trying to do stuff on the internet as much as I can. I also have a lot of middle school music teacher friends in our school division that get together and share ideas and we have decided to take it on ourselves… even though we don't get professional development hours for it. We just meet on our own time. We just rotate schools and kind of steal each other's ideas, because that's how you get better. And we all want to get better. Everybody wants to do a good job. We are competitive. You want somebody to hear one of your performances and be like, "Oh! How did they do that?" You want your students to do the best. I don't mind doing all that stuff it's just that I wish there was time built in the day. It is frustrating when you have a huge stack of things to grade and you need to be in your room, and I have to go to a meeting and when we show up and ask "What are we going to talk about today?" [the response we receive is] "I don't know, what do you want to talk about today?" It's frustrating. And I am sure there are a lot of meetings that on paper look really good for the school. Like the school

submits its papers to the school board office and the school board office submits it to Virginia, and they are like, "Oh, we do these professional learning community meetings. And we do seven hours of that, and we do this many of this…." … I am sure on paper it looks like we are awesome. But we are really not learning anything. I don't know. It is not the best use of time. The best use of time for me, what is going to impact my students the most, is getting together with other music teachers and sharing ideas and hashing out solutions to problems that we have. All of that stuff I do on my own time.

Desiree

Desiree, a mid-career computer science teacher, provides the following response to a question asking her to rate her current morale, "I feel pretty good….I talked to somebody today and mentioned that I had an observer coming for the study. And he said, 'well I purposely didn't sign up for that because I know that my morale is bad.' And I am thinking, that is why I don't have long conversations with you…I think that I am realistic. I am positive and I want to stay positive. Because if I am not positive, what is that going to do to my students and the morale in my classroom? I think that my own morale is going to really affect them. And not to say that I have to be pumped everyday, but if I come in and I'm like 'uhhh', then they are going to have that same attitude. And I feel like my morale is also my responsibility. When I was in a situation where I didn't feel supported and I wasn't happy with what I was doing, I left. I am not going to sit around and just be miserable, so I love where

I work. I love what I do. It is hard work, it is overwhelming. I say on a regular basis, 'I still don't make $50,000 dollars a year.' It's rewarding in other ways, but if I didn't feel that way, I wouldn't be here. So I do feel like I have pretty good morale. Even when I am overwhelmed, I think…there is nothing else I want to do."

Desiree has spent most of her teaching career at her current school. She offers several stories describing her colleagues and the overall school culture as a family. She is the student government sponsor, a role she views as facilitative, encouraging and allowing students to take ownership. "I told them from the get go, 'this is your club, this is your thing, and you make the decisions.'" She finds satisfaction in seeing the group's evolution over the course of a year as their leadership skills improve. Desiree also serves in leadership roles at both the school and district level. Desiree loves teaching and learning and spends her summers seeking additional certifications. The following passages provide insight and context for Desiree's high morale. We pick up after Desiree has just relayed the story of her entry into the teaching profession – she did not graduate with a teaching degree – explaining how her first teaching assignment differed significantly from the schools she attended as a child, influencing her initial decision to leave education, and how she found her way back to teaching.

How did you come to teach at this school?
I left the first school and went and worked somewhere else, outside of education. And then thought…I kind of miss it. I just don't think

It is doing exactly what I said I wanted. It is increasing my autonomy and it is increasing my ability to collaborate, but just the beginning stages of that are overwhelming.

the first job was the right fit for me. But I think maybe education is. I applied with a few school districts, got hired in this one. And I thought, a middle school, seriously? This probably isn't what I want to do either. It is the exact opposite of what I was doing before. I had a short time to complete the necessary coursework to be licensed. So I did the courses and I had so much more support here and I was so much more comfortable in the environment here that I felt like, yeah this is something that I want to do and I stuck with it…I have obtained additional teaching certifications and accomplishments and a lot of that has to do with the environment that I am in, rather than something that I always wanted to do. I did not grow up thinking that I was going to become a teacher. I just kind of stumbled into it and found my niche here.

You've had different teaching experiences. You know one wasn't a good fit and this one is. Describe some of the qualities of your ideal teaching situation.
So a lot of collaboration is ideal for me. Having a lot of support. But also having the autonomy to do what I feel is appropriate in my classroom with my students. This year since we have changed the curriculum I have to create all of the resources. And it is kind of overwhelming. But at the same time, I am trusted as a professional to do that. I am handed a curriculum, but it is pretty much a short list and here are some things that you should cover at the same time. I am not given a book and told, you need to do this many quizzes and this many tests during this amount of time. I mean we want to be fair, and consistent across the county. So having a sense of being trusted as a professional and

being given autonomy to do what is appropriate in my classroom. But having the opportunity to collaborate with others to share ideas and develop ideas would be ideal. Although this takes time, it allows all of the teachers of a certain level to collaborate and have the same curriculum… A teacher who feels like an island at her school is now able to collaborate with teachers in another school, to find out what they are doing at various levels and share ideas….and it is nice to be able to do that. We haven't been able to do that before. And so it is doing exactly what I said I wanted. It is increasing my autonomy and it is increasing my ability to collaborate, but just the beginning stages of that are overwhelming.

What do you believe are the factors that drive teacher morale?

I hear teachers complain about not having autonomy to do what they want because they have to teach to a test, as they say. That they are not respected as professionals. I think that is something that we see a lot of with teaching where everybody thinks because they went to school they can just do this job. Like they know what we do for a living because they had teachers for 15 years. And I don't feel like I have people telling me how to do my job. And I don't know if it is because I do it right, so nobody has to say anything or if it is because of my rapport with my students and their parents…that parents just don't treat me the way I hear other teachers are treated. I don't know if it is because I command a certain kind of treatment or if low morale begets that kind of negativity, maybe it is just kind of a Catch 22. But I do hear people complaining about all of the testing. And I think that if I had all that testing, I might be likely to complain about it as well. It's a lot of testing for the kids. But I think it's a personal outlook. I think a lot of teachers who have low morale would probably have that attitude no matter what job they were in.

Differences Between Schools
RQ3: How do differences between schools related to social context and policy context affect the dynamics of job satisfaction and morale?

While the uniqueness of our three case schools had much to do with the individual qualities of the teachers and the administrators that worked within the schools, we were also interested in how differences in the social context and the policy context of schools influenced the the dynamics of the school's professional culture.

One of our beliefs coming into this study was that racial/ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of a school could affect teachers' experience of work. As shared in the methods section, our three case schools had a fair range related to the socioeconomic status and the racial ethnic diversity of the student population. At one end was Vernon Middle School (VMS) with 40% of the students qualifying for Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) - a common measure of poverty - and a 70% non-white population. VMS's non-white population included large percentages of both Black and Hispanic students. In contrast, Brighton Middle School (BMS) was only 15% FRL and had a significantly lower percentage of non-white students. BMS's non white students were an equal mix of Black, Hispanic and Asian. Logan Middle School (LMS), while having less racial diversity than Brighton, had slightly higher levels of students receiving FRL (20%).

We were also interested in differences in policy context. Each of the schools we selected were not only operating under different school division policy frameworks, but also had different positions in relation to the state school accountability system. Although all the case schools were accredited, there were varying levels of confidence in ongoing accreditation across the schools. Our belief was that these pressures had the potential to impact the professional culture of the school and the experiences of teachers in those schools.

Although comparing the overall levels of morale between the schools was not part of the design of this study, we did find that BMS had the most teachers identify as high morale, while VMS had the lowest. As we have reviewed throughout this findings section, there are a wide range of factors that may have influenced these results. However, it is likely that the policy and social context have strong influence. Below, we will explore some of what we learned.

Claim 1: Differences in socioeconomic and racial ethnic diversity of the students served by the school influenced teachers' job role expectations, and the ability to realize job satisfaction and high morale.

Through our interviews across the schools, the effects of a school's socioeconomic and cultural diversity on teachers' experiences of their work came out in four ways: (1) its relation to the the basic socioeconomic needs of students, (2) its relation to student ability and academic disposition, (3) its relation to student behavior, and (4) its relation to parental influence and support. Although, in general, economic disadvantage and cultural diversity - especially of disenfranchised communities - were associated

with more challenging teaching contexts for teachers, there were also instances of teachers highlighting the challenges of working in affluent communities.

Meeting the needs of students

When teachers across the three schools talked about their work, it was relatively common for them to reference factors related to the socioeconomic and cultural diversity of the students in their schools. In some cases, teachers shared challenges faced when addressing the needs of students living in poverty. While this was a point of pride among some teachers - it enhanced their sense of "making a difference" - many also felt frustrated by their inability fulfill their roles as teachers when faced with what they perceived to be a more challenging student population. At one school a teacher commented: "Some of them come to school and they haven't eaten, so they really are not worried about their homework, so it's a tough population."

There were also cases of teachers who felt their own socioeconomic background inhibited their ability to address the needs of the student. For example one teacher stated, "My parents were at home. So to me some of the things that I experience on a daily basis are completely foreign. And every time I think I have heard it all … I hear something else … all we can do here is just continue to be kind and consistent and hope that's going to help." Teachers also expressed the need for additional support to meet students' needs. One teacher stated, "We have a lot of students who are hungry, it just breaks your heart….because they're not going to learn if they have other things that they're worried about." This teacher also expressed the desire for students to have basic supplies: "Being able to have students that have all of the supplies they need. I need them to get out paper and I have to provide the

paper a lot of times."

Perceptions of students' ability and academic disposition

The socioeconomic status of the community led to certain beliefs among teachers about the academic abilities and dispositions of the students. A self-identified low morale teacher at LMS shared how conditions of poverty impacted her work, "We are being told, 'They need to pass this test. Take out the fact that they didn't eat.… Take all of that out of the equation.…You can't change that they didn't eat. But I want you to take all of that out of the equation and I want you to make these scores come up, because whatever you are doing is not working.'" In contrast, there were also examples of teachers working with more affluent students who felt frustrated by what they perceived as the attitude of privilege within the community. One teacher reflected on the work ethic of some of her students: "I can miss it. I'll have an excuse. I can get the makeup work … They're playing the game and they know they're playing the game."

We also found that all three schools were experiencing increases in their population of limited English proficiency students, and that this led to situations where teachers felt unable to meet the needs of the students. A teacher at BMS suggested more team-building for the staff outside the school in the community to help teachers adapt to the changing social context. He stated, "I would have more education for people to learn how to deal with English language learners. That population is only going to grow."

Perceptions of student behavior

Some teachers drew a relationship between socioeconomic status and student behavior. In certain cases these statements were made in contrast to what the teacher perceived to

be other schools' challenges. For example, at BMS, a teacher shared the following comment in regard to student behavior at her school: "It's outstanding. I mean, obviously we're in a pretty affluent area, so the kids are well behaved. We have it great in that regard." Later in the interview she followed with, "We've got good kids. We don't have serious behavior issues and violence and fighting. We don't deal with that." However, some BMS teachers also suggested there were drawbacks to teaching an affluent population. One teacher stated, "When working with high socioeconomic students there is a feeling that the kids get away with too much. Their privilege has an effect on the way the school structures its systems….it would be nice if the standards that they held us to – if you're going to hold us to such a high standard, the kids should be held to high standards."

Parental support and influence
Across all the schools, discussion of parents and family regularly came up in the context of the interviews. Teachers' discussions of parents included statements about the level of support that parents offered as well as perspectives on parental influence in the school.

Teachers' perspectives on parental support and influence were often discussed in relation to social class status. A LMS teacher relayed, "We have a very needy population. We have a lot of blue collar working class parents who are working two and three jobs to try and do what they can do, so there isn't that support at home." A teacher at VMS stated, "I think part of it is what's going on in our community at large, as far as the parents not really being home because they are having to be out working … I think that is a huge factor. It impacts their ability to learn. It impacts their behavior, their self-esteem. It impacts so many of those things." In certain cases,

the teachers' perceptions of the lack of parental support were connected to feelings of frustration and stress. One teacher at LMS shared a story of how a parent had requested that her son complete his homework at school. She reflected on the situation, "Well, you are right, that would be great, wouldn't it. But I am only here for 8 hours and in that 8 hours you want me to fix all the world's problems and it's just not possible. I don't have the time. I don't have the energy. I am so worn down that it's just exhausting."

Perceptions of parental support of more affluent students were different. At one level, teachers at BMS recognized the academic advantages that affluence provides. One teacher stated, "we are in a community where parents a lot of times have the funds to hire tutors if they are not getting the support that they feel like they need." However, there was also the perception among some teachers that affluent parents presented challenges. One teacher at BMS stated, "the parents tend to be very assertive and you've got to be on your toes." Another, veteran teacher suggested that at times this had the potential to undermine the teacher's authority: "I can't tell you how many times I've had something happen … and it's the parent going, 'Okay, well, what's your side of the story. I've listened to my kid and heard their side, what's your side?' It's not like, 'Hey, what happened, this is what my kid told me, I know you're right.' It's become a profession that you really don't feel as if you're respected anymore for what you do." Along these lines, teachers also reflected on times that parents with concerns about a class went straight to the principal or superintendent, without talking to them first.

Claim 2: *Differences between schools in accountability pressure related to state accreditation impacts teachers' work expectations.*

68

The three schools we studied were located in three different school divisions, and thus operated in three different local policy contexts. In the interviews, the differences between divisions were reflected in teachers' discussions of the various division-level initiatives. For example in one division a recent push for technology integration was often discussed, while in another a new teacher evaluation system was a central topic. However, the effects of the differences in division-level initiatives were unclear for two reasons. First, as discussed earlier in the findings, teachers' perceptions of division policy were influenced by the principal's negotiation of the policies. For this reason it was hard to distinguish whether differences in the impact of division initiatives across schools was related to the division policy context or the principal's skill in implementation.

The second, and more significant reason, was that the differences in state accountability pressures across the schools made the division-level and principal influences less clear. Through the findings, the pressures of accountability have been highlighted as a key factor affecting teachers' relationships to their work. When the systems of accountability are not supportive of teachers' work, they have the effect of restricting teachers' professional judgment, burdening teachers with reporting responsibilities, and ultimately impacting their ability to find satisfaction in work. While there were teachers at all the schools who expressed concerns about the pressures of accountability, these effects were more intense at the schools that were closer to losing state accreditation. A teacher at VMS identified the state accountability system as having a big impact on the nature of the school: "We are in warning. We are not accredited. I worked ..at a different school that is still a red school. I know what happens." She then went on to discuss how accreditation impacted the principal's approach

to leadership: "My feeling is she's preparing the school.... And if [the state] comes in, they are going to say, 'Where is this? Where is this? And, where is this?' ... I try to tell people she is not being a bully by making you show. She's teaching you how to cover your rear end." A VMS teacher explained how accountability pressures were impacting her instruction, "We got an email at the beginning of the year that they want to test us early again this year. We're in the process of trying to fight it again. I'm supposed to meet with our principal next week and look over the numbers from the past three years. … So we're trying to prove it does make a difference testing later." One principal reflected, "My message is it's nobody's fault. You know, that's what I try to bring out is that we just need to keep working and making sure we're giving the students what they need where they're at, and the rest will come into play, you know; the rest will take care of itself. But those kinds of things are the things that I think bring morale down."

Teacher Profiles 3

In the following three teacher profiles, teachers discuss concerns they have about their treatment as professionals. While reading the profiles, consider how perceptions of being valued as a professional might influence a teacher's morale.

Michelle

Michelle, a second-year science teacher responds as follows to an inquiry about her current morale, "I would say my morale is pretty high. Like, I have days when I'm frustrated, but I'm always usually able to step back and say that it's just been a bad day. And it always comes back to my kids….I like my coworkers, but I love my students. When I need to know that the work I'm doing is worth it, that's where I draw that worth. The relationships I have with them, seeing them learn, seeing them be challenged like that, for me, is constant, and so the biggest factor for my morale is that my kids are succeeding and happy, and I'd say I'm a nine or a ten most days, but some days I'm a six or a seven. I'd say I'm pretty happy overall."

Michelle was inspired to teach after working at a summer camp for low-income students. She saw that "magic happens when [kids] are surrounded by caring people that have high expectations for them. These were kids that people look at

I think every teacher that decided to teach at some point wanted to help a kid that really needed help. The problem is when all of your kids need that level of help and you have 140 students, that's not possible, and then you feel like you're failing.

and they're like I'm not even going to bother." Experiencing the effectiveness of working with these students eventually became a motivating factor for Michelle. She accepted a job in the corporate sector after college and after doubling her salary in five years still felt unfulfilled. Seeking meaningful work that would make a difference in others' lives, she decided to make a career switch to teaching. Michelle describes herself as an energetic and passionate teacher. She appreciates the opportunity to teach both high and low-ability students, and the different challenges each group presents. Michelle coaches, serves on a school-wide committees, and is in a teacher leadership program. The interview excerpts below provide perspective from her lens as a second-year teacher.

Describe your ideal teaching situation.
I might be in my ideal situation. What I like about my schedule is that when you're teaching a demanding remedial class it's great to have other classes that are more self-sufficient. I have

my three advanced classes where I can really push them and I can do really creative things in the classroom, and they're better about work completion, and there's not as much paperwork to fill out on them. And then I love, love working with my remedial students. Some of the teachers in other schools in parts of the county, all of their classes are like that, and the thought of that is so exhausting because you get so wrapped up in their problems and trying to figure out how to reach them, and getting them to just write down their answers. I can't imagine having to do that all day, every day, and so I love that the remedial kids are prominent in my day, that I see them every day, and I get to do what I really set out to do as a teacher, but that there is a good balance of higher level learners that I get to work with too. Part of me really loves pushing them and doing some things that are higher level, too … I think every teacher that decided to teach at some point wanted to help a kid that really needed help. The problem is when all of your kids need that level of help and you have 140 students, that's not possible, and then you feel like you're failing. Like, even some days, you know, I'll see my remedial students for 45 minutes, and some days they are just not on it or something happens or somebody has a meltdown or a lesson just straight up doesn't work with them, and in that 45 minutes, that sense of failure is palpable, and that's awful. Like, having that feeling all the time would be really, really hard. So I think the balance is important, and I'm liking that about this year.

Is there a specific example of what frustrates you the most?

The biggest frustration, it's not even necessarily frustration, it's just I don't know how long the amount of work I'm doing is sustainable. I work all the time, and I know I'm still new and still building and refining a curriculum, and this is a new population of kids this year with the remedial students, so that's been more planning, and admittedly, I am obsessive about my stuff. I want it to be perfect, connect the previous knowledge and see how it all works together and I think that's a good thing. It shows itself in my classes, and helps my students learn. But I spend hours a day on curriculum and lesson planning and whatever, and that is exhausting. I'm a million times better this year. Last year, I probably was working 60 hours a week just to get everything made. But I also know realistically that right now I'm not married, I don't have kids, but if I ever am I have to have time in my life for myself. Something's got to give a little bit, because I can't just do this all the time. I know I'll run out of steam, and I understand why people do. I wouldn't be happy if I became a teach from the internet teacher, and I don't ever want to get to that point, but honestly, I can see why people do, because I know everybody started wanting to do everything perfectly, and you know, after a certain amount of time, that becomes hard to keep doing. So that's my biggest – not frustration but just fear about teaching in general, and that's a big one.

How would you rate the morale of the school and why?

I think we're fortunate and we know it. We have a strong community. People might fuss and complain about all the work – the work that we have to do, but I think that everybody knows that our principal cares about us and cares about her job and that she works really hard, and that goes a long way. I think people are happier because they have collaborative planning teams, because we're given collaborative planning periods so that we can meet together. I think for the most part we feel backed up by our administration, and we have classrooms that are manageable. We don't have too many kids in a classroom to address their

needs. Like, we don't get exhausted necessarily in that way that a lot of our peers do in different parts of the county.

What factors within a school do you think have the greatest impact on the morale of the teachers at this school?

The community that the school serves is the biggest factor. Even as great as our leadership is and as great as my co-workers are, if you picked up our building and you put it in another part of the county, it would be really hard to do what we do. And that's not to say that there aren't wonderful things that happen in those schools, because there absolutely are, and I have the utmost respect for people who teach in those buildings, but you just cannot ignore the fact that socioeconomic issues are the number one thing. Like, you cannot fight a million wars in a day. No one is that good.

Susan

Susan, a late career teacher, provided the following response to the question asking her to rate her morale. "I'd say really good. There's some frustrating parts….but on a scale of one to ten, I don't think you can get any better than this: nine, ten?" Susan views teaching as a calling. She offers the following story about her path into teaching, "It sounds so cliché…It's just that you want to make a difference in the world…have an impact…I've always wanted to be a teacher and so I can't imagine myself ever retiring. It's just what I do. It's who I am."

Susan's lengthy teaching career affords

her a wide range of perspective. She has taught elementary and middle school in multiple school divisions, both rural and suburban. She has also worked with students of varying socioeconomic backgrounds and ability levels. She's been at her current school for almost half her career. Susan teaches math at all levels, and chairs her department. Her years of experience have led her to surmise, "kids are kids, and it's what you make of it in your classroom." In the interview excerpts below Susan shares her insights on her teaching style, the students, her colleagues and the school leadership, all factors that influence her morale.

How would you describe your teaching style?

More student-directed. I have an idea of what I want to do. I've got the plans that are all formal and all that kind of stuff, but that's really not me. It's more of once you start teaching and you feel how the class is going, you shape and you kind of go that direction with it…I like to take risks, I like to take chances…. For example, if a kid says, oh, I'm going to do a Weebly – I don't know how to do a Weebly – I'm not going to say no, you can't do that That's how I like my classroom to be, more independent investigation, not me saying you have to study and then you have to do this report, that report. I like it to be more open, where the kids can say, "hey what if we did it this way?" where they're really creating, and I like them to be able to collaborate, if they want to. It's not just my classroom, it's our classroom. I want them to be able to, years from now, look back and remember there was fun, they had a good time. You learn algebra from a lot of people but I want them to remember that it was fun and they had a voice.

Do you feel like the expectation around teaching and learning allows you to be the type of teacher that you need to be?

Yes, definitely….If somebody tells me, this is the way I want you to teach, it's not really me….For me the very best lessons are the ones that just kind of occur, not the ones that I've got planned out step by step….I'm great for sitting with the team and getting and sharing ideas, but if you said to me, you've got to teach this lesson this way, then that totally stumps me….I have to be able to put a twist on it, put a flair on it. I think our principal knows we do our job. She knows what we cover… she's got the plans, she's got all that kind of stuff, so she knows, and plus she's in the classroom. The kids are used to having people come in and out. If you asked her right now what's going on in the science department upstairs, what they are teaching, she could tell you. We make sure that we cover what we're supposed to cover, and we might be a little off with the pacing guide sometimes and not cover any given specific topic this nine weeks and instead cover it in the second nine weeks, but we're going to teach what's there, but we're also going to add to it, we're not going to limit ourselves just to what's in the SOL or what's expected… and we feel trusted to do that.

I've got the plans that are all formal and all that kind of stuff, but that's really not me. It's more of once you start teaching and you feel how the class is going, you shape and you kind of go that direction with it…I like to take risks.

How do you feel about the level of collegiality, trust and respect among faculty here?
Here we have to collaborate and I think most teachers can now see the value of it, because you're building relationships in that whole process, you're getting to know each other. It's important to be able to trust the people that you work with. If I have something I haven't shared, it's because I've forgotten…just ask me and you've got it…you want to take my computer and take

everything off of it, fine. That's what teachers should do, you want to help people, you want to have an impact, not just close it off and just keep it for yourself. This school has a culture of sharing but sometimes the brand new young teachers that are coming in they just don't get it yet, it takes them a while to get it.

Is there anything about your principal's leadership style that stands out to you?
As a leader, she has confidence in herself… and she's got to know what's going on, she's got to keep the morale, all that kind of stuff, up I mean, that's exactly what she does here. If she's got something going on, she knows who's going to be the best person for it. If she came into the room right now, you're going to sit up a little bit straighter… it's not that you're scared or anything like that, it's like there's a respect there, there's an expectation, and you want to meet those expectations. I wish you could sit in on a leadership meeting or something and just see how organized she is… She's teaching us to become better leaders. She uses teachable moments not just to go in and to say, this is what we're working on…she asks…she does not make a decision typically without our involvement, even if it's something like exams, changing schedules, all this kind of stuff, she'll bounce it off of all of us first…it's that kind of respect.

In what aspects of your job do you find the most satisfaction?
It's with the kids in the classroom. I think that's the answer that most people will tell you that's

why they're teachers. It's not the paperwork. The other part that I really enjoy is the planning for the kids…it's the whole planning and creative part of it.

What parts of the job frustrate you the most?
Today you saw how all the numbers, all the data that's collected right there…that's going to help the kids. That's not the frustrating part…the frustrating part is sitting down and writing the curriculum the way that the county wants to see it, or the way that the state wants to see it, you know, doing things that you know you're just doing it because it's required, it's not actually improving things, it's more like a waste of time, the way that you're having to sit and phrase it… it ultimately comes down to paperwork. Like the lesson plans. I understand the need for it, but the detail that they had you go into with it is over the top. You have to highlight all that you're going to do or accomplish. Well, that's ridiculous because I'm doing all this with the students anyway, but what's frustrating is the fact that the instructional planner isn't a tool that is truly as useful for what the county and the state think it's doing…not for us, anyway… Maybe at another school, if they're not already collaboratively planning.

Kyle

Kyle, a career switcher and now mid-career English teacher responds to a question asking him to rate his morale "My current morale? I'm tired today….I have a good morale. I'm blessed. I know things could be worse, and so, you know, I'd say seven or eight. On bad days, it might drop down to four or five. But I have enough perspective, having taught different places, I know that I'm fortunate to have this job at this school, because the problems we have sometimes seem trivial."

Kyle teaches both regular and advanced classes, coaches and sponsors student government. He's been at his current school for several years, but previously taught in multiple counties and one other state. He is motivated to teach by his desire to make a positive impact on students. When asked about the the source of his job satisfaction, he states, "The kids. What you just saw in the hallway, kids reaching across to high-five me. I mean, it makes you feel like your life has value……So I think the big thing I get out of all this is that relationship with the kids. It's awesome. In the following interview excerpts Kyle offers his perspective on both the joys and trials of teaching.

What would be your ideal teaching situation?
My ideal teaching situation would be where I didn't have to adhere to any kind of pacing chart. I've been told that the dates for year-end testing are arbitrary. I believe that we need to test, but I don't understand why we have to test so early and then have five or six more weeks of school left. It just boggles my mind. And we're speeding up, it

deprives us of the ability to go down a rabbit hole kids might want to, you know, their imagination has been struck and they have questions and we have to speed through this stuff. It drives me insane. The speed at which we have to teach kids drives me nuts.

What is your perspective on the school's leadership?

The leadership is good. Sometimes I feel like we're stretched too thin. I mean, even though this is a great school to work at, I still would rather put more time into planning, and it's the last thing on my list. It's literally the last thing that I get to because of all the other stuff we've got to do. Now, some of that's because of state, some of that's because of the county, some of it is because of stuff our administration puts on us. And a lot of times I find out from the grapevine that we do things at our school that none of the other schools do, and it's a double-edged sword, because I know on the one hand that makes us a unique school and it makes us a better school because we're willing to do more stuff. On the other hand, man, it wears us out…And sometimes you wonder why you're doing it.

You mentioned some of your frustrations…can you provide me an example of a time where you just felt frustrated?

I've been asked to do more and more on technology and do less and less of the things that I normally do, whether it's on paper and kinesthetic or whatever, and it's very frustrating because the way I teach has been successful, and then you saw today you start relying too much on technology and that's what you get…It becomes a lot of wasted time and then you're already rushed. It would be one thing if you had unlimited time and you could let kids go down rabbit holes and teach them, you know, hey, what did you learn from this – it's hard to even reflect on a project like that because you've already wasted so much time trying to find time to pull kids in and say, all right, what did we learn from that situation – so I get frustrated when I am feeling rushed, and nobody cares. I almost wish they would just say your kids will take their test on this date, cover all the material, and we trust you're going to do it. Are you a professional or not? If I'm not, then fire me, you know what I'm saying? Like, you've given me a goal or a test, allow me to do it. So I mostly get frustrated when I feel like we're doing things or jumping through rings that seem pointless to me, and we're doing a lot of paperwork and stuff that you just don't know why you're doing it.

> If you've earned that professionalism, then you should be treated like you're a professional. And I know it's got to be earned and it's like respect. But those things, when you're not being treated like that, it is a huge blow to your morale.

What factors do you think have the greatest impact on morale?

The factors that you have no control over. It's like life. I mean, if you have control over it, you feel like you could do something about it. But stuff that's handed down on high, people that don't listen, all those things I think have the biggest effect on morale, and then on the flip side, is what you're doing being valued, and that all kind of goes hand in hand. When you give advice and nobody listens, or you don't understand why you're doing something, and you're being told you have to do it this way even though your way works, and you know your students better

than anybody else, better than somebody in Washington, somebody in state government, even somebody better than up the hallway – I mean, you know each class, the dynamics of each class, the kids in each class, and to be on the front line and not feel like you're being valued. If you've earned that professionalism, then you should be treated like you're a professional. And I know it's got to be earned and it's like respect. But those things, when you're not being treated like that, it is a huge blow to your morale.

Have you witnessed a change in morale since you've been here in this school, positive or negative?
I think people are by and large, are on the positive side of seven, eight, but I think it has gotten worse. That's why I said maybe a six, because you do get more stuff handed down, and you spend more time filling out paperwork and stuff, and you're like, why are we doing this? It literally takes an hour, and that's one of your planning periods, it's gone, and then the next day it's something else, and so when are you lesson planning? When are you doing what really impacts the kids, not for some bureaucrat, not for some data analysis. When are you putting time in? It's at home, when you would rather spend time with your kids or, you coach a rec team or do a community service…you don't have time for that, and that affects your morale.

Do you see yourself here for the next three years?
I love teaching…but I could see myself at a point where I want to get out. I think I can see why teachers want to get out. It's not like you're making six figures and you could say, well, I live this kind of lifestyle. But nobody got into it for that, we know that. Plus you get summers off. I mean we get paid a good wage. I'm not one of these teachers who complains about what we get

paid. But for the hours we put in I could have gotten a law degree and been a lawyer. So, you know, you look at that stuff and you think will there be a change of profession in my future? There's going to be a day when it gets too much… the whole point of you being in this classroom and why you do it is so that you know that your life is impacting a multitude of other people's lives, and the more it gets away from that, you're just going to leave. I mean there's no point in it. You can get anybody – if they're going to tell us how to teach and what to teach and do this and do that, just get somebody else to go up there and roll out this PowerPoint or this or that, and just tell them exactly how to teach. It's an art. There's some science involved, but teaching is an art, and it's perfected over years – I don't know if it's ever perfected, but it's refined over time, and you've got to allow us as teachers to refine, but we get lumped in. One school's got to do this, so this school's got to do this too. Well, maybe school A, they need that because of their clientele, the teachers there, whatever, and maybe school B doesn't, they need something else. Treat people as individuals because you'll get more out of them.

5 REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this final section of the report, we will discuss the relevance of the findings in two ways. First, we will present some reflections on how what we learned relates to existing scholarship on teacher morale, teachers' experiences of their work, and teacher professionalism. Second, we will connect our findings to strategies for improving teacher morale and recommendations for specific action in the region. When the leadership of MERC commissioned this report they requested that the report contain ideas for improving morale that could be used by local policy makers, school division leaders, central office personnel, principals, and teachers. In this section we will begin to outline practical steps that could be taken following the publication of this report. This section also includes a series of *Study Team Perspectives*. In these quotes, members of the Teacher Morale Study Team share their thoughts on the relevance and the utility of the study's findings.

Reflections on the Literature

The design of this research was largely informed by Linda Evans' work on teacher morale and job satisfaction.[1] In section 2 of the report we shared Evans' definition of morale and outlined the conceptual framework she developed to understand the factors and processes that influence morale. In section 4, we explained how our work both confirmed and expanded her definition. However, beyond the work of Evans, there are a number of ways that our findings build on existing literature on teachers' experience of work. Below is a series of short discussions that connect our findings to prior scholarship in this area.

Morale, school culture, and the role of the principal

Much of the literature on teachers' experience of work focuses on the influence of work conditions and school culture.[2] This was also evident in our finding that teacher job satisfaction and fit comes from a teacher's sense of efficacy and success in working not only with students, but also from the quality of the professional and personal relationships with colleagues. In certain respects, the importance of relationships to teacher fit made us consider the issue of morale as an individual versus group (whole-school) phenomenon. Across the interviews, we

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1   Evans, 1997, 1998, 2001, 2008

2   Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012; Kraft, Marinell, & Yee, 2016; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013

Study Team Perspective
Debbie Gilfillan
Teacher
Henrico County Public Schools

How does this make you think differently about your work?
It's far too easy to discount the importance of teacher morale in creating an effective educational environment. Teaching may be considered a science, but it is also an art and a practice. Many dedicated teachers in the field work diligently to address the needs of each student and to have a lasting, positive impact on students' academic lives. Good teacher morale will empower these teachers to retain in the field of education and will help them serve as leaders and mentors for new teachers entering the field. Participating in the teacher morale study has been an invaluable experience, as I have learned a great deal about the many factors affecting morale and strategies that can help improve morale. I have learned that educational systems can implement strategies and procedures to improve teacher morale. Good morale benefits the entire educational system.

found evidence of individual morale being both encouraged and discouraged by the quality of the collegial relationships within the school. The high morale teachers generally felt connected personally and professionally to the community of the school; low morale teachers were more likely to feel isolated. In our work, we also gained some insights into the nature of the relationships that characterized school cultures. In line with the literature we found that the levels of relational trust between individuals and groups

(teachers, students, administration) enhanced commitment and engagement among teachers, even in the face of an intense workload.[3]

Our study also shed light on the critical role of the principal in developing and maintaining a school culture that supported teacher job satisfaction.[4] Through the interviews we conducted, teachers' discussions of their work often came back to assessments of school leadership. Good leadership, from the teachers' perspective, required principals to manage the systems of the school in ways that were efficient, effective, fair, and allowed for some degree of teacher autonomy and voice. Also critical to the success of a principal was the ability to communicate about policy and build understanding of the rationale of the policy systems. We also found that because principals operate as negotiators at the intersection of the system (i.e., state and division policy) and the professional culture of the school, there was the potential for the principal to be perceived as the system itself. That is to say, frustrations with the system were often articulated as frustrations with the administration. In this regard, successful leadership supported teachers' ability to distinguish between the design of the policy - which they might attribute to the division or state - and its implementation by the principal.

Teacher morale, teacher effectiveness, and retention
In many ways our findings also resonate with the literature that examines teachers' emotional experience of work. For example, the burnout literature includes themes of an overbearing workload, both physical and emotional exhaustion, and feelings of inefficacy connected

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3   Bryk & Schneider, 2002

4   Burkhauser, 2016; Duyar, Gumas, & Bellibas, 2013; Griffith, 2004; National Center for Educational Statistics, 1997

to the inability to meet students' needs.[5] These were all themes that also emerged in our study with the teachers we interviewed. In fact, several of the teachers specifically identified themselves as "burned-out." On the other hand, we also profiled a number of examples of teachers that had positive emotional dispositions toward work. They expressed feeling engaged both intellectually and emotionally with their students and with colleagues, and felt that they had the support needed to be effective in their role as a teacher. These findings reinforce the evidence from research we presented in section 1 of this report, that low morale and low job satisfaction among teachers leads to less engagement, less effective teaching, and lower student achievement.[6]

However, our findings led us to reconsider the relationship between dissatisfaction and teacher effectiveness. The points above suggest that ineffectiveness may be a result of teachers disengaging from work. However, in our study we found that in most cases the low morale teachers were not disengaged or checked out. Their commitments to teaching and serving their students were strong. They were working long hours, often at the expense of work/ life balance. At the same time these teachers admitted that they did not feel effective. In some cases this led them to express doubts about their abilities, another possible explanation for teacher effectiveness. For example, in an interview one teacher began to question her ability to do the work: "I don't want to say I can't do this because then I feel inadequate. I should be able to do this. Why am I not feeling that I can do this?" However, rather than being an issue of disengagement or lack of skill, the

evidence suggested that the problem was related to the structures that had been imposed on teachers' professional work. In the face of increased load, tight pacing guides and accountability mandates, often teachers expressed wanting to have more time to "just teach." In this way we might want to consider the ways that ineffective teaching might be an outcome of the system that structures teacher work in a way that limits the possibilities for effectiveness, rather than the result of an unskilled, disengaged, or demoralized workforce.

This also speaks to the issue of teacher retention. The well-documented challenges of teacher retention have been connected to teacher dissatisfaction with work.[7] Our interviews ended with the question, 'Do you see yourself working at

7   Ingersoll & Perda, 2009

Study Team Perspective
Rodney Robinson
Teacher
Richmond Public Schools

What would you suggest to someone who wanted to improve teacher morale at their school?
There are always things that can be done. Learning about the framework helped me understand all of the issues that can impact teacher morale. There are a lot of factors that can affect individual teacher morale. The number one thing I would suggest is to survey the teachers in order to find out the individual problems with morale. You have to find the problem and deal with it. If it's a serious issue of leadership, look at a change of leadership. Look at restructuring the organization. There is always something you can do to improve morale.

5   Chang, 2009; Ingersoll 2001, 2003; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001

6   Chang, 2009; Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013, Kraft, Marinell, & Yee, 2016

this school in three years?' Low morale teachers that expressed wanting to leave did not attribute it to lack of engagement or to a loss of sense of purpose. Generally their passions for the work of teaching were still strong, however they felt like they could not do what they needed to do. For example, one teacher who expressed a desire to leave the profession stated, "I don't want to just stop teaching … I think I would regret it. I really like what I do. I really like being around the kids. I can't imagine myself doing anything else, but when you leave here in tears there is a problem … I just don't know if some of the things that I feel frustration toward are going to change anytime soon."

Morale, policy effects, and teacher professionalism

Our study also provides insight into the effects of policy on teacher work. Although Evans' framework of morale accounts for the influence of the policy context, the central focus is on the school-level dynamics. In our study the effects of division and state-level policy pressures were strong, and led us to a system for categorizing the qualities of policy both in its design and implementation. Some of these categories overlap with Evans' categories of fit (e.g., fairness), however others are new (e.g., coherence, burden). Our focus on the policy context is likely due to the fact that Evans' model was developed in the early 1990's as the standards and accountability era of school reform was in its early stages. Over the past twenty-five years the logic of standards and accountability has come to dominate the education policy agenda in the United States as well as in the UK where Evans' work was done. These reforms – which in the United States are best represented by the Bush-era *No Child Left Behind* legislation – are characterized by a number of initiatives that structure teacher work.

Study Team Perspective
Autumn Nabors
Assistant Director of
Curriculum and Instruction
Chesterfield County Public Schools

If you were talking to a principal or a teacher and you had to tell them about the study or recommend some strategies, are there any take-home bullets that you'd like to mention? Building a culture of trust is vital. Leadership needs to set the example, and teachers need to own the responsibility for building that trust, too. Leadership needs to keep the bar high, to set the example that success can be achieved, to not settle for mediocre, but they should understand that teachers want to do a good job, so help your people get there, scaffold and support them the whole way…and build some excitement in the school culture. I think that's key.

This includes state-mandated content standards, standardized curriculum, and standardized assessment systems. These policies are also driven by a logic of high stakes accountability tied to both to the outcomes of the standardized reforms (e.g., standardized test scores), as well as compliance reporting with prescribed procedures (e.g., data reporting mandates). These accountability systems then become the basis for making high stakes decisions about the success of students, the success of teachers, and the success of schools.

In our study, the effects of high stakes accountability on teachers were evident. Many teachers in our study expressed frustrations at the loss of curricular autonomy, at the increased pressure for performance on standardized tests,

and on increased workloads related to the reporting of data. These findings are in line with the research on the effects of control-oriented accountability systems on the work of teachers.[8] These effects even held among teachers that identified as high morale. For example, even at BMS – what would appear to be a best case scenario (high SES, freedom from accountability pressures, strong principal) – a number of teachers expressed cynicism about the effectiveness of the policies in terms of supporting quality teaching and student learning. Others expressed feeling lucky that they were, by virtue of their subject or school placement, exempt from these policies.

Also, in line with the research was our observation that the negative effects of accountability-driven policies were experienced with more intensity and frequency among the schools with the lowest socio-economic status students and the most academic challenges.[9] For example, at VMS the concern about losing state accreditation led to increased control over teacher work and increased burdens related to accountability reporting. As one teacher stated regarding the principal's requirement of providing documentation, "if [the state] comes in, they are going to say, 'Where is this? Where is this? And, where is this?'... I try to tell people she is not being a bully by making you show. She's teaching you how to cover your rear end."

This brings us back to the relationship between teacher morale and professionalism. In section 2, we provided an overview of Lee Shulman's six characteristics of professions.[10] Shulman's vision of the professional outlines key ideas about the nature of professional knowledge, professional judgment, professional learning, and the professional community. Shulman also emphasizes the moral and ethical commitments that motivate the work of the professions. This framework of professionalism is one that has been embraced by educational scholars interested in the preparation and professional work of teachers.[11] At the end of section 2, we drew connections between Evans' morale framework and the idea of teacher professionalism. We suggested that the problem of fit between a teacher and the school in which she/he works may, in essence, reflect a conflict in visions of teacher professionalism. In our study we found this to be true. Teachers' frustrations often highlighted the ways that the work of teaching, as defined by the professional culture of the schools and the policy systems that informed school culture, were out of sync with their own beliefs about what teachers' work should entail. In our study we saw evidence of this in the tendency among high morale teachers to express strong frustration about the incoherence and inefficiencies of the policy systems that governed their work. For example, Kyle, who liked his school and valued the skill and commitment of his principal, expressed significant frustrations about the pacing guides and assessment systems that he felt compromised his ability to make professional judgments. He said, "There's going to be a day when it gets too much." This sheds troubling light onto the factors that influence teacher retention.[12] While morale might be good in relation to a particular school placement, in the face of increasing policy pressures on teachers' work, it might not be enough to keep teachers in the classroom. This finding confirms scholarship that explores the negative effects of policy on teacher professionalism.[13]

One theme of this study is the idea

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8   Ingersoll, 2003; Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Ravitch, 2010

9   Lipman, 2004

10   Shulman, 1998

11   Berliner, 2001, Bransford, et al. 2005; Cuban, 1992

12   Ingersoll, 2001, 2003; Kraft, Marinell, & Yee, 2016

13   Day, 2007

that teaching is changing. On the one hand this is what we would expect. As Shulman's framework of professionalism suggests, one of the characteristics of a profession is that it continually evolves to cope with the uncertainty inherent in a field of practice. Schools and teachers also face ever-changing economic, political, social, and cultural contexts of communities and society. For example, many schools are facing rapid demographic shifts that require teachers to meet the needs of growing numbers of students from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. As professionals, teachers must be on the forefront of addressing these challenges of great social importance. However, over the past two decades there have been shifts not just in the ways that teachers, as professionals, must adapt to changing contexts, but more fundamentally in what professionalism within teaching means. As we move forward and look for solutions to the problem of low teacher morale, it is important that the question of professionalism be at the center of the discussion.

Recommendations

As suggested in the introduction to this study, the teaching profession is in the throes of a crisis: national levels of teacher dissatisfaction are on the rise, more teachers are leaving their schools, and fewer people are choosing to enter the field. This a problem that has significant impact not just on the emotional wellbeing of teachers, but also on the quality of schools and on student achievement. Furthermore, the negative effects of low teacher morale are experienced with greater frequency and intensity by the most challenged schools, effectively exacerbating the already significant achievement gap.

While we did not emerge from this study with a simple solution to the problem of teacher morale, our findings suggest that there are a

number of opportunities for local action not only within schools and school divisions, but also regionally in partnership with universities, governmental agencies and advocacy groups. The complicated nature of the problem suggests that the solution will require action on multiple fronts. We have structured these recommendations to include a general list of strategies for improving morale as well as concrete, next steps that are specific to the MERC region.

Before we begin there are two important points about these recommendations. First, it should be noted that some of the recommendations require a commitment of resources. In some cases the suggestions for resource allocation are significant, for example, reducing class size to address issues of teacher workload, or tackling the problems of teacher compensation. Although, these resource intensive recommendations may be more difficult to act on, they should be considered in relation to the costs of not taking action. As stated in the introduction, the effects of low teacher morale place significant financial burden on school systems.[14]

Second, many of the recommendations also rely on the willingness of key school stakeholders to rethink this issue of teacher morale, so that future work can attend to the dynamics that impact it. Rather than outline a prescriptive set of policies to improve morale, we encourage the conceptual use of this research to change the lens through which we make decisions about our work within the schools.[15] In this regard, developing understanding of the dynamic of teacher morale will likely involve various forms

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14   Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014; Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Guin, 2004; Ingersoll, 2001; Kraft, Marinell, & Yee, 2016; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013; Simon & Johnson, 2013

15   Weiss, 1977

of professional development for critical school stakeholders (teachers, building-level leaders, and division-level personnel) so that their future work supports the needs of teachers. In this, we will suggest possible uses of this report as a focus of discussion. The report was written and designed with this purpose in mind. We hope that it will be used in this way.

Strategies for improving teacher morale

The following strategies are based on our findings. They provide a foundation of local, contextualized knowledge for local school divisions to draw on as they move towards a new way of thinking about the structures that support teachers' work and, ultimately, student success. This effort to identify levers of change is in line with the recently published report by The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2016). This report called on policymakers to use the new education knowledge and research base developed over the past two decades to invest in a new way of thinking about teaching and learning. The report suggests that this effort "asks much of teachers but gives them the supports they need to be successful throughout their careers…. establishing a new compact between teachers, states, and districts; between teachers, students, and parents; and the education system as a whole."[16]

Rethinking the design and implementation of policy
Review current and new policies that impact teacher work. One of the key findings of our study was that teachers' frustrations with work were often connected to their experiences of the centralized policies governing teachers' work that originated

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16   National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2016, p. 5

Study Team Perspective
Patrick Neuman
Principal
Colonial Heights Public Schools

Why is teacher morale an important topic?
During the study meetings, we talked about how much turnover there is in education right now. The accountability in education from the government and what teachers are expected to produce and report, what teachers are expected to do on a daily basis in terms of accountability, it something we talked about in group meetings and teachers that we interviewed talked about it as well. Teachers feel that pressure immensely. Teacher salaries and compensation have been very stagnant for the last ten to fifteen years, and teacher never get paid what they would get paid in the private market for their training and experience. It's important to keep good teachers in the profession and to keep good teachers motivated, because education is a job that relies very much on the intrinsic motivation of the teacher to want to do their job and perform their duties. If teacher morale is not positive, you end up losing good teachers, or, you have good teachers who may become negative. Teachers who are not invested or committed to their work are very damaging, because our effectiveness in education is not measured by a product, it's measured by people, by our students. Teacher morale is very important to the continued success of any building or any school.

from the state and division level. Teachers relayed stories of how policies played out in their day to day lives, far removed from their original, intended goals. School division personnel and building-level leaders should incorporate a process for examining how current and future policy impacts teachers' work. Protocols and timelines for periodically revisiting the goals of existing and new policies should be created and should incorporate opportunities for feedback from multiple perspectives to gauge whether they are meeting their designated goals and to address their unintended consequences.The policy framework that emerged from this study (i.e. coherence, autonomy, load, fairness, and compensation) could be used to structure this analysis.

Rethink the models of accountability and the role of data. Our findings reveal teachers' frustration with systems of accountability within schools that were primarily based on reporting mechanisms rather than authentic forms of observation by administrators and peers and dialogue that promotes professional reflection and learning. Teachers, as professionals, must be able to exercise professional judgment in their practice over the issues of teaching, curriculum and student care. For this reason, school leaders must balance the need for accountability with increased autonomy. Absent these opportunities, expertise suffers. Of particular concern was the burden of the collection and reporting of data for accountability purposes. While teachers recognized the importance of data in assessing student mastery and informing teaching practices, school divisions and principals need to be cautious of data "reporting" that significantly contributes to teachers' overload and displaces valuable planning or instructional time.

Address the issue of load. One of the ideas expressed by study participants was the desire for more time to "just teach." Most teachers in our study felt overloaded by the number of students, number of course preparations, paperwork, and the constant requirements of new initiatives. Overload has a number of negative effects including compromising the quality of teaching, increasing stress, and upsetting work life balance. Careful consideration should be given to anything that adds to a teacher's workload. Annual surveys on teacher workload perceptions should inform decision makers, and for every new initiative or responsibility added to a teacher's workload, something of equal weight should be removed. Policies that address class size should also be considered.

Address issues of fairness. Teachers' perceptions of inequity between teachers was a common source of frustration. Division and school leaders should seek ways to address teachers' concerns about inequities. In some cases this might mean improving communication about the rationale for differentiated workloads. In others, it might require concrete efforts to reduce within-school and across division inequities. Publicly recognizing the additional challenges faced by certain groups of teachers or certain schools has the potential to improve morale as do shifts in resources.

Address the issue of teacher compensation. Our findings revealed that teachers hold realistic expectations regarding their salary limitations. However compensation surfaced as an issue in relation to the changing nature of the profession. When teachers weighed their pay against the increased workload and time commitments, the combination caused some to share their considerations of leaving the profession. Division leaders and school principals should take public stands to raise awareness of the need for increased revenue streams for school funding and should publicly stand with teachers in their efforts to

Study Team Perspective
Kenya Jackson
Human Resources Specialist
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Are there 2-3 specific strategies or approaches that you would suggest in order to assess and to help improve morale?
It's important to be mindful of the needs of a school. Going into this study I had this belief that all schools have their different, unique personalities and demands. I still believe that. When there are also socio-economic factors that affect the school, or a school is low performing or at-risk school, it definitely has a higher bearing on the workload. This might increase the turnover rate of a school. I think that it is important for principals and central office leaders to be mindful of data such as that. I think it's important to be inclusive with teachers, making sure that they give teachers the ability to voice their concerns and offer their input. Relationship building is definitely necessary. It's important to understand where a teacher is in their career journey. It's important that everything is not so regimented and that everything is not just told to teacher, but that teachers are given a voice. During our exit interviews, and even during interest interviews given by principals as they are hiring new teachers or serving their current teachers, I think it's important to make sure that they are asking questions relating to all of the different framework factors addressed in this study. That's a change I'd like to make based on my participation in this study.

improve teacher salaries.

Communicate policy rationale with clarity, consistency and transparency. Morale improves when principals and school division leaders are intentional about sharing the rationale for their decisions. Twenty-first century education calls for teaching students to think critically, which often entails asking why questions. Our findings reveal that teachers have many unanswered why questions. When teachers do not understand or fail to see value or utility in policy mandates, and when these required tasks divert time and attention from what their professional expertise suggests, they may resort to strategic compliance. Strategic compliance ultimately has negative impacts on teaching and learning, and creates cynicism about the system. Our findings revealed higher morale among teachers who experienced and could anticipate answers to their job-related questions and concerns.

Promoting school and division cultures that support teacher professionalism and leadership
Be attentive to relational dynamics in schools
Through this study, we learned of the importance of relationships to the work of teachers. It was the foundation of classroom practice and central to work with colleagues as well. Teachers' fit within schools often related to the strength of the personal and professional relationships they held. In instances where they felt disconnected, morale suffered. Policies should be structured to support relational dynamics. This involves creating time and space for teachers to forge authentic relationships.

Create structures to promote professional growth. Teachers need more opportunities to develop their professional practice and engage with their professional community. While most schools have systems in place for professional development, often these systems do not

effectively serve the needs of teachers. Professional development systems should be designed with the model of professionalism in mind. This means providing structures that encourage engagement with scholarship, reflective practice and professional collaborations. These systems should also be flexible to allow for self-directed learning so that differences in teacher experience and subject focus can be addressed.

Institutionalize opportunities for teacher voice and leadership at both the school and division level
Our findings revealed higher morale among teachers who felt their school principals fostered open and honest communication. Inviting and fostering teacher voice through both formal and informal structures leads to relational trust and creates alignment in the expectations for teachers' work and for student outcomes. Soliciting teacher voice should not just be about allowing teacher's voices to be heard. There should be a commitment to the idea that teachers bring critical perspectives to questions of policy and leadership practices. School-division leaders and principals should invite teacher input on every new policy that impacts teachers' work prior to implementation, with the goal of using the input to inform optimal implementation of the measure.

Support principals
As we have shown through the findings, principals play a critical role in the development of teacher morale. Like teachers, principals are professionals. This means they must have the ability to use theories of leadership, adapt policies, and structure the complex systems that exist within schools in a way that is responsive to ever changing and uncertain context. This work of the principal also requires the ability to communicate and foster trusting relationships within the

building. In this regard, school systems need not only to develop professional expertise among school leaders, but also be attentive to the policies that may impact their ability to lead.

Specific recommendations for next steps

While the strategies listed above are useful for thinking, in general terms, about actions that could be taken to improve morale, we know that moving forward will require some recommendations that provide clear suggestions for next steps. It is also important that these proposals build on resources that currently existing within VCU, the MERC school divisions, and allied stakeholders. Below is an introductory list of possible initiatives. In the coming months, we hope that invested stakeholders within the MERC region can come together to begin the work of developing these ideas with the goal of addressing this critical issue.

Division-level teacher morale discussion groups
MERC could lead a reading group drawn from the school divisions that includes teachers, division-level personnel, school administrators, state education officials, and VCU students/faculty. The goal would be to improve understanding of morale within and between these groups. Additional ideas for action could also emerge from these discussions.

Division and regional support for school climate surveying.
In conjunction with MERC's current work on school climate surveying[17], we could review the current systems for monitoring school climate to determine attention to the drivers of teacher morale. The region could adopt new school climate monitoring techniques that allow

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17   McMillan & Shakeshaft, 2017

87

building- and division-level leaders to assess the state of teacher morale within the schools. This tool could be used to evaluate how new policies impact the conditions that support or hinder the development of teacher morale.

School-level teacher morale task force

MERC could develop a model for a school-level team tasked with addressing the issue of morale within buildings. The teams could include teachers, non-instructional staff, and school administration. This work could begin with a review of the *Understanding Teacher Morale* report, and then engage in analysis of school-level policies and practices that support morale. Findings from the analysis could lead to a list of specific recommendations.

Division-level teacher morale policy task force

Each school division could assemble a Teacher Morale Policy Task Force to conduct an analysis of the design and implementation of local and state policies that impact teachers' work. The task force should include key central office staff (e.g., professional development leads, human resource professionals) as well as teachers and building administrators. The work of the task force could lead to recommendations for policy changes or suggestions for policy advocacy at the state-level.

Promoting teacher professionalism task force

MERC could assemble a division-level or regional task force exploring opportunities for promoting teacher professionalism. This work might involve collaborations between the school division personnel and VCU's Center for Teacher Leadership. The task force would consider the recommendations of the morale report in light of existing professional development opportunities, and provide recommendations for additional work in this area.

VCU teacher and leadership preparation task force

MERC could assemble a team of representatives from VCU's School of Education to consider implications of teacher morale findings to pre-service preparation for both teachers and school leaders. The team could develop recommendations for ways to address the findings of the report through the curriculum of these programs.

We would appreciate your feedback on the form and content of this report!

The Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium is dedicated to disseminating research that is accessible, relevant to partnering school divisions, and potentially generalizable to broader conversations about education. Scan the QR code or click the link to share your perspective in a quick survey. We welcome any feedback you have about this report.

http://tinyurl.com/TeacherMoraleReport

To learn more about MERC visit our website:
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APPENDICES

Appendix A
Extended Field Note Questions

1. What did you learn about the **social context** of the school? What evidence gave you insights into how the community served by the school shapes the school's professional culture?

2. What did you learn about **the policy context** of the school? What evidence gave you insights into how division, state, and local policies impact the professional culture of the school?

3. What did you learn about **the school leadership**? What evidence gave you insights into the impact of building leadership on the professional culture of the school?

4. What was your impression of the **professional orientation** of the teacher you shadowed? Did she or he seem to be more of a **restricted** or **extended** professional? What gave you this impression?

5. What was your impression of **fairness** within the professional culture of the school? What was you impression of the teacher's attitude about the level fairness within the school? What gave you these impressions?

6. What was your impression of the quality of **pedagogy** (i.e., the curriculum and the expectations around teaching and learning) within the school? What was your impression of the teacher's attitudes about the **pedagogy** of the school? What gave you these impressions?

7. What was your impression of the **organizational efficiency** of the school? What was your impression of the teacher's attitudes about the **organizational efficiency** of the school? What gave you these impressions?

8. What impression did you have about the level of **collegiality** at the school? What impression did you have about the teacher's attitudes toward **collegiality** in the school? What gave you these impressions?

9. What impression did you have about the quality of **interpersonal relationships** at the school? What impression did you have about the teacher's attitudes about **interpersonal relationships** at the school? What gave you these impressions?

10. What was your overall impression of **the teachers' fit** within the professional culture of the school? What gave you this impression?

11. What was your impression of teacher's level of **job satisfaction** and **morale**? What gave you this impression?

12. What was your impression of the overall **morale** of the school? What gave you this impression?

13. Was there anything else you observed that seems relevant to this study?

Appendix B
Teacher/Staff Interview Questions

Job-Related Ideal

1. What inspired you to become a teacher (non-instructional staff (e.g., counselor, etc.))?

2. How did you come to work at this school?

    a. Prior work experiences

    b. Prior teaching (non-instructional staff) experiences

3. What would be your ideal teaching situation?

4. There are different types of teachers (non-instructional staff). How would you describe yourself as a teacher (non-instructional staff)?

Current Experience of Teaching

5. What classes do you teach? What other job responsibilities do you have?

6. How do you feel about working at this school?

    a. What do you like about the school? What don't you like?

        i.   Relationships with colleagues?

        ii. Leadership?

        iii. The expectations around teaching and learning?

7. If you were the principal, what changes would you make?

Satisfaction and Morale

8. In what aspects of your job do you find the most satisfaction?

    a. Can you share an example of a time recently that you felt real job satisfaction?

9. What are the parts of your job that frustrate you the most?

    a. Can you share an example of a time recently when you felt frustrated with work?

10. How would you rate your current morale? Why?

11. How would you rate the morale of the school overall? Why?

12. What factors within the school do you think have the greatest impact on the morale of the teachers and staff at your school?

13. Have you witnessed a change in morale during the time you have been a teacher (staff)? If so, what type of changes have you witnessed? What impact has this had?

14. Do you see yourself working at this school in 3 years? Why or why not?

Appendix C
Administrator Interview Questions

Principal Identity

1. What was your path to becoming the principal at this school?

   a. Prior experiences as a teacher / administrator?

   b. How many principals have you worked under? Do you see any of your former principals as role models?

2. What inspired you to become principal?

3. There are different types of school leaders. How would you describe your leadership style?

Current Experience of Leadership

4. What are your leadership goals and priorities for this school year?

5. As a school leader, what have been the biggest challenges?

   a. Policy?

   b. Community context?

6. What do you see as your biggest accomplishments as a school leader?

Perceptions of Satisfaction and Morale

7. How would you rate the overall morale of the teachers and staff in your school?

8. Have you witnessed a change in morale during the time you have been a principal? If so, what type of changes have you witnessed? What impact has this had?

9. If we think about teacher (or staff) morale as the experience of individuals, that suggests that there could be both high and low morale staff members at a school. Why do you think some staff members have low morale? Why do others have high morale?

10. What factors do you think have the greatest impact on the morale of the teachers and staff at your school?

11. Do you see building teacher job satisfaction and morale as an important part of your job?

    a. Do you see teacher morale as important to school success?

    b. What strategies do you use to improve teacher morale?

12. How would you rate your morale?

13. Do you see yourself leading this school in 3 years? Why or why not?