2023

TEACHER TURNOVER AND RETENTION THE CHOICE TO LEAVE: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS IN RURAL MONTANA

Brittany Elizabeth Julie Katzer

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation
Katzer, Brittany Elizabeth Julie, "TEACHER TURNOVER AND RETENTION THE CHOICE TO LEAVE: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS IN RURAL MONTANA" (2023). Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers. 12065.
https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/12065

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.
TEACHER TURNOVER AND RETENTION

THE CHOICE TO LEAVE: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS IN RURAL MONTANA

By Brittany Elizabeth Julie Katzer

Master of Science in Applied Psychology, Eastern Washington University, 2009
Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology, Eastern Washington University, 2007

Dissertation

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education
in Educational Leadership

University of Montana, Missoula, MT

April 2023

Committee Members:
Dr. John Matt, Committee Chair
Department of Educational Leadership

Dr. William McCaw
Department of Educational Leadership

Dr. Erica Allen
Department of Educational Leadership

Dr. Kirsten Murray
Department of Counseling

Dr. Daniel Lee
Associate Dean, University of Montana

Ashby Kinch
Dean of the Graduate School, University of Montana
Teacher Turnover and Retention: The Choice to Leave: Lived Experiences of Teachers in Rural Montana

School districts across the United States are grappling to fill, and to keep, their classrooms operating with qualified teachers, especially in rural communities. To ensure a quality education for the millions of students in the nation in the coming years, educational leaders and government officials need to evaluate what can be done to increase the number of teachers staying in their positions. Schools must be better equipped to understand what contributes to high turnover rates and the inability to retain their teachers. It is necessary to create conditions that will keep fully trained and qualified teachers in the field. The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine and discover the factors contributing to high turnover rates of teachers in rural communities as well as to take a closer look at school climate and its impact on retention. The study helped unveil the contributing factors and lived experiences of teachers who chose to leave a teaching position. Teacher shortages have become a well-documented problem, but many in the education community continue to characterize the shortages as one, nonspecific, national crisis. Because of this, broad solutions are proposed to address the shortages, and they do not target the specific needs of states, districts, and schools. This study focused specifically on rural Montana elementary teachers who chose to leave a teaching position between 2017 and 2022. The central question asked: What is the lived experience of teachers who decided to leave a teaching position? The interviews conducted with 12 elementary teachers created significant statements about teacher turnover. The composite description revealed ten themes about how participants experienced teacher turnover and retention. This study adds a greater understanding about how and why teachers are leaving their positions at such alarming rates, particularly in rural Montana elementary schools. Leaders and policymakers would be well served to focus their efforts on the areas of participants’ expressed concerns which include administration, lack of support and appreciation, low pay, a toxic school climate, health and safety, an increased workload, and lack of teacher voice.
Acknowledgements

For the past several years, I have steadily worked toward my goal and dream of completing my doctorate degree. Thank you to those who have supported me along the way. I could not have succeeded without the love and encouragement of my husband Cody Sr. At times, I needed his gentle nudging words, “You can do this,” and “Don’t give up, keep going.” He fervently believed in me and gave me the courage to tackle this feat. Next my three energetic, wild boys: Cody Jr., Waylon, and Cash. They reminded me about the importance of prioritizing my family and ensured I keep a healthy work/life balance. Cody Jr., thank you for expressing to me that you are proud of me. Your words kept me going during challenging times. Waylon, thank you for being a realist and telling me to put the computer down when you needed my attention and focus. Cash, thank you for constantly making me laugh with your sense of humor and for keeping me centered on what is most important in life: God and my family. I also want to acknowledge my Dissertation Chair, Dr. John Matt, who was by my side from the very beginning of my journey. Thank you to the rest of my dissertation committee. I would also like to thank Dr. Lori Schieffer, one of the best principals I have ever worked with, for offering me advice, feedback, and understanding. Thank you to my classmate who became a friend, Justine Alberts, for enduring the program with me and spending countless hours working and studying with me. Finally, without the willingness of the educators who volunteered for this study, no research could have occurred. My heartfelt thanks and appreciation are extended to these teachers who offered their input and experiences of teacher turnover. Their commitment and passion to their students is commendable and humbling.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IX</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Question</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Questions</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions of Terms</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delimitations</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding Teacher Retention, Teacher Turnover, and Teacher Shortages</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributing Factors of Teacher Turnover</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributing Factors of Teacher Retention</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Incentives</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeted Recruitment</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induction and Mentoring Programs</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Climate</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Impacts of Teacher Turnover on Students</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Classroom Disruption
Staff Instability
Changes in Teacher Quality
Teacher Turnover, Teacher Retention, and Leadership
Conclusion

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY
Design of the Qualitative Approach
Phenomenology
Research Questions
Central Question
Sub-questions
Data Collection
Epoche or Bracketing
Role of the Researcher
Data Collection Procedures
Data Collection Methods
Interview Questions
Data Analysis
Significance Statements and Labels
Clustering the Statements into Meaning Units and Themes
The Essence of the Experience
Trustworthiness of the Data
Transferability of the Data
Accuracy
CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

Personal Experience of Teacher Turnover
Participant Selection and Demographics
Central Question
Data Analysis
Horizontalization Significant Statements
Interview Data
Clustering Meaning Units Labeling Themes
Intuitive Integration: The Essence of the Experience
  Meaning Theme One- Student Relationships
  Meaning Theme Two- Camaraderie
  Meaning Theme Three- Health and Safety
  Meaning Theme Four- Lack of Support and Appreciation
  Meaning Theme Five- Toxic School Climate
  Meaning Theme Six- Administration Changes
  Meaning Theme Seven- Low Pay
  Meaning Theme Eight- Effective Communication and Trust
  Meaning Theme Nine- High Demands and Stress
  Meaning Theme Ten- Lack of Teacher Voice
Summary of Results
Summary
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Questions Answered</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Question Answered</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for the Field of Education</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for School Leaders</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for School Leaders</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Future Research</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A: SCREENING LETTER TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B: LETTER TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX D: CONSENT TO BE AUDIOTAPED</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX H: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX I: SELECTED SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX J: THEMES OR MEANING UNITS WITH EVIDENCE</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Participant Demographics ................................................................. 92
Table 2. Maximum Variation of Participants’ Backgrounds and Experiences ............... 94
Table 3. Teacher Turnover and Retention Themes .................................................. 134
Table 4. Meaning Themes and Implications ......................................................... 146
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Concept Map of Themes 119
Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

Each school year offers an opportunity for a new beginning and a fresh start (Andrews, 2018). It is a chance to foster a positive and motivating school environment, where staff and students feel safe, supported, engaged, accepted, and look forward to spending their time in the building every day (Prothero, 2020). It holds the promise of new chances and gone are the failures of the previous year. Teachers have a brief window of opportunity and many students come into classes desiring a fresh start and eager to act upon this start (Dyck, 2004).

The first day of school is often filled with mixed emotions and new clothes, new binders, pencils, and best of all, new teachers, new students, and a new class (Dyck, 2004). Leaders in the building may ponder what can be done so that their teachers will choose to happily stay in their positions at the end of the school year (Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008). Teachers play an important role in American society, with the essential task of educating youth, the future of the country. Teachers can influence how students feel about school and ultimately how much or how little they value their education (Ahern, 2018).

Retention of teachers has become a concerning topic in the field of education, due to the number of quality teachers leaving their school or the profession every year (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Walker, 2022). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 8% of teachers leave the profession every year and another 8% move to other schools, which brings the total annual turnover rate to 16% (Carver-Thomas & Darling- Hammond, 2017; Wang, 2019). This equates to three out of 20 teachers leaving the profession annually. This matter is a cause for concern and more research in the field needs to be conducted, so that state, district, and school leaders can make better informed decisions regarding public education’s working conditions (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Teacher Retention, 2019).
The teacher shortage is real, large, and growing, and districts around the country are dealing with the negative impacts on educational opportunities and outcomes (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Natanson, 2022; Will, 2022). In response to this challenge, leaders and policymakers are rethinking practices in hopes of keeping their educators in the classrooms. Lack of teacher retention can pose a variety of harmful effects in many different areas. These include increasing educator shortages, extra costs for schools to train and hire new teachers, reduced student achievement, less collaboration among staff, disruption to relationships among teachers, less school stability, and a loss of important institutional knowledge (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Donley et al., 2019; Garcia & Weiss, 2019). It is imperative that these factors are addressed and that long-term solutions are implemented, so that teacher retention rates can be improved and losses in learning can be minimized. A shortage of teachers harms students, staff, and the public education system (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Walker, 2022).

Educational leaders play an important role in staff retention (Blase & Kirby, 2000; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Learning Policy Institute, 2017; Teacher Retention, 2019). In order to have an effective school system, there must be strong leadership and school environments that are focused on the educational and social well-being of students (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Day et al., 2016). Educational leaders are in a place to make decisions that can influence whether or not teachers choose to stay in their positions (Sunde & Ulvik, 2014). According to some, teachers’ perceptions of the school administration have by far the greatest influence on teacher retention decisions (Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankdord, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2011). Research related to principal qualities that impact teacher retention could inform educators and policymakers who are struggling to reduce high teacher turnover rate (Learning Policy Institute, 2017; Martinez, 2019). Other factors to be considered
include teacher burnout, job demands and stress, lack of mentorship, compensation, working conditions, and workplace climate (Adejumo, Donovan, Schaack, & Ortega, 1997).

The American education system is struggling to maintain a steady workforce and the need for strengthening the teaching profession is apparent (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; OECD, 2012; Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2019). Diving deeper into this phenomenon will allow policymakers and leaders to identify factors that can decrease teacher turnover and shed light on necessary changes that need to be made in order to retain staff. This study will focus on what factors contribute to teacher turnover and what can be done to ensure greater retention of staff. The first chapter focuses on the problem of teacher retention, the purpose of the study, and how it addresses the problem. The research question that drove the study is explored and definitions of specific terms related to the study are explained. The limitations and delimitations that give the study boundaries are described below, along with the significance of the research and how it will benefit schools that are facing high attrition rates.

**Statement of the Problem**

A main goal in public education is for all children to receive a quality education from highly qualified teachers (Balow, 2021; State, 2007). However, a teacher shortage in the nation’s K-12 schools has become a growing problem (Baitinger, 2021; Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Natansan, 2022). Increased attention has been called to this concern, as teachers are leaving the classroom in pursuit of other opportunities or leaving the field altogether (Walker, 2022a). This is witnessed throughout the country, with many states experiencing shortages and turnover. Districts need to establish a work environment that will bring committed new teachers into the field as well as keep the productive, enthusiastic teachers throughout their careers (Walker, 2022a; O’Brien & Tye 2002).
Even though teachers are among the most highly respected professionals (Garcia & Weiss, 2019), research shows that school districts across the U.S. are grappling to fill, and to keep, their classrooms operating with qualified educators. To further compound the situation, in a recent study conducted by the National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research, findings showed that approximately 500,000 teachers in the United States are leaving their schools each year (Balow, 2021). Every state and every region across the United States has been affected according to data from the 2017-2018 school year (The Teacher Shortage, 2018). Nearly half of the teachers at the time said they were actively looking to leave the profession altogether and about 30% of college graduates that become teachers are leaving the profession within 5 years (Walker, 2022). With this considerable teacher shortage and continual turnover, school systems across the country are battling with building and maintaining a high-quality teacher workforce to meet the needs of all their students (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2019). Rural communities are hit the hardest by the teacher shortage and according to a 2019 report from the Rural School and Community Trust (Morton, 2021), Montana has the highest portion of rural schools in any state, at just below 75%. As of November 2022, Montana had 835 schools and more than half of them had less than 100 students (RMHP3, 2022).

In order to ensure a quality education for the millions of students in the nation in the coming years, school leaders, government officials, and other stakeholders need to evaluate what can be done to increase the number of individuals staying in their positions (OECD, 2012). It is necessary to create conditions that will keep fully trained and qualified teachers in the field. Schools must become better equipped at understanding what contributes to high turnover rates and the inability to retain their educators (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Teacher Retention, 2019).
Certain characteristics such as subject, student demographics, and community make up also impact teacher shortages. Teacher shortages are often in schools with specific characteristics such as in urban and rural settings. These settings tend to experience greater difficulties filling teacher vacancies compared to schools in suburban areas (McVey & Trinidad, 2019). Turnover rates also differ by subject area. Districts throughout the United States have experienced major shortages of qualified teachers in mathematics, science, special education, and English language development. Furthermore, research shows that teachers working in these subjects are more likely to leave their school or the field than other teachers in the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Likewise, schools that serve a higher percentage of minority students have more difficulty with teacher shortages than schools that serve a lower percentage of minority students (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Lastly, schools serving more low-income families have a harder time filling vacancies with qualified teachers (Hong & Yee, 2022). States, districts, and schools face a shortage of teachers from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and as the student body in the United States grows increasingly diverse, the teacher workforce remains predominantly white (McVey & Trinidad, 2019). Research shows that students of color perform better academically when they have at least one teacher of the same race during schooling, which makes the lack of diversity in the teacher population problematic, particularly in a district that serves high proportions of students of color (Ordway, 2017).

Teacher shortages have become a well-documented problem, but many in the education community continue to characterize the shortages as one, nonspecific, national crisis (Natanson, 2022). Because of this, broad solutions are proposed to address the shortages and they do not target the specific needs of states, districts, and schools. Specific shortages have impacts on school, students, and communities, and a loss of one teacher in a school could mean less
opportunities for students (Donley et al., 2019). Communities suffer and the suffering is not
distributed equally. The ones that are hurt the most from teacher shortages are typically low-
income and under-resourced, so treating the challenges with broad solutions does a disservice to
the communities who are most affected (McVey & Trinidad, 2019).

Perhaps the most important reason teacher turnover matters is its impact on students
(Carver-Thomas, Darling-Hammond, & Sutcher, 2019; The Impact of Teacher Turnover, 2018).
Research shows that high teacher turnover rates in schools negatively impact student
achievement for all the students in a school, not just those in a new teacher’s classroom.
Turnover rates are higher in schools with low-income students and students of color and the
constant change worsens staffing difficulties that lead to shortages. Because of this, students in
these schools suffer the consequences of both turnover and shortages which include substitute
teachers, canceled classes, and inexperienced, underprepared teachers (Carver-Thomas, Darling-
Hammond, & Sutcher, 2019).

High turnover rates and teacher shortages can create a significant cost financially.
Teacher replacement costs, including costs related to turnover, recruitment, hiring, and training
can be about $9,000 per teacher in rural districts and more than $20,000 per teacher in urban
districts (Carver-Thomas, Darling-Hammond, & Sutcher, 2019). In high turnover districts, it’s
important to think about how else the money could be spent, including teacher mentoring and
learning opportunities to increase effectiveness, which ultimately means better overall student
performance (Carver-Thomas, Darling-Hammond, & Sutcher, 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The teacher shortage and high turnover rate is a major challenge for school districts, and
according to some, is a greater challenge than any other they face (Hodges, 2018). Obtaining and
retaining qualified teachers is a complex effort. A comprehensive study and understanding of the situation are needed, so that leaders and policy makers can address the factors causing teachers to leave their school or leave the profession altogether.

When the purpose of a study is to provide an understanding of the critical components of an experience such as teacher turnover, one approach is to use a phenomenological analysis. Researchers use case phenomenology to understand essential themes of a lived experience (Creswell, 2009). For the purpose of this study, educators from different school districts within the field of education will provide data and information. The purpose of this phenomenological study will be to examine and discover the factors contributing to high turnover rates of educators in rural communities as well as to take a closer look at school climate and its impact on retention of teachers. A phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Specifically, the researcher will look at what personal and professional characteristics led to teachers either leaving or staying in their position. The results of this study will help leaders and policymakers to better understand the successful practices that keep teachers satisfied in their current positions and less likely to leave their school or the field altogether.

**Research Questions**

Research questions guide researchers and are concerned with the unknown aspects of a phenomenon of interest (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The specific problem required exploring educators’ lived experiences while remaining in, or exiting, their school site. One central question and five sub-questions guided the design of this study to identify educators’ lived experiences.
Central Question

The central question of this qualitative phenomenological study is a broad question that asks for an exploration of the central phenomenon or concept in a study. This question is the broadest question and is the foundation for the study:

What is the lived experience of teachers who decided to leave a teaching position?

Sub-Questions

In phenomenology research, sub-questions are used to further refine the central question and “help to establish the components of the essence of the study” (Creswell, 2013). The central phenomenon is broad; therefore, sub-questions are asked to better understand the factors that impact teacher turnover rates.

1. What are the reasons elementary teachers have for staying in their positions?
2. What are the reasons elementary teachers have for leaving a school or the field altogether?
3. From a teacher’s perspective, what strategies may reduce teacher turnover?
4. How does school climate contribute to teachers’ decisions to leave rural schools?
5. What factors contribute to overall job satisfaction and retention?

The central question drives the study with five related sub-questions found in Chapter Three that were also addressed in the research.

Definitions of Terms

To best understand the concepts related to the study, definitions are given for terms that will be frequently used throughout the study. This section reviews and identifies the definition of terms that readers will need in order to understand a research project and terms that individuals
outside the field of study may not understand and that may go beyond common language (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2007). For the purpose of this study, the following definitions are used.

**Classroom teacher.** A staff member assigned the professional activities of instructing students in classes or courses (Colorado Department of Education, 2021).

**COVID-19 Pandemic.** Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. It was first reported in 2019 and became a pandemic. Symptoms can include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. There are many types of human coronaviruses, including some that commonly cause mild upper-respiratory tract illnesses. COVID-19 is a new disease that has not previously been seen in humans (Oxford, 2022).

**Educator.** A person who provides instruction or education, a teacher (Oxford dictionary, 2022).

**Mixed method research.** Studies that include at least one quantitative method and one qualitative method in the research design (Creswell & Clark, 2011).

**Phenomenological research design.** Describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon, and it focuses on describing a phenomenon that all participants have experienced (Creswell, 2013).

**Qualitative research.** This method of research uses interpretive frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. (Creswell, 2013).

**Quantitative research.** The process of collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and writing the results of a study (Creswell, 2013).

**Rural.** The majority of Montana's geographic area is defined by the Census Bureau as rural, meaning most population centers have fewer than 2,500 people (Montana Census, 2020).
**Teacher Retention.** Teacher retention refers to the proportion of teachers in one year who are still teaching in the same school the following year (Arroyo, 2020).

**School climate.** The quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students’, parents’, and school personnel’s experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures (National School Climate Council, 2007).

**School culture.** The guiding beliefs and values evident in the way a school operates. School culture can be used to incorporate all the attitudes, expected behaviors, and values that affect how the school operates (Fullan, 2007).

**Teacher attrition.** The number or percentage of teachers who leave the profession in a given year, diminishing the teacher supply (Behrstock-Sherratt, 2016).

**Teacher demand.** The number of teachers that districts wish to employ at prevailing wages and conditions (Behrstock-Sherratt, 2016).

**Teacher shortage.** A situation where the teacher supply falls short of teacher demand (Behrstock-Sherratt, 2016).

**Teacher supply.** The number of individuals willing and able to teach at prevailing wages and conditions (Behrstock-Sherratt, 2016).

**Teacher movers or teacher mobility.** The number or percentage of teachers who leave a school or district to teach in another school or district (Behrstock-Sherratt, 2016).

**Teacher turnover.** The rate at which teachers are replaced (due to teacher attrition or teacher mobility) (Behrstock-Sherratt, 2016).

**Reserve pool.** The number of certified teachers not currently employed as teachers (Behrstock-Sherratt, 2016).
**Turnover rate.** The rate at which personnel whose primary function is classroom teaching leave or separate from the district or change from their classroom teaching to another position from one school year to another, expressed as a percentage (Colorado Department of Education, 2021).

**Urban.** Of or related to cities and the people who live in them (Oxford dictionary, 2022).

**Delimitations**

The delimitations according to Creswell (2009) “define the parameters of the research study” and are those characteristics that give the study its boundaries and articulate the site and participants (p. 113). The participants will be educators in Montana who have worked in the field between the years 2017 and 2022 and have chosen to leave a teaching position within the stated time frame.

The inclusion criteria delimited the participants by requiring them to meet specific criteria prior to their participation. First, the educator must work in Montana. Second, the participants for this study were delimited to working in the field of education in the last five years (2017-2022). Third, they must have worked at the elementary school level (Kindergarten through 6th grade). Lastly, they must have left a teaching position by choice during the 2017-2022 time frame.

**Limitations**

According to Creswell (2003), a researcher needs to “provide limitations to identify potential weaknesses of the study” (p. 148). The researcher was aware of the limitations and the threats to transferability, which were inherent in the study, and understood that nothing could be done about them due to the nature of the problem and study. Because the researcher could not control these phenomena, they are limitations.
Some natural limitations of the study include willingness of participants, truthfulness, and memory. Not all participants are equally articulate and perceptive, and researcher’s presence may also bias responses (Creswell, 2009). There was a small number of participants, which is a limitation to the study. Other limitations related to this study are:

Social desirability. The respondents to the interviews may have provided the answers they believed the researcher wanted or what was perceived to be culturally acceptable and positive, rather than giving their honest opinions.

Educators will be contacted by telephone or in an online format to volunteer to be interviewed at a later time. This may have left the researcher with individuals who wanted to talk about their reasons for dissatisfaction in the field of education but may not represent the complete view of all educators who are working within the field.

Interviews provided indirect information filtered through the views of interviewees (Creswell, 2009, p. 179).

The role of the interviewer, whose background, and demographics (such as gender, race, sexual orientation, age, etc.) may have affected the respondents’ answers (Alamri, 2019).

Maturation. A process of change that occurred naturally within the subjects because of the passing of time or experiences during the study. The maturation is not a consequence of the study or the researcher’s involvement.

Consideration of the current situations of the participants. The participants may have participated in a recent event that would alter their perceptions about working in the field of education.
Bias. Participants’ biases about teaching may have limited their responses. The participants’ experiences and biases may prevent them from answering honestly. Past work history may have biased the responses.

The interviews will take place through an online format using Zoom. Relying on this method, instead of face-to-face communication, may have limited the study, because these methods did not allow the researcher to see all non-verbal cues of the participants (Creswell, 2007).

Participants may have feared that their answers provided information for an evaluation of their job performance. Because the researcher could not control these phenomena, they are limitations.

**Significance of the Study**

School districts throughout the country are struggling to recruit and retain qualified teachers, especially in rural areas (Mihaly, Moore, & Yoon, 2019; Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Natanson, 2022). In Montana specifically, the state is characterized by a high percentage of school districts being classified as “rural” (Montana Census, 2020; McCracken, 2016; Mohr & Furois, 2017). Data from the Montana Office of Public Instruction (2021) indicated that the teacher retention battle is at a “near-crisis” level and has possibly been worsened by the COVID-19 Pandemic (Szpaller, 2021a). Crystal Andrews, educator licensure director at Montana Office of Public Instruction, issued a forceful statement with data collected in regard to the struggle with teacher retention and recruitment:

We received the most requests for emergency authorizations of teacher hires since at least 2005; districts request emergency authorizations when they exhaust all possibilities for hiring a licensed educator and get permission to bring on a teacher without the
certification. The number hit 120 in 2021, jumping from 23 in 2017, and 43, 94, and 84 the following years. The number of schools with non-licensed teachers was also at an all-time high and had more than doubled from 69 non-licensed teachers in 2019 to 136 in 2020. The state has seen a major loss in the number of teachers from 600 teachers in 2019 to 470 teachers in 2020. (as cited in Szpaller, 2021a, p. 1)

There is pressure to keep teachers in the field of education and in their classroom, as teacher turnover continues to plague our country’s schools (Adejumo, Donovan, Schaack, & Ortega, 1997; Walker, 2022; Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Understanding what is causing teachers to resign from the profession and what is causing teachers to stay in the profession is valuable information for individuals invested in improving retention rates and ultimately student learning and outcomes (Ciullo, 2018; Walker, 2022; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Consideration of such research could provide educational administrators and school leaders with a better knowledge of ways to effectively keep teachers before they leave their classroom or profession altogether (Ciullo, 2018).

Information collected from this study will provide strategies that can be used to maintain quality teachers in Montana school districts. This study benefits not only the practitioners in the educational field, but also researchers, policy makers, communities, families, and the future of the country.

**Summary**

Educating the youth of our nation is the cornerstone upon which hope is built for future generations. Schools around the country are dealing with high rates of teacher turnover and teacher shortages, and teacher retention continues to be one of the most problematic issues
within public education. Understanding the factors that contribute to teacher retention will benefit the educational field as a whole. This research is imperative, as the teacher retention battle is at a “near-crisis” level (Szpaller, 2021a; The Facts and Fictions, 2005). This chapter introduced the study and included the introduction, problem statement, and purpose of the study. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine and discover the factors contributing to high turnover rates and retention of educators in rural communities as well as to examine the relationship between school climate and retention of teachers. In addition, the research question, definition of terms, delimitations, and limitations provided the boundaries of the study. Finally, this study is significant because teacher retention and national teacher shortages continue to plague our educational systems. This study will add insight and research about the topic.

The intent of Chapter Two is to present a critical analysis of prior scholarship related to the research questions of the study. The research analysis includes an overview of teacher retention and factors contributing to teacher turnover. The literature review explores past and current research of teacher retention. The contents of Chapter Two also contain the impacts of a positive school climate and a negative school climate. The literature review evaluates areas related to teacher shortages and retention as well as the consequences these have on the future of society.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to examine and discover the factors contributing to high educator turnover rates and retention of educators in rural communities as well as to examine school climate and the impacts on turnover. In Chapter Two, research, theories, articles, and ideologies are reviewed that are related to teacher retention and turnover. The areas that are reviewed meet the three criteria recommended by Creswell (1994): “to present results of similar studies, to relate the present study to the ongoing dialogue in the literature, and to provide a framework for comparing the results of a study with other studies” (p. 37). This chapter will describe the ways that philosophers, theorists, and researchers view teacher retention and reviews contributing factors that either keep educators in their positions or contribute to the high rates of turnover. Further, it explains a leader’s role and impact and also describes the effects on students, including academic achievement.

The purpose of the literature review is to share “with the reader the results of other studies that are closely related to the one being undertaken, [and to relate the study] to the larger, ongoing dialogue in the literature, filling in gaps, and extending prior studies” (Creswell, 2009, p. 25). The review of literature was developed based on the five criteria or categories suggested by Boote and Beile (2005):

1. Coverage. Justified criteria for inclusion and exclusion from the review.

2. Synthesis. Is designed to gauge how well the author summarized, analyzed, and synthesized the selected literature on a topic.

3. Methodology. Measures how well the author identified the main methodologies and research techniques that have been used in the field and analyzed their advantages and disadvantages.
4. Significance. Measures how well the study rationalized the practical and scholarly significance of the research problem.

5. Rhetoric. Measures whether the literature review was written with a coherent, clear structure that supported the review (pp. 7-9).

The research studies and articles are reviewed and described based on Boote and Beile’s (2005) recommended categories and are chosen based on how they relate, support, or build upon the successful retention of qualified staff in schools. The main areas of focus of this review will include:

- Understanding teacher retention, teacher turnover, and teacher shortages in the United States
- Contributing factors of teacher turnover
- Contributing factors of teacher retention
- School climate
- The impacts of teacher turnover on students
- The relationship between teacher turnover, teacher retention, and leadership

The organization of the literature review occurs in six main sections. The first section includes the trends in teacher retention and covers understanding teacher retention, teacher turnover, and teacher shortages in the United States. It includes both past and present research to provide background knowledge of the topic of study. The second section of Chapter two is a summary of factors which contribute to teacher turnover and includes a summary of four categories that researchers have discovered to have an immense impact: compensation, teacher preparation programs, administrative support, and working conditions. The third section of the review is a summary of factors which contribute to teacher retention and includes descriptions of the main categories that have a strong influence. The fourth section is a review of the school
climate and its impact on teacher turnover. The fifth section describes the literature related to the relationship between teacher turnover, teacher retention, and school leadership. The sixth and final section is a review of the current literature on teacher turnover and the effects on students. Chapter Two provides research on teacher shortages throughout the United States, retention of qualified staff, and the impacts of turnover on the field of education.

Understanding Teacher Retention, Teacher Turnover, and Teacher Shortages in the United States

The literature review indicates the teacher shortage in the United States’ K-12 schools is an increasingly recognized matter yet is still poorly understood (Balow; 2021; Carver-Thomas, Darling-Hammond, & Sutcher, 2019; Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Teacher shortages can be described as the inability to staff vacancies, at current wages, with individuals qualified to teach in the fields needed (Carver-Thomas, Darling-Hammond, & Sutcher, 2019). While the shortage is recognized in the media and by policymakers, the reasons contributing to the crisis are complex and therefore can be difficult to comprehend.

The shortage exists because there is an inadequate number of credentialed teachers to fill the openings at schools and the demand is continuing to expand, with student enrollment expected to grow by three million in the next decade (Berry & Shields, 2017). Unfilled vacancies occur for a variety of reasons, which include reduced attractiveness of teaching as a career, increases in school enrollment numbers, increases in class sizes, and excessive numbers of teachers leaving their schools (Barnum, 2018). Teachers leaving their schools say they feel devalued by work-related policies, are feeling constant stress due to matters such as state testing, experience unfair teaching evaluations, and are given less professional autonomy than desired; all of which contribute to work dissatisfaction (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). This problem continues to have a ripple effect on students, teachers, and the educational system as a whole. It demands
urgent attention, comprehensive research, and sustainable policy solutions. Curbing teacher movement out of the schools or out of the profession will ultimately aid in solving the current shortage issue (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Walker, 2022).

According to Berry and Shields (2017), the teaching profession has regressed to where it was nearly 30 years ago, and the difficulties that teachers face are much more challenging than before, and for the students, the stakes are much greater. In a descriptive study conducted in Montana by research associate Nielsen (2001), Nielsen took a closer look at the national teacher shortage and described three different types of shortages: shortages in specific subject areas, many job openings, and the inability to attract and retain qualified teachers. The main subject areas she found were harder to fill were math and special education. The large number of openings occurred due to rapid enrollment, a large number of retirements, and a high turnover rate. The inability to attract and retain teachers was shown to be because the job openings were where teachers were not willing to go, nor were they willing to stay. Remote locations attracted less educators (Nielsen, 2002). Nielsen’s study looked specifically to identify factors in Montana’s smallest elementary school districts that attracted and retained teachers. The delimitations of this study were geographic location, school size, and elementary grade level. The study examined Montana educators, surveyed only rural school districts, and concentrated specifically on the elementary level. The population surveyed was an adequate number, with 147 teachers, within 107 schools, used to gather information. Results indicated that teachers believed competitive salaries, insurance benefits, and mentor programs were the biggest contributors to job satisfaction and teacher retention (Nielsen, 2002).
In another report titled, *The Teacher Shortage is Real, Large, and Growing, and Worse Than We Thought*, authors suggested that the current national estimates of the teacher shortage likely underestimate the magnitude of the problem:

When issues such as teacher qualifications and the unequal distribution of highly credentialed teachers across high and low poverty schools are taken into consideration, the teacher shortage problem is much more severe than previously recognized. Building on that research, and using the same quality and equity angles, this paper examines challenges schools are facing in trying to recruit, hire, and retain sufficient, qualified teachers, with a particular focus on high-poverty schools, where those struggles are heightened (Garcia & Weiss, 2019, p. 1).

These matters have indicated some commonalities to be further explored and studied. The current trends show teachers exiting the profession as quickly as they enter it (Walker, 2022). Schools in the United States are facing challenges of staffing themselves, a large number of public school teachers are leaving their school or the teaching profession altogether, schools are having a harder time filling the vacancies, there is a depleting supply of applicants, less education degrees are being awarded, fewer people are completing teacher preparation programs, schools are having a harder time retaining credentialed teachers, and the challenges are more severe for high-poverty schools (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). If school districts can take aim at the factors that create high turnover, they can reduce the demand for teachers who are in short supply (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

While the call for qualified educators is increasing, so is the number of students enrolling in the public education school system. According to the Census Bureau, an astounding 49.6 million students entered the nation’s schools in 2003, which was a record-breaking amount.
Today, student enrollment continues to be on an upward trend and is expected to expand by millions in the next decade (Earley & Ross, 2022). Two of the greatest factors contributing to this large number are an increase in birth rates among children of baby boomers and an increase in the number of immigrant families moving to the United State (Earley & Ross, 2022).

Data collected showed that the demographics of children entering school changed as well. During the 1950s, approximately 80% of students enrolling in school were non-Hispanic whites, as compared to the 2003 school year, where white students comprised about 60 percent of the school population and Hispanic students comprised 18 percent (Earley & Ross, 2022). The demographics of the teaching personnel do not mirror student race or gender. Elementary and secondary school teachers are, and have been for a long period of time, predominately white and female (Will, 2020). Federal data collected from 2017-2018 estimated that 79.3 percent of public-school teachers were white and 89% of elementary school teachers were women (National Center for Education, 2020). The teaching field is also said to be aging, with recent research indicating that 42% of teachers are currently over fifty (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Taking a closer look at the numbers in the United States, 13.8 percent of public-school teachers are said to either be leaving their school or the profession altogether, and further, schools are having a harder time filling vacancies, especially with credentialed teachers (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Total turnover rates are highest in the south (16.7%) and lowest in the Northeast (10.3%), where incentives such as higher pay, smaller class sizes, and advanced improvements in education are offered (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Turnover rates are much higher in low-income, Title 1 schools, especially with mathematics and science teachers. Further, turnover rates are 70% higher for teachers in schools serving large populations of
students of color, due to the fact that these schools are staffed by teachers with less experience and less teacher training (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). According to federal data from the 2015-2016 school year, over 80% of teachers in the United States were white and less than 7% were black, and at the same time, the white student population steadily declined. While all students benefit from having teachers of color, a report by the Learning Policy Institute revealed that when taught by teachers of color, students of color perform better academically, are more likely to graduate, and are more likely to attend college. Many districts are seeing a decrease in teachers of color as well as lower retention rates for teachers of color (as cited in Heubeck, 2020).

Across the United States, the teacher shortage has worsened (Natanson, 2022; Garcia & Weiss, 2019). In a seminal report produced by the Learning Policy Institute, an estimate of the size of the teacher shortage was produced. The report, titled, *A Coming Crisis in Teaching? Teacher Supply, Demand, and Shortages in the U.S.* found that many districts were finally hiring again after years of teacher layoffs during the Great Recession and because of this, there was significant difficulty in finding qualified teachers (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). School districts found it challenging to get student-to-teacher ratios back to previous numbers and also to expand their curriculum offerings. They had difficulties meeting the projected increase in student populations. The prediction described was that by the year 2025, there would be an estimated 100,000 decrease in the supply of teachers and 100,000 increase in the demand for qualified teachers (Shields, 2022). The number of individuals completing their teacher preparation programs dropped by 27.4% from the 2008-2009 school year to the 2015-2016 school years (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). As of January 2022, forty-four percent of public schools reported having at least
one teaching vacancy, with over 50% identifying as this being due to resignation (US Schools Report, 2022).

To analyze and understand the numbers, data, and information, the Learning Policy Institute relied on a variety of databases for their study. They took a closer look at teacher turnover in the workforce using the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) from three different school year time frames (2003–04, 2007–08, and 2011–12), and the SASS Teacher Follow up Survey from three school year time frames (2003–04, 2007–08, and 2011–12). The strengths to this collection method are that the data sources are nationally representative, and they monitor teachers and schools over time (Carver-Thomas, Darling-Hammond, & Sutcher, 2019). They also used the Common Core of Data (CCD) from years 1999-2000 through 2012-2013, which is a universal database of teachers and students in the United States and provides accurate, reliable teacher and student counts. Lastly, public school teacher projections from 2000-2025 were published in the Digest of Education Statistics and allowed for the model to estimate workforce trends a decade into the future. To examine teacher production and the supply side of the labor market, this analysis used universal data on teacher preparation programs collected by the U.S. Department of Education under Title II of the Higher Education Act 228, which is the most recent and complete national data on teacher preparation. To further investigate individual’s lives from teacher preparation programs to their classroom career, researchers used 2008:2012 Baccalaureate and Beyond (B&B), which is a longitudinal dataset that follows recent baccalaureates from 2008 until 2012, four years after their graduation, with a special focus on careers in education (Carver-Thomas, Darling-Hammond, & Sutcher, 2019).

It is apparent that it has become harder for districts to retain and attract credentialed teachers (Saenz-Armstrong, 2022). Taking all of this into consideration, research should look at
how positive changes can be initiated and carried through. Work conditions and factors that are prompting teachers to leave their jobs and dissuading new hires from entering the profession must be addressed in a proactive, productive way (Garcia & Weiss, 2020). Low wages, negative school and work environments, weak professional development programs and opportunities, and lack of professional autonomy have been shown to negatively impact the profession.

Furthermore, high-poverty schools need to be given extra consideration, support, and funding, as data continually shows these schools are continually hit the hardest, with teacher shortages being even more of a problem (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). The next section focuses on the concepts and definitions of teacher turnover and teacher retention in the field of education. Contributing factors deserve attention (Berry & Shields, 2017), especially as the number of teachers leaving their school or the profession is on the rise and is expected to continue to impact the nation-wide teacher shortage crisis.

**Contributing Factors of Teacher Turnover**

Definitions of teacher turnover are similar throughout the literature. For the purpose of this study, a simple definition offered by Behrstock-Sherratt (2016) will be used to describe teacher turnover: the rate at which teachers are replaced, due to teacher attrition or teacher mobility. Teacher turnover continues to concern K-12 educators who see teachers leave every year. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016), 8% of teachers leave the profession yearly and another 8% of teachers move to other schools, with a total annual turnover rate of 16%. This means that a school will lose three out of every 20 teachers each year (Wang, 2019). Teachers are exiting the profession as quickly as they are entering it. Marinell et al. stated, “It’s as though they are coming and going through a revolving door,” (2017, p. 9). The data from their study provided information on teacher turnover and retention, offering insights on how public schools will continue to experience shortages of caring,
certified, quality teachers until states focus on improving teacher preparation programs and working conditions (Berry & Shields, 2017).

A substantial amount of empirical analysis focused on teacher turnover and studies have shown that it is a significant phenomenon and a dominant factor behind the demand for new teachers and the difficulties schools have staffing classrooms. Through a set of research data collected from the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and the Teacher Follow up Survey (TFS), conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), researcher Ingersoll (2000) explained how his research indicated that the “revolving door” was the primary reason for school staffing problems. For his study, Ingersoll relied mostly on data collected from SASS and TFS, because they encompass the largest and most comprehensive data available on the staffing, occupational, and organizational aspects of elementary and secondary schools and are, “specifically designed to remedy the lack of nationally representative data on these issues” (Ingersoll, 2000, p. 507). For his analysis, he utilized the Schools Staffing Survey data for NCES, which collected a random sample of schools stratified by state, public/private sector, and school level. Each survey included questionnaires for administrators and surveys for a random sample of teachers in each school. After 12 months, the same schools were contacted again and all those in the original teacher sample who had moved from or left their teaching jobs were given a second questionnaire to gather further details about their departures. This latter group, along with a representative sample who stayed in their teaching jobs, comprised the TFS. In total, there were 6,733 elementary and secondary teachers, of which 3,343 were continuing, 1,428 were migrations (moving to another school or district), and 1,962 were attritions (leaving the profession).

This particular study was unique in several ways, because it did not focus only on a particular subset of turnover, rather, it included all turnover and departures (teacher migration
and teacher attrition). It also included both voluntary and involuntary turnover (retirements, layoffs, and termination). Analysis of the data was divided into three stages. The goal of the first stage was to establish the overall magnitude of teacher turnover and its relationship to teacher demand and staffing issues. Ingersoll discovered that teacher turnover was a sizable phenomenon (2000), with large flows of teachers coming in, through, and out of schools. Not all of the teachers who left their schools left permanently, with some teachers coming back in later years. The second stage of the study was a regression analysis of the effects of teacher characteristics, school characteristics, and organizational conditions on turnover. This was different from other studies which focused primarily on individual characteristics impacting turnover. In the regression analysis, Ingersoll explained that the age of teachers was the biggest predictor of the likelihood of turnover. Both younger (less than 30 years) and older (greater than 50 years) teachers were more likely to leave than middle aged teachers (between 30 and 50 years old). The statistically significant relationship between age and likelihood of turnover showed that the odds of young teachers departing were 171% higher than for middle aged teachers (Ingersoll, 2000). Smaller school size, private schools, high poverty populations, and urban areas led to higher departure rates as well. The third stage included a detailed exploration of the reasons teachers give for leaving. Ingersoll compared the self-report data with the prior regression analyses, to provide a way to compare the sets of findings. One of the least prominent reasons for turnover was retirement. Personal reasons such as raising children, health issues, and family relocation were more often reported as reasons for turnover, with over 30% of migrating teachers and over 40% of attrition teachers stating personal reasons as contributing factors. The most prominent reason for teacher turnover was job dissatisfaction. Participants were asked to specifically list their reasons for job dissatisfaction and the most frequently listed factors were low salaries, lack of support from school administrators, student
discipline problems, and lack of teacher influence over decision making as the reasons for their dissatisfaction (Ingersoll, 2000). These findings were consistent with the results of the regression analysis, which gave more confidence to the findings in both stage two and three of the study.

In the Lankford et al. (2002) study of schools in New York State, researchers found that non-white students, low-income students, and English-language learners typically had less qualified teachers than their counterparts. They explained that teacher turnover was higher in urban areas and in schools with more challenging work environments. Their results were consistent with Ingersoll’s (2000) results; more qualified teachers sought the chance to leave difficult working environments and moved on to more desired, attractive conditions. Teachers were more likely to leave low income, urban schools and the teachers leaving are the individuals more likely to have better skill sets than those who stayed (Ingersoll, 2000).

The impact of teacher turnover reaches much further than just the quantifiable financial cost of recruiting and hiring a new employee. In a study completed at the elementary school level, Guin (2004) discovered that schools with substantial teacher turnover also had a negative school climate. The school districts also had low morale, lack of trust, and poor working relationships between teachers. According to his study, schools with high indicators of negative school climate were correlated with more teacher turnover and lower student performance. Most often, the teachers who were leaving were first year teachers and experienced teachers found it disheartening to mentor the new staff, since there was a strong chance, the new teacher wouldn’t return the following school year. Veteran teachers reported feeling resentment about this and about the repetitive professional development opportunities, geared toward new hires. The result was less unity and collaboration and low trust and camaraderie among teachers as a whole.
Policies at the local, state, and federal levels must take into consideration the economic consequences of teacher turnover as well as the educational consequences for the students. Teacher turnover leads to teacher shortages, greater monetary costs for the schools they leave behind, and reduced student achievement (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

According to the teachers, there are a number of factors for leaving their school or the profession. Most often, they say dissatisfaction is a very big reason for voluntarily leaving the field.

Frederick Herzberg took a more in-depth look at the idea of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. In his studies, he addressed the question, “What do people really want from their work experience? He surveyed a large sample of workers to find out what work components made them feel really good or really bad about their jobs. The results explained that certain factors were continually related to employee job satisfaction and others could create job dissatisfaction (Motivating Employees, 2022). Herzberg described motivating factors, also called job satisfiers, as mainly intrinsic job factors that lead to satisfaction. Examples of intrinsic job elements that lead to satisfaction include achievement, recognition, the work itself, advancement, and growth opportunities. He also explained that hygiene factors, or job dissatisfiers, were extrinsic components of the work environment. Examples of hygiene factors include company policy, relationships with work superiors, work conditions, relationships with coworkers, and wages.

One of the most riveting results of Herzberg’s studies was the suggestion that the opposite of satisfaction is not dissatisfaction. Herzberg believed:

Proper management of hygiene factors could prevent employee dissatisfaction, but that these factors could not serve as a source of satisfaction or motivation. Good working conditions, for instance, will keep employees at a job but won’t make them
work harder. But poor working conditions, which are job dissatisfiers, may make employees quit. According to Herzberg, a manager who wants to increase employee satisfaction needs to focus on the motivating factors, or satisfiers. A job with many satisfiers will usually motivate workers, provide job satisfaction, and prompt effective performance. (p. 1)

The most frequently cited reasons for teacher job dissatisfaction in a survey conducted in 2012-13 were testing and accountability pressures, lack of administrative support, dissatisfactions with the teaching career, lack of opportunities for advancement, and dissatisfaction with working conditions (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). More than half of those leaving the profession mentioned that these factors contributed to their dissatisfaction and 66% of teachers who left to go to another school noted these factors as impacting their dissatisfaction. From 2002 to 2022, many states have taken a closer look at the teacher shortage issue and have taken steps to expand the supply and number of teachers in the workforce. Policymakers have funded many efforts in hopes of improving the concerning conditions. These efforts involved improving teacher recruitment, professional development, mentoring programs, and incentives for teachers such as pursuing national board certification.

National Board Certification is said to be the most reputable professional certification in education and offers many beneficial aspects to teachers, students, and schools. It was “designed to develop, retain, and recognize accomplished teachers and to generate ongoing improvement in schools nationwide” (National Board, 2022). Researchers found such policies to be productive and helped improve teachers staying in the profession. However, state policymakers slowly withdrew funds and support for these efforts. As a result, many of the same challenges previously mentioned continued to emerge. Current numbers show teacher shortages still being reported in 48 states, specifically in the subjects of special education, mathematics,
In another more recent study, conducted in March 2021, over 1,000 teachers were surveyed to find out more about their reasons to leave or stay. The academic year 2020-2021 with the COVID-19 pandemic was unlike any other (Education, 2022). Even so, the survey results indicated that 42% of teachers said that they considered leaving or retiring from teaching, with more than half of those teachers listing COVID-19 as the reason (Camp, et al., 2021). COVID-19 was a significant, unprecedented event that affected teacher turnover, however there were other prominent issues that affected teacher turnover long before 2020 (Garcia & Weiss, 2019).

Teacher burnout is another topic to consider in teacher turnover matters, as it can be a major problem in the education field (Hanson, 2013). Teaching is considered to be one of the most challenging fields in the United States, and teachers report feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work (Vesely et al., 2013). Burnout is often the result of prolonged stress and occurs when someone has reached a physically and mentally exhausted state in his or her professional life (Pickering, 2008). Student misbehavior, lack of autonomy, increased workload, and lack of support are some of the reported causes of stress in teachers (Hanson, 2013). Teachers who have reached burnout experience depersonalization from the job, low morale, and emotional exhaustion (Bousquet, 2012). This is important, because teacher morale directly relates to student achievement; the higher the teacher morale, the better the student achievement (Bousquet, 2012). When the demands and challenges become overwhelming to educators, the result is reduced productivity, increased absenteeism, and can cause burnout (Hanson, 2013). When a teacher is feeling burned out, it is difficult for them to feel valued in their profession, and they are more likely to leave (Vesely et al., 2013). A national survey conducted in January 2022 found that two-thirds of teachers said they were burned out and 55 percent said they
thought about leaving the profession earlier than they had planned (Darling-Hammond, 2022).

Two years after the pandemic, teachers are still working to support others, “but at the expense of their own well-being” (Falecki, 2022, p.1) and their psychological health and safety is a cause of concern. Work conditions such as staff shortages, student mental health issues, state testing, and stressed parents have placed increased demand on teachers’ abilities to cope (Falecki, 2022). In her book *The Burnout Epidemic: The Rise of Chronic Stress and How We Can Fix It*, Jennifer Moss explains, “Burnout is a complex constellation of poor workplace practices and policies, antiquated institutional legacies, roles and personalities at higher risk, and system, societal issues that have been unchanged, plaguing us for too long” (Falecki, 2022, p. 1). She describes six reasons for burnout at work, which are correlated with negative work environments for teachers. These reasons include workload, perceived lack of control, lack of reward or recognition, poor relationships, lack of fairness, and differing or unmatched values (Falecki, 2022). In 2022, teachers report feeling exhausted and frustrated and explain the root cause is a lack of support and respect (Walker, 2022b). Strategies such as reflection on one’s practices, setting goals, engaging in physical activity, and developing resilience can help lessen stress in teachers, improve self-efficacy, and therefore prevent turnover (Hanson, 2013). Taking preventative measures will help educators to avoid the physical and emotional effects of prolonged stress and will help them to continue to be successful teachers throughout their careers (Bousquet, 2012). When speaking about the topic of teacher shortages and what can be done to address the issue, researcher Linda Darling-Hammond (2022) stated:

The current crisis may offer the opportunity to break with the past, to rethink schools, and reconsider what teaching and leading schools should look like and how they can be supported. Educators are inspired and motivated by the opportunity to succeed with children. Creating conditions of schooling that support them in this work can
simultaneously build the profession.

With turnover rates at an all-time high (Falecki, 2022), it is important to find ways to increase overall teacher well-being.

Teacher turnover has a plethora of negative effects on both students and teachers, with the largest effect arguably on student achievement (Lankford et al., 2011). It is typically understood that about half of new teachers will leave within the first five years of teaching, with the rate of turnover being significantly higher in certain fields, such as special education and among new teachers in high poverty schools (Earley & Ross, 2022). Limiting turnover is the most effective way to keep districts fully staffed with credentialed teachers (DiSchiano, 2017). Looking further into the matter at hand, and more specifically at job dissatisfaction and the most common factors educators list as contributors (low salaries, lack of support from school administrators, student discipline problems, lack of planning time, and lack of teacher influence over decision making as the reasons for their dissatisfaction), will guide researchers to proactive and preventative solutions (Ingersoll, 2000; Feistritzer, 2005).

**Contributing Factors of Teacher Retention**

In dealing with contributing factors of teacher retention, researchers concerned with this topic of study need to consider public policies that will attract individuals into teaching and once hired, keep them working in the profession. In order to gain a better grasp on the issue, it is necessary to take a look at the demographics of classrooms and the demographics of teaching personnel. There are unique characteristics that comprise the teacher marketplace and can complicate teacher recruitment and retention policy options (Earley & Ross, 2022). The supply and demand in the labor market for public school educators have certain unique characteristics to acknowledge, which Earley and Ross (2022) described as follows:

- K-12 teaching is a large enterprise, representing roughly 2.7 percent of the U.S
workforce, according to the U.S. Department of Education 2005.

- It is directly impacted by increases or decreases in the school-age population, according to the U.S. Bureau of the Census 2005.
- Workers are primarily white and female.
- The demand for teachers is a function of the state or local rather than national needs (American Association for Employment in Education).
- An increased supply of new teachers in one part of the country may not relieve shortages in another geographic area.
- Because teachers must be qualified in each subject they are expected to teach, their preparation programs are sometimes more different than similar.
- Content and pedagogical preparation programs are influenced by state laws, which also account for a measure of difference among teachers.
- Teachers tend to work in communities similar to and near where they grew up.
- The majority of hiring decisions are made during a four-month period from late spring to September.
- Because of state licensure policies, the market is segmented by teaching field. (Earley & Ross, 2022, pp. 4-5).

Teachers represent a large portion of the nation’s workforce, but there are many differences between them. They are not a homogenous group (Earley & Ross, 2022). Teachers working at the high school level may feel like they do not have many similarities to teachers working at the elementary level, for example. Individuals in urban settings may have different challenges and obstacles than individuals in rural settings. Teachers also have tendencies to accept jobs close to their hometowns, with the K-12 curriculum and standards for teachers being created by individual states (Reininger, 2011). This then leads to more limited
viewpoints and experiences, thus making it more difficult to create national policy regarding teachers’ qualifications and preparation (Carver-Thomas, et al., 2019).

Teachers are recruited and offered contracts in a way that is different from other occupations. These hiring practices may make it more difficult for school districts to hire the teachers they want, due to the narrow and specific time period for hiring. Levin and Quinn (2003) looked at hiring practices of urban school districts and found that most districts didn’t offer new teachers a position until mid-to-late September. If an offer was given to a teacher, the teacher often had to wait to find out what specific position they would fulfill, until in-district personnel had decided whether or not to transfer schools and/or positions. Many times, due to these unique hiring practices, the top candidates would withdraw their application and take jobs in other districts (Earley & Ross, 2022). These circumstances contribute to the lack of hiring and retaining highly qualified staff.

The federal government, states, and local entities have strategized ways to improve the supply and demand crisis and retain qualified teachers. The focus has been on the supply side of the issue, with policies created to entice individuals into teacher education programs and into difficult-to-fill positions (Earley & Ross, 2022). Examining federal policy over the last 20 years shows that recommendations from Congress and the executive branch have tended to be similar over time. Borkow and Jordan’s 1983 Congressional Research Service analysis of teacher supply and demand offers six federal policy options to increase the number of K-12 teachers:

1. College scholarships and loans repayable by K-12 teaching.
2. Financial rewards or bonuses for excellent teaching.
3. Federal salary subsidies for teaching in “hard to teach” geographic locations.
4. Grants to colleges to establish innovative teacher education programs.
5. Support of research on the connection between teacher preparation and K-12 student outcomes.

6. Doing none of the above because teacher recruitment is a state matter rather than a federal matter. (Earley & Ross, 2022, p. 9).

Financial Incentives and Loan Forgiveness

Following the analysis, five of the six policy options have been implemented nationwide. Financial incentives to enter teaching continues to be one of the most common and most promoted state and federal strategies utilized (Learning Policy Institute, 2020). Financial incentives can and do play a role in teacher recruitment and retention (Aragon, 2016). While new teachers may be drawn to the field due to other factors besides salary, low wages keep potentially promising individuals away and contributes to turnover. In contrast, a correlation between teacher retention and higher pay grades has revealed that for those earning a salary of at least $40,000 annually in their first year, they are more likely to come back the next year compared to those earning less (Teacher Retention, 2019). Research shows that state financial incentive programs have the possibilities to direct teachers to shortage areas and make sure they stay, but they lose their lure if they are not adequate, sustainable, and coupled with improvements to working conditions. Some examples include loan forgiveness programs, scholarships and rewards based on teaching excellence, signing bonuses, internships, allowances, and targeted, intentional recruitment (Aragon, 2016).

The Higher Education Act was a financial incentive which allowed federal loans to be forgivable by teaching (Douglas-Gabriel, 2022). Funds available to states under the Higher Education Act were used for a variety of recruitment programs, which included raising salaries for teachers going into difficult-to-staff schools and encouraging higher education to create new programs. Another financial incentive was given when President Bush declared a new
initiative, which provided states funding to reward teaching merit (Money Starts Flowing, 2006). In addition, research money was made available to study the relationship between teacher preparation and K-12 student performance (McKenna, 2018). For the most part, these programs were based on the idea that individuals’ decisions about teaching as a career and where and how to teach were highly impacted by financial incentives and that the programs offered to prepare teachers were not effective to prepare educators for K-12 classrooms.

Offering financial gain to people who pursue teaching is a common practice and category of policy, yet the long-term effectiveness is not fully evident; Approximately half of all teachers leave after five years, whether they were given loan forgiveness incentives or not (Woods, 2016).

When reviewing policies that date back to the 1980s, which include the National Direct Student Loan Program and The Health Professions Student Assistance Program, it was found that neither were very successful (Earley & Ross, 2022). In similar studies conducted in 1986 and another in 2005 by the South Carolina Educational Policy Center, interesting viewpoints were offered from individuals who received forgivable loans to enter teaching but chose to repay their loans instead. Of those individuals repaying loans instead of being reimbursed through forgiveness programs, 44 percent had not entered teaching at all and listed the following as reasons: left teaching, teaching in another state, and not teaching in a critical needs school. This meant that for some, they would rather pay their student loans than work in less than desirable positions and higher needs districts. When reading about incentives and recruitment programs in the literature, there is a lot of data collected about state and local programs, however, there is a lack of evaluation data on the effectiveness of such recruitment programs (Earley & Ross, 2022). Some of the limitations of the data gathered is that it tends to not be done by outside evaluators, is not replicated by other researchers, and it is not published
in peer reviewed journals. Government entities continue to pass bills and introduce loan forgiveness programs for teaching, even though it is not clear whether or not these programs are attracting individuals into teaching careers, whether or not they work, and whether or not individuals stay in teaching after they fulfill their loan or scholarship forgiveness programs (Callahan, 2017).

The U.S. does not compete with the average salary of similarly educated workers (Aragon, 2016). As of April 2022, the average teacher salary was lower than it was ten years ago, and salaries for teachers are not keeping up with inflation (Walker, 2022). Inadequate pay and pay that fails to properly compensate the most qualified and competent individuals plays a role in the struggle to retain teachers. Many states have already instituted statewide monetary incentive programs for teachers and teacher candidates. In 2016, at least 16 governors set forth proposals to make sure high-quality teachers were recruited, retained, and better compensated, and legislatures and task forces across the states were considering policies related to this. Currently, most states are implementing one or more financial incentive strategies to influence teacher pay, elevate the profession, and improve teacher recruitment and retention (Arogan, 2016).

**Signing Bonuses and Salary Increases**

A similar incentive program offers signing bonuses to recruit people into a teaching career. One study in Massachusetts conducted by Liu et al. (2004) studied the effect of such programs. The Massachusetts Signing Bonus Program offered a $20,000 signing bonus to individuals with a minimum of a bachelor’s degree who agreed to partake in a quicker route to certification. Candidates received a starting payment of $5,000, with the rest to be paid over the course of their four-year teaching commitment. Tracking the employment of thirteen of the original fifty-nine signing-bonus recipients, the researchers discovered that eight left during
their first or second year of teaching, before earning their complete bonus. Furthermore, they found that of the thirteen, all except for one had decided to change to a teaching career before the bonus program was offered. Through interviews with these thirteen teachers, it was discovered that the “bonus recipients entered teaching positions in schools that were not organized to support their ongoing learning and address their particular needs as novices” (Earley & Ross, 2022, p. 12). Incentives, such as the Massachusetts Signing Bonus Program, are another example where research does not provide clear evidence of their effectiveness on keeping teachers in their positions.

Researchers Goldhaber and Player (2005) used data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the American Federation of Teachers to take a closer look at the salaries of teachers and the salaries of others in comparable fields. They discovered that teacher salaries were comparable with other fields in the 1980’s and 1990’s, but by the mid 1990’s, salaries in other fields increased at a higher rate than for teachers (Earley & Ross, 2022). Goldhaber and Player believed that competitive salaries and incentives should be a strategy used by schools to recruit and keep top teachers.

Carver-Thomas and Patrick (2022) analyzed teacher compensation for all 50 states. Annual starting salary can be described as the salary paid to a teacher with a bachelor’s degree and no prior teaching experience (Carver-Thomas & Patrick, 2022). Annual starting salaries were collected by the National Education Association from district teacher salary schedules and according to 2019-2020 data, Montana ranked 50th, or the lowest with a starting salary of $32,871 (Carver-Thomas & Patrick, 2022). When teachers are adequately compensated, they are more likely to stay, so promotion strategies and pay increases should be a part of teacher retention practices (Teacher Retention, 2019).
Grow Your Own and Targeted Recruitment

Another program aimed at recruiting teachers who would stay in their positions was called, “Grow Your Own.” The idea was to recruit teachers in high school or before they enrolled in college, and it intentionally targeted people from a specific geographic area. The hope was that they would return to that community after earning their teaching degree. Other studies indicated consistent findings: teachers tend to look for work within 150 miles of where they grew up (Feistritzer, 2005). There is little attention given to this program category in the literature, even though studies have consistently shown that people are more likely to return to work close to their hometowns.

In another study completed in 1994, researchers looked at a set of programs aimed specifically to prepare Native American teachers. Financial assistance was provided beyond college tuition and included extra monetary funds and payment for books. Participants were also given a job placement or internship opportunity during the summer months. They received education and training to prepare themselves with the curriculum on Native American culture and language. This such program showed significant success, with participants reporting that the best part of the program was that it created a sense of community among teacher candidates (Earley & Ross, 2022). In the end, the results were promising, as 72 percent of participants received their degrees, and within that group, 85 percent continued on to work in education. The majority, or 80 percent, took jobs in schools with a majority population of Native Americans (Earley & Ross, 2022). Implementation of financial incentive strategies can influence teacher pay, boost the teaching profession, and improve teacher recruitment and retention (Aragon, 2016).

Induction and Mentoring Programs

In the next five to ten years, schools will need to hire even more teachers and schools
will feel pressure to retain both new staff and existing teachers (Earley & Ross, 2022).

Providing new teachers with induction and mentoring can be an effective strategy to retain teachers (Woods, 2016). Teacher induction can be defined as a process in which a variety of support services are given to newly hired teachers and educational staff under the supervision of professional personnel to help with the transition into the education profession (Kaufman, 2007). Induction programs provide new, inexperienced teachers with tools and skills needed to begin their career. They also allow new teachers to adjust to the procedures of a school system and develop effective instructional and classroom management skills (Woods, 2017). Using different activities and ideas within their first three years in public schools, induction programs help to train, orient, and support teachers.

Teacher mentoring is an important part of teacher induction. Mentoring typically involves a pairing between a novice teacher and an experienced, veteran teacher. Within the professional relationship, the veteran teacher may offer guidance and support in a number of areas such as with lesson planning, professional development, and collaboration (Kaufman, 2007). When new teachers are inadequately supported or underprepared, they are more likely to leave the field within the first five years of teaching (Woods, 2016). According to Quality Counts (as cited in Earley & Ross, 2022), eight states currently require but do not fund induction programs for first year teachers. Sixteen other states provide funding to support their mandates for induction programs, but the length of time and money allocated for the programs vary (Woods, 2016).

Funding of induction and mentoring programs is another important consideration within the topic of retention. As previously described, some of the reasons teachers leave are due to frustrations with the general quality of the work environment and perceived lack of autonomy. Comprehensive induction programs can improve teacher retention by addressing these issues.
and placing value in their benefits. These programs have shown to “accelerate the professional growth of new teachers, provide a positive return on investment, and improve student learning” (Woods, 2016). Typically, the most successful programs are multi-year, organized programs that have meaningful professional development opportunities for experienced teachers in the mentor role. The mentor is able to provide constructive, effective feedback to new hires in a professional and collaborative relationship (Woods, 2016). There are many reasons why this is important. Today, approximately one in five teachers in United States classrooms are in their first three years in the profession, and many teachers have completed alternative certification programs to get there (Woods, 2016). Even though 31 states require some type of induction or mentoring for new teachers, few state policies meet all of the criteria commonly recommended for high-quality comprehensive programs (Evans et al., 2019). According to Recruiting New Teachers (Earley & Ross, 2022), there are four factors that make an induction program successful:

1. Orientation to the culture of teaching
2. Training in curriculum and management skills
3. Mentoring
4. Assessment of new teachers (p. 4).

Furthermore, taking a close look at the literature review provided by Curran and Goldrick (2002) there are more common characteristics that make a program effective. Induction and mentoring programs are successful when they:

1. Promote universal participation for new teachers from both traditional and alternative preparation programs.
2. Use experienced teachers as mentors.
3. Include mentor preparation.
4. Facilitate release time or reduced teaching loads for mentors and beginning teachers.

5. Have earmarked funding from state legislators.

6. Are based on clear and established standards.

7. Are structure, defined, and evaluated by input from beginning and veteran teachers.


9. Have a subject-specific or content-area focus.

10. Extend throughout the school year and beyond the first year of teaching.

11. Provide teachers with workplace conditions that enable them to focus on strengthening their teaching skills, including:
   
a. Placement in subjects that teachers are qualified to teach.

b. Placement with students who are not the most challenging.

c. Opportunities to participate in targeted professional development.

d. Opportunities to observe and be observed by veteran teachers, (As cited in Earley & Ross, 2022, p. 26).

Data collected from the National Center for Education Statistics (Earley & Ross, 2022) suggest that the relationship is strongly correlated with the amount of time that a mentor and beginning teacher spend working together. Mentored teachers also report substantial improvements in their professional skills and say they feel more empowered, supported, and identify their work environment as positive (Woods, 2016). Replication of quality induction programs may help address the variety of needs of new teachers, as well as the variety of experience levels of teachers who are new to a particular school but who are experienced. These programs often ensure release time for participants and evaluate progress based on
Induction and mentoring programs have been shown to improve teacher retention. In a recent study, results indicated that teachers who were assigned a mentor and participated in induction during their first year of teaching were more likely than teachers without these supports to teach for at least five years (Woods, 2016). Data were collected in the Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Study (BTLS), conducted by The National Center for Education Statistics of the Institute of Education Sciences within the U.S. Department of Education. It included five waves of data collection with the first wave being part of NCES’s 2007–08 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). It began in August 2007 and ended in June 2008. SASS was utilized for the study because of the strengths it provides with substantial data on the characteristics and qualifications of teachers and principals, teacher hiring practices, professional development, class size, and other conditions in schools across the nation (Woods, 2016). Nearly 1,990 first-year, public school teachers completed the 2007–08 SASS and comprised the cohort that was followed in the study. Data collection for the second wave was conducted with NCES’s 2008–09 Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS), which began in February 2009 and ended in August 2009. Data were collected for the third through fifth waves of BTLS during January through June of the following three years. Survey responses were weighted to produce national estimates (Gray & Raue, 2015).

Among all beginning teachers, 80 percent of those who participated in an induction program during their first year of teaching taught all five years of the study and 69 percent of those who did not participate in such a program taught all five years. Among beginning teachers who taught all years, 63 percent of induction program participants and 59 percent of nonparticipants remained in the same school for the full length of the study. Among those who did not teach all years, about three-fifths of induction program participants and nonparticipants
had returned to teaching or were expected to return. A larger percentage of BTLS teachers who were assigned a mentor during their first year of teaching taught all five years of the study (80 percent) compared to those who were not assigned a mentor (64 percent). Among beginning teachers who taught all years, 61 percent of those assigned a first-year mentor and 67 percent of those not assigned a first-year mentor remained in the same school all five years. Among beginning teachers who did not teach all years, 61 percent of those who had been assigned a mentor and 53 percent of those who had not been assigned a mentor had returned or were expected to return (Gray & Raue, 2015).

Early induction and mentoring programs were shown to be extremely successful, especially in urban districts. They reduced turnover by more than two-thirds in districts in Ohio and New York (Gray & Raue, 2015). While the studies indicated that these programs could reduce attrition and improve teacher job satisfaction, they also suggested the strength of the positive outcomes depended on the type and quality of program offered. Factors such as “having a mentor from the same field, having common planning time with other teachers in the same subject and having regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers” may be more influential than other factors contributing to retention (Woods, 2016, p. 3). Additionally, school culture was shown to be an important factor, with induction and mentoring programs having their greatest impact on teachers working in schools with “strong school leadership, collegial professional relationships, adequate supplies and equipment, and a positive and supportive climate among all adults (Woods, 2016, p.3).”

Other studies examining the effects of induction programs on beginning teacher retention found similar results (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Researchers focused on seven specific studies that provided evidence about the relationship between participation in induction and a beginning teacher’s job satisfaction, commitment, retention, and turnover. Three studies
were evaluations of specific state or school district beginning teacher induction programs and four of them were secondary statistical analyses of large-scale nationally representative teacher surveys (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). The investigators examined data on teachers’ retention or attrition obtained from surveys of individual teachers, districts, and state personnel databases. In two studies, the investigators used beginning teachers’ self-reported intentions in regard to how long they planned to stay in teaching, rather than teachers’ actual retention or turnover. A weakness in this methodology is that its measure aimed to better understand teachers’ level of commitment and job satisfaction rather than their actual length of work. All three evaluations of specific school district or state beginning teacher induction programs found that induction had positive effects; new teachers who received some type of induction had higher job satisfaction, commitment, or retention (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

Another study evaluated the Texas Beginning Educator Support System (TBESS), which was a statewide comprehensive program of instructional support, mentoring, and formative assessment to help teachers during their first years working within Texas public schools. About 15 percent of the state’s new teachers were involved, with the ultimate goal being to improve retention of beginning teachers (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). The study obtained information from participants through a mailed survey questionnaire, which asked for more information about the relationship between mentors and mentees, including time spent with the mentor, whether release time was granted (to both mentor and mentee) for the meetings, whether the mentee wanted a mentor, and the nature of the meetings with the mentor.

The study obtained data on teacher retention from a state personnel database and compared annual retention rates of TBESS participants with those of all beginning teachers in the state from 1999-2000 through 2002-2003. Analysis showed that among teachers who entered in the 1999-2000 school year, TBESS participants left the Texas public school system
at statistically significantly lower rates, for each of their first three years, than did teachers who did not participate in TBESS. The effects were also significant (in both magnitude and statistical significance) in both high-poverty and high-minority enrollment schools (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). This was an important finding because these schools more often used the state program and had disproportionate numbers of beginning teachers in the TBESS program, but also generally had higher attrition of new teachers. Moreover, the analysis found that the retention effects held up across school levels; elementary, middle, and high schools all had significantly higher retention of TBESS participants. Finally, the analysts also found that TBESS appeared to help underqualified beginning teachers. TBESS participation by beginning teachers who did not hold full certification, or who had been assigned to teach subjects out of their certification, resulted in better retention than when similarly underqualified teachers did not participate in TBESS.

The study has limitations worth noting. First, since school districts selected participants for the program in different ways, differences in the characteristics of participants and nonparticipants, rather than the program itself, might account for differences in outcomes (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Second, since school districts differed in which components they used, variations in program content could account for different outcomes. Third, this study did not control for other factors that could also affect teacher retention, regardless of the existence of an induction or mentoring program.

Induction programs can make a tremendous difference in the teacher as well as in the learning experiences the students have (Earley & Ross, 2022). Teachers who are assigned a mentor and participate in induction during their first year of teaching are more likely than teachers without these supports to teach for at least five years (Woods, 2016). Research studies indicate that such programs help to improve attrition rates, increase retention rates, and increase
the chances that new teachers will stay in the profession (Curran & Goldrick, 2002). Comprehensive programs can also improve teaching quality, help lessen the revolving door of new teachers entering and exiting the profession, and decrease the overall cost of recruiting, training, and developing teachers (Woods, 2016). Additionally, school culture and a positive work environment are important factors, as induction and mentoring programs may have their greatest effects on teachers working in schools with strong school leadership, collaborative professional relationships, and a healthy and supportive climate among the staff (Woods, 2016).

**School Climate**

The environment in which a person works has a large impact on not only job satisfaction, but also on the ability to do the job well and maintain the desire to continue working in the job and the profession (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). This is true for teachers, who spend a lot of their time interacting with students and other school personnel and are therefore a big part of their workplace climate. The working environment for teachers, often referred to as school climate, is challenging and plays a part in the teacher shortage problem (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). School climate can be defined as a set of internal characteristics that distinguish one school from another and influence the behaviors of each school’s members (Kelly, Thornton, & Daugherty, 2005). It also reflects the quality and character of school life, and data suggests a relationship between tough climates and teacher turnover (Garcia & Weiss, 2019).

School climate involves many different areas within the educational realm, including relationships between teachers and administrators and students, school safety, the school environment, and the improvement process (Thapa et al., 2013). School climate and workplace conditions are key factors in the determination of job satisfaction for teachers; the more favorable the conditions, the higher the satisfaction (Norton, 1999). Highly satisfied teachers
are less likely to change schools or to leave the teaching profession altogether than those who are dissatisfied with their work life (Baker, Perie, & Whitener, 1997).

A school’s climate can either enhance or undermine the ability for a teacher to succeed (Kiley, 2016). A negative school climate, disruption to the work environment, and low job satisfaction among teachers may also result in the shift of valuable educational resources away from instruction toward costly staff replacement efforts (Baker, Perie, & Whitener, 1997). A taxing school environment wears down morale, pushing a growing number of teachers away from the field (Walker, 2019). Work conditions, such as administrative leadership and support, school climate, teacher autonomy in the classroom, student behavior, and parent support are directly associated with the job satisfaction of teachers (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Each of these factors shows stronger correlations with job satisfaction than salary and benefits and are of significant importance in retention efforts (Baker, Perie, & Whitener, 1997). Even though most individuals are attracted to teaching because they want to work with children and youth (Marsh, 2015), when they experience stressful, challenging working conditions, they find themselves in the midst of a profession with a negative image, lacking the support needed to be successful as a teacher, and are often times assigned to teach content outside their areas of talent and interest. Due to these factors, many continue to leave education to work in other careers (Norton, 1999).

For quite some time, improving the working and learning environment in schools has been a topic of interest for educators (Walker, 2019). In recent years, researchers and policy makers have focused much of their attention on teacher effectiveness, but a teacher’s work is multifaceted, and their school’s climate can either enhance or undermine their ability to succeed with students (Kiley, 2016). Teachers throughout the United States have asked for more funding to gain support and resources to improve school conditions and cultivate better student learning. According to a study by the Economic Policy Institute, more than half of
teachers do not feel supported in their jobs and 25% consider leaving the profession because of this (Walker, 2019). Research associate Elaine Weiss points out that, “Improving teaching environments would go a long way toward helping teachers feel more supported,” (Walker, 2019, p.3).

Weiss and Garcia (2019) analyzed data from the U.S. Department of Education’s National Teacher and Principal survey and identified many factors that shape school climate, including barriers to student learning, leader support, autonomy in the classroom, a say in school policy decisions, work-related stress, and personal safety. Another study noted certain organizational and administrative factors that can decrease teacher turnover and increase student test scores (Kiley, 2016). A school is more likely to keep its successful teachers if it is led by an administrator who “promotes professional development for teachers, is characterized by collaborative relationships among teachers, has a safe and orderly learning environment, and sets high expectations for academic achievement among students” (Kiley, 2016, p. 1). Of the teachers surveyed by Weiss and Garcia (2019), half reported not feeling much backing or encouragement from the administration and six out of 10 reported that cooperation and collaboration among staff at the school was poor (Weiss & Garcia, 2019). Teachers who had quit their job had higher rates of negative school climate indicators. More than one in four teachers said that poverty was a serious issue challenging their ability to teach and the ability for students to learn (Walker, 2019).

In another study published by the American Educational Research Journal, Marinell and Shen-Yee (Kiley, 2016) looked at teacher and student responses to the School Survey as well as test scores, human resources data, and school administrative records for 278 public New York middle schools for the years 2008-2012. They looked more closely at changes over time in leadership and professional development, high academic expectations for students, teacher
relationships and collaboration, and school safety and order. They found “robust relationships between increases in all four dimensions of school climate and decreases in teacher turnover,” (Kiley, 2016, p. 2), suggesting that improving the work atmosphere for teachers is an important piece in retaining effective teachers.

Research suggests that in a positive school climate, there is an emphasis on safety as well as: (a) academic learning, (b), effective discipline policies, (c), respect for others in school, and (d) involvement of the family and community in the students’ lives (Curry et al., 2022). School safety matters incorporate the physical and emotional safety of students and teachers. Data collected from the 2011-2012 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) depicts the issues teachers are dealing with that affect their workplace experiences. Teacher’s emotional health, mental health, and physical safety were all impacted by the school climate, and among all teachers surveyed, one in 20 reported that stress and disappointments of teaching “aren’t really worth it” (Garcia & Weiss, 2019, p. 3).” Most concerning for researchers was the fact that more than one in five teachers (21.8%) reported that they had been threatened by a student at the school where they currently teach and one in eight (12.4%) reported that they were physically attacked by a student at their current school. These indicators clearly shape the work environment and conditions and contribute to shortages by making the profession less appealing (Walker, 2019).

Students also report not feeling safe at school. For example, in the school year 1999-2000, 71% of schools in the United States reported the occurrence of at least one violent incident (Curry et al., 2022). Furthermore, one in three high school students say they do not feel safe at school and 9.2% of high school students say they have been threatened or injured with some type of weapon while at school or on school property (Curry et al., 2022). Given these statistics on both staff and student safety, it is important for leaders and policy makers to
understand the need for a safe school climate and its relationship to teacher attrition and retention.

The impact of school climate on reducing teacher stress and improving teacher retention is observable. Teachers want to feel safe, respected, and valued for their role within a school. While it may not be possible to lessen the workload, it can be possible to create a better school climate. Policy makers and leaders can pay attention to the cries from educators and the results from research studies; Teachers who quit the profession are more likely to have reported, in the year before they quit, feeling “stressed, unsatisfied, unsupported, and not involved in setting school or classroom policies” (Walker, 2019, p. 4). Improving the funding and resources to counter the deteriorating working environments in schools should be made a priority (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Marinell and Shen-Yee (2016) found evidence that improving a school’s climate, specifically in the areas of school safety and academic expectations, predicted greater job satisfaction for staff and better learning outcomes for students. Their study in the New York City middle schools demonstrated that when students and teachers think their school is a safe and orderly environment, they are more likely to achieve academic improvements (Kiley, 2016).

The presence of a positive sense of community among stakeholders (families, teachers, and students) is thought to be one of the most important aspects of successful schools (Walker, 2019). School climate is molded by the relationships between teachers and administrators, fellow staff members, and parents. It affects how well the school provides a learning place in which administrative supports are strong, there is time for peers to work together in a productive manner, and staff share a strong sense of purpose (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). In their investigation, Garcia and Weiss (2019) discovered disagreeable relationship patterns and a high number of teachers experiencing some level of conflict or disagreement in their schools. Due to
these reported numbers of conflict, teaching has become continuously viewed as an unattractive career option, both for potential educators and for experienced teachers who are leaving the field (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). In relation to the amount of support for teachers by parents, the most significant gap was between high and low poverty schools, with nearly 90% of teachers in high-poverty schools saying they do not feel fully supported by parents for the work they do with their child (Garcia & Weiss, 2019).

Having a sense of purpose and a voice about the working conditions and policies of their school is an important element within a healthy school climate for teachers (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Many teachers are advocates by nature and say they became teachers because they wanted to impact the lives of their students and make a positive difference (Carlisle, 2022). However, a very small number of teachers believe that they have any power or control over issues such as school policy and teacher evaluations, which makes them feel like their professional knowledge and abilities are being disregarded. A meager three percent of teachers feel they have any influence over how teachers are evaluated and more than 80% of teachers report they do not have a great deal of sway over the policies at their school (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Researchers cannot effectively address the teaching shortage crisis when teachers are not given the opportunity to speak up and have a voice in the process (Carlisle, 2022).

Understanding the ins and outs of the challenging school climate for many teachers, it is not surprising that teachers have increasingly reported job dissatisfaction and lower desire and motivation to stay in the profession. When teachers are not as driven or passionate as they could be, it affects the school climate (Johnson, 2022). Nearly half of all teachers indicate some amount of unhappiness and discontentment with being a teacher at their school, and only roughly 25% say their schools’ teachers are a happy, content group and that they like how things are done at their school (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). The many contributing factors of a
negative school climate make it difficult for teachers to do their job, which then impacts student learning and achievement. Toxic school climates clearly have a role in the teacher shortage (Walker, 2019). Even though educators undergo a great deal of training and hold a high level of expertise to deal with the challenges of their job, the negative components of the school climate can deter young people from becoming teachers and push experienced teachers out of the field. The challenging work environments faced by an increasing number of teachers is contributing to teacher shortages across the nation, especially in high poverty schools (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Even though some variables, such as teacher’s age and years of experience are related to job satisfaction, research explains these aren’t nearly as significant in explaining the different levels of satisfaction as are the workplace condition factors, and workplace conditions have a positive correlation with a teacher’s job satisfaction and desire to stay (Baker et al., 1997).

**The Impacts of Teacher Turnover on Students**

High rates of turnover negatively impact a school’s climate, increases student behavior problems, and leads to lower job satisfaction among both teachers and principals. Perhaps the most concerning impact of high rates of teacher turnover is the harm it has on student achievement (The Impact of Teacher Turnover, 2018). Research shows that increases in turnover consistently correlates with decreases in achievement in core academic subjects and the negative effects are particularly detrimental to low achieving, high poverty schools (Donley et al., 2019).

Researchers have demonstrated that teachers continually leave schools with large populations of traditionally underserved racial groups and low-income students at higher rates than other schools (Henry & Redding, 2018). What happens as a result is that more qualified and successful teachers are less likely to teach the most high-need students (Redding & Henry
2018). Further explaining the relationship between teacher effectiveness and teacher turnover, Boyd and colleagues said:

The more effective transfers tend to move to higher achieving schools, while less effective transfers stay in lower-performing schools, likely exacerbating the differences across students in the opportunities they have to learn. In addition to exacerbating the inequitable distribution of teachers across schools, teacher turnover negatively impacts student learning. (As cited in Henry & Redding, 2018, p. 1)

Studies from New York City and Texas offered an estimate of the effect of teacher turnover on student achievement, specifically looking at fourth and fifth grade students. When all teachers left their position the previous school year, students scored significantly lower in math and in English language arts, compared to a grade in which all teachers had returned (Henry & Redding, 2018).

Researchers Henry and Redding (2018) were able to take a unique approach to their research study, because they used data and methods to distinguish between the effect of teacher turnover that happens before the school year begins from the turnover that takes place during the school year. It is useful to differentiate between the two, because approximately a quarter of all teacher turnover takes place within the school year (Henry & Redding, 2018). For their study, they used data from the 2008-2009 to 2013-2014 school years, looking at students in fourth-eighth grade who take an end-of-the-year English language arts and math test. Their sample included 2,496,694 student-year observations for ELA and 2,052,965 observations in math. For middle school, the sample included 1,623,216 student-year observations for ELA and 1,582,019 observations in math. They found students who lost their teacher during the school year had significantly lower test score gains (-7.5 percent of a standard deviation unit) than those students when their teachers stayed. Teachers who left their classrooms from December
through April had the most damaging effects on achievement (Henry & Redding, 2018).

To better understand the concerns of losing a teacher midyear and the detrimental effects on students’ learning as a result, researchers asked the following specific questions: (1) What is the average effect of teacher turnover on student achievement? (2) Does grade-level turnover affect student achievement more or less than when it occurs within versus the end of the school year? (3) What is the effect of within-year classroom teacher turnover on student achievement? Does the timing of teacher turnover cause the effect to vary? (Henry & Redding, 2018, p. 3). Their research revealed consistently negative effects of within-year teacher turnover on ELA and math achievement, at both the elementary and middle school levels. Results also shed some light on the importance of considering the timing of teacher turnover when analyzing its impacts.

Many other studies aimed to gather a better understanding of the impact of turnover on student achievement. One particular study discovered that “losing a teacher during the school year is linked with a loss of between 32 and 72 instructional days, which equates to one sixth to nearly half of the school year” (Redding, 2018). Another study collected data on 1.1 million New York elementary school students over the course of ten years and found that students in grades with higher turnover scored lower in both English Language Arts and Math and stopping teacher turnover entirely increased student achievement in math by two percent to four percent of a standard deviation (Redding, 2018).

Teacher turnover can have a negative effect on more than academic performance alone. Researchers have pointed to other detrimental effects such as classroom disruption, staff instability, difference in quality of replacement and replaced teacher, disrupting the continuity of a child’s learning experience, breaking the student-teacher and parent-teacher relationships that have been formed, and weakening the academic support system for students (The Impact
of Teacher Turnover, 2018; Redding, 2018; Donley et al., 2019; Henry & Redding, 2018).

Classroom Disruption

Henry and Redding (2018) describe classroom disruption as, “The interruption to students’ learning that results from their teacher turning over during the school year” (p. 4). When a teacher leaves in the middle of the year, it can weaken the student-teacher bond and worsen a student’s learning experience. Disruption to a child's learning and development can have negative effects both in and out of the classroom. In terms of the impact of instability on child development, Sandstrom and Huerta (as cited in Henry & Redding, 2018), tell us that, “Children thrive in stable and nurturing environments where they have a routine and know what to expect. Although some change in children’s lives is normal and anticipated, sudden and dramatic disruptions can be extremely stressful and affect children’s feeling of security” (p. 4).

Throughout their time together, students and teachers build cohesive and trusting relationships and within-year teacher turnover can be an adverse experience for a child. When students deal with less structure and stability in their environment, they are more likely to underperform and have a higher risk of dropping out of school (Henry & Redding, 2018). When a teacher quits at any time throughout the school year, it is likely to cause considerable disruption for students. The disruptions may be worse in the spring, given the fact that it is closer to state testing and the teacher and student have had more time to build a relationship with one another (Henry & Redding, 2018). However, the disruption caused by turnover early in the school year may last for days or weeks if a replacement teacher is not quickly hired (Henry & Redding, 2018).

Staff Instability

Another manner by which teacher turnover may impact student achievement is staff instability. According to authors Henry and Redding (2018), “The instability caused by teacher
turnover can inhibit the formation of a cohesive organizational culture that is capable of implementing a coherent instructional program” (p. 6). Teacher attrition can result in a loss of institutional knowledge about students, curriculum, and school programs and policies (Simon & Johnson 2015). For the remaining staff, less shared knowledge lessens their ability to create a close-knit instructional atmosphere. Further, stability of the staff is necessary for the development of staff collaboration and a positive school culture (Peterson, 2002). Study results on the school conditions needed for teacher instructional improvement maintain that working in a school with an evident culture of collaboration and collegial peers can positively affect student achievement (Mora-Ruano et al., 2019). Teacher turnover, especially mid-year, makes it difficult to establish collaborative relationships that encourage and promote instructional improvements (Torgerson, 2022). Teachers are often replaced with short-term solutions, in the form of substitute teachers, and class sizes may increase. Teachers may have to tack on extra duties to help when a new teacher is hired and principal’s time is shifted to re-staffing vacated classrooms (Whitaker et al., 2019).

**Changes in Teacher Quality**

Differences in the quality of the teacher who leaves, and the teacher hired as a replacement are another way in which turnover can affect student achievement. A teacher of less ability may replace the teacher who quit and lessen the quality of instruction. Research on the matter has typically demonstrated that lower-quality teachers are most likely to leave the profession (Boyd et al. 2008). Results from researchers Hanushek et al. (2016) depict that even though less-effective teachers are most likely to leave the classroom, replacement teachers are even less effective. Teachers new to the school or placed in a different grade were less effective than teachers who stayed in their same assignment within the school (Henry & Redding, 2018). When teacher turnover occurs during the school year, the pool of replacement teachers is small
and mostly filled with teachers who were not hired in other schools. In their study of teachers hired late in the school year, Kraft and Papay (2014) found that in mathematics in particular, teachers hired after the start of the school year performed worse than teachers hired by the beginning of the school year. Less qualified and less effective teachers result in weakened academic rigor and instruction. Substitute teachers who step in to take over the teacher’s role are usually less experienced and have less credentials compared to full-time teachers (Teacher Retention, 2019). Even so, planned absences, such as maternity leave or retirement, may be less disruptive and also result in less drastic changes in the quality of the original and replacement teacher (Hansen & Quintero, 2020).

Guin (2004) studied 66 elementary schools in a large urban district to look at the relationship between turnover and the number of students meeting standards on statewide assessments in reading and math. Pearson correlations were statistically significant and negative, meaning that schools with higher turnover were correlated with lower achievement. These results are consistent with other correlational evidence showing schools with more teacher turnover tend to have lower achievement (Boyd et al., 2008). Correlation does not mean causation, as other factors may also correlate with achievement, such as job satisfaction, school leadership, school climate, and poverty. As previously outlined, job satisfaction has strong implications for student learning. Specifically, a teacher’s satisfaction with his or her career may influence the quality of instruction given to students. When teachers are dissatisfied with their career and do not feel supported in their work, they may be less motivated to do their best work in the classroom (Toropova et al., 2021). Teacher surveys describe certain characteristics of the student body that make teaching difficult and negatively affect student performance. Walker (2019) describes these conditions to include: student tardiness and absenteeism, parents’ struggles to be involved, student disengagement, poor student health, and insufficient
student preparation for instruction. Many teachers see these factors as serious problems in their schools and indicate they are becoming increasingly worse.

**The Relationship Between Teacher Turnover, Teacher Retention, and Leadership**

“Recruiting and retaining excellent teachers and principals is critically important for the success of future generations, especially for those living in underserved communities,” (Learning Policy Institute, 2017, p. 1). Attrition is the reason for almost 90% of the demand for new teachers, so a plan of action to increase teacher retention is especially key. Principal leadership plays a significant role in teacher retention and turnover. Teachers in a survey conducted by the Learning Policy Institute (2017) identified the quality of administrative support as one of the main factors in the choice to leave a school. The question asked was, “Why do teachers leave their school?” 21% of teachers listed dissatisfaction with administration as their reason. Other top reasons included personal life reasons (37%), to pursue a different position (28%), dissatisfaction with school assessment/accountability policies (25%), and dissatisfaction with teaching as a career (21%) (Learning Policy Institute, 2017).

Other data show teacher turnover percentages hitting nearly 25% amid teachers who strongly disagree that their principal encourages and supports staff, has a clear mission and direction for their school, and for the most part leads a school effectively. The statistic is more than double the turnover rate of teachers who feel their administrators are supportive (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). A 20-year veteran teacher from Minneapolis (Learning Policy Institute, 2017) spoke about her principal and the influence they had on her decision to stay at her current school:

For the past decade, I’ve worked at a school where 97% of the children qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. I stay because the school climate is good for children and
teachers alike. I stay because my principal is wonderful, supports us, does what’s best for children, and because I trust her. I stay because my colleagues are gifted teachers and good company, and because I continually learn from them. (p. 2)

Principals who can establish a collaborative and trusting relationship with staff and foster a positive school climate are more likely to keep their teachers (Sawchuk, 2020). They can also take part in instructionally focused conversations, provide opportunities for collaboration between teachers, and manage staff and resources with intention (Gold, 2022). Recent research in this area indicates that principals participating in these practices are able to successfully influence school working conditions, resulting in better retention of teachers, specifically effective teachers (Gold, 2022).

In their synthesis of research, authors Grissom et al., (2021) focused on three main questions: 1. Who are public school principals, and how have their characteristics changed over the past twenty years? 2. How much do principals impact student achievement and other school outcomes? 3. What motivates principals’ contributions and what are effective principals’ characteristics, skills, and behaviors? They collected information using a variety of sources, such as surveys and nationally represented data sources (National Center for Education Statistics at the US Department of Education). They discovered three main changes: (1) school leaders have become considerably more female, (2) principals’ level of experience has decreased on average, more so in high-need schools, and (3) regardless of major changes in the racial and ethnic demographics of students, racial and ethnic diversity in school leadership has changed only a little bit, contributing to increasing racial and ethnic gaps between principals and the students they work with (Grissom et al., 2021). Hispanic and Black students have the largest principal representation gap, and in relation to their white classmates, students of color are less likely to work with a principal who shares their ethnicity (Grissom et al., 2021).
Characteristics of a principal matter for several reasons because some lead to more success at retaining teachers, including more effective teachers, than others. Researchers Grissom et al., (2021) found that teacher evaluations of the success of principals’ work predicted observable outcomes, such as student achievement and teacher retention. Using an immense amount of research, including both quantitative and qualitative studies, Grissom et al., discovered three domains of skills and expertise that school leaders need to be successful: instruction, people, and the organization. They also talked about how these areas present in four categories of behaviors that renown research suggests create positive school outcomes. These behaviors fall under the following categories:

1. Engaging in instructionally focused interactions with teachers. Forms of engagement with teachers that center on instructional practice, such as teacher evaluation, instructional coaching, and the establishment of a data-driven, school-wide instructional program to facilitate such interactions.

2. Building a productive school climate. Practices that encourage a school environment marked by trust, efficacy, teamwork, engagement with data, organizational learning, and continuous improvement.

3. Facilitating productive collaboration and professional learning communities. Strategies that promote teachers working together authentically with systems of support to improve their practice and enhance student learning.

4. Managing personnel and resources strategically. Processes around strategic staffing and allocation of other resources (Grissom et al., 2021, p. 17).

These findings have implications for policymakers. They show the importance of effective principals and the need for policies which encourage and prepare a high-quality principal pool. The positive outcomes go beyond student learning and reach other areas such as
Research shows two major characteristics of school leadership that affect teachers’ decisions about whether and where to stay in the profession. These are administrator support and leadership style (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). In regard to administrator support, teachers are more likely to remain in the classroom when they feel supported by administrators. In fact, studies suggest that principal support can mean more than other areas, such as wages or workload, when it comes to decisions to stay at or leave a school. Support can be given in a variety of ways, such as support with curriculum and instruction or emotional and personal support. School leaders who help teachers with “instructional resources, teaching materials, and professional learning opportunities” have also been associated with lower teacher attrition rates (Learning Policy Institute, 2017, p. 2). Principals at schools with lower numbers of teacher turnover also make certain that staff have the needed communication pathways and reasonable budgets to address the diverse learning needs of all their students. In regard to leadership style, studies have also found that a principal’s leadership style is associated with teachers’ decisions to leave the school or profession. Principals who do not see themselves as authoritarian, top-down leaders have been linked with low teacher attrition rates (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). Rather, these leaders typically describe their leadership role as “facilitators, collaborators, team leaders, or leaders of leaders” (Learning Policy Institute, 2017, p. 2). These leaders are more likely to encourage collaboration and teamwork among teachers and create a sense of community. Teachers believe they have a voice and an opinion and that their input is valuable.

Principals are usually less skilled in schools with more minority students, low-income families, and low-achieving schools, and therefore can have even more of an impact on teacher attrition (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). Many research studies about teacher attrition in
high-poverty schools discovered that teachers’ beliefs about their school’s leader are a critical factor in their decision to keep working in the school. When principals set clear guidelines, offer support to teachers, and show appreciation for their staff, teachers are less likely to leave. Six different studies, looking at teacher turnover in high-poverty schools, found that effective school leaders were:

1. Effective school managers (ensuring that teachers have the necessary resources, communication channels, and sensible budgets)
2. Effective instructional leaders (strategically hiring teachers and staff, providing regular and fair teacher evaluations, and helping their teachers to continually improve)
3. Inclusive decision makers (listening to teachers’ ideas and engaging them in change and providing teacher autonomy within their classroom as appropriate) (Learning Policy Institute, 2017, p.3).

Effective preparation programs can help school leaders be more successful and develop their skills, which leads to less teacher attrition. Preparation programs are more conducive to principal effectiveness when they offer the opportunity for close collaboration between the program and schools, principals learn in cohorts that support problem solving with their professional peers, hands-on internship experiences, mentoring opportunities, and using data to drive decisions (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). An example of one program, proven to be a quality professional development opportunity for principals, is called The McREL Balanced Leadership Professional Development (BLPD) program. This is a research-based training that has been linked with reducing teacher and principal turnover. Participants focus on factors such as creating a positive school climate, establishing clear rules and expectations, creating a vision of academic achievement for all students, enhancing instructional strategies, and promoting leadership in others. A study of the program’s effectiveness revealed a 23% reduction in
Decades of research acknowledges the crucial role that effective principals have in cultivating a strong and sustainable teacher workforce. Studies conducted throughout the United States found that the quality of leadership can have a large impact on teacher turnover. In fact, teachers often identify the quality of administrative support as more important in their decisions to stay or leave, more-so than salaries, workload, or lack of autonomy (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). Individuals concerned with creating solutions to the teacher turnover matter can focus on developing and retaining high-quality principals who are able to successfully cultivate positive working conditions.

Conclusion

As Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) stated,

With high turnover rates driving teacher shortages and undermining student learning, policymakers should pursue strategies that can improve teacher retention in all schools, but especially in those where turnover rates are most extreme—namely, schools serving students of color and students in poverty. By addressing the key factors that drive teachers from their schools, tailored policy interventions can, over time, stabilize and improve the teacher workforce and better serve all students. (p. 8)

Teacher shortages have been growing since 2015, and it has become increasingly challenging for districts to retain and attract credentialed teachers (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). As students return to school each year, many will be met with untrained, underprepared teachers. Schools must take action to mitigate teacher turnover. This can be done by conducting research on factors that have been shown to correlate with high rates of turnover, such as low wages, negative school and work environments, weak professional development programs and opportunities, and lack of professional autonomy. These conditions that are prompting teachers
to leave their jobs and dissuading new hires from entering the profession must be addressed in a sustainable way. Furthermore, high-poverty schools need to be given extra consideration, support, and funding, as data continually shows these schools are continually hit the hardest, with teacher shortages being even more of a problem (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Problems associated with a dwindling teacher population will only intensify in the coming years. Recent studies and teacher feedback shed light on the matter and revealed proven methods that will improve the likelihood of teacher retention. Along with mitigating the substantial cost related to turnover, these strategies help to strengthen schools, cultivate meaningful collaboration, increase teacher efficacy and job satisfaction, and improve school climate. As a result, school leaders can be a part of a school community where both students and teachers can thrive.

The review of literature provided an overview of the current literature on teacher turnover and retention. It began with a detailed overview about the history of teacher retention, teacher turnover, and teacher shortages in the United States. It included a summary of factors that contribute to teacher turnover such as compensation, administrative support, school climate, and working conditions. Teacher turnover has been shown to impact students and their achievement and to be correlated with strong or weak leadership. The methodology for this study is detailed in Chapter Three. The design choice, participant selection methods, proposed data collection, and data analysis provided information on the study’s procedures. The research methods are outlined below. The chapter ends with a summary of the methodology.
Chapter Three: Methodology

The chapter will begin with a description of the study’s design. The purpose of Chapter Three is to elaborate on the design of the study, including the methodology, selection of participants, research question and central question, role of the researcher, data collection procedures, data analysis, and credibility procedures. The design of the study and rationale explain why a qualitative method is best. The research evaluated and developed theories of what is contributing to high rates of teacher turnover and what is contributing to retention of qualified teachers in the field of education by using qualitative methods. The study utilized a phenomenological approach to conduct research and formulate conclusions. A phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Creswell explained that the type of problem best suited for this form of research is “one in which it is important to understand several individuals’ common or shared experiences of a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 81). It is important to explore these common experiences of participants, so that practices and policies can be developed as well as to gather a more comprehensive understanding about the components of the phenomenon. The study looked at whether or not school climate impacted retention of effective, qualified teachers and what personal and professional characteristics led to teachers either leaving or staying in their position. The research explored the lived experience of teachers who decided to leave a teaching position in rural communities.

The purpose of the study was to better understand what contributing factors are causing teachers to leave their school or their profession altogether. These results will assist in helping leaders and policymakers throughout the country in understanding the successful practices that
keep teachers in their current positions and reduce attrition in the field of education. The research methods are outlined below. The chapter ends with a summary of the methodology.

**Design of the Qualitative Approach**

There are three types of research designs that are used: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Qualitative research is a “means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2009, p. 4). Quantitative research is a “means for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables” (Creswell, 2009, p. 4). Mixed methods research is an approach to inquiry that combines both qualitative and quantitative forms (Creswell, 2009). For the research design of this study, a qualitative approach was utilized.

Qualitative research has changed and developed over the past century and today is considered to be a commonly used research methodology. Qualitative methodology utilizes interviews, observations, and documentation review “to get at the inner experiences of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 12). A phenomenological study “describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept of a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 78). The research in this study was based on the phenomenological theory approach.

**Phenomenology**

A phenomenological study “describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013). The purpose of this approach is to investigate the factors needing exploration, which in this study are high rates of teacher turnover, increased teacher shortages, and increased demands of qualified, effective
educators. Because the study sought to find what was contributing to the high turnover rates and job dissatisfaction of educators, the study needed to focus on the lived experiences of teachers who had decided to leave a teaching position. Specifically, the design employed a phenomenological approach to understanding what factors lead to high rates of teacher turnover and what factors contribute to retention. The research was conducted in a way that provided a comprehensive, holistic approach to determine the lived experiences of educators and described the personal and professional factors contributing to their decisions to leave their teaching job. Creswell (2013) stated, “Moustakas’s transcendental or psychological phenomenology is focused less on the interpretations of the researcher and more on a description of the experiences of the participants” (p. 81). Moustakas (1994) exposed the distinctive features of phenomenology as a way to understand complex social phenomena. This approach focuses on the experiences of the participants, (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994) collects data from the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon and will require looking at several individuals’ common or shared practices.

A phenomenological qualitative study provides the opportunity for rich data to be collected through the use of interviews. This approach provided information to better understand the influence of school climate on teacher retention, about the lived experience of teachers who decided to leave their teaching position in rural communities and will inform the development of practices surrounding teacher turnover and job satisfaction. Through interviews, participants’ accounts were methodically collected and analyzed with dialogue between the researcher and participant concerning events, feelings, and experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

**Research Questions**
The research questions serve to narrow the purpose of the study (Creswell, 2013). In qualitative research, the central question is the broadest question that could possibly be posed about the research problem. The central question is broken down into sub-questions to subdivide the central question into more specific, relevant questions (Creswell, 2007). Moustakas (1994) discussed the use of literature in a phenomenological study for framing the research problem and creating a platform for inquiry. The sub-questions were developed from review of the literature.

Central Question

The central question guides researchers and is concerned with the unknown aspects of a phenomenon of interest (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The central question of this qualitative phenomenological study is a broad question that asks for an exploration of the central phenomenon or concept in a study. The central question that will drive this qualitative phenomenological study is:

What is the lived experience of teachers who decided to leave a teaching position?

Sub-Questions

The central question is further broken down into sub-questions to “narrow the focus of the study but leave open the questioning” (Creswell, 2009, p. 130). The sub-questions create a frame of reference, further identifying the scope of impact and viewpoints from each of the participants, as detailed within the interview protocol. The following were the sub-questions for this study. Each sub-question was generated from the literature review as follows:

1. What are the reasons elementary teachers have for staying in their positions?

   The federal government, states, and local entities have strategized ways to improve the supply and demand crisis and retain qualified teachers. Borkow and Jordan’s 1983 Congressional Research Service analysis of teacher supply and demand offered policy
options to increase the number of K-12 teachers. These included college scholarships and loan repayable by K-12 teaching, financial rewards or bonuses for excellent teaching, federal salary subsidies for teaching in “hard to teach” geographic locations, grants to colleges to establish innovative teacher education programs, and support of research on the connection between teacher preparation and K-12 student outcomes (Earley & Ross, 2022). Providing new teachers with induction and mentoring can be an effective strategy to retain teachers (Woods, 2016). Additionally, school culture and a positive work environment are important factors of teacher retention, and induction and mentoring programs have their greatest effects on teachers working in schools with strong leadership, collaborative professional relationships, and a healthy and supportive climate among staff (Woods, 2016).

2. What are the reasons elementary teachers have for leaving a school or the field altogether?

The research of Ingersoll (2001) indicated that smaller school size and high poverty schools were more likely to experience high rates of teacher turnover, and the most prominent reason was job dissatisfaction. Participants were asked to list their reasons for job dissatisfaction and the most frequently listed factors were low salaries, lack of support from school administrators, student discipline problems, and lack of teacher influence over decision making as the reasons for their dissatisfaction. In another study, researchers discovered that schools with substantial teacher turnover also had a negative school climate, low morale, lack of trust, and poor working relationships between teachers (Guin, 2004).

3. From a teacher’s perspective, what strategies may reduce teacher turnover?
The literature review revealed that teachers leaving their schools say they feel devalued by work-related policies, are feeling constant stress due to matters such as state testing, experience unfair teaching evaluations, and are given less professional autonomy than desired; all of which contribute to work dissatisfaction (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Principal leadership also plays a significant role in teacher retention and turnover. Teachers in a survey conducted by the Learning Policy Institute (2017) identified the quality of administrative support as one of the main factors in the choice to leave a school. Principles who can establish a collaborative and trusting relationship with staff and foster a positive school climate are more likely to keep their teachers (Gold, 2022).

4. How does school climate contribute to teachers’ decisions to leave rural schools?

The environment in which a person works has a large impact on not only job satisfaction, but also on the ability to do the job well and maintain the desire to keep working in the job and profession (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). The work environment for teachers, or school climate, is challenging and plays a part in the teacher shortage problem (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). School climate and workplace conditions are key factors in the determination of job satisfaction for teachers; the more favorable the conditions, the higher the satisfaction (Norton, 1999). A taxing school environment wears down morale, pushing teachers away from the field (Walker, 2019). The presence of a positive sense of community among stakeholders is thought to be one of the most important aspects of successful schools (Walker, 2019).

5. What factors contribute to overall job satisfaction and retention?

Highly satisfied teachers are less likely to change schools or to leave the teaching profession altogether than those who are dissatisfied with their work (Baker, Perie, &
Whitener, 1997). Work conditions, such as administrative leadership and support, school climate, teacher autonomy in the classroom, student behavior, and parent support are directly associated with the job satisfaction of teachers (Garcia & Wiess, 2019). Frederick Herzberg took a more in depth look at the idea of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction and surveyed a large sample of workers to find out what work components made them feel really good or really bad about their jobs. The results explained that certain factors were continually related to employee job satisfaction and others could create job dissatisfaction (Motivating Employees, 2022). Examples of intrinsic job elements that lead to satisfaction include recognition, the work itself, and growth opportunities. He also explained that hygiene factors, or job dissatisfiers, were extrinsic components of the work environment. Examples include company policy, relationships with work supervisors, work conditions, relationships with coworkers, and wages.

Participants

There are several features that are usually included in phenomenological research. One of these features involves the exploration of the phenomenon with a group of individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon, and the number of participants can vary in size. Polkinghorne (1989) recommended a range of five to 25 for a phenomenological study (Creswell, 2013). Data saturation can be achieved with 12 participants (Guest et al., 2006), and 12 participants were interviewed for this study. Saturation in qualitative research is when, through interviewing, the researcher observes the same themes from the participants, repeatedly (Guest et al., 2006). As more interviews are conducted, the researcher stops finding new themes, ideas, opinions, or patterns and saturation is said to be achieved (Guest et al., 2006).
Participants were selected based on the standard of who would best inform the research questions and enhance the understanding of teacher turnover and retention. Maximum variation sampling was used to collect information from a wide range of perspectives and participants differed from one another (Zach, 2020). In order to better understand the phenomenon of teacher turnover, it was important to interview a diverse group of teachers with different backgrounds and experiences (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Participants varied in gender, age, years of experience in the teaching field, the year they left their job, and if they had left the teaching profession altogether.

All participants met a defined set of criteria through preliminary screening and all candidates qualified to participate (Yin, 2008). The screening took place either by email, Facebook, or Facebook Messenger and the inclusion criteria was:

1. Participants must have worked as a teacher between the school years 2017 and 2022.
2. Participants must be elementary school educators (Kindergarten through Sixth grade).
3. Participants must have worked in Montana.
4. Participants must have worked in a rural school district.
5. Participants must have chosen to leave their teaching job within the stated time frame (2017-2022).

The process of purposeful selection and maximum variation, criterion sampling, and snowball sampling was utilized and representative participants were considered by role (teachers), perspective (those who worked in the field of education as a teacher between the years 2017 and 2022, and/or diversity (gender, rural, and other demographics). The participants and individuals of interest to the research of this study were elementary school teachers who have worked in rural schools in Montana. There are approximately 604 schools that exist in
Montana that qualify as rural (Selected Statistics, 2015). Montana is unique, because it has the highest percentage of rural schools (74%) and the highest percentage of rural school districts (95.3%) (Rural Research, 2022).

Participants also met the selection criterion; The study will be composed of teachers who have left the field altogether or have left a teaching position between 2017 and 2022. After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board, a post was made on the researcher’s Facebook page seeking volunteers for the study. Emails were also sent to principals throughout Montana asking for teachers to volunteer to participate. Teachers must have been hired within this timeframe, with previous teaching experience. Each volunteer participant was sent an email with a consent form to participate in the study, including permission to participate in a semi-structured, recorded interview.

Data Collection

Epoche or Bracketing

Moustakas’s (1994) phenomenology is focused on descriptions of the experiences of participants. Moustakas also focuses on epoche, or bracketing, which is a method that researchers use to set aside biases when conducting phenomenological research (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). To begin the process, the researcher created a rich description of her own experience about the phenomenon of interest in order to help prevent her assumptions from influencing the study. The proactive method allowed the researcher to first consider her own opinions so that the researcher can “set aside their own experiences, as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination” (Creswell, 2013, p. 80). Epoche is the first step of the phenomenological reduction process (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) suggests, “no position whatsoever is taken, nothing is determined in advance” (p. 84).
Role of the Researcher

For qualitative research, the role of the researcher is particularly important. The role of a researcher is to use the research process to better understand the world around us. In qualitative studies, the role of the researcher is quite different, because the research is “considered an instrument of data collection” (Simon, 2022). Data is collected through human interaction, examining documents, and observing behavior, rather than through inventories or questionnaires. Because of this, the researcher's background experiences can influence the interpretation and evaluation of data. Throughout the qualitative study, I was aware of my background in developing questions, interviewing, and analyzing data. Eisner (1991) explained that the researcher’s background influences the interpretation of the data. At the time of this research study, I had 13 years of experience in the field of education, working in a variety of roles including school counselor, behavior interventionist, and dean of students. I have also worked in four different rural school districts throughout the state of Montana.

Yin (2008) believes that an investigator must have a firm understanding of the study’s issues, as the researcher serves as the main instrument for data collection and analysis. I have worked in schools with many of the factors listed in the literature review, including a negative school climate, lack of consistent school leaders and high principal turnover, low wages, and lack of mentor or induction programs. I have also worked in schools with strong mentor programs, effective principals, and favorable work environment conditions. It is important to note potential bias because the researcher is responsible for data collection and analysis.

Data Collection Procedures

There are certain criteria that must be followed in collecting data to obtain strong results. Creswell (2013) stated that “data collection steps include setting the boundaries for the study,
collecting information through unstructured or semi-structured observations and interviews, documents, and visual materials, as well as establishing protocol for recording information” (p. 178). For this qualitative phenomenological study, the researcher collected data from 12 rural educators and interviews were conducted via Zoom, a video conferencing platform with audio and video recording capabilities. Each interviewee was asked 15 questions and all the interviews were audibly recorded and transcribed.

In a phenomenological qualitative approach, interviews are an essential part of data collection and in this research, data was collected from participants through one-on-one interviews. The participants chosen were elementary school teachers, who worked in rural school districts in Montana, and had taught between the school years 2017 and 2022. The study was explained and outlined to participants. The Interview Protocol was explained, and participants were asked to sign the Participant Information and Consent Form (Appendix C). Interviews were conducted via Zoom after the participants agreed to contribute and a suitable time was set. The interviews were conducted one-on-one, which allowed the “researcher control over the line of questioning” (Creswell, 2009, p. 179). Throughout all interviews, the researcher audio recorded the questions and answers to later transcribe and evaluate. The participants’ identifying information was coded to ensure confidentiality. The researcher was aware of the limitations of using interviews as outlined by Creswell (2009):

- Interviews provide indirect information filtered through the views of interviewees.
- Researcher’s presence may bias responses.
- Not all people are equally articulate and perceptive (p. 179).
Data Collection Methods

For the purposes of this study, a variety of sources were evaluated and gathered to complete the literature review. These sources included Montana Office of Public Instruction’s website, articles about the topic, research articles, news articles, school district websites, and other literature relating to the topic of teacher turnover and retention. The participants were purposefully selected, and criterion and snowball sampling were utilized. The study was explained and outlined to these teachers, the Interview Protocol was explained, and participants were asked to sign the Participant Information and Consent Form. Interviews were conducted by the researcher after the participant had agreed to the interview and a time and date was agreed upon.

Qualitative research interviews are “attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples’ experiences, and to uncover their lived world” (DeJonckheere & Vaugn, 2022, p.1). The interviewer asks questions in order to gather information about the topic of study, and the interview process is a key component of qualitative research. It “aims to explore the complexity and in-process nature of meanings and interpretations that cannot be examined by survey interviews” (Rafique, 2020, p. identifier). During the interview, the researcher followed Rafique’s (2020) suggestions and listened to the verbal responses as well as noticed all the emotions, body language, and nonverbal responses from the participants. Qualitative interviewing is typically semi-structured and consists of open-ended questions. The phrasing of the questions and the order in which they are asked does allow for flexibility (DeJonckheere & Vaugn, 2022). The interview included questions about demographics in order to gather basic details about gender, years of experience, educational level, preparation, and age.
Interview Questions

In qualitative research, there are various forms of interview design that can be developed to obtain thick, rich data utilizing a qualitative investigational perspective (Turner, 2010). This study utilized standardized open-ended interview questions and all participants were asked identical questions. The questions were worded in an open-ended format which allowed participants to, “contribute as much detailed information as they desire and it also allows the researcher to ask probing questions as a means of follow up” (Turner, 2010, p. 3). The data provided through this method is typically rich and thick and also reduces researcher biases within the study (Gall, et al., 2003. There are eight principles to consider when conducting interviews:

1. Choose a setting with little distraction.
2. Explain the purpose of the interview.
3. Address terms of confidentiality.
4. Explain the format of the interview.
5. Indicate how long the interview usually takes.
6. Provide contact information so that the participant can get in touch later if needed.
7. Ask them if they have any questions before starting.
8. Don’t count on your memory to recall their answers (Turner, 2010, p. 3).

The following questions were developed based on these criteria and the information gathered from the literature review. The questions were further broken down based on the research sub-questions and included questions to gather background information, details about school climate, reasons for staying in their positions, reasons for leaving their school or profession altogether, factors impacting job satisfaction, and possible follow up questions. The interview questions are written under each sub-question as follows:
Sub-questions:

1. What are the reasons elementary teachers have for staying in their positions?
   - Tell me about how you came to the teaching profession?
   - Tell me about the joys you experienced as a teacher.
   - What do you like about teaching?

2. What are the reasons elementary teachers have for leaving a school or the field altogether?
   - As an elementary school teacher, what are your perceptions of why the high turnover rates exist? What situations have influenced your experiences of this?
   - As a teacher, what have you experienced in terms of teacher turnover?
   - Are there times you have considered leaving or left? What contributed to your decision?
   - Tell me about the obstacles and challenges you experienced as a teacher.

3. From a teacher’s perspective, what strategies may reduce teacher turnover?
   - How has your administrator played a role in your experience with teacher turnover?
   - What role do financial incentives have in your experience as a teacher?
   - What do you dislike about teaching?

4. How does school climate contribute to teachers’ decisions to leave rural schools?
   - Tell me about the school climate at the school (or schools) you chose to leave?
   - Describe your relationship with your coworkers.
   - Describe your experience working with students.

5. What factors contribute to overall job satisfaction and retention?
   - As a teacher, what factors or situations have influenced your job satisfaction?
   - What advice would you give to a new teacher entering the profession?
These are the questions for the open-ended, semi-structured interview. The questions focus attention on gathering data that will lead to a “textural and structural description of the experiences, and ultimately provide an understanding of the common experiences of the participants” (Creswell, 2013, p. 81). This study relied on the participants’ memories and reflections about their experiences as teachers in the field of education (Lauterbach, 2018).

Data Analysis

Moustakas (1994) embraced the value of qualitative research and focused on the wholeness of experience and a search for essences of experiences (p. 22). Prior to conducting interviews and the research study, I set aside any prejudgments, also known as epoche or bracketing, as much as possible and used systematic steps for analyzing the data. This process is called transcendental, because the researcher sees the phenomenon “freshly, as for the first time” (p. 34). The method of analyzing phenomenological data, according to Moustakas (1994), follows a systematic process that is rigorous, yet accessible to qualitative researchers. After describing my own experiences with teacher turnover, I identified significant statements from the participant transcripts, clustered these statements into meaning units and themes, synthesized the themes into a description of the experiences of the individuals, and then constructed a composite description of the meanings and the essences of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Significant Statements and Labels

The first step was to decontextualize and recontextualize the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which involved examining the data, analyzing, and interpreting the data, and arranging it. Moustakas (1994) refers to the first step as horizontalization. Here, I went through the interview transcriptions and highlighted significant statements, sentences, or quotes that provided an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon of teacher turnover.
(Moustakas, 1994). Selection, summary, and highlighting of the data organized and focused the data. Moustakas (1994) suggests listing the significant statements relevant to the experience. The significant statements provided a range of perspectives about teacher turnover and are provided in a table so that the reader can identify the range of perspectives about the phenomenon.

**Clustering The Statements into Meaning Units and Themes**

The next step involves deleting irrelevant statements and statements that are repeated or overlapping. The remaining statements are the horizons or textural meanings (Moustakas, 1994). I carefully examined the identified significant statements, then clustered the statements into themes or meaning units (Moustakas, 1994). Codes or labels were used to assign meaning to the data. The codes and labels were attached to words, phrases, sentences, or whole paragraphs, (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This helped to identify new and emerging themes from each participant. The coding tied together observations and statements and allowed for patterns and themes to emerge. I read through the interviews and demographic forms, and as I read through the transcripts, I took notes in the margins of the transcripts. Upon reading a second time, I labeled chunks of data and made note of the data that seemed relevant to answering the research questions. This step helped to process the data into meaning units or themes (Moustakas). The emerging themes were displayed using a mental model in the form of a concept map and a table showing themes or meaning units containing evidence in participants’ statements.

**The Essence of the Experience**

In this final step, I began to decide what the data meant. The textual and structural descriptions of the experiences were synthesized into a composite description of the phenomenon through the research process referred to by Moustakas (1994, p. 100) as “intuitive integration.” This description became the essence, which captured the meaning ascribed to the experience of
the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). A graphic organizer was created to highlight patterns, themes, similarities and differences, and explanations.

Transcendental phenomenology based on Moustakas (1994) provides a systematic approach to analyzing data about lived experiences and allows researchers to develop an objective “essence” through clustering subjective experiences of a number of individuals. Participants have experienced the phenomenon of teacher turnover and offer a deeper understanding of what they have experienced. During the data analysis process, I sought to answer the central question and sub-questions:

Central question: What is the lived experience of teachers who decided to leave a teaching position?

Sub-questions:

SQ1: What are the reasons elementary teachers have for staying in their positions?

SQ2: What are the reasons elementary teachers have for leaving a school or the field altogether?

SQ3: From a teacher’s perspective, what strategies may reduce teacher turnover?

SQ4: How does school climate contribute to teachers’ decisions to leave rural schools?

SQ5: What factors contribute to overall job satisfaction and retention?

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to construct an explanation of the factors which have contributed to the high rates of teacher turnover in the United States. Qualitative research informs practice through transferability. Findings can be transferred from the study to future situations with confidence to the degree that they are trustworthy. In qualitative research, the researcher purposefully chooses participants to understand a particular situation (Merriam, 2009). For this qualitative study, rich, thick descriptions allowed for transferability, and the outcome included the use of a rich narrative, direct quotes, components of
the demographic forms, and questionnaire (Merriam, 2009). The purposeful participant selection was intended to capture the lived experience of teachers who chose to leave a position.

Yin (2008) further suggested that the researcher record field notes into a database. In an effort to create a chain of evidence, the researcher kept a database of notes generated during the interviews and data collection process. Yin provided the definition of this norm:

The principle is to allow an external observer— in this situation, the reader of the case study— to follow the derivation of any evidence from initial research questions to ultimate case study conclusions. Moreover, this external observer should be able to trace the steps in either direction (from conclusions back to initial research questions or from questions to conclusions). (p. 2526)

The researcher attempted to create an accurate picture, reflecting the phenomenon under study to establish the trustworthiness of the data.

**Trustworthiness of the data**

To address accuracy and verification, interview questions were created to focus on the spectrum of factors contributing to teachers’ decisions to leave their teaching job. Questions were used to learn the background of each participant and how it would influence the study. Multiple forms of verification were included to assure consistent, accurate, and unbiased data collection, and help allow participants’ true voice to come through in the researcher’s interpretative writings (Creswell, 2007). Open-ended questions were used to gather more information about the background of each participant and their experience of teacher turnover. All interviews were recorded and transcribed to help with accuracy of the data (Creswell, 2007, pp. 207-209). Trustworthiness was established through the following accuracy and verification procedures.
Accuracy

Accuracy was established by the way information and data was collected and transcribed. All interviews consisted of the same questions and were recorded. Additionally, the transcription of the interviews was completed by the researcher. Because the researcher conducted the interviews and transcribed the data, this ensured accuracy of the study.

Verification

Data verification utilized multiple measures which include triangulation, member checking, external audit, rich, thick descriptions, and the role of the researcher.

- Triangulation: using triangulation, the researcher made use of multiple sources of data to confirm findings.
- Member checking: the researcher utilized member checking and solicited participants’ views during the interviews for clarification. A transcript of the interview was sent to each participant to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences.
- External audit: Throughout the study, the researcher continually consulted with an external source (the dissertation chair) to examine the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994;). The University of Montana dissertation committee, which is composed of research experts, was asked to externally check the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994).
- Rich, thick descriptions: Using rich, thick descriptions is a technique that gives detailed descriptions and interpretations of situations observed by the researcher (Drew, 2019).

With these descriptions, the researcher helps readers to transfer information to other settings and to determine whether the findings can be transferred because of shared
characteristics. It also adds subjective information and meaning from participants about the topic of study and data collected “tends to be of great value” (Antony, 2022).

- Clarifying researcher bias: Recognizing researcher bias and bracketing prior to conducting the research was a verification strategy utilized (Creswell, 2013).

Confidentiality

All data was kept in strict confidentiality in accordance with the guidelines of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Montana. Permission was received from The IRB Human Subjects Approval from University of Montana prior to the study being conducted. The participants signed a consent form before participating in the study. Pseudonyms were used in order to protect the identity and maintain confidentiality of the participants. Contact information as well as a pseudonym key was kept separate from the data in a secure location. The researcher’s personal computer was used to store the data. A tape recorder application on the computer archived the interview recordings. Shredding all documents at the end of the study upheld confidentiality of the participants.

Summary

Chapter Three contained the methodological approach for this study. The methodology of the study was planned out well before the gathering of data. The methodology behind this research was a review of the research questions, central question with sub-questions, the participants of the study and how they were selected, how the data would be collected through interviews, the transferability of data, and what role the researcher played in conducting the study. The phenomenological qualitative approach offered an opportunity to study the lived experiences of teachers working in the field of education. Chapter Four presents the results of the data collection from the interviews and artifacts of the study.
Chapter Four: Data Analysis

The purpose of Chapter Four is to analyze the data of this study of 12 participants’ lived experiences of high rates of teacher turnover in rural Montana elementary schools. The chapter begins with a presentation of the data collected. To explore the data gathered in this study effectively, five sections divide the chapter. First, the researcher presents an overview of personal experiences. Second, a summary of the participants’ demographics and a maximum variation table set the groundwork for the textural description of what the participants experienced. The third section reviews data collection procedures. The fourth section provides a list of significant statements and associated meaning of units or themes. The chapter ends with textual and structural descriptions of the experiences that are synthesized into a composite description of the phenomenon referred to by Moustakas (1994) as “intuitive integration” p. 100. This description becomes the essence, which captures the meaning ascribed to the experience of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The components of the chapter provide the framework for data analysis of the phenomenological research study.

According to Moustakas (1994), “Phenomenology is rooted in questions that give a direction and focus to meaning, and in themes that sustain an inquiry, awaken further interest and concern, and account for our passionate involvement with whatever is being experienced” (p. 50). Phenomenology is most useful when the researcher has identified a phenomenon to understand and has individuals who can provide a description of what they have experienced (Moustakas, 2994). This study into teachers’ experiences of teacher turnover has both characteristics. The purpose of this study was to examine and discover the factors contributing to high turnover rates of elementary teachers in rural communities as well as to take a closer look at school climate and its impact on retention of teachers. A review of the related literature on
teacher turnover and retention revealed several areas of consideration regarding contributing factors which guided the data collection and analysis. The literature and central question guided the research for this phenomenological study: What is the lived experience of teachers who decided to leave a teaching position?

**Personal Experiences of Teacher Turnover**

Moustakas (1994) described the concept of identifying and setting aside personal judgments, biases, and beliefs by the researcher as epoche or bracketing. A researcher uses this method to increase awareness of any potential biases that need to be set aside to view the phenomenon under study from a fresh perspective (Moustakas, 1994). In addition, Moustakas (1994) stated, “Although epoche is rarely perfectly achieved, the energy, attention, and work involved in reflection and self-dialogue, the intention that underlies the process, and the attitude and frame of reference, significantly reduce the influence of preconceived thoughts, judgments, and biases” (p. 84). By journaling my personal experiences, I attempted to set aside any personal judgments. This started the data reduction process and allowed me to be aware of my personal views of teacher turnover so that the focus could shift to the views reported by the participants (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas suggested that “No position whatsoever is taken ... nothing is determined in advance. The researcher remains present and focuses on one’s own consciousness by returning to whatever is there in... memory, perception, judgment, feeling, whatever is actually there” (p. 84). I journaled about my personal experiences with teacher turnover in Montana during the 2017-2022 school years. The journaling included both positive and negative experiences. Through this process, I first considered the fact that I had left a rural elementary school within the stated time frame. I journaled about my experiences at the previous school and the factors that contributed to the decision to leave. I had a 20–30-minute commute each way,
and my children attended school in the district in the community where we lived. There was a change in administration with the superintendent moving to the elementary building and working halftime as the elementary principal, while the elementary principal at the time went to halftime employment. I wanted to work as a full-time school counselor, but the position was part-time (about half-time). I enjoyed the rural atmosphere and getting to know every student in the school. More recently, I also experienced high rates of teacher turnover at my current school. For the past five years of my experience in the field of education, I have worked in a variety of positions which include working as a school counselor, working in an administrative role as dean of students, and serving as a behavior interventionist. There have been three administration changes in the last four school years. Each administrator had a different leadership style and varying degrees of experience as administrators. The process has assisted me to be more aware of past and present experiences of teacher turnover and empathetic to the needs of the school community. I believe administration turnover has an impact on the attitude and work of teachers as well as the school climate as a whole. I also think leadership style and administration preparation programs can positively or negatively impact retention and turnover. Less experienced leaders and leaders with micromanaging characteristics seemed to have a harder time retaining staff. Through the process of examining personal biases toward teacher turnover, I was able to concentrate more on what the participants said about their own perceptions of turnover and retention. The journaling process helped to set aside preconceived beliefs and to listen more attentively and thoughtfully to the participants' lived experiences. After journaling about my own personal experiences of teacher turnover, research participant selection began.

**Participant Selection and Demographics**
The process of purposeful selection and maximum variation, criterion sampling, and snowball sampling was utilized, and representative participants were considered by role (teachers), perspective (those who worked in the field of education as a teacher between the years 2017 and 2022), and/or diversity (gender, rural, and other demographics). Purposeful selection of participants included those who met a set of inclusive criteria. The participants of this study were elementary school teachers who had worked in rural schools in Montana. They left a teaching job within the stated time frame, 2017-2022.

To begin the search for participants, the researcher posted a request for participants on her personal Facebook page that included the criteria for participation. Facebook was chosen, because it is the social media platform she uses, and it would allow for snowball sampling to occur. The Facebook post was shared by 17 different people, and educators who saw the post could choose to participate and/or pass the information along to others they knew who qualified to participate. Twelve participants replied to the original post for participants, either on the post itself or through Facebook private messages. Three Montana administrators asked for the Screening Letter to Potential Participants (Appendix A) to share with their staff. The researcher contacted all 12 interested participants and scheduled a date and time for the interviews. Five of the participants backed out of the study because of other family commitments, work commitments, or they thought they did not have enough time to participate. The researcher also received six emails from teachers interested in participating, who had heard about the study by word of mouth or had received the letter from their administrator. The researcher contacted the first five responding participants.

All 12 participants met the inclusion criteria and the requirements for participant selection, as outlined by Moustakas (1994), (a) the participants had intense experience of the
phenomenon, (b) were interested in understanding it, and (c) were willing to participate. Participants were contacted via an email providing an informed consent form which was approved by the University of Montana Institutional Review Board (IRB), a consent form to be audiotaped, and a demographic form before any data collection began. The true identities of the participants were kept confidential throughout this work due to the potential nature of the discussions. In place of their names, pseudonyms were chosen to present results. In addition, each person’s place of work was kept confidential. Maintaining confidentiality was deliberate and consistent with the method of transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994), because the aim is to understand the phenomenon in the broader context of teacher turnover in Montana, not in the context of a specific school or district.

With the participants established, data collection began. Upon completion of the 12 interviews, the researcher discovered technological glitches with one of the recordings and the exact words were difficult to hear and understand. The researcher attempted to contact the participant for 10 days but did not hear back from the participant. Therefore, the sixth participant who had contacted the researcher via email was emailed in order to schedule an interview. The interview was conducted within 24 hours of the email being sent. The following sections present the findings in detail, beginning with Table 1, which is a demographic overview of each participant. Table 1 describes the participants’ age, gender, level of education, years of teaching experience, whether or not they completed their program prior to teaching, indicates whether they are still teaching or left the field, and the subject or grade level the teacher was teaching the year they chose to leave their job. Creswell (2007) noted the importance of understanding the common experiences of the participants in order to recognize the key features of the phenomenon. To develop an overview of the participants, each participant completed a
demographic questionnaire and explained their experiences as teachers. Table 1 lists the significant information about the participants’ demographics and experiences.
Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Characteristics</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-36</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37-47</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59 and older</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Degree in progress</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of experience:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 to 3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 to 5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 or more</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree completed prior to teaching?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching or left the field:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject/ grade level taught at the school they left:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There were 12 total participants, two of which were men and 10 were women. Each participant worked in a rural elementary school in Montana and left a teaching job between 2017 and 2022. Three of the participants hold a master’s degree, six hold a bachelor’s degree, and three are in the process of completing a master’s degree program. All 12 participants indicated that they had completed their teaching preparation programs prior to beginning their teaching career. All of the participants were at least 26 or older, with one participant fitting into the 59 and older category. Among the 12 participants, there was teaching experience at every elementary grade level (kindergarten through 6th grade), as well as special education, physical education, and music being represented. Demographic forms provided insight into the diversity of teachers’ age, years of experience, level of college education, and whether or not they had left the field altogether. Moustakas (1994) described the importance of considering the experience of participants as imperative data in understanding the lived phenomenon. The demographic form asked participants to consider whether or not their teaching preparation program prepared them for their work as a teacher. Appendix H provides the participants’ responses to this question.

**Maximum Variation**

Maximum variation sampling was used to collect information from a wide range of perspectives and participants differed from one another (Zach, 2020). In order to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of teacher turnover, it was important to interview a diverse group of teachers with different backgrounds and experiences (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Participants varied in gender, age, years of experience in the teaching field, number of years since they left their job, and if they have left the teaching profession altogether.

There were 10 female participants (83%) and two male participants (17%). Elementary school teachers are predominantly women (Elementary Education Teacher, 2022), with 82.5% of
teachers in the United States being female, which was the same percentage represented by participants. The participants varied in age with the youngest participant being 26 and the oldest participant being 66 years old. Six have a bachelor’s degree, three have a master’s degree, and three are in the process of obtaining a master’s degree. Years of experience as a teacher range from two to 20. All of the participants had earned their teaching degree prior to their work in the field. Two participants left a teaching job in 2017, two in 2018, two in 2019, one in 2020, two in 2021, and five in 2022. Two left two different rural elementary schools within the time frame. Four left the teaching profession and are currently working in other fields, and eight are still teaching. Table 2 describes the maximum variation of participants’ backgrounds and experiences.

**Table 2**

*Maximum variation of participants’ backgrounds and experiences*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year left</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2022</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left the profession</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Central Question**
The central question of this qualitative phenomenological study asks for an exploration of the central phenomenon or concept in a study. This question is the broadest question and is the foundation for the study: What is the lived experience of teachers who decided to leave a teaching position? Moustakas (1994) discussed the use of literature in a phenomenological study for formulating research questions and creating a foundation for inquiry. The sub-questions were developed from a review of the literature, which set the foundation for the construction of the interview questions. The purpose of the interview questions was to determine the lived experience of teacher turnover and retention.

Data Analysis

In this section, representative data gathered from the interviews and demographic forms present the discoveries of the lived experience of teachers who chose to leave a teaching job. The researcher recorded and transcribed the 12 interviews. The interviews lasted between 27 minutes and 64 minutes. Recording of the interviews took place on Zoom, which is a video conferencing, online platform that was used on a computer laptop. The researcher conducted a video conference with each participant, and the interview was audio recorded and saved to the Zoom platform. Zoom also produces a transcription. The researcher played back the Zoom recordings while reading the printed transcription, checking for accuracy. The transcription was edited as needed to represent exactly what was said by researcher and participant. All interviews were transcribed within 48 hours of the interview.

Data saturation can be achieved with 12 participants (Guest et al., 2006) and was attained upon completion of the 12 interviews in this study. The same themes from the participants were observed repeatedly and no new themes, ideas, opinions, or patterns were found after the 12th interview. Saturation was achieved and interview data collection was completed. Upon
completion of the interviews, each participant received an emailed transcript of the interview to allow for member checking. Two of the participants responded to the email transcript asking for a change. One of them asked to add a thought she had about teaching in a rural area and to add additional information about advice she would give to a new teacher entering the teaching profession. The other asked to edit out the “uh and um” phrases in the transcript in order to provide more clarity to the essence she wanted captured. The transcribed interviews formed the starting point of the data analysis process. A description of the main methods for data analysis provides an understanding for the conception of the composite description. Moustakas (1994) described data analysis of phenomenology as a means to determine both the meaning of an experience and an inclusive account of it. To begin the process, the interview transcripts were read and reviewed several times in an effort to find significant statements.

**Horizontalization- Significant Statements**

The first step of data analysis required the identification of specific statements in the transcripts about the experiences of the participants. Moustakas (1994) referred to the first step of data analysis as horizontalization. Horizontalizing the data required viewing every statement from the interview transcripts as having equal value. These “horizons” were taken directly from the transcripts and acted as the “condition of the phenomenon that gives it a distinct character” from other phenomena (Moustakas, 1994, p. 96). Moustakas (1994) posed the following questions to test for possible reduction and elimination of data:

Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it? Is it possible to abstract and label it? If so, it is a horizon of the experience. Expressions not meeting the above requirements are eliminated. (p. 120)
I read through the 12 interview transcriptions and highlighted significant statements, sentences, or quotes that provided an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon of teacher turnover (Moustakas, 1994). Selection, summary, and highlighting of the data helped to organize and focus the data. Significant statements relevant to the experience were then listed.

The phenomenological themes that emerged from the study were the result of twelve Zoom interviews with teachers. The significant statements offered a range of perspectives about teacher turnover. Appendix I lists the significant statements and denotes original statements made by the participants. The statements represent participants’ verbal responses and are personal accounts of their views of teacher turnover and retention. The significant statements were gathered and organized by the sub-questions to identify the range of perspectives about the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

**Interview Data**

Throughout the 12 Zoom interviews, teachers extensively shared their lived experiences of teacher turnover. Participants responded to fifteen open-ended questions about their choice to leave a teaching job. The questions served to form the answers to the five sub-questions in this qualitative study. The data were summarized by each corresponding Sub-question. The list of interview questions provided a framework for the responses.

**Sub-question #1. What are the reasons elementary teachers have for staying in their positions?**

*Interview Questions:*

- Tell me about how you came to the teaching profession?
Participants came to the teaching profession through a variety of ways. Most commonly, it was a profession or a career they had thought about doing from a young age. Six of the twelve participants talked about how they knew they always wanted to be a teacher. The other six became teachers due to life experiences or college courses they had taken that grew their interest in student learning, psychology, or a helping profession.

Lynette said it was something she always knew she was going to do, especially in music. She expressed she “pretty much knew in sixth grade that I wanted to be a music teacher, and I have always worked toward that goal.” Danny said his long family history of education impacted his choices. He had a grandpa who was an educator who earned national teacher of the year honors, a dad who was a teacher and superintendent, a brother who was a school psychologist and special education director, and another brother who was a teacher as well, so “there was always a natural interest there.” An eighth grade English teacher made a positive impact on Elizabeth, when he sparked her interest to become a teacher. When she started high school, she got experience as a teacher’s assistant at the local elementary school and helped out anytime she could. Ever since then, it was “just what I wanted to do.” Rose also started thinking about a career in teaching while she was a teacher’s assistant in high school. She was assisting in a Kindergarten class at the time and was told she would be a natural at it, and then when she went to college, she “started right off in some education classes.” Becky said it was just “always one of the careers that I thought I might want to do. Sara spoke about wanting to be a teacher ever since she was young. She believed it was “something that I had in me, and it was something I was always really passionate about.”

Four of the participants began their careers in different fields or by taking prerequisite classes which included nursing, physical therapy, psychology, and social studies. As they began
taking their college classes, they learned they wanted to work with kids, believed they could help others by becoming a teacher, they loved learning about student learning and the brain, and that teaching would be a great way to capitalize on their strengths and interests. Another participant said she was trying to think of something to do and landed on teaching by chance, and she stuck with it. Susan had been a preschool teacher for many years and made the choice to pursue a degree in education because she “really wanted more information on how to teach, how to be a better teacher, and so that’s kind of where I started.”

- Tell me about the joys you experienced as a teacher.

Understanding how joy is experienced by teachers provides possible insights into retention efforts. Participant responses repeatedly show that making connections with students, watching them have aha and lightbulb moments, building lifelong relationships with students and their families, being able to make a difference in their students’ lives, camaraderie with colleagues, and opportunities for mentorship, collaboration and professional development led to joy in the workplace.

All twelve participants talked about their joy as a teacher coming from making connections with their students and building positive relationships with them. Marie said her favorite part about teaching was the physical part of teaching and watching the kids experience success with their learning. She also enjoyed building connections with the students and being a person, they could depend on for hugs, snacks, or a listening ear. She explained that “building those connections with kids and having kids come back year after year, those are the reasons that people stay.” Danny said seeing “students’ faces light up is so meaningful, because education and learning can be fun.” He continued on to talk about the contact he still has with students he taught in 2013 who reach out to him for support and advice. He believes that is how you know
you did something and changed their lives. Elizabeth reminisced fondly of the relationships she built and the lifelong connections she gained with her students,

Like now I see where all those kids are. I see, you know, they’re in college, I see if they have kids, which I didn’t really expect to be that important, I guess, but that was huge. I think that the number one joy is still having those relationships continuing past the elementary years.

Building lifelong relationships with families was another factor teachers mentioned. Rose said she really “cherished those relationships that I’ve built with those kids, I mean, I think of my previous school, and the parents still communicate with me about their child, and so it’s really that along with just growth in general.”

Teachers spoke about witnessing student academic growth and progress and the rewarding feeling that came along with that. Julie said her biggest joy was when she would see students succeed when they had been working toward the goal, “just seeing the growth in my kids is the greatest joy.” Susan talked about a time she worked with a specific student for two years, helping him read and feeling like they weren’t getting anywhere. Then all of a sudden, he “made tremendous growth, and it was exciting.”

Danielle and Susan expressed that some of their greatest joy with teaching came from knowing that they were affecting the kids in a positive way. Danielle explained that “I know I am affecting these kids. I know that I am making a difference. I can feel it. I can see it in their faces.” For her, knowing she is making a connection, building lifelong connections, and knowing she made a difference in their lives, even though they may not express it, was the most joyful thing that brought her the most happiness in her career. Susan said she likes the kids and their personalities and being able to help them through difficult times in their lives. Sometimes they
come to school experiencing “trauma and they still come in with bad days and friend trouble and being able to talk to them about that and having them open up and trying to help them get through their day or figure out how to handle their trauma, because most of the kids have a lot of traumas in their lives.”

Within the school community, participants highly valued their relationships with their colleagues and being able to glean support, advice, collaboration, and camaraderie from their fellow teammates. Having communication, honesty, respect, and trust were values mentioned by several participants. Sara noted, “My relationship with my coworkers was wonderful, especially my teaching team. We worked very well together, and we helped each other, it’s a very healthy relationship. Lots of collaborating, working together, sharing ideas, sharing the workload,” Amanda also spoke positively about her coworkers and said it was “a very positive atmosphere, everyone was really nice, and we would try to help each other. If you have a good partner teacher, there is nothing better than that, like if the two can work together, brainstorm with each other, help take each other’s loads, that’s really great.” A big contributing factor for Danielle’s joy came from the opportunity to talk with her coworkers and her school team. She spoke about the times they would get together and have conversations, make connections with one another, and that those factors “definitely contributed to reasons why she loved my job.” Elizabeth said the biggest thing teachers want is to communicate and be respectful toward each other, because “when we’re cohesive and we’re working together and supporting each other, it’s awesome, it’s healthy, it’s fun, and we want to be here.”

Most participants mentioned that they had participated in opportunities to collaborate with others, whether it was through instructional coaching, professional development opportunities or a mentorship program and that these avenues helped to be able to build trusting
relationships with their coworkers. Communication and opportunities to talk to other teachers really helped Danny feel as though he was able to grow as a teacher. Marie was thankful to have an instructional coach and felt that it is a huge asset to teachers. Danny said having “professional development and getting a healthy dose of that” contributed to his joy and satisfaction in his work. Elizabeth and Susan were strong in their convictions that schools need to have mentor programs. Elizabeth stated that, “I think it is huge. Make sure they have a mentor program. The mentor program I was a part of was amazing.” Susan said she participated in a mentor program for the first two years at her job and that “it was super helpful. I became friends with both of my mentors.”

- What do you like about teaching?

Participants believed many of the same aspects that brought them joy also contributed to their favorite parts about being a teacher. They enjoyed building relationships and lifelong connections with students and their families, they loved the teaching part of teaching and being able to witness student growth academically, socially, and emotionally, opportunities to get to know their coworkers and develop friendships and being compensated for their work. Becky said the reason she stayed as long as she did was the students and the few coworkers that she really leaned on, “100% the kids, even the tough ones, I was always able to find something good in them and being able to see them grow was really rewarding.” Sara said that “connecting with families, seeing the kids get things when you’re working really hard, and they have that moment where they understand it. The joy they have for you coming to school every day and just the funny things that they say. There are still a lot of wonderful things about teaching.” Lynette’s favorite part about teaching is “seeing the students succeed,” and Kevin talked about seeing the child holistically. For him, he enjoyed “just being able to connect with the kids, socially,
emotionally, academically. Like I said, I really enjoyed getting to know the families. I think that was one of the strengths that I had in terms of trying to figure out how to connect with the kids, through their families. It’s not just the child, but it is, what is the child going home to? What is the family capable of doing to augment what we do during the day?” For Danielle, it was about so much more than the curriculum, it was more about “teaching them how to be good humans and being allowed to make an impact on kids.”

**Sub-question #2.** What are the reasons elementary teachers have for leaving a school or the field altogether?

*Interview Questions:*

- As an elementary school teacher, what are your perceptions of why the high turnover rates exist? What situations have influenced your experiences of this?

  High turnover rates are usually associated with job dissatisfaction and reasons teachers often give for being dissatisfied with their jobs include low salaries, lack of support from school administrators, student discipline problems, and lack of teacher influence over decision making as reasons for leaving. Schools with high rates of teacher turnover are also more likely to have a negative school climate, low morale, lack of trust, and poor working relationships between teachers. Each of the twelve participants in the study expressed the same concerns and described these as contributing factors to high rates of turnover in Montana elementary schools.

  Becky was candid about her perceptions of why the high turnover rates exist saying, “I think it’s like a no-brainer, why people are leaving. You get treated like crap and paid like crap. It’s tough to have my own kids and family, I am bringing work home every day.” Becky gave specific examples that contributed to her perceptions of why the high turnover rate exists. She was at a school she describes as tough, as it had the only classroom for emotionally disturbed
kids in the whole district. She explains, “We didn’t get support with them and the last year that I was there, I had a kid straight out of a treatment facility in my classroom. He put a hole in the ceiling of my classroom and hit me, he threw a chair at me across the room, hit me with a chair. I had to evacuate the class on day one.” Marie also believed the pay was a big reason for high turnover, “I mean lots of people have the same amount of education and are starting their career significantly higher than what teachers are able to start their career, specifically Montana, we are 50th out of 50 for new teacher pay.” Lynette said the behavior situation was one of her biggest obstacles she faced as a teacher and that “it is getting worse every year, especially after COVID-19. It’s struggles like when I have behavior problems where I have thought, do I really want to continue teaching? That’s how much it’s affecting what I do.” Danielle “had never considered leaving teaching until I had a terrible experience with administration.” Rose also believed that the administration at her previous school was a huge issue, and she had quite a few things happen to her that were inappropriate and part of the reason she chose to leave. It caused her to feel on edge and “people didn’t feel like they were being trusted as educators either, like we’re all professionals. We didn’t feel trusted in that sense, and we were micromanaged.” Amanda felt like teachers no longer had control over anything and the little things “I might have control over, they would dissect so minutely and be told that it’s not enough. You should do this. We don’t feel trusted, this isn’t right how we are teaching, I’ve left. I have way less stress.” Sara has considered quitting as well, “The biggest reason is, the workload is a lot and the political side of things, and not feeling appreciated by the admin. I think it’s probably the biggest reason why I thought about quitting.”

- As a teacher, what have you experienced in terms of teacher turnover?
In her rural district, Sara said the year she left, 16 other teachers left as well. Marie started her career in 2017 and was one of seven teachers hired. By the end of her third year, she was the last one remaining. Danny also noticed a high rate of turnover in his school. He believes it is partly because the “demand for teachers is high. The demand for teacher accountability is really high. So, you already have these teachers, they are very stressed out, working really hard because they love kids, and the pay isn’t equal to what they’re doing and the services they are providing. I think a lot of times, what drove me almost away from teaching for good was, I felt, the lack of support.” Elizabeth said she has seen a mass turnover the last couple of years, “I would say big time COVID-19 did some damage to the teaching career, and it was also due to communication with leadership. It wasn’t due to better opportunities; it all came down to communication.”

- Are there times you have considered leaving or left? What contributed to your decision?

Many of the participants talked about their increase in stress and anxiety levels and the consequence was often their physical, mental, and emotional health suffering as a result. For Kevin, he was hoping to work in the teaching profession for at least another five years, but he was growing increasingly irritated:

I was frustrated with central administration, with the, what I felt was inappropriate reliance on standardized testing, school leadership that was not appropriate, and so I carry my stress in my back and my back just started going more frequently and finally it just went out. I couldn’t do it anymore. I ended up in the hospital three surgeries later, and I decided at that point that it was time to leave.

Danielle developed severe anxiety that was “keeping me up at night, and I could not, I could not handle the environment any longer, and that’s kind of what the tipping point was for me.” Rose
said it is important for potential teachers to understand the high demand of the job and that the demand is “mentally, physically, all of the above.” Amanda said a lot of factors contributed to her decision to leave the field all together. The main part was the balance between home life and work life, and also the stress. After discussing the topic of anxiety medicine in the teacher break room, she realized every single teacher in the room was medicated for anxiety. “We should not be medicated for our career. So that was kind of eye-opening. I was like, this is common, but this isn’t good.” Susan has been a teacher for three years and has left one rural school already. She was working in Special Education and believed her position was too much for one person without enough support. She stated, “I also don’t feel like my college training prepared me as well as it could for a lot of those areas.” Becky spoke about her thoughts on mental health, expressing, “The worst thing is, if you put that much time in and everyone in the district knows that it’s a really hard school, and then they don’t give you an opportunity for a change for your own mental health.”

Tell me about the obstacles and challenges you experienced as a teacher.

Some of the biggest obstacles and challenges teachers faced were due to the lack of autonomy over decision making and how they lead their classrooms, lack of parental involvement, increasing demands, and changes in administration. Sara described her biggest obstacle as having:

Everything dictated to me, and not having a lot of choice in how I was going to go about teaching and not having enough staff to run small groups or Title or things like that. Not feeling like I was able to support my students the way that I wanted to.

For Julie, it was the lack of parent involvement and constant demands of a teacher “so whether it be from the principal or giving input, even if it’s paperwork or scheduling meetings during your
prep time, whether it be submitting lesson plans or just different paperwork type things.” Lynette described another obstacle or challenge “I think administration is a hard part. We just got a new administrator this year, and he is our superintendent. It is pretty difficult to connect and it’s someone from out of state. So, they see things way differently.” For Kevin, obstacles and challenges were due to “flexibility being whittled away to the point where we were having to show basically what page we were on each week.”

Sub-question #3. From a teacher’s perspective, what strategies may reduce teacher turnover?

Interview Questions:

- How has your administrator played a role in your experience with teacher turnover?

Of the 12 participants, 11 of them had at least one change in administration within the stated time frame, and each of them talked about the impact of administration changes on teacher turnover. Marie expressed frustration with the lack of administration support and administration turnover, “that didn’t set a good role model, because not only were there four administrator changes in the four years I taught, but there was also a change with the superintendent.” Each administrator that came in:

Tried to do their own thing, but one year wasn’t enough to really get it going and consistent and have the follow-through and so there was just a lot of like let’s try this and then it kind of falls apart and then the next person who says don’t try this and it was hard to get footing especially as a new teacher when you are trying to figure out everything else and then add new policies every year and new curriculum and new Administrators every year.
Kevin enjoyed his first administrator who was supportive, open to talking, not egocentric, and did “not feel threatened by having frank conversations.” Danielle also had a good working relationship with the principal who left during her tenure. She said:

I had a superintendent who was supportive and easy to talk to and a principal who was kind of like a grandfather figure almost. He was just kind and if I needed anything, I could go to him. He had my back.

The changes in administration disrupted their work environment and relationships with their administration. Several participants mentioned working for principals who micromanaged the work environment and had dictator-like personalities. Danny said his administrator directly influenced his decision to leave his school. “It was getting to the point where we couldn’t set up the classrooms the way we wanted them. The walls had to be painted a certain color. There was this big control thing.” Danielle described her relationship with her administration as “toxic” and the reason she “absolutely had to go.” She went from having a family type feel of collaboration at her work to crying on a daily basis and feeling as though she “could not physically, mentally, and emotionally be here anymore.” There was no trust in decision making and the environment of collaboration and teamwork had been shut down. Elizabeth said her administration “definitely micromanaged to where he shouldn’t have and probably crossed those boundaries.” For Rose, her principal was also a big reason she chose to leave, and she expressed that it was a big role and a big reason why she left. She described:

It was inappropriate how my administrator talked to me, in a sense of asking personal questions about sexuality and making assumptions between staff that I didn’t think were appropriate, especially in the work setting. They didn’t trust us as teachers, micromanaging, liked to kind of play games, is a childish way for me to put it.
Sara’s new administrator contributed to her reasons for moving to another school as well. She didn’t feel appreciated by the administration and felt that reason was probably the biggest reason why she thought about quitting. They had new administration, and it was not aligning with how she taught and “not aligning with making me feel okay. It was pretty much a dictatorship and didn’t feel very safe.”

- What role do financial incentives have in your experience as a teacher?

There have been many different financial incentives created in hopes to increase the number of K-12 teachers which include college scholarships, loan repayment, financial rewards for excellent teaching, and federal salary subsidies for teaching in hard to teach locations (Earley & Ross, 2022). Amanda summarized her thoughts on financial incentives with her sentiments:

But a huge factor is we are in the ‘passion’ field and so people do like a passion tax where they pay us less, because we’re passionate about it. But it’s like, that will only go so far until you see there are other options that use your skills and use your passions but treat you better.

Another participant, Rose, discussed the scholarship she received for college tuition in exchange for playing college sports. She said, “I wouldn’t say they’ve had a huge role in my career yet. I am only 26, so it’s not like I have a house payment or anything like that yet.” The remaining 10 participants talked about the lack of compensation for the amount of work, hours, and demand required to be a passionate teacher. Several participants mentioned that the pay is considerably higher in other jobs that do not require a college degree. Marie, Lynette, and Julie each talked about moving to different districts where they knew they would receive a pay increase. For Marie, it was a nearly $12,000 pay increase and Lynette landed a job in one of the highest paying
districts in her area. Julie said she took a pay increase moving to another rural district in Montana.

    For me, personally, it does help a little bit because you have in the back of your mind like I am being compensated for this at least. It gives you the thought that I am able to support my family a little bit like it helps rather than just being completely drained all the time and knowing I could honestly go work at the grocery store with no stress for almost the same amount of money.

Danny also took a pay increase, leaving his rural school to teach in a private school in Montana. He said,

    With inflation, you know, I have a house now and if you are single, I don’t know how you do it. I could barely pay rent and provide food for my golden retriever and me. And you could look at a handful of jobs with the amount of college that you went into to become a teacher, I could drive a Schwann’s truck and make that amount of money, like there’s plenty of things that you can do if you have a college degree without having to teach and put up with the parent feedback, administration feedback, and the constantly being critiqued on how you could perform better.

A lot is expected of teachers without necessarily being compensated for the work. Danielle spoke about her thoughts on this and described her thoughts:

    I think that as teachers, we’re expected to do things and not be paid for them I think that that’s unfortunate, and I always tried to do my best to make sure that I did my work during the school day, and obviously I can’t leave all the emotional and mental stuff behind, but I tried to leave the work behind.
Several teachers, including Danny, Elizabeth, Becky, Kevin, and Susan took on additional work duties and or jobs outside of school in order to compensate for the low wages. These positions included coaching, athletic director, after school program, owning a business, and tutoring.

- What do you dislike about teaching?

Marie said she disliked the political elements of teaching, which included the lack of say and control in what teachers can actually do as teachers, and post-pandemic, having to deal with, “that whole mind set of we have to catch kids up and kids are behind.” Several teachers said there is a lack of trust and respect for teachers and that the public’s perception of teachers has made it difficult to be in the teaching profession. They described an increasing workload and immense amount of paperwork, such as grading papers and filling out report cards, and that “the management of those things is the not-so-fun stuff.”

Susan, Kevin, and Becky talked about their work with special education students and the variety of needs the students had. Becky said she was the only Kindergarten-Fourth grade special education teacher and that this presented several challenges for her. She felt she did not have enough time to prepare for her classes or lessons and mentioned she was in charge of multiple lesson plans for twenty children, all with varying backgrounds and abilities. She had extra duties in preparing and managing schedules for paraprofessionals, and the result was “a lot of chaos and not enough space for everybody.” She felt ill-equipped and undertrained to deal with students, paraprofessionals, and the severity of student behaviors. The biggest struggle for her was that she had multiple students with big behaviors such as:

Throwing chairs, screaming, biting, destroying the classroom, and my college didn’t teach me a lot about that and so I didn’t have any training through the school to help with that. My principal would pop in and see what was happening and then say, oh, I can’t
really help with that, and he’d leave and these students were destroying the classroom.

We’ve been bitten, we’ve been kicked, one kicked me in the stomach, and with no help. She went on to describe incidents where the principal would come in and try to help, but then he would say he couldn’t help and would turn around and walk out of the classroom. These situations made her feel like she had no support from the administration.

Lynette also said student behavior problems were one of the things she disliked most about teaching. She shared that she had received mean parent emails and phone calls. She stated, “I just know that in the future, it’s going to be really hard. I’m afraid the teacher turnover is going to get worse and worse.” Becky said she has also seen teacher turnover getting worse and that she has grown to dislike the tedious aspects of teaching such as grading and standardized testing:

I guess I feel like in the long run, who cares what they got on their fourth-grade standardized test? Do we really need to spend all this time preparing for it, so that our school has scores that make our school look good? Like, nobody is going to care. The only thing I see happen in my class is it stresses my kids out and they are in tears. They are just miserable. I really don’t see any good in it.

Kevin said his physical health suffered as a consequence of the stress he endured while teaching and much of the stress was due to an over reliance on standardized testing, the realization that administration was not appropriate and unqualified, and work environments that were “deteriorating physically and emotionally.” Erin, when talking about working with kids who experienced poverty and trauma, expressed that she “just took too much home worrying about the kids, and I wasn’t able to detach myself from that just because I knew how bad they had it.”
**Sub-question #4.** How does school climate contribute to teachers’ decisions to leave rural schools?

*Interview Questions:*

- Tell me about the school climate at the school (or schools) you chose to leave?

Teachers expressed that their work environment greatly impacted their job satisfaction and their work performance. According to Garcia and Weiss (2019), school climate is challenging and plays a part in the teacher shortage problem. Furthermore, a taxing work environment wears down morale, pushing teachers away from the field (Walker, 2019). All 12 participants described the school climate they chose to leave as “toxic, unhealthy, and not as healthy as it could have been.”

When asked to talk about the school climate at the school she chose to leave, Danielle revealed that when she left, the “climate was extremely toxic. That was the reason why I had to go. I could not be in an environment where we were not allowed to sit at lunch anymore with one another, we were not allowed to collaborate.” Julie also communicated her thoughts about administration changing constantly, “It changed the whole demeanor, morale. It takes a while to build a solid team, so when you change an integral piece to that, how the school is led, the morale, everything, it’s difficult to build a successful environment.”

Danny described his former school climate saying,

I felt like it was a facade, I felt like we were more interested in saying that we did all these things than actually implementing them. And if anyone would say that we’re not doing these things, we would be frowned upon. Honestly, I think over in my other school, they’ve created I want to say a cult, but that’s a little strong.
Julie said she would describe her former school as “toxic” and “very, very negative,” and Rose described her school as “quite negative, and almost like on edge, and people didn’t feel like they were trusted as educators either, like we are all professionals, we didn’t feel trusted in that sense, and we were micromanaged.” The school climate Susan chose to leave wasn’t healthy either and she believed “there was a lot between coworkers. The admin. contributed to it, anytime there was an issue amongst coworkers, nothing was dealt with that specific person.”

Kevin saw his school climate shift throughout his years at his school. It began as a very positive climate, with a great reputation, and by the time he left, the physical conditions of the building were condemned, which ultimately led to an adversarial work environment. When Sara left her school, the environment could be described as very negative, and morale was pretty low. She mentioned there were certain groups that would hang together and try to do things to bring a little bit more joy into the school, but “I think everyone was exhausted from the high expectations and even parent volunteers that would have been coming and helping our classes for a long time could feel the shift. It was just not as welcoming as it has been in the past.” When the school climate and workplace conditions are unfavorable, teachers are more likely to be dissatisfied.

- Describe your relationship with your coworkers.

Participants described their relationship with coworkers as an overall positive experience and a big reason why they have stayed in the teaching profession as long as they have. Teaching teams and the teaching community to give feedback and bounce ideas off each other was a reason Marie enjoyed her career. Lynette said her experience with coworkers was overall positive and that she had good experiences in each of the schools she served in. One of Danny’s favorite parts about teaching was building rapport with fellow coworkers and Danielle agreed
that having connections and relationships with her coworkers “contributed to me loving my job.”

Elizabeth said turnover can impact relationships with coworkers, because the “closeness can dwindle.” Amanda went out of her way to get to know everyone, especially during COVID-19 when she felt isolated. She would invite coworkers to take walks or go to lunch and mentioned feeling that it was helpful to talk to each other and get to know each other: She enjoyed spending time with a special education teacher and said, “We would talk about our days and offer advice or offer resources, and that was pretty much what got me through it. It was amazing, and I had an afternoon para who was also amazing.”

- Describe your experience working with students.

For the participants in the study, working with students was the greatest reward in the teaching profession. Even if there were challenging situations or challenging behaviors with students, they still believed that the passion to work with them and watch them experience growth was worth it. Kevin enjoyed teaching experiential learning and served as a Montessori teacher for part of his career. He also worked in special education in a classroom setting designed for emotionally disturbed students. He enjoyed taking the students on field trips, building relationships with the students and families, and the holistic approach he brought to the classroom. For Becky, the reason she stayed was because of the students, they were:

    The reason I stayed as long as I did and the few coworkers that I really leaned on. I think the kids, 100% the kids, even the tough ones, I was really able to find something good in them and being able to see them grow was really rewarding.

Amanda enjoyed the fun activities her kindergarten class would take part in. She especially enjoyed creative freedom to implement hands-on learning activities and watching them grow not only academically, but socially and emotionally as well.
Sub-question #5. What factors contribute to overall job satisfaction and retention?

Interview Questions:

- As a teacher, what factors or situations have influenced your job satisfaction?

  Respect, trust, communication, and being appreciated were values participants mentioned throughout the course of the interviews. Respect and communication, “all the way from the top,” contributed to job satisfaction for Elizabeth. Collaborating with fellow teachers and building lifelong relationships with students was also a factor that contributed to her satisfaction. Julie said,

  A big thing is trust just like trusting you to do your job, if your classroom is running smoothly and you’re showing results, I feel like you should be trusted to continue on and also maybe being recognized once in a while.

  Susan said her job satisfaction comes from “the attitude of the superintendent and the administration, up higher than the principal, affects that too. Our superintendent doesn’t seem to be very appreciative of his teachers.” She said it was not very often that they would do special things for their teachers. For Danny, job satisfaction is all about “communication, honesty, and trust, those three and passion. When you are on teams that have all of those, you don’t want to go home.”

- What advice would you give to a new teacher entering the profession?

  There was a variety of advice offered for new teachers entering the profession such as get experience subbing prior to having a classroom to yourself, ask for help when needed, and seek out positive influences and help from coworkers and teammates. Participants suggested new teachers work closely with their mentors if they were given a mentor teacher to work with, and they described their mentor relationships as “positive and helpful” in a number of ways. Four
participants said if they were given the opportunity all over again, they would not choose teaching as a career. Becky said,

Honestly, it’s like I love it, but at the same time, if I did it over, I don’t know that I would, just because it’s hard. Make sure you aren’t in it for the money and that you are willing and able to be spread pretty thin, because it’s tough.

Susan vented, “I would say, don’t do it Don’t become a teacher. I think that in general, it is just broken right now. It doesn’t work.” Amanda, who has left the profession, advised,

Don’t feel like you are stuck, get the experience, and if you love it, that’s great, keep going. But if you want to change grades, or change schools, or change jobs, don’t think you are trapped just because the school might desperately need you. If it is not a good fit, you can leave.

Kevin’s advice to new teachers considering the field is to “try to keep it in perspective and balance your personal and professional life.” Danielle thinks subbing was a major help to her as she began her career, “No one ever told me you should go sub a little bit before you go into it, before you get your own classroom, nobody ever did that for me.” Marie said it helped to have someone at work who could help, whether they’re actually giving instruction on how to do something or just a person to bounce ideas off of, “or someone to watch you teach and give feedback, any of those, that is a huge asset to teachers and having someone to vent to and somebody who understands.”

The fifteen interview questions generated data regarding participant’s experiences with teacher turnover. The interview questions help to answer the five Sub-questions in this qualitative study. The meaning units evolved from the summary of the significant statements and subsequent development of emerging themes.
Clustering Meaning Units - Labeling Themes

Moustakas (1994) noted that the clustered and labeled themes create the essential themes of the experience, stating, “From the individual descriptions, general or universal meanings are derived, in other words the essences or structures of the experience” (p. 4). The next step for data analysis occurred through deleting irrelevant, repeated, or overlapping statements. The remaining statements were then considered the horizons or textural meanings. The researcher carefully examined the identified significant statements about teacher turnover and clustered the statements into themes or meaning units (Moustakas, 1994). The following 10 themes emerged from this analysis about how participants experienced teacher turnover in rural elementary schools in Montana (see Appendix J for themes and meaning units). Through a process of reduction and elimination, the researcher extracted the invariant horizons. These were coded and clustered into meaning units from which 10 themes emerged:

A. Student relationships
B. Camaraderie (with coworkers)
C. Health and Safety (mental, physical, emotional)
D. Lack of support and appreciation
E. Toxic school climate
F. Administration changes
G. Low pay
H. Effective communication and trust
I. High demands and stress
J. Lack of teacher choice
There were 10 themes to emerge from this qualitative phenomenological study to investigate factors contributing to teacher turnover in rural Montana elementary schools. Information obtained from a participant demographic form and 12 semi-structured interviews conducted via Zoom were compiled and analyzed to answer the Central Question and five Sub-Questions. The 10 themes emerged from the data reduction and elimination. The final step in the data analysis process was to decide what the data means. The textural and structural descriptions of the experiences are synthesized into a composite description of the phenomenon through the
research process referred to by Moustakas (1994, p. 100) as “intuitive integration.” This description becomes the essence, which captures the meaning ascribed to the experience of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

**Intuitive Integration: The Essence of the Experience**

The final step in the data analysis process was to decide what the data means. Moustakas (1994) described the final stage as creating a combination description that represents the “essence” of the whole groups’ experience (p. 120). The composite description incorporates the textural and structural description in order to depict the themes emerging from the general study and reveal the participants’ experience of teacher turnover (Moustakas, 1994). The textural and structural descriptions of the experiences are synthesized into a composite description of the phenomenon through the research process referred to by Moustakas (1994, p. 100) as “intuitive integration.” This description becomes the essence, which captures the meaning ascribed to the experience of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). In this final step, patterns, themes, similarities and differences, and explanations will be highlighted to capture the essence of the phenomenon.

All 12 Participants experienced the phenomenon of teacher turnover and offered a deeper understanding of what they experienced. Through the data analysis process, the researcher was able to answer the Central question and five Sub-questions.

Central Question: What is the lived experience of teachers who decided to leave a teaching position?

Sub-questions:

SQ1: What are the reasons elementary teachers have for staying in their positions?

SQ2: What are the reasons elementary teachers have for leaving a school or the field altogether?

SQ3: From a teacher’s perspective, what strategies may reduce teacher turnover?
SQ4: How does school climate contribute to teachers’ decisions to leave rural schools?

SQ5: What factors contribute to overall job satisfaction and retention?

The 10 meaning-themes presented below represent the essence of the lived experiences of teacher turnover and retention:

A. Student relationships

B. Camaraderie (with coworkers)

C. Health and Safety (mental, physical, emotional)

D. Lack of support and appreciation

E. Toxic school climate

F. Administration changes

G. Low pay

H. Effective communication and trust

I. High demands and stress

J. Lack of teacher choice

**Meaning Theme 1 - Student Relationships**

“Just seeing the growth in my kids is the greatest joy.” “The biggest satisfaction I get is from the families and the kids.” “Working with students is incredible.” “I really cherish the relationships that I’ve built with the kids.”

The importance of building student relationships and connectedness was apparent among teachers. Participants spoke fondly about their students and the joy they had for getting to know their students, finding ways to connect with them, helping them grow, seeing them learn, getting to know their families, and doing fun activities like field trips and class parties. The attitude of a teacher toward a student is a major influencing factor to the student-teacher relationship and
good rapport is fundamental to a child’s success in school (Coristine et al., 2022). Some of the participants listed students as the only reason they have continued to teach as long as they have. They communicated that any time they doubted wanting to be in the profession, they would think of the students. Children need positive people in their lives and the participants had the confidence in themselves to be that person for them.

**Meaning Theme 2- Camaraderie (with coworkers)**

“My relationship with my coworkers was wonderful.” “We worked very well together.”

“It’s a very healthy relationship.” “I really do enjoy my coworkers.”

Many participants found themselves positively impacted by the collegiality and connection to their coworkers. A number of teachers responded that their coworker relationship was a chance to share similar experiences and develop lasting friendships. The relationships consisted of support, helping each other, collaborating, sharing ideas, seeking advice, venting, offering resources, sharing the workload, and spending time together inside and outside of the school setting. Having strong, communicative teaching teams led to more job satisfaction and also allowed for mentoring and supporting new teachers. Teachers expressed that coworker relationships and healthy interactions with their fellow staff members helped them have a more positive outlook while teaching.

**Meaning Theme 3- Health and Safety (mental, physical, emotional)**

“We should not be medicated for our career.” “I had to evacuate the class on day one.”

“Teachers were assaulted often.” “I had a kid in my class saying he was going to rape girls, in third grade, kill them, and zero consequences.” “Your love of kids can only go so far before you need to provide for a family and your mental health.”
Participants expressed concern with their mental, physical, and emotional suffering due to their experiences as teachers. Teachers repeatedly communicated that their anxiety had increased, and their mental health had plummeted. It is becoming increasingly important for schools to support their teachers by looking at their mental health (Gewertz, 2021). Participants in the study either experienced unsafe situations, mental, physical, and emotional stress themselves, or witnessed their coworkers battling issues with mental illness due to work conditions and/or unsafe scenarios. In one participant’s school, she realized every teacher she talked to was medicated for anxiety. Another participant had three back surgeries due to a stress-related injury from his teaching career, which ultimately led to his decision to leave the field altogether. One participant noted she found it difficult to turn off her brain and her emotions, and she was regularly taking home the mental burden every day. The balance between home and work life was difficult to attain and most participants mentioned they worked in increasingly violent and poverty-stricken rural schools. The result was poorer health. Teachers are being constantly exposed to multiple stressors including violence and other dangerous and unsafe teaching environments (Phoenix, 2017). Participants believed it was important for schools to address mental, physical, and emotional health and wellness. Mental, emotional, and physical health matters are affecting teachers on many levels and contributing to some of the highest turnover rates ever (Gallup, 2014).

Meaning Theme 4- Lack of Support and Appreciation

“One disgruntled phone call from a parent can lead to an investigation.” “I think it’s evidence to show that when you’re not feeling supported or valued, teachers leave all the time.”

Participants were putting in relentless efforts each day in hopes of ensuring student success. One of the main reasons teachers said they had thought about quitting or had quit was
because they did not feel supported or appreciated in their efforts. They mentioned that there isn’t enough support for teachers in general, and when teachers aren’t feeling supported or valued, teachers leave all the time. They felt that being recognized for their efforts once in a while would go a long way, for example, being told, “I know you are doing a good job, I appreciate it.” They expressed that the lack of support came from all angles—administrators, parents, and society in general. One participant openly shared that she thinks the public’s perception of teachers has made it really difficult to teach now. There has been a lot of negative press and negative feelings toward teachers that makes it especially difficult when teachers are trying so hard to make a difference. Society has a negative feeling toward education as a whole and that has been a big shift.

**Meaning Theme 5- Toxic School Climate**

“When I left, the environment at the school was very negative.” “The morale was low.”

“I would describe it as toxic.”

Several participants used the words “toxic, negative, and unhealthy,” to describe their school climate at the school they chose to leave. While many teachers had good working relationships with their coworkers, they believed that the administrator set the tone for the overall health of the school environment. They described their leaders as dictators and micromanagers with an inability to lead in a productive, safe manner. The consequence of poor leadership dripped down to the staff, and the school climate was adversely affected. They also felt like their principal had favorites and that cliques were being formed, which resulted in feelings of resentment and inadequacy. Different rules for different teachers contributed to a toxic atmosphere. Two participants shared that their staff began to feel divided, and it was an atmosphere of “us vs. them,” referring to teachers vs. administrators or teachers vs. other
teachers. At one of their schools, newer teachers began targeting teachers who had taught for 30 years. “The climate among staff was also very negative, like nobody seemed to be enjoying their jobs. It was very cliquey.” One participant specifically mentioned he and his staff were afraid to teach, and it was miserable. “It was a fear of retaliation from the administration.” Not getting support with student behavior problems was another frustration participants shared. One, who worked in a special education setting, had been asking for years to be Mandt trained to work specifically with unsafe, challenging student behaviors. Mandt training is evidence-based training aimed at reducing workplace violence and gives teachers tools to use to work with difficult student interactions. She never received the training and spoke about times when students were destroying the classroom, biting staff, kicking her in the stomach, and no one would help. At one point, the principal “popped his head in and he said oh, I can’t really help with that, and he would leave, he would leave myself and my paras.” Allowing teachers to be abused or physically attacked contributed to her description of her school climate as “toxic.”

**Meaning Theme 6- Administration changes**

“My absolute I can’t do this anymore was because I had a new principal who was incredibly toxic.” “We had a new administrator, and it was not aligning with how I teach. It was a dictatorship and didn’t feel very safe.” “I think the administrator at my previous school was a huge issue. There were a few things that had happened to me that were quite inappropriate, which was one of the reasons I did leave.”

11 of the 12 participants experienced changes in administration during the 2017–2022 time frame. Several of them experienced multiple administrative changes throughout their careers. One participant said she had 10 administrative changes in the last 11 years, one said she had five principals in 10 years, and another participant said she had four changes in her four
years at her school. All 12 participants said administration played a significant role in their decisions to leave. School board members, superintendents, and principals were all mentioned as areas of concern. Most participants found it hard to adjust to new leadership styles, and half of the participants mentioned their principal had dictator characteristics and micromanaging tendencies. One participant said she had never considered leaving the teaching field until she had a terrible experience with an administrator. Now, she has left the teaching field altogether. Administration changing constantly impacted the morale of the building. Administration is an integral part of an effective school system and when an integral part of that continually changes, it is difficult to build a successful environment.

**Meaning Theme 7 - Low Pay**

“People do like a passion tax where they pay us less because we’re passionate about it.”

“Montana is the lowest, 50 out of 50 states, for new hire teacher pay.”

Low pay is a contributing factor for teachers who chose to leave a teaching job. Participants repeatedly shared their disappointment with low pay and not being compensated for their college training or hours on the job. One participant said it is extremely disheartening to know that Montana ranks 50th out of 50 states for new-hire teacher pay. Several others noted they could find work at other places that do not require a degree, such as fast-food restaurants or grocery stores, and the pay would be comparable with less stress. Some had to leave their schools in pursuit of higher paying jobs, so that they could afford to have more kids, pay childcare, and eliminate the high cost for gas due to their commute. One participant shared that he was sometimes working until one in the morning and waking up to begin again at four in the morning, representing that the day in the life of a teacher doesn’t end at the contracted time. After school, many teachers noted how they would attend meetings, professional development
opportunities, confer with other teachers, make parent phone calls, and work well beyond the required contracted hours. When calculating what they are making per hour, participants shared they know they are not being compensated for what they have earned and deserve. The pay is minimal, or bottom of the barrel, and even though they enjoy teaching, they are not being compensated for all the hours it takes. About a third of participants shared they supplemented their income by working additional duties which included the after-school program, offering tutoring services, coaching extra-curricular activities, serving as department head, or on teams such as the school leadership team.

**Meaning Theme 8- Effective Communication and Trust**

“There was no communication and no relationship to be had, and there was no way that the relationship was ever going to grow.” “People didn’t feel like they were trusted as educators, like we are all professionals.”

Effective communication was highly valued by the participants and was a skill necessary for building trust as well. Although teaching is often done in the isolation of a classroom, it also involves consultation with colleagues. Teachers plan lessons together, learn from one another, problem solve different student needs, and share the workload - both physically and mentally. Effective communication between teachers contributed to better coworker relationships, constructive collaboration, and a healthy work environment. Several noted the need for communication, especially from their administrators. They provided examples of times where communication was poor, and the result was damaged relationships and lack of trust. Common modalities of communication included emails, in person at staff meetings, or addressing issues verbally or in writing. Some felt as though their superiors used abusive body language and tone and failed to communicate in a caring manner. Several participants noted that their trust for their
administrator had been damaged or broken, due to experiences with ineffective communication. By building an effective communication channel between students and teachers, teachers and parents, and teachers and administrators, trust can be established.

**Meaning Theme 9- High Demands and Stress**

“I cannot physically, mentally, and emotionally be here anymore.” The demands are so high, and you don’t have the time or resources to meet the needs.” “The demand for teachers is high and they are very stressed out. They’re working really hard, because they love the kids, and the pay isn’t equal to what they’re doing and the services they are providing.”

Teaching is a demanding profession. Many of the participants were unaware and did not fully understand the demands of the job until they began their careers and had their own classrooms. For half the participants, they had wanted to be teachers since they were children and would consider themselves naive to what the day-to-day job would actually entail. They expressed their plates already seem too full, yet tasks and responsibilities continue to be added, with nothing being taken away. There is a great amount of work that goes on beyond the physical act of teaching, such as data collection and paperwork, parent teacher conferences, grading papers, curriculum teams, lesson plans, dealing with disgruntled parents, politics, and increasingly violent student behaviors. The result is a very high-stress environment. Participants expressed frustration with the fact that sick days or personal days weren’t always an option. One participant was denied paternity leave, and another was not allowed to use a personal day to celebrate her birthday. Another said it is more challenging to write sub plans and prepare for her absence, so not using sick or personal days seemed like a better option. Another took a job in another district, partly because it offered more paid leave time. All 12 participants performed work tasks well beyond the scheduled workday and found that they were not only taking
physical work home such as grading papers and tracking student progress but were taking home an emotional and mental burden for their students’ and their well-being as well. One participant knew she was overworked, because she no longer looked forward to going to the school anymore. It all added up to be a lot of pressure on the teacher’s shoulders, and she began searching for another place to work.

**Meaning Theme 10- Lack of Teacher Choice**

“The little things I might have control over, they would dissect so minutely.” “Not allowing teachers to have the freedom to teach how they know is best.” “A really big dislike of mine currently is the emphasis on assessment.

Common with the experience of teacher turnover, was lack of teacher choice in academic decisions and overreliance and emphasis on standardized tests. Teachers felt like their day was planned for them, and the focus was on the wrong direction. Participants said they couldn’t teach how they wanted to teach, and their creative freedom was taken from them. One participant said her teaching practices were being micromanaged, and it was getting worse. She didn’t feel trusted as a professional to do her job. Participants shared that their work expectations were being dictated to them, they were not allowed to have freedom to teach how they knew best, and students were not being put first. It was a very rigid way of teaching, and teachers were being told exactly what to write on their whiteboards and what to say. One felt as though teachers were being watched like a hawk. Teachers were increasingly limited in what they could do and their ability to capitalize on their individual strengths as teachers was not permitted.

**Summary of Results**

There were 10 meaning themes which represented teachers’ experiences of turnover and retention and evolved from the collection of data: (A) Student relationships; (B) Camaraderie
(with coworkers); (C) Health and safety (mental, physical, emotional); (D) Lack of support and appreciation; (E) Toxic school climate; (F) Administration changes; (G) Low pay; (H) Effective communication and trust; (I) High demands and stress; (J) Lack of teacher choice.

The description of teacher turnover among rural Montana teachers was captured, creating an essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). A summary of the results was provided, and all of the themes have the potential to influence teacher turnover and retention. The meaning themes could be viewed as contributing factors to the teacher's decision to leave their job or as opportunities to improve conditions and impact teacher retention. For some participants, themes such as effective communication and trust are traits that lead to greater teacher retention and job satisfaction, whereas ineffective communication and lack of trust contribute to their frustration and choice to leave.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to investigate factors contributing to teacher turnover in rural Montana elementary schools. Purposeful sampling, criterion sampling, and snowball sampling were used to recruit volunteer participants for the study. The study participants consisted of 12 elementary school teachers who had made a choice to leave a rural school within the 2017–2022-time frame. Creswell (2013) recommended that a sample size of five to 15 participants is sufficient for a qualitative phenomenological study, therefore the 12-participant sample size for this study was appropriate. Saturation of the data was also reached. In order to reach saturation, the sample size was diverse enough to include experiences that satisfied the data to be analyzed and coded (Moustakas, 1994). Information obtained from a demographic form and 12 semi-structured Zoom interviews were compiled and analyzed to answer the central question and five sub-questions. The findings from the study may
provide information that can be used to help reduce teacher turnover in rural schools. The data analysis process generated 10 themes critical to the research questions, specifically: (A) Student relationships; (B) Camaraderie (with coworkers); (C) Health and safety (mental, physical, emotional); (D) Lack of support and appreciation; (E) Toxic school climate; (F) Administration changes; (G) Low pay; (H) Effective communication and trust; (I) High demands and stress; (J) Lack of teacher choice.

In the concluding chapter of this study, Chapter Five, the findings, and conclusions from this research study are presented. The findings are further explored through the exploration of the central research question: What is the lived experience of teachers who decided to leave a teaching position? The findings are beneficial to teachers, administrators, leaders in education reform, and policymakers. The chapter and study conclude with recommendations and implications for practitioners and future studies.
Chapter Five: Findings, Conclusions, Implications, Recommendations

Chapter Five summarizes the findings from Chapter Four and presents the conclusion of the study. This chapter’s summary presents a holistic view of the study and revisits the purpose of the study. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of teachers who decided to leave a teaching position. A phenomenological approach was used to understand teacher turnover and retention of 12 elementary teachers who decided to leave a teaching position in a rural setting between 2017 and 2022.

Prior to conducting interviews and the research study, I set aside any prejudgments, through the process of epoche, or bracketing, as much as possible and followed systematic steps for analyzing the data. Using a journal to bracket past experiences, I noted that I had chosen to leave a job within the stated time from (2017-2022). I then wrote out a detailed list of factors that contributed to my decision to leave. My main reasons were due to the 20–30-minute commute each way, the school I was working at was not in the community I lived in or in the district my children attended, and the fact that the position was only a part-time position, and I preferred full-time employment. The pay difference for part-time work, compared to full-time work, was significantly higher. I also recognized that the district I chose to leave had a high turnover rate, especially with new hires.

After detailing my own experiences with teacher turnover, I went through the interview transcriptions and highlighted significant statements, sentences, or quotes that provided an understanding of how the 12 participants experienced the phenomenon of teacher turnover (Moustakas, 1994). The significant statements provided a range of perspectives about their experience of teacher turnover. The next step involved deleting irrelevant statements and
statements that were repeated or overlapping. The remaining statements were the horizons or
textural meanings (Moustakas, 1994).

I carefully examined the identified significant statements, then clustered the statements
into themes or meaning units (Moustakas, 1994). Codes or labels were used to assign meaning to
the data. This helped me to identify new and emerging themes from each participant. The coding
tied together observations and statements and allowed for patterns and themes to emerge. I also
labeled chunks of data that were relevant to answering the research questions. There were 10
themes to emerge which were: student relationships, camaraderie (with coworkers), health and
safety (mental, physical, emotional), lack of support and appreciation, toxic school climate,
administration changes, low pay, effective communication and trust, high demands and stress,
and lack of teacher choice.

In the final step of data analysis, textual and structural descriptions of the experiences
were synthesized into a composite description of the phenomenon and this description became
the essence. Transcendental phenomenology based on Moustakas (1994) provided a systematic
approach to analyzing data about teachers’ lived experiences and allowed me to develop an
objective “essence” through clustering subjective experiences of the 12 participants.

Findings

The review of the literature provided the context to support the central question: What are
the lived experiences of teachers who decided to leave a teaching position? From this question,
the review of the literature categorized the factors leading to turnover or retention of teachers.
The two categories helped establish the specific areas for exploration of the study. The interview
questions and demographic forms were used to gather data to answer the central question. There
were 10 themes that evolved:
Table 3

*Teacher turnover and retention themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turnover</th>
<th>Retention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health and Safety</td>
<td>Student Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Support and Appreciation</td>
<td>Camaraderie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toxic School Climate</td>
<td>Communication and Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration Changes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Pay</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Demands and Stress</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Teacher Choice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the following section, each sub-question is offered along with the findings. Five sub-questions helped answer the central question. Each sub-question is stated and fully explored.

**Sub-questions answered from the results of the analyses in Chapter Four.**

**SQ1: What are the reasons elementary teachers have for staying in their positions?**

The most common reason elementary teachers had for staying in their positions was the students. Teachers frequently mentioned building relationships, making connections, and seeing student growth and progress as their primary reasons for staying. Many of the teachers participating in the study indicated that they still stay connected with students they had several years ago and that students have reached out to them as adults to ask for advice, talk about their career aspirations, and share personal stories. Teachers didn’t expect to form lifelong relationships and found this to be one of the greatest rewards. Through their relationships with the students, they also built positive relationships with the students’ families.
Another common reason teachers gave for staying in their positions was coworker camaraderie and working with people who share a common goal. They enjoyed working with their teaching team, the teaching community in general, and developing friendships. Many of the participants expressed the importance of bouncing ideas off each other, sharing resources, venting, giving, and receiving feedback, getting to know each other, and working with people who are striving to make each other better teachers.

SQ2: What are the reasons elementary teachers have for leaving a school or the field altogether?

Several reasons elementary teachers had for leaving their school or the field altogether were discovered in the study. The most common reason for leaving a school or the field altogether, according to the literature review, was job dissatisfaction. Work conditions such as administrative leadership and lack of support, teacher autonomy in the classroom, student behavior, and lack of parent support are directly associated with job satisfaction of teachers (Garcia & Weiss, 2019) and each of these factors showed stronger correlations with job satisfaction than salary and benefits according to the literature (Baker, Perie, & Whitener, 1997). Many of these same reasons were offered by participants in this study, with specific examples provided to explain their reasons for job dissatisfaction. The six most frequently stated are listed below, each with a detailed description.

The most common reason participants in the study offered for their choice to leave a school or the field was administration. Several said the administration was the main reason they decided to leave and find different work. 11 of the 12 participants noted there were several administration changes during their time at the school they chose to leave, which led to other issues such as lack of consistency, differences in educational values, not being treated fairly,
dictator-like professional relationships, micromanaging leadership styles, lack of support, and a toxic school climate. Participants also said that unqualified principals and principals with little experience contributed to their decision.

Low pay was a reason most participants gave for leaving their school or their profession. Many talked about their frustrations with inadequate compensation for the number of hours they worked, the immense workload, college degree necessary to be certified, and explained that Montana specifically had the lowest pay for new hires in the United States. Several teachers left their school to move to other districts that offered higher pay, which some said would also allow them to have more opportunities, have more children, pay for childcare, and cut down on the commute time and save money.

Lack of teacher choice over academic decisions and an overreliance on standardized tests were also reasons many teachers had for leaving their positions. Participants said they felt like their freedom and creativity was stifled and everything was being decided for them. They were losing the ability to teach how they wanted to teach and felt like they were not being trusted as professionals to do the job they knew how to do. There is also a big emphasis placed on standardized testing and teachers are feeling the pressure to “catch kids up” after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another reason for teacher turnover was lack of support and appreciation. Participants felt like teaching had become a thankless job, with not a lot of support from administrators, the school board, parents, and society in general. They spoke mostly about the lack of support from administrators, especially in situations where they felt unsafe or attacked by students or parents. Participants shared several examples of when students’ behavior was escalating, to the point of the teacher being physically injured, and not having the support or specific training to deal with
such magnitude of behaviors. When parents expressed frustration or concerns to administration, teachers felt that administrators did not support them in ways they needed support, and that the administration would side with parents before having all the information necessary to make an informed decision. Many participants have seen a shift in the public’s perception of teachers and toward the education system as a whole, which has made it difficult for them to teach now. Examples include negative press, negative perceptions, and negative attitudes toward teachers, which makes it discouraging for them when they are trying to make a difference in students’ lives.

Several participants mentioned their mental, physical, and emotional health and wellbeing was suffering, and they began having thoughts about wanting to leave. They found teaching to be a job that was difficult to “turn off” when the workday was over. The home/work life balance and creating personal and professional boundaries were hard to create. One participant suffered from physical injury, several participants noted anxiety was increasing, and others spoke of the negative impact on their overall health and well-being. An increase in student behavior problems and violence in the school setting harmed teachers not only physically, but emotionally and mentally as well. This contributed to teachers feeling unsafe in their job.

The importance of safety in schools was mentioned by nearly all participants, and it is worth noting that safety was viewed as an internal threat by teachers in this study. Teachers shared detailed descriptions of situations that resulted in fear of their own students. These situations included aggressive acts and student violence toward staff as well as toward fellow students. These acts of violence included threats, physical altercations, bodily injury, and other crises that resulted in regular police presence on campus. Participants also worried about their students’ safety, well-being, and general welfare. Teachers in the study spoke about increases of
intense misbehavior, which resulted in broken bones and damaged property and expressed that they did not feel adequately prepared or trained to deal with such magnitude of unsafe disruptions. Severe behavior issues among students, coupled with the lack of support from administration, parents, and society in general toward education, resulted in a general sense of unsafety for educators.

Increased expectations, demand, and workload emerged as reasons for choosing to leave a teaching position. All participants agreed that teaching is a high demand job with an enormous number of responsibilities that leads to feelings of stress and pressure. The result of prolonged stress that occurs when someone has reached a physically and mentally exhausted state in his or her professional life is commonly referred to as burnout (Pickering, 2008). Many teachers expressed feeling like there was not enough time or energy to keep up with the variety of tasks required to be a teacher, including working with students from poverty, managing high IEP and 504 caseloads, preparing lesson plans, collecting data, and tracking progress, parent teacher conferences, and working with a high number of students requiring special accommodations.

All 12 participants chose to leave a teaching position in a rural Montana community, which presented unique challenges. Some of the challenges participants mentioned included long distances that participants had to travel to work in dangerous conditions like icy roads, lower salaries than in more populated and larger communities, sparse populations and feeling isolated, lack of resources such as health care facilities or daycares, and limited job opportunities for spouses. Participants described these characteristics of rural communities as contributing factors in their decision to leave their teaching job.

SQ3: From a teacher’s perspective, what strategies may reduce teacher turnover?
Teachers provided several strategies they believed could reduce teacher turnover. These included mentoring programs, more resources for behavior management, professional development opportunities, competitive salaries, opportunities to substitute teach prior to having a classroom of your own and obtaining qualified and supportive administrators.

Participants in the study spoke about their participation in mentoring programs during their first year or two of becoming teachers. When asked to describe their experiences with coworkers, some of the participants noted how their relationship with their mentor was positive and helpful. They reported that they found the mentor program to be a huge help acclimating them to the teaching world. Some relied on their mentors for more than instructional advice or classroom management strategies, and appreciated having someone to go to with simple, day-to-day questions they might not otherwise be able to answer. Providing new teachers with mentoring can be an effective strategy to retain teachers (Woods, 2016), as they provide teachers with tools and skills needed to begin their career. They also allow teachers to adjust to the procedures of a school system and to receive support.

Some of the participants expressed concern over witnessing an increase in violent and unsafe student behaviors and that they felt limited on what they could do to deal with such behaviors. They conveyed they feel ill-equipped for managing situations such as lockdowns, what to do when a student “blows out in class,” and other aggressive scenarios like biting, hitting, kicking, and throwing objects. Participants shared that they see it getting progressively worse and one participant even noted that there was daily police presence at her school. An idea one special education teacher suggested was Mandt training, which is a research-based program that aims to reduce and prevent workplace violence (The Mandt System, 2022). It is important
for both staff to feel safe at school, as a safe and healthy workplace not only protects workers from injury and illness, but it can increase productivity and reduce turnover (Safety Pays, 2013).

Many of the participants expressed the importance of different types of professional development opportunities. Participants had varying backgrounds of teacher preparation programs, but in general, did not feel like their college education prepared them for “real life” teaching. Some explained that the opportunities offered through different professional development would provide them with a chance to learn different skills and glean advice from other experienced educators while engaging in professional development.

As noted above, teachers expressed concern over not being compensated for their time, efforts, and college training necessary to become a teacher. Earning higher wages was a reason teachers had for staying in their positions. Some of the participants had also chosen to leave their jobs knowing they could find work in other schools, or careers, for higher wages and less stress. A couple of the participants moved on to other districts that offered significantly higher pay; one participant in particular took a $12,000 pay increase at her new school.

Opportunities to spend time in the classroom as a substitute teacher was a strategy many participants used to gain teaching experience. They appreciated being able to lead a classroom on their own and practice different classroom management techniques and instructional strategies. Two of the participants mentioned subbing for two years prior to teaching and that the opportunity was helpful in their teaching career. Subbing was an idea teachers had to reduce teacher turnover.

Having qualified, supportive, and appreciative principals was noted as a reason participants had for staying in their positions. Participants believed that having administrative support made a difference in the confidence they had in themselves as teachers. When principals
were present in the classroom and in the building, gave positive and appreciative feedback, worked together, and collaborated to create behavior plans, and communicated effectively, the result was a healthier work environment where teachers “could stay forever.”

**SQ4: How does school climate contribute to teachers’ decisions to leave rural schools?**

The environment in which a person works has a large impact on not only job satisfaction, but also on the ability to do the job well and maintain the desire to continue working in the job and the profession (Garcia & Weiss). Teachers are a big part of their workplace climate and information from the literature review suggested a correlation between tough climates and teacher turnover (Kiley, 2016). The results of this study revealed that this is true for the participants as well. School climate consistently appeared as a contributing factor to participants’ decisions to leave rural schools.

When asked to describe the school climate at the school they chose to leave, the most common word used was toxic. Some examples of participant statements were: “Oh, toxic!” “When I left, the school climate was extremely toxic.” “I would describe it as toxic.” Most of the participants spoke about how the adults in the building contributed to an overall negative and unhealthy atmosphere. One participant shared that her school climate was extremely toxic and was the reason she “had to go.” She found herself needing to leave the building every day because the heaviness of the building felt so unhealthy. Another participant said that his school climate was also toxic and that staff in his school were afraid to teach, due to fear of retaliation from the principal. Other words used to describe the school climate were negative and unhealthy. Participants described their work environment as unhealthy in general, with low morale setting the tone of the building. They also provided examples of situations that felt unsafe or inappropriate. One had a principal who had asked her personal questions about her dating life
and another had a principal who was taken to court over sexually inappropriate conduct. Another participant shared examples of her superintendent having poor personal and professional boundaries.

Several other examples illustrate how a toxic school climate also impacts mental health and job satisfaction. Two participants said that the climate was progressively getting worse every year and that the interactions between staff, as well as staff and students, was negative. One shared that she would overhear staff talking about other staff in the break room as well as staff talking negatively about students. The other said it began to seem as though, “no one was enjoying their job.” Cliques were forming and an us vs. them mentality had developed, whether it was administration vs. staff, or staff vs. other staff.

The literature review also noted that school safety impacts school climate (Currey et al., 2022). School safety matters encompass both physical and emotional safety. Some of the teachers in this study described feeling unsafe in their classrooms and in the building and described the work conditions as “chaos.” One participant shared, I cannot physically, mentally, and emotionally, I cannot be here anymore. This anxiety is keeping me up at night, and I could not handle the work environment any longer, and that was the tipping point for me.” There was an increase in police presence due to dangerous and threatening student behavior. Teachers who quit their jobs have higher rates of negative school climate indicators (Walker, 2019), and school climate contributed to rural teachers leaving their Montana elementary schools.

**SQ5: What factors contribute to overall job satisfaction and retention?**

The factors that contribute to overall job satisfaction and retention easily overlap with the reasons teachers have for staying in their positions. Sub-question one included further explorations into two of the most prominent reasons teachers gave for being satisfied with their
job and staying in their positions: student relationships and coworker camaraderie. Participants also listed passion, effective communication, trust, and a good atmosphere as contributing factors.

Participants frequently mentioned having a “passion” for the career and for making a difference in the lives of their students. One participant said he sees each kid as an opportunity to get them to believe in education and to believe that people are kind. For him, the most satisfying aspect was knowing he could provide a safe environment for kids to learn and for people to trust him. Another participant said that knowing she was affecting the kids and making a difference was enough for her to stay in the classroom. She described this as, “the most joyful thing that really brought me the most happiness was the connection.”

The way participants communicate effectively with each other contributed to a healthy environment, one where participants felt like they could “stay all day and never go home.” They enjoyed building respectful, communicative, cohesive, and supportive teams. Overall, it made work an awesome, healthy, and fun place to be for the teachers. When staff are positive with one another, the overall morale is improved and keeps people “satisfied in the job.” Having support from multiple stakeholders, paraprofessionals, parents, partner teachers, and administrators, motivated participants to keep teaching.

Both intrinsic job factors and extrinsic job factors lead to participants being satisfied with their teaching positions. Intrinsic job elements they described were the work itself, the teaching part of teaching and watching kids grow and learn and being recognized and appreciated for their efforts. Extrinsic job elements included building cohesive and supportive relationships with work workers and the work conditions like a positive team morale.

Central Question answered from the analyses of the sub-questions
What is the lived experience of teachers who decided to leave a teaching position?

The 12 participants in this study had a variety of experiences with teacher turnover and their decisions to leave a teaching position. There were many similarities among participants, which was surprising considering their varying backgrounds and demographics. The most common reasons teachers provided as contributing factors of their decisions to leave were due to concerns about administration and leadership, lack of support and appreciation from administrators, parents, and society in general, low pay, especially in comparison to other states and other jobs requiring similar college training, a toxic school climate, health and safety matters, an increase in workload and stress, and lack of teacher voice in academic decision making.

Mental health was an unexpected theme to emerge. Participants described their mental health as suffering and gave many examples of what contributed to this. The participants in the study felt overwhelmed by the around-the-clock mental and emotional demands of the teaching profession and expressed the need to make a change because of the toll the mental health suffering had taken on them. One participant mentioned taking medication to cope with her increase in anxiety upon becoming an elementary school teacher.

Conclusions

A teacher shortage in the nation’s K-12 schools has become a growing concern (Baitlinger, 2021; Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Natansan, 2022). Increased attention has been called to this problem, as teachers are leaving the classroom in pursuit of other opportunities or leaving the field altogether (Walker, 2022a). This study adds a greater understanding about how and why teachers are leaving their positions at such alarming rates, particularly in rural Montana elementary schools. The study revealed contributing factors of teacher turnover which include
concerns about administration and leadership, lack of support and appreciation from administrators, parents, and society in general, low pay, especially in comparison to other states and other jobs requiring similar college training, a toxic school climate, health and safety matters, an increase in workload and stress, and lack of teacher voice in academic decision making. Contributing factors of teacher retention were described by participants as the opportunity to build student relationships and lifelong connections, camaraderie among coworkers, and effective communication and trust.

Implications

The following section provides the implications from this study. The findings of this study have generated some significant implications. These implications are divided and outlined into two sections: (a) “Implications for the field of education” and b) “Implications for school leaders.” The implications derive from the 10 meaning themes discovered during the study. Table 4 lists the meaning themes and their associated implications.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning Theme</th>
<th>Implications For</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Student relationships</td>
<td>Field of education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Camaraderie (with coworkers)</td>
<td>Field of education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Health and safety</td>
<td>Field of education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Lack of support and appreciation</td>
<td>School leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Toxic school climate</td>
<td>School leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Administration</td>
<td>School leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Low pay</td>
<td>Field of education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Effective communication and trust</td>
<td>Field of education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. High demands and stress</td>
<td>School leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Lack of teacher choice</td>
<td>Field of education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Implications for the field of education.**

The study revealed six implications from the meaning themes that are noteworthy to potential teachers as well as teachers currently working in the field of education. The implications include student relationships, camaraderie, health and safety, low pay, effective communication and trust, and lack of teacher choice. Teachers in the study say they have stayed in the field or in a position because of the students and the relationships and connections they build with students and families. They also enjoy the camaraderie with coworkers and developing friendships with them. Having effective communication leads to higher levels of job satisfaction and a feeling of increased trust with coworkers, administrators, and parents.
The investment of mental, physical, and emotional energy is important and potential teachers need to consider their own reasons for pursuing a teaching career. The results of the study showed that teachers’ health and well-being was suffering, due to the challenge of maintaining a healthy work/home-life balance. The demands of the job do not necessarily end at the contracted time and many participants expressed that they were taking work home on a daily basis, physically and emotionally. They also explained that student behavior issues are becoming more aggressive and unsafe, and teachers have requested specialized training and support to better work with these students in particular.

Teachers in the study also described that the compensation for their college training and hours worked is not equal to other careers with similar training requirements. This is an important implication for potential teachers to understand, as low salaries are correlated with job dissatisfaction and higher rates of turnover (DiSchiano, 2017). Participants also expressed concern over having a lack of say in academic decision making and an overreliance on standardized testing. Teachers in the field convey they are growing increasingly frustrated with state tests and not being trusted as professionals to teach how they think is best for their students.

**Implications for school leaders.**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of teachers who chose to leave a teaching position. Many of the participants in the study explained that their principal played a big role in their decision to leave their school. School leaders play a pivotal role in staff retention, turnover, and school climate. Effective leaders are the cornerstone for successful teaching and student learning. There were four implications derived from the meaning themes that are important for potential or current school leaders to consider. These are lack of support and appreciation, toxic school climate, administration, and high demands and stress.
Recommendations for school leaders.

- Establish an emphasis on school safety. When there is an emphasis on school safety, research suggests there is also a positive school climate which impacts a) academic learning, (b) effective discipline policies, (c) respect for others in school, and (d) involvement of the family and community in the students’ lives (Curry et al., 2022).

- Build a mentoring program. Mentoring programs have been shown to improve teacher retention, and when new teachers are inadequately supported or underprepared, they are more likely to leave the field within the first five years of teaching (Woods, 2016). Participants in the study reported positive feelings and associations with being a part of a mentor relationship and said it made an impactful difference in their careers.

- Promote, establish, and maintain a positive and healthy school climate. A leader’s support has been shown to be a factor in shaping a school’s climate (Garcia & Weiss, 2019) and there is less teacher turnover in schools that are characterized by a safe and orderly learning environment.

- Provide opportunities for professional development. A school is more likely to keep its successful teachers if it is led by an administrator who promotes professional development for teachers (Kiley, 2016).

- Offer support and appreciation for staff by developing collaborative and trusting relationships. Principals who can establish supportive and trusting relationships with staff are more likely to keep their teachers (Sawchuk, 2020). Support can be given in a variety of ways such as support with curriculum and instruction or emotional and personal support.
• Continually model effective communication and collaboration. A principal’s leadership style has an impact on teacher turnover; authoritative, top-down leaders tend to cultivate higher rates of teacher turnover (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). Leaders can keep this in mind and strive to be facilitators, collaborators, and team leaders which leads to better teamwork among teachers and a sense of community. Teachers who work for this type of leader also believe they have more support, a voice in decision making, and that their professional input is valuable.

Principals had a significant role in the lived experiences of teachers who chose to leave a teaching position. Decades of research also acknowledges the crucial role that effective principals have in cultivating a strong and sustainable teacher workforce. In fact, teachers often identify the quality of administrative support as more important in their decisions to stay or leave, more so than salaries, workload, or lack of autonomy (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). In the case of school leadership, high turnover rates result in a negative school climate, which in turn also has a negative effect on student achievement (Lathan, 2022). On the other hand, effective and committed principals who remain in their schools are associated with improved schoolwide student achievement. The effect of principal turnover suggests that principals need time to make meaningful improvement in their schools (Donley et al., 2020). Principals also need opportunities for professional development and licensure pathways that prepare and equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary to support effective teaching and to lead across a diverse range of responsibilities. With this, principals will be more skilled to foster school environments in which adults and students thrive.

Recommendations for Future Research
In answering the central question about the lived experience of teachers who decided to leave a teaching job, a number of other questions have emerged that warrant further study. It is hoped that other researchers will use the conclusions from this study as a starting point to gain deeper insights and understanding of teacher turnover. The recommendations for future research provide closure to the section. Some specific areas that emerged from this study and require further research are:

- Examine the relationship between teacher preparation programs, practicum, internship, field experience, and teacher turnover.
- Research the importance of principal preparation programs and the impact on teacher turnover.
- Examine the relationship between principal turnover and teacher turnover.
- Study the role of district administration in teacher turnover and retention.
- Research and examine the impact of leadership style on teacher turnover.
- Investigate the impact of technology on teacher turnover and retention.
- Conduct research that focuses solely on the impacts of COVID-19 on teacher turnover.
- Conduct a quantitative study on the relationship between school climate and teacher turnover to support and strengthen the results of this study.
- Examine how elementary teacher turnover compares to middle and high school levels.

Summary

The aim of this study was to explore and examine the lived experiences of rural elementary school teachers who decided to leave a teaching job between 2017 and 2022. The results of this phenomenological study contribute to the body of knowledge of teacher turnover and retention. Research shows that school districts throughout the nation are grappling
to fill, and to keep, their classrooms operating with qualified teachers, and approximately 500,000 teachers in the United States are leaving their schools each year (Balow, 2021). Teacher shortages have become a well-documented problem, but many in the education community continue to characterize the shortages as one, nonspecific, national crisis (Natanson, 2022). Because of this, broad solutions are proposed to address the shortages, and they do not target the specific needs of states, districts, and schools. This study paid particular attention to Montana rural elementary schools and narrowed the focus to help optimize ways to keep qualified educators in their positions, specifically in rural, under-resourced Montana communities.

This phenomenology study described the lived experience and meaning of teacher turnover of 12 participants. The researcher looked at what personal and professional characteristics led to teachers either leaving or staying in their position. The study has shown that contributing factors of teacher turnover are health and safety (mental, physical, emotional), lack of support and appreciation from administration, parents, and society in general, a toxic school climate, administrative changes, low pay, high demands and stress, and lack of teacher choice in academic decision making. There were also themes revealed as contributing factors of teacher retention and these are student relationships, camaraderie with coworkers, and effective communication and trust. The results of this study will help the field of education and leaders to better understand the successful practices that keep teachers satisfied in their jobs and less likely to leave the school or the field altogether.
References


Effects of workplace conditions, background characteristics, and teacher compensation.

*National Center for Education Statistics.*


Barnum, M. (2018, January 9). In many large school districts, hundreds of teaching positions were unfilled as the school year began. Chalkbeat.


Carlisle, G. (2022). Teachers can positively impact education policy, we just have to use our teacher voice. Voices of Change.


Policy Analysis Archives 11(23).


Education in a Pandemic: The Disparate Impacts of COVID-19 on American Students.


Hong, J., & Yee, E. (2022). Low income students are more likely to be in classrooms with underqualified teachers. *CalMatters*.


*OECD Publishing.* [http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264130852-en](http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264130852-en)


[https://journalistsresource.org/education/minority-teachers-studentssame-race-research/](https://journalistsresource.org/education/minority-teachers-studentssame-race-research/)

Peterson, K. (2002). A school’s culture is always at work, either helping or hindering adult learning. Here’s how to see it, assess it, and change it for the better. *National Staff Development Council.* [https://www.nesacenter.org/uploaded/conferences/FLC/2014/handouts/Kent_Peterson/KP_JSD_Pos_Neg_Cult_copy.pdf](https://www.nesacenter.org/uploaded/conferences/FLC/2014/handouts/Kent_Peterson/KP_JSD_Pos_Neg_Cult_copy.pdf)


APPENDIX A

Screening Letter to Potential Participants
To be sent from the school principal

November 6, 2022

To whom it may concern,

My name is Brittany Katzer, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program at The University of Montana in Missoula, Montana. For my dissertation, I am conducting a qualitative study on the lived experience of teacher turnover in rural Montana Elementary Schools.

I am proposing to conduct research on the phenomenon of teacher turnover and retention. I am looking for volunteers to participate in a phenomenology study who have experience with teacher turnover. Once the participants are selected, they will be asked to complete a 1-hour Zoom interview. The interviews will be held within the next four weeks. The questions will focus on the lived experiences of choosing to leave a teaching position or the profession all together. I am also requesting a demographic form and questionnaire to be filled out.

To participate, you must meet the following inclusion criteria:

1. Participants must be, or have been, teachers in rural Montana.

2. Participants must be Elementary school teachers.

3. Participants must have chosen to leave a teaching position.

4. The participant must have worked between 2017 and 2022.

Confidentiality of information can be a concern in any study such as this. Information from this study identifying the participants will be kept confidential at all times. There are two governing bodies to ensure this confidentiality: my doctoral dissertation committee and the Institutional Review Board of The University of Montana. Before publishing the findings, I will provide you with the opportunity to review the conclusions to verify that the interpretations are consistent with your intent. At the conclusion of the study, I will be happy to provide you with a brief summary of my findings.

I would appreciate a response within five business days of your receipt of this email. That response can be by email. If I have not heard from you within five days, I will follow up with an e-mail to answer any questions you may have and to ask again about the possibility of conducting an interview with you.

Sincerely,
Brittany Katzer

Doctorate Candidate, Educational Leadership
University of Montana
Missoula, MT 59801
katzerb@libbyschools.org
509-863-5353
APPENDIX B

Letter to potential participant

November 6, 2022

Dear Participants:

My name is Brittany Katzer, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program at The University of Montana in Missoula, Montana. Recently, you replied to an email query from your school principal that you would be willing to participate in a research study for my dissertation. This study is a qualitative study of the lived experience of teacher turnover in rural Montana elementary schools.

I am proposing to conduct an approximately one-hour Zoom interview with you. The interviews will be conducted within the next four weeks. I will meet with you at your desired time to minimize the inconvenience to you. The questions will focus on your experiences with teacher turnover. I will also ask that you fill out a demographic questionnaire.

Confidentiality of information can be a concern in any study such as this. Information from this study identifying the participants will be confidential at all times. There are two governing bodies to ensure this confidentiality: my doctoral dissertation committee and the Institutional Review Board of The University of Montana. Before publishing the findings, I will provide you with the opportunity to review the conclusions to verify that the interpretations are consistent with your intent. At the conclusion of the study, I will be happy to provide you with a brief summary of my findings.

I would appreciate a response within five business days of your receipt of this email. That response can be by email. If I have not heard from you within five days, I will follow up with an e-mail to answer any questions you may have and to ask again about the possibility of conducting an interview with you.

Sincerely,

Brittany Katzer

Doctorate Candidate, Educational Leadership
The University of Montana
Missoula, MT 59801
katzerb@libbyschools.org
509-863-5353
APPENDIX C

Participant Information and Informed Consent

**Study Title:** TEACHER TURNOVER AND RETENTION
A Phenomenology of Elementary Teachers Lived Experiences in Rural Montana

**Project Director:** Brittany Katzer, katzerb@libbyschools.org
University of Montana Department of Educational Leadership (EDLD)
32 Campus Drive Missoula, MT 59812
Dissertation Chair- Dr. John Matt
E-mail: John.Matt@mso.umt.edu

**Special Instructions to the Participant:**

This consent form may contain words that are new to you. If you read any words that are not clear to you, please ask the person who gave you this form to explain them to you.

**Purpose:**

- You are being asked to take part in a research study examining contributing factors to teacher turnover and retention. You have been chosen because you are, or have been, an educator between the 2017 and 2022 school years.
- The purpose of this research study is to learn more about what is contributing to high rates of teacher turnover and teacher shortages in rural Montana elementary schools.

**Procedures:**

- If you agree to be a participant in this study, you will be asked to engage in an approximately one hour Zoom interview with researcher Brittany Katzer.
- You will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire, which will take about 15 minutes to complete.
- You will be asked a variety of questions detailing your career and experiences as a teacher. A detailed analysis will be done of the data provided through your interviews.
- You will need to sign this consent form in order to participate in the study.
- The interview will take place at a time of your designation.

**Risks/Discomforts:**

- Although any risks or discomforts are not anticipated, answering the questions may cause you to think about feelings that make you stressed, anxious, or upset.
- You may experience emotional discomfort as a result of recalling difficult experiences when participating in this study. You have the right to stop the interview.
at any time and for any reason without consequence. Appropriate counseling referrals will be provided to participants if difficult emotions arise, and you wish to seek professional assistance.
● You will be informed of any new information that may affect your decision to remain in the study.

Benefits:
● Although you may not directly benefit from taking part in this study, your contribution to it continues to help all understand the issues facing the educational field as they attempt to improve teacher retention rates and decrease teacher turnover.
● Your help with this study may help leaders and policy makers have a deeper understanding of the factors impacting teacher turnover.
● Participation may bring a deeper understanding and awareness to your decisions to either stay or leave your job as a teacher.

Confidentiality:
● Your data will be kept private and will not be released without your consent except as required by law.
● Only the researcher, their faculty supervisor, and the IRB will have access to the files.
● Your identity will be kept confidential.
● If the results of this study are written in a scientific journal or presented at a scientific meeting, your name will not be used.
● The recorded data and transcriptions will be stored on the researcher’s computer.
● Your signed consent form will be stored in a cabinet separate from the data.
● The audiotape of the one-on-one interview will be transcribed without any information that could identify you. The tape will then be erased.

Compensation for Injury:
● Although we do not foresee any risk in taking part in this study, the following liability statement is required in all University of Montana consent forms.

In the event that you are injured as a result of this research you should individually seek appropriate medical treatment. If the injury is caused by the negligence of the University or any of its employees, you may be entitled to reimbursement or compensation pursuant to the Comprehensive State Insurance Plan established by the Department of Administration under the authority of M.C.A., Title2, Chapter 9. In the event of a claim for such injury, further information may be obtained from the University's Claims representative or University Legal Counsel. (Reviewed by University Legal Counsel, July 6, 1993)

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal:
● Your decision to take part in this research study is entirely voluntary.
● You may refuse to take part in or you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are normally entitled.
• If you decide to withdraw you may do so at any time during the study without penalty.
• You may leave the study for any reason, and you may choose not to answer any question during the interview.
• You may be asked to leave the study for any of the following reasons:
  1. Failure to follow the Project Director’s instructions.
  2. A serious adverse reaction which may require evaluation.
  3. The Project Director thinks it is in the best interest of your health and welfare; or
  4. The study is terminated.

Questions:
• You may wish to discuss this with others before you agree to take part in this study.
• If you have any questions about the research now or during the study contact: Brittany Katzer, 509-863-5353.
• If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of the IRB through The University of Montana Research Office at 406-243-6670.

Participant’s Statement of Consent:
I have read the above description of this research study. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Furthermore, I have been assured that any future questions I may have will also be answered by the researcher conducting the interview. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study. I understand I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Printed (Typed) Name of Subject: __________________________________________________

Subject’s Signature: _____________________________________________________________

Date: _____________________________
APPENDIX D

Consent to be Audiotaped

Statement of Consent to be audiotaped: I understand that audio recordings may be taken during the study.

* I consent to having my interview recorded.

* I understand that if audio recordings are used for presentations of any kind, names or other identifying information will not be associated with them.

* I understand that audio recordings will be destroyed following transcription, and that no identifying information will be included in the transcription.

Printed (Typed) Name of Participant ____________________________________________

Participant’s Signature ______________________________________ Date ___________
APPENDIX E

Participant Demographic Questionnaire

1. What is your age?
   - 25 or under
   - 26 to 36
   - 37 to 47
   - 48 to 58
   - 59 and older

2. What is your gender?
   - male
   - female

3. What is your highest earned degree level of education?
   - bachelor’s degree
   - master’s degree
   - post master’s
   - doctorate degree

4. How many years have you taught?
   - 1 or under
   - 2 to 3
   - 3 to 4
   - 4 to 5
   - 6 or more

5. Did you complete your teaching degree prior to working as a teacher?
   - yes
   - no

6. Please list the teaching position(s) you held at the job you chose to leave.

7. Please describe your teaching preparation program and discuss whether or not you thought it prepared you for your job as a teacher.
APPENDIX F

Interview Protocol

Interview Information

Interviewer Name________________________________________

Interviewee Name________________________________________

Date___________    Time___________

Opening Statements:
Thank you for completing the Consent to Participate form and thereby agreeing to take time from your busy schedule to participate in this research study. There are a few things that I would like to make sure you understand before we get started.

• I will be asking you some general questions and writing notes as we proceed.
• All information from this interview will be confidential. That is, you will not be identified by name, location, or place of employment in this study or in any report from this study.
• You will only be identified by a pseudonym in these notes. A confidential subject code will be used to identify you for any follow-up questions.
• When quoting, your identity, location, and place of employment, will remain confidential.
• Your name and place of employment will only be known by this researcher and Dr. John Matt, Department of Educational Leadership Professor, the University of Montana. Dr. John Matt is my chairman for this study, and he oversees all aspects of this research study.
• The confidentiality of your name and place of employment is also under the purview of the Institutional Review Board at the University of Montana.
• You may stop this interview at any time without any negative consequences.

Please be assured that there are no correct answers to the questions that I will be asking. What is important are your thoughts, feelings, and experiences. The intent of this interview is to gather your thoughts, feelings, and experiences, not to make judgments about your responses.
APPENDIX G

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about how you came to the teaching profession?

2. As a teacher, what have you experienced in terms of teacher turnover?

3. Are there times you have considered leaving or left? What contributed to your decision?

4. As an elementary school teacher, what are your perceptions of why the high turnover rates exist? What situations have influenced your experiences of this?

5. Tell me about the joys you experienced as a teacher.

6. Tell me about the obstacles and challenges you experienced as a teacher.

7. Tell me about the school climate at the school (or schools) you chose to leave?

8. How has your administrator played a role in your experience with teacher turnover?

9. What role do financial incentives have in your experience as a teacher?

10. As a teacher, what factors or situations have influenced your job satisfaction?

11. Describe your relationship with your coworkers.

12. Describe your experience working with students.

13. What advice would you give to a new teacher entering the profession?

14. What do you like most about teaching?

15. What do you dislike most about teaching?

Ending Statements:

- Before we conclude, is there anything you would like to add? Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to participate in this research study. As we conclude our interview, I would like to have your permission to email you a copy of the interview transcript. I would like you to have the opportunity to check the transcript for accuracy and to see if the general
meaning is what you intended to convey. If you agree, I will email you an interview transcript.
APPENDIX H

Participant Demographic Questionnaire Responses

Describe your teaching preparation program and discuss whether or not you thought it prepared you for your job as a teacher. All 12 participants had completed the teaching preparation program prior to working as a certified teacher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>P1</th>
<th>Undergrad at Montana State University and a Masters in Trauma Informed Education from Bellarmine University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree at Northern Michigan University. NWU has a strong education department and I thought it prepared me very well. It was a rigorous program, and the content area (music) was very thorough and intense. I am also working on my master’s degree, currently, from Montana State University.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>I think the teacher prep programs are flawed. First of all, you have professors that haven’t been in the field in forever, so they are out of touch with rapidly changing trends in education. Secondly, less time taking the same classes with a different spin and longer student teaching times. Ideally, I believe student teaching should be a one year long paid internship so students can get a true indication of what teaching is and they don’t have to semi live out of their car because they are broke like I was.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>My teacher prep program consisted of the C&amp;I courses coupled with my HHP courses. Some classes were more beneficial than others, and I definitely wish I had more classes that focused on my specific curriculum. I feel like I learned more in my first semester of teaching as a full-time teacher than I ever did in college. My student teaching was okay, the first 8 weeks were amazing, I had a teacher who was awesome! My second 8 weeks were awful, but I learned what I DIDN’T want to be. My cooperating teacher didn’t have her PE certification. I didn’t learn anything that I wanted to use, only what I never wanted to be or use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>The teacher preparation program at Eastern Washington University has prepared me very well along with an endorsement from Dillon and now doing my Educational Leadership master’s currently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>I attended the University of Montana Western. This program consisted of observing rural school settings, having children come to the university where we would conduct practice lessons, student teaching, and traditional coursework. I did not feel the program prepared me to become a teacher. The hands-on experiences that we had were helpful, but most of the coursework</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
was not. Student teaching is really what gave me the whole picture and understanding of working in education. I feel there should have been more courses on behavior management, ACE scores, content knowledge, designing lessons to fit state standards and accommodations/modifications. There was also little to no information on IEP, 504 plans, etc.

P7

After getting admitted into the education program at my institution, I started method classes, which targeted different teaching methods and subjects such as math, literacy, science, social studies, special education, PE, music, art, technology, etc. After I completed the methods, I student-taught for one semester. During that time, I was fully immersed in a classroom with guidance from a cooperating teacher. My program also offered a “mock interview” session where actual hiring schools participate, and jobs could result from this along with practicing the art of interviewing. I thought it prepared me for “typical” teaching but did not prepare me for all the other little things in teaching that you must know how to do. For example, how to make a CPS call, assessments, and data collection, grants, insurance, handling parents, more information, and classes on IEPs, 504’s, etc. I feel like I had GREAT professors and education program, but often feel like it was sugar-coated as to what could actually happen in a classroom environment.

P8


P9

My teaching preparation program was through Montana State University. My sophomore year, I was required to do seven hours of observations in two separate classrooms, Junior year I started Practicum where it was 30 hours of teaching throughout the semester (2 hours, twice a week, for 7ish weeks), and my Senior year had Student-teaching where I full-time taught for about 12 weeks. I counted myself lucky in that my Lead Teacher for Student teaching was hands off and let me run the classroom, while others were just assigned to cut paper. I built great relationships which still hold on to today. I do think it prepared me well for classroom management. However, it did not prepare me well for the balance of all that is teaching. (Learning curriculum, changing curriculum, parent communication, new students, para management, assessing, grading, and more). After college I was a long-term substitute for 2 years and that is what really prepared me for my own classroom!

P10

Western Governors University, online. They did a good job in most areas but didn’t prepare me at all in others.

P11

I wish that I was given the opportunity to be in more classrooms prior to
graduating. I was in some, but they were mostly very small (one room) schools in very rural communities.

|   P12   | I went to University of Montana Western for my degree in education and for the most part, I felt it prepared me well for teaching. I feel that longer student teaching observations would be helpful for educators to get a real sense of what teaching really is. |
I love the teaching part of teaching. The actual physical teaching, seeing kids come into the beginning of the school year knowing letter sounds and leave the school year reading chapter books is unexplainable.

It is joy, it’s exciting, it’s incredible seeing those light bulb moments and those aha moments and building those connections with kids and having kids come back year after year whether to raid your desk for snacks, or get a hug, or tell you something. I mean, those are the reasons that people stay.

One thing that I had that is a huge bonus is an instructional coach and someone to help, whether they’re actually giving instruction on how to do something or just a person to bounce ideas off of, or someone to watch you teach and give feedback. That is a huge asset to teachers.

My teaching team and the teaching community that you have to get that feedback and bounce ideas and just to vent to somebody who understands.

Building those student relationships.

Seeing students’ faces light up because education and learning can be fun. It is so meaningful. I still connect with kids from 2013, and I still talk to and support them. They reach out to me for advice. And that is how you know that you did something, and you changed their lives, and that is really powerful.

A lot of my joys come with connecting. If you’re not connecting and relating to their lives, or getting them hooked, and then teaching them some sort of lesson along the way, I think it is a lost art to really get that human connection without technology.

The pay is better where I am now.

It is all about communication, honesty, and trust. I mean those three and passion. I have been on teams that have all of those and you don’t want to go home.

Seeing a kid really succeed, that is what it is all about.

You have to communicate, and you have to be on the same page. If you are working with people that are striving to make you better, you are going to be an awesome teacher.

Professional development and getting a healthy dose of that. Having opportunities and collaborating with others.
• We have a long history of education, so it kind of runs in the family. There’s always a natural interest there.

• Opportunities to talk to other teachers that are excited about teaching, that’s when I really grow.

• If there is one thing I am good at, I pride myself on building rapport.

• The biggest push was, where do we want our family? Where do we eventually want to end up together?

• I love the kids.

• When I went from one rural school to another rural school, I did take a pay increase. It does help a little bit, because you have in the back of your mind like I am being compensated for this at least. It gives you the thought that I am able to support my family a little bit, it helps rather than just being completely drained all the time and knowing I could honestly go work at the grocery store with no stress for almost the same amount of money. So just knowing you are getting compensated for your efforts.

• I really do enjoy my coworkers. It’s really nice to be around everyone that kind of has a common goal and that likes kids.

• I went out of my way to get to know everyone and be like, do you want to get lunch? You want to go for a walk? Sometimes we realize this is just so rough, let’s go for a walk around the block, and that helps a lot, and we would talk to each other. We would get to know each other, offer advice, offer resources, and that pretty much got me through it.

• Camaraderie between teachers. That, like I said, there are some fantastic teachers and just having the camaraderie between the teachers is really nice and the friendships that you make.

• I like the kids, I like their personalities and helping them and even though I am strictly academics right now, they still come in with trauma and they still come in with bad days and friend trouble, and being able to talk to them about that and having them open up and trying to help them get through their day or figure out how to handle their trauma, because most of the kids have had a lot of trauma in their life.

• There are still kids that I have taught, tough kids, that contact me still today to tell me about how things are going. I actually had one last year. I taught him and one of his brothers. Dad was in prison, and they had a lot of drugs and stuff in their family. The oldest just graduated last year. He came to my current school because he has decided he wants to teach, so he came to do a job shadow. So, I think now that I’ve gone that long in my career that I am able to hear those things from kids that have grown up that makes it,
you know, worth everything.

- They (students) were the reason I stayed as long as I did and the few coworkers that I really leaned on. I think the kids, yeah 100% the kids, even the tough ones, I was always able to find something good in them and being able to see them grow is really rewarding.

- Connecting with families. Seeing the kids get things when you’re working really hard, and they have that moment where they understand it. The joy they have for you coming to school every day and just the funny things that they say. There’s still a lot of wonderful things about teaching.

- One thing that kept me from leaving was it was the only school in that community, so I didn’t have other job opportunities to leave to.

- I enjoyed getting to know the families, getting to know the kids, and working with the kids.

- I enjoyed the process of teaching.

- Just being able to connect with the kids, like I said, I really enjoyed getting to know the families.

- Teaching is not just a job; it is a life.

**What are the reasons elementary teachers have for leaving a school or the field altogether?**

- It was a small community that didn’t offer a lot of other supports for families and other careers for spouses and that kind of thing, so they tried to bring in young teachers and they didn’t have the tools to support them, not necessarily in their career, but in their future as a whole.

- I have considered quitting for sure, and I would say the biggest reason is, the workload is a lot and the political side of things, and not feeling appreciated by administration.

- The school I was at was pretty tough. We had the only classroom for emotionally disturbed kids in the whole district. So, we got all of those kids sent to us, but there wasn’t enough space for all of them. They overflowed into our classrooms, but we didn’t get support with them.

- The worst thing is, if you put that much time in and everyone in that district knows that it’s a really hard school, and they won’t even give you an opportunity for a change for your own mental health.

- I think it’s like a no-brainer, why people are leaving. You get treated like crap and paid like crap, and I know, there are loans to pay off.
• It’s tough to have my own kids and family, I mean, I am bringing work home every day.

• A lot of us felt like everything was micromanaged, it got worse. It didn’t feel like they trusted us as professionals to do our job.

• I had a kid straight out of a treatment center, nobody gave me any background information on him. It was just like, good luck. He put a hole in the ceiling of my classroom, a brand-new building, and hit me with a chair across the room. I had to evacuate the class on day one of school.

• We went through five principals in ten years.

• Teachers were assaulted often.

• There is too much for teachers to do and there are so many constraints on what you can teach, and how you can teach, and the standards aren’t necessarily set by teachers. There’s so much being dictated to how we run our day, but we are supposed to be gracious and mindful of all of the programs that are happening with the kids’ home lives, but there’s no time for that connection. And so much is dictated that it’s really overwhelming to feel like, how can you do everything?

• I felt like I didn’t get a lot of administration support.

• There have been situations where a parent is upset about something that happened with their child and administration did not handle it well, and the teacher did not feel supported by the administration, and it was a really uncomfortable situation. So not feeling supported that way and feeling safe with your job, unrealistic work expectations, and administration not treating everyone fairly.

• It goes back to the dictating and not allowing teachers to have the freedom to teach how they know is best, and not putting students first. A lot of things coming down where there was not a lot of joy, it was very rigid, a dictatorship really.

• I just took too much home worrying about the kids. And I wasn’t able to detach myself from that just because I knew how bad they had it, and it was really hard.

• It was just one thing after another that’s being added to the plate, nothing goes away, getting added, but I mean, I think the behaviors are a huge part. The behaviors from kids and the lack of respect from parents. It’s not fun to go to a job and feel like you just expect to be treated like crap every day.

• The biggest thing I think that was a struggle for me was I had multiple students that had big behaviors like throwing chairs, screaming, biting, destroying the classroom, and my college didn’t teach me a lot about that, and I didn't have any kind of training through the school to help with that.
• I was in special education and in the elementary, it was too much for one person without enough support.

• I think there is a lot of politics in schools, more than I knew and more than I wanted to be true.
• Then they’re throwing this new curriculum at you, new standards at us, where they’re telling us what to write on the whiteboard and what to say. They’re watching you like a hawk.

• Time, just not enough time to do the long list of expectations that we have that is ever growing.

• It is a high demand job, mentally, physically, kind of all of the above and burnout.

• Demographics, poverty, the lack of parents, the discipline, a lot of behavior problems, and then the lack of resources to help with those would be a lot of negative experiences.

• Zero support from the board, even when you would bring up issues.

• Unfortunately, I ended up under a supervising teacher that I just couldn’t work under, moral standards, that things didn’t align there. I couldn't get on the same page, so I went back to my other district.

• We had a high level of IEPs for one, and then we also had just a lot of troubled kids, low-income families. A lot of domestic abuse, a lot of unstable homes, even down to like where we are staying tonight, families living in campers. You really saw all sorts of extremes there.

• Lack of parental involvement, you didn’t have that support from home.

• The demands are so high, and you don’t have the time or resources to meet those needs. And then all of that tied with low pay really makes it hard to stay.

• I think a big dislike of mine currently is the emphasis on assessment.

• The reasons I debated leaving were pay, lack of support, long hours, and feeling like I was just very limited in what I could do and having the ability to teach.

• Lack of administrative support with behaviors and instructional policy as well as lack of parent support in trying to help kids and getting them the tools that they need.

• The one reason we moved and switched to a different school was because the school I am teaching at now offered significantly higher pay for the same opportunities, a difference of like 12 grand a year. It also offered more time off than my previous school, more educational opportunities, and support, as well as an annual budget to do either online
classes or travel to trainings.

- I personally think the biggest reasons for high turnover are like I said the pay not I mean lots of people who have the same amount of Education are starting their career significantly higher than what teachers are able to start their career specifically in Montana we are 50th out of 50 for new teacher pay and then I think the biggest thing that you hear a lot from teachers who left is that it was a very high-stress environment and they didn't feel like they were supported with the extreme behaviors that we're seeing in classrooms and having to regularly do like clear the room practices and having their classrooms trashed or having to leave for the safety of themselves and their other students.

- I taught at my first district for four years and every year I was moved to a new classroom which is a long, stressful process of moving everything and setting that up.

- I had a different administrator or administrative team every year that I worked there.

- Every year of those four years, I taught a different curriculum.

- A lot of stress, a lot of hope, a lot of not being followed through. Kind of an us versus them mentality when it came to either staff teams or staff verses administration and a lot of people kind of getting stressed to the point where they can’t have anything more on their plates and they’re unwilling to compromise or go that extra step of that kind of thing because they physically and mentally couldn’t anymore.

- There was a lot of administration turnover, so that didn’t set a good role model.

- Each administer or each administrator team that came in tried to do their own thing but one year wasn't enough to really get it going and consistent and have the follow-through and so there was just a lot of like let's try this and then it kind of falls apart and then the next person who says don't do that try this and it was hard to get footing especially as a new teacher when you are trying to figure out everything else and then add new policies every year and new curriculum and new administrators every year.

- Part of what led to us leaving the school and the community was going somewhere where we could afford to have another kid and put them in daycare and have other opportunities.

- Student behavior is a big one so not only are we seeing an increase in schools of these extreme kind of blowout behaviors which I don’t remember seeing at all when I was in elementary school or you know that has definitely changed so not only are we seeing an
increase in those behaviors but we're also being limited as teachers of what we can do as a follow through for those behaviors and what we can’t do too, what supports we have and are able to give to our students.

- You don't have a way to prepare for those moments, like how do you help a kid when you have to go or class of kids when you get put into a lockdown or what do you do when a kid throws up in the middle or blows out or you know there's no sub in the classroom next door, those real day-to-day moments that you don't think of when you're going to school to be a teacher.

- The political aspects of it, the lack of say and control in what we can actually do as teachers.

- Now being post, still in pandemic, or post pandemic, that whole mindset that we have to catch kids up, kids are behind, we have to do that, and I don’t feel like we are giving kids the same opportunities.

- I think it’s frustration with a lot of things. Through the pandemic, the demand for teachers is high, the demand for teacher accountability is really high. They’re very stressed out, working really hard, because they love the kids and the pay isn’t equal to what they’re doing, and the services they are providing, and I think a lot of times, I mean for me, what drove me almost away from teaching for good was, you know, I felt the lack of support.

- When you’re already expecting all of these demands and more paperwork, and smart goals, and parent teacher conferences, and grading, and for being part of these interventions, and curriculum teams, and then also teaching in the classroom and expecting to get 80% engagement and keeping on pace within ten percent of a curriculum map, and then expecting to have detailed lesson plans for everything, it’s just not achievable.

- Your love of kids can only go so far before you need to provide for a family and your mental health.

- I would say lack of support and then honestly, I think pay needs to be more competitive.

- If you were to break it down and go by the hour, we would be broke.
• A lot of teachers are feeling like all the accountability is on them and there’s a lack of accountability for kids, kids’ behaviors, and then parent accountability as well.

• You’ll come in and you’re doing your best to provide these accommodations for a kid and an IEP and you’re bending over backward to implement PBIS and you're working all these hours, staying up til midnight, and then you know, one disgruntled phone call from a parent can lead to an investigation.

• Different educational philosophies with administration. I felt like we were too focused on grants, making the school look good, but not necessarily making sure all our kids were taken care of in the right way.

• Standardized tests are frustrating. I think the focus is in the wrong direction.

• The enormous responsibilities. I was doing student council, but I was also the athletic director, and I was also a teacher, and then I am also supposed to be a father, I am supposed to be a good husband, and at the end of the day, you just have very little left for yourself.

• We’re getting to the point where we couldn’t set up our classrooms the way we wanted them. The walls had to be painted a certain color. There was this big control thing and we’re being forced to do education in one way, educators have different strengths.

• I think it's evidence to show that when you’re not feeling supported or valued, that teachers leave all the time.

• I never really considered leaving teaching until I had a terrible experience with administrators.

• I developed severe anxiety from my (Superintendent’s) decisions.

• I guess my absolute just, I gotta go, I have to get out of here, like I love teaching, I can’t do this anymore, because I had a new principal who was incredibly toxic.

• There was no trust to make our own decisions.

• The environment of collaboration and teamwork and connection was shut down, and this was pre COVID-19 too.

• The housing is not exactly attainable.

• The commute is terrible, not only dangerous, but also the distance.
• I think the emotional burden might be one of the things that I disliked the most was going home and not being able to turn off the brain. It’s exhausting. It’s physically exhausting and mentally exhausting to make that many decisions and to have all that information in your head at all times.

• The other thing I had a really hard time with when I was at my hardest moments was parents and administration.

• Teacher preparation. I would stay up until one in the morning preparing lesson plans and getting up at 4:00am to perfect those lessons. No one prepared me for that. I was a first-year teacher.

• I commuted and it was rough. The highway is not nice in winter. The road, the long days, then I did the extra-curricular activities coaching junior high basketball, softball, like I did a lot. I was part of RTI committees. I was there all the time, all night, it felt like.

• But the conflict within that school district was the superintendent. I am trying to find the right words, the way he went about things, his fingers were too involved in other stuff not like where he needed to be.

• Definitely micromanaging to where he shouldn’t have probably crossed those boundaries.

• We saw a lot of teachers looking to leave because they wanted better leadership. That’s what it comes to and communication.

• It’s those data collections, the standardized tests, meeting their goals. I think that is the biggest stressor.

• The demands are very high. You have a high case of special needs, low-income kids and then minimal pay, I mean it’s bottom of the barrel pay for that.

• I enjoy teaching but after a while it really wears on you what you’re getting compensated for all the hours and emotional toll it takes.

• You spend so many hours at school, and I wasn’t willing to compromise my happiness for that chunk of time in my life because of my admin and so I would say that is a pretty big reason. Well, pretty much the only reason I did just because I couldn’t see myself working and being happy there, and that was really important to me.

• I think the main part was balance between home life and work life, and also stress.

• We should not be medicated for our career, so that was kind of eye-opening. I was like this is common. But this isn’t good.

• There’s this wave of teachers leaving and being like, this isn’t right. We’re on anxiety meds, and this isn’t right. We don’t feel trusted, I’ve left. I have way less stress, I am
making a lot more.

- People do like a passion tax where they pay us less because we are passionate about it.

- I am being told what to write on my whiteboard, what to say and when, what my hours look like. I have no control over anything, and the little things I might have control over, they would dissect so minutely and be told that it’s not enough. You should do this, but it’s just like you’re never enough.

- So, I think money is huge, and seeing that there are other options that use your skills and use your passions, but treat you better.

- I think back to not enough support for teachers in general. There’s been a lot put on teachers from everybody, themselves, their superiors, from parents.

- I feel like teachers are asked to parent children, but then, if they don’t do it the way the parents would like, then the parents get mad. It just adds to the workload that is already so full.

- It felt like a lot of need, like a varying set of needs. I didn’t feel like my college training prepared me as well as it should for a lot of those areas.

- Pacing wasn’t realistic and the lack of respect given to teachers who were seasoned and had proven results.

- I was growing increasingly frustrated, irritated with central administration, with what I felt was inappropriate reliance on standardized testing, school leadership that was not appropriate.

- Deteriorating work environments: physically and emotionally.

- As I saw administrators change, I saw that egos were getting in the way much more.

From a teacher’s perspective, what strategies may reduce teacher turnover?

- Make sure they have a mentor program. I think that is huge. The mentor program I was a part of was amazing.

- The biggest one I think is trust, trusting you to do your job. If your classroom is running smoothly and you’re showing results, then I feel like you should be trusted to continue on.

- Maybe being recognized once in a while like, “Hey, I know you are doing a good job, I appreciate it.” That can go a long way.

- A big thing is the pay would help a lot.
• More resources for behavior management and then also the IEP would be another one. More resources to help with those, because a lot of times, you’re handed an IEP and saying, “You need to follow this,” with no resources to help you on how to meet those needs.

• The best would be professional development.

• It would have been amazing if they had given me my years of experience, because if they had, I would be making a comparable amount of money.

• Set clear boundaries with your time.

• Remember what you got into it for, and you didn’t get into it for the money, you got into it to change kids’ lives.

• Don’t do something if you aren’t passionate about it.

• I think, in rural schools, you’re just starting out and what I experienced, you just don’t have the resources whether you’re a sped teacher or you know maybe you have a co-op there. There’s just a lack of just plain and simple resources to provide a quality education.

• The administration will back me up.

• The whole staff was communicating over here, and it was one of the best experiences I’ve ever had in my life. I would have stayed in that job forever.

• Teaching a healthy home/work balance.

• There were certain times where I got denied paternity leave for dads, and we had our first child, and they said I could use my three days. There’s no paternal leave. So, I ended up in the collective bargaining agreement getting two weeks of paternal leave.

• No one wanted to leave that school, because you know, the superintendent was in the rooms every day. Administrators were in the room asking us what do you need? You’re doing an awesome job. Yeah, I know it’s hard, here are some solutions. Let’s come up with a behavior plan and people got together and they collaborated instead of complaining. It’s just the culture that you create within a school.

• I got a five-thousand-dollar bump, and I couldn’t believe it. I was like, you are giving me another year of experience and you are putting me on the pay scale where I am supposed to be.

• The advice that I would give is number one go sub. No one ever told me that, no one ever said, hey go sub a little before you go into it before you get your own classroom.
Find a school that you want to student teach in and then find a teacher that you want to student teach with.

The first two years were awesome because there was communication all the way from the superintendent to the principal to the counselor to all of the teachers to the paras.

Only teaching one grade level at a time versus two, because you are only working with one set of curriculum at a time and standard, instead of two. When you’re working with two, you’re trying to integrate basically two different years at the same time.

Our principal was kind, helpful, and understanding. So, you would voice your concern, and she would listen to you. She would do what she could to help. You at least know you have support, and it helps get you through.

The older teachers are saying things have changed, and that they don’t have as much creativity, freedom.

Class size. I had 24 5-year-olds in a room. It is too much.

Trust and creative freedom.

I have an administrator now that sticks up for us and will handle those difficult parents.

I totally understand having a curriculum and following the curriculum, but I think, allowing us to have some freedom in how we deliver that, or if there are things to be supplemented, trust us to do that.

Excellence in leadership, having great superintendents and principals and department heads. That was a huge help because it helped to complete the team and the team is what helps drive the whole system.

How does school climate contribute to teachers’ decisions to leave rural schools?

I have butted heads with other coworkers and had different priorities or saw a different path students should take, and I am not the most soft-spoken of individuals, and I have voiced my opinion, and it has not always been welcome.

For the school climate in general, there were times where other teachers were having conflict among themselves, but it really impacted the school as a whole, even if I wasn’t involved in that situation.

Oh, toxic! Everyone was afraid to teach, so they had these boring lesson plans, and it was just miserable. I will straight up say it was a fear of retaliation from administration.
We went from this family feel of educators who are collaborating, and we are allowed to really share our ideas and those ideas are being looked at, and those ideas were being included in big decisions to literally the administrator would put her hand up during staff meetings like we are done talking about this, just kind of verbally abusing people.

I can’t work for somebody who doesn’t believe that I make a difference in the work environment and even though I love teaching, I cannot physically, mentally, and emotionally, I cannot be here anymore, because I was crying on a daily basis, I was developing extreme anxiety. This anxiety was keeping me up at night, and I could not handle the environment any longer, and that’s kind of what was the tipping point for me.

It went from kind of a laissez faire feel with the former administrator to this feeling of complete control. It wasn’t like, hey we are going to have so and so make the schedule, it was like, I am making the schedule and nobody else gets to touch it, and it’s my way or the highway.

The administrator was yelling at some of my coworkers.

There was really no communication, like there was no relationship to be had.

When I left, the school climate was extremely toxic. That was the reason why I had to go. I could not be in an environment where we were not allowed to sit at lunch anymore with one another, we weren’t allowed to collaborate. We weren’t allowed to be seen talking to each other. The administrator thought we were talking about her. It became so toxic that daily, I had to leave the building and go on a walk with one of my coworkers. It just felt like the heaviness of the building was so unhealthy.

I think there was just the micromanaging that happened. I think that would be the unhealthy part.

I would describe it as toxic.

Administration changing constantly. It changes the whole morale. It takes a while to build a solid team. So, when you keep changing an integral piece to that, how the school is led, the morale and everything, it’s difficult to build a successful environment.

Before I left, it was pretty negative.

I think administration at my previous school was a huge issue, in my opinion. There were quite a few personal things that happened to me that were quite inappropriate, which was one of the reasons I did leave.

Very, quite negative, and almost like on edge, and people didn’t feel like they were trusted as educators either, like we’re all professionals. We didn’t feel trusted in that sense and micromanaged.
• I think at the time that I left it wasn’t very healthy.

• The admin contributed to it. Anytime there was an issue amongst coworkers, nothing was dealt with, with that specific person.

• When I started it was completely different than when I left, it progressively got worse every year, just negative in general. The interactions between staff and students, a lot of times were negative. The behaviors were often really scary, I mean, we had the police coming to an elementary school two or three times a day to remove kids. One of my friends got pushed down a flight of cement stairs, cracked her head open, broke her arm. It was definitely unsafe.

• The climate among the staff is also very negative, like nobody seems to be enjoying their job. And the newer teachers were very clicky and targeting some of the teachers who had taught there for like 30 years.

• I remember looking out my classroom window constantly to see if the cops were outside, because we would hear screaming in the hallways, and it was like a constant state of chaos. And then you have kids who are coming from chaos and school is supposed to be their safe place, and it wasn’t like that.

• We had a new administration, and it was not aligning with how I teach, and it was pretty much a dictatorship and didn’t feel very safe.

• When I left, the environment at the school was very negative, the morale was pretty low. There were certain groups that would hang together and try and do things to bring a little bit more joy into the school, but I think everyone was exhausted from the high expectations.

• I had some good relations with my cohorts, but it was not a productive situation, because we were all in, kind of in, a bad boat. It was a leaky boat, and when you’re in a leaky boat, I mean you’re trying to survive.

• It became adversarial.

What factors contribute to overall job satisfaction and retention?

• I love teaching the kids. I love making a difference in their lives. Each kid is a puzzle, like a jigsaw puzzle, and you’re trying to figure out what makes them click. You’re not only getting them to believe in education, but you’re getting them to believe that other people are kind. That’s what it’s all about, knowing that it’s a safe environment where people trust you.

• Put aside differences for a common goal. 99% of our problems can be solved if we just get in a room and like you can be respectfully honest and politely honest.
• I know that I am affecting these kids, and I know that I am making a difference. I can feel it. I can see it in their faces. Even though they might not say it, they light up when I see them. And I think that the most joyful thing that really brought me the most happiness was just the connection.

• I loved being able to, in a rural district, think of my own activities and sculpt it in order to fit my population.

• The community was a huge factor, like it was unbelievable the things they did for us.

• The most satisfaction that I felt was being able to talk to my coworkers, my team, the music teacher, the librarian, we get together and we talk about school, or we talk about not school, and just being able to have those conversations, and connect for like five minutes every single day. Then having the connection with other teachers in the building, I really do think that contributed to how much I loved my job.

• I had a mentor who ended up becoming one of my best friends.

• That lifelong connection, now I see where all those kids are. I see if they’re in college, I see if they have kids, which I really didn’t expect to be important I guess, but that was huge. I think that the number one joy is still having those relationships continuing past elementary years. I think that’s number one over the data, overseeing the progress, I think it comes down to the relationships.

• Financials are huge in teaching 100% and any time someone says, “No,” honestly, they are lying.

• The relationship with the teachers and the way we communicate. If you don’t have that, it’s not going to be a healthy environment. I think it comes down to that communication piece and respecting each other. When we’re cohesive and we’re working together and supporting each other, it’s awesome, it’s healthy, and it’s fun. We want to be here. The biggest thing we teachers want, we just want to communicate. Be respectful toward each other, be professionals.

• We were all positive and we tried to support each other. It was really nice, because we felt comfortable to just step in next door and say, “Hey do you have any ideas here?” Also, a good morale.

• Satisfaction is having a positive morale and a strong team to work with, that supports you and you support them- mutual respect.

• I think just going back to the kids. Any time I doubt my want to be in the profession, I think of them. They need positive people in their life, and I guess I have the confidence in myself that I am that for them. And that type of thing keeps me satisfied in the job.
- Definitely support. If you have good para support, good parent support, a good partner teacher, I think there’s nothing better than that. If the two of you can work together, brainstorm with each other, and help take each other’s loads, that’s really great.

- Trust and creative freedom, because I feel like as the teacher, you do really know what your students need, and some unique ways to bring that out of their learning, but if you have to stick to so many guidelines, it’s kind of like, where is that freedom?

- I did the mentor program both years, and I became friends with both of my mentors. It was super helpful. Most of the teachers are very, very helpful.

- We put together a field trip to take fourth graders on an overnight trip, which was amazing. So that was super cool, different things we did like that as a school community, back when it was more of a school community. It just felt like home.

- When parents tell me that their kids are thriving and it’s their best year yet. I think the biggest amount of satisfaction I get is from families and the kids.

- My relationships with my coworkers were wonderful, especially my teaching team. We worked very well together, and we helped each other, and it’s a very healthy relationship. Lots of collaborating, lots of working together, sharing ideas, sharing the workload.

- Working with students is awesome. I enjoy that part of my day. I always say if I can just do my job and teach kids, I will. That would be the best thing ever. They work really hard for me, and we set really firm boundaries, and we have lots of fun, and I laugh a lot with them. Working with students is incredible. I would definitely not still be doing it, if it weren’t for them. That is my driving force for sure.

- I really like my coworkers, and it was just one of those things that I was like, I think I will stay.

- Great elementary school principal, he was supportive. Guided me a lot of the ways because I was coming into Montana as a first-time teacher. I never had my own classroom, I was a sub for a year and a half, so I never held my own classroom, I knew nothing. So, the elementary principal was awesome and guided me.

- I think it’s a good atmosphere that you can create for yourself and kind of build relationships once again with those kids yearly and it’s a new day every day, it’s different every day.

- I would say that the attitude of the superintendent and the administration up higher than the principal affects that too. Our superintendent didn’t seem to be very appreciative of his teachers.
APPENDIX J

Themes or Meaning Units with Evidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clustering Units of Meaning/Themes</th>
<th>Evidence in Participants’ Statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Relationships</td>
<td>“It is joy, it's exciting, it’s incredible seeing those lightbulb moments and those aha moments and building those connections with kids.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Connectedness</td>
<td>“Building those student relationships.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Lifelong</td>
<td>“Seeing students’ faces light up, because education and learning can be fun. It is so meaningful.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Relationships with the family</td>
<td>“I still connect with kids from 2013, and I still talk to and support them. They reach out to me for advice, and that is how you know that you did something, and you changed their lives, and that is really powerful.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Watching students progress and succeed</td>
<td>“I love the kids.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“A lot of my joy comes with connecting. If you’re not connecting and relating to their lives, or getting them hooked, and then teaching them some sort of lesson along the way, I think it is a lost art to really get that human connection without technology.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Seeing a kid really succeed, that is what it is all about.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“If there is one thing, I am good at, I pride myself in building rapport.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I like the kids. I like their personalities and helping them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“There are still kids that I have taught, tough kids, that contact me still today to tell me how things are going.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|                                   | “They were the reason I stayed as long as I
did and the few coworkers that I really learned from.”

“100% the kids, even the tough ones. I was always able to find something good in them and being able to see them grow is really rewarding.”

“Connecting with families. Seeing the kids get things when you’re working really hard, and they have that moment where they understand it.”

“The joy they have for you coming to school every day and just the funny things they say. There’s still a lot of wonderful things about teaching.”

“I enjoyed getting to know the families, getting to know the kids, working with the kids, I enjoyed the process of teaching.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Camaraderie (with coworkers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“My teaching team and the teaching community that you have to get that feedback and bounce ideas and just to vent to somebody who understands.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Opportunities to talk to other teachers that are excited about teaching, that’s when I really grow.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I really do enjoy my coworkers. It’s really nice to be around everyone that kind of has a common goal and that likes kids.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I went out of my way to get to know everyone. We would get to know each other, offer advice, offer resources, and that pretty much got me through it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Camaraderie between teachers. Having that camaraderie between the teachers is really nice and the friendships that you make.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The most satisfying thing I felt was being able to talk to my coworkers, my team. We...”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
got together and we would talk and have conversations and connect every single day.”

“Having the connections with other teachers in my building, I really do think that contributed to how much I loved my job.”

“I had a mentor who ended up becoming one of my best friends.”

“We were all positive and tried to support each other.”

“When we are cohesive and we’re working together and supporting each other, it’s awesome, it’s healthy, it’s fun.”

“My relationships with my coworkers were wonderful, especially my teaching team. We worked very well together, and we helped each other, it’s a very healthy relationship. Lots of collaborating, working together, sharing ideas, sharing the workload.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health and Safety (mental, physical, emotional)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

“The worst thing is, if you put that much time in and everyone knows in that district that it’s a really hard school and they won’t give you an opportunity for a change for your own mental health.”

“We should not be medicated for our career.”

“He put a hole in the ceiling of my classroom and hit me with a chair across the room. I had to evacuate the class on day one of school.”

“The behaviors from the kids and the lack of respect from parents. It’s not fun to go to a job and feel like you just expect to be treated like crap every day.”

“The biggest struggle for me was having multiple students who had big behaviors like throwing chairs, screaming, biting, and destroying the classroom.”
“Not feeling safe with your job, unrealistic work expectations, and administration not treating everyone fairly.”

“I took too much home worrying about the kids, and I wasn’t able to detach myself from that.”

“Teachers were assaulted often.”

“I taught at my first district for four years and had to move to a new classroom every year which is a long, stressful process to move everything and setting that up.”

“Student behavior is a big one, we are seeing an increase in blowout behaviors.”

“You don’t have a way to prepare for the moments when you are put into lockdown or when a kid throws up or blows out.”

“Your love of kids can only go so far before you need to provide for your family and your mental health.”

“I developed severe anxiety.”

“The emotional burden might be one of the things that I disliked most was going home and not being able to turn off the brain.”

“It’s exhausting, it’s physically exhausting and mentally exhausting.”

“The behaviors were often scary. We had police coming two to three times a day to remove kids.”

“One of my friends was pushed down a flight of stairs, cracked her head open, broke her arm, it was definitely unsafe.”

“I remember looking out my classroom window to see if the cops were outside because I would hear screaming in the

""
“Teaching a healthy home/work balance.”

“Set clear boundaries with your time.”

“I cannot physically, mentally, and emotionally be here anymore because I was crying on a daily basis. I developed extreme anxiety. The anxiety was keeping me up at night.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lack of Support and Appreciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“It was a small community that didn’t offer a lot of other support for families and other careers for their spouses.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I have considered quitting and one of the biggest reasons is not feeling appreciated by the administration.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We had the only classroom for emotionally disturbed kids in the whole district, there wasn’t enough space for them, they overflowed into our classrooms, but we didn’t get enough support with them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I felt like I didn’t get a lot of administration support.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“There have been situations where a parent is upset about something, and administration didn’t handle it well. The teacher did not feel supported by the administration, and it was a really uncomfortable situation.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I was in special education, and it was too much for one person without enough support.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Demographics, poverty, lack of parents, discipline, a lot of behavior problems, and then the lack of resources to help with those.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Zero support from the board, even when you’re bringing up issues.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Lack of parental involvement, you didn’t have the support from home.”

“Lack of administrative support with behaviors and instructional policy, as well as lack of parent support in trying to help kids and getting them the tools they need.”

“What drove me away from teaching, almost for good, was I felt the lack of support.

“It’s evidence to show that when you’re not feeling supported or valued, that teachers leave all the time.”

“Maybe being recognized once in a while like I know you are doing a good job; I appreciate it.”

Toxic School Climate

“The environment of collaboration and teamwork and connection was shut down.”

“There were times where other teachers were having conflict and it really impacted the school as a whole, even if I wasn’t involved in the situation.”

“Oh toxic! Everyone was afraid to teach.”

“I could not handle the environment any longer and that was the tipping point for me.”

“When I left, the school climate was extremely toxic. That was the reason I had to go.”

“It became so toxic that daily, I had to leave the building and go on a walk with one of my coworkers. It just felt like the heaviness of the building was so unhealthy.”

“I would describe my school climate as toxic.”

“Before I left, it was a negative work climate.”
“Very, quite negative.”

“It progressively got worse every year, just negative in general. The interactions between staff and students a lot of times was negative.”

“The climate among the staff is also very negative, like nobody seemed to be enjoying their job.”

“The environment at the school I left was very negative, the morale was pretty low.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Changes in administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Micromanaging</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“There was a lot of administrative turnover, so that didn’t set a good role model.”

“I had a different administrator or administrative team every year that I worked there.”

“Each administrator or administrative team that came in tried to do their own thing. One year wasn’t enough to be consistent and follow through.”

“Different educational philosophies with administration.”

“I never really considered leaving teaching until I had a terrible experience with administrators.

“I had a new principal who was incredibly toxic.”

“Definitely micromanaging to where he shouldn’t have crossed those boundaries.”

“We saw a lot of teachers looking to leave because they wanted better leadership.”

“I wasn’t willing to compromise my happiness for the chunk of time in my life because of my admin.”
"I will straight up say it was a fear of retaliation from the administration."

"I can’t work for someone who doesn’t believe I make a difference in the work environment."

"It went from a laissez faire feel with the former administrator to this feeling of complete control."

"The administrator was yelling, verbally abusing people."

"I think there was just micromanaging that happened, I think that was the unhealthy part."

"Administration changed constantly."

"Administration at my previous school was a huge issue. Quite a few inappropriate things happened to me, which was one of the reasons I did leave."

"We had a new administration, and it was not aligning with how I teach, it was pretty much a dictatorship and didn’t feel very safe."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low pay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Not being compensated for the time and/or training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The pay is better where I am now.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| "When I went from one rural school to another rural school, I did take a pay increase. It does help a little bit, because you have in the back of your mind, like I am being compensated for this at least."
| "It’s a no-brainer why people are leaving. You get treated like crap and paid like crap and there are loans to pay off." |
| "The low pay really makes it hard to stay." |
| "I am teaching at a school now with significantly higher pay, a difference of like 12 grand a year." |


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effective Communication and Trust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“It is all about communication, honesty, and trust. I mean those three and passion. I have been on teams that have all of those, and you don’t want to go home.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“You have to communicate, and you have to be on the same page. If you are working with people that are striving to make you better, you are going to be an awesome teacher.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“There was no trust to make your own decisions.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We saw a lot of teachers looking to leave because they wanted better leadership. That’s what it comes down to, that and communication.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We don’t feel trusted.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The biggest one is trust, trusting you to do your job. If your classroom is running</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
smoothly and you’re showing results, you should be trusted to continue on.”

“The whole staff was communicating over here, and it was one of the best experiences I have ever had in my life. I would have stayed in that job forever.”

“There was really no communication, like there was no relationship to be had.”

“The relationship with teachers and the way we communicate. If you don’t have that, it’s not going to be a healthy environment. It comes down to communication and respecting each other.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High demands and Stress</th>
<th>“I have considered quitting for sure, and I would say the biggest reason is the workload is a lot.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Workload</td>
<td>“There is too much for teachers to do.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increasing expectations</td>
<td>“It was just one thing after another being added to the plate, nothing goes away, it gets added.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Time, just not enough time to do the long list of expectations that we have that is ever growing.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It is a high demand job: mentally, physically, kind of all of the above and burnout.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The demands are so high, and you don’t have the time or resources to meet those needs.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Long hours.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Every year I taught a different curriculum.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“A lot of stress”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The demand for teachers is high, the demand for teacher accountability is really high.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“They’re very stressed out, working really hard, because they love the kids.”

“When you’re already expecting all these demands and more paperwork, and smart goals, and parent teacher conferences, and grading, and for being a part of these interventions, and curriculum teams, and then also teaching in the classroom and expecting to get 80% engagement, and keeping pace within 10% of a curriculum map, and then expecting detailed lesson plans for everything, it’s just not achievable.

“The enormous responsibilities.”

“Balance between home life and work life, and also stress.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lack of Teacher Choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Over Reliance on Standardized testing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Lack of freedom and creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Lack of control over academic delivery</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“There are so many constraints on what you can teach, and how you can teach, and the standards aren’t necessarily set by teachers.”

“There is so much being dictated to how we run our day that it’s really overwhelming to feel like, how can you do everything?”

“Then they’re throwing this new curriculum at you, new standards at us, then telling us what to write on the whiteboard and what to say. They’re watching you like a hawk.”

“A big dislike of mine is the emphasis on assessment.”

“I debated leaving because I felt very limited in what I could do and having the ability to teach.”

“The political aspects, the lack of say and control in what we can actually do as teachers.”

“Standardized tests are frustrating; I think the focus is in the wrong direction.”
“We couldn’t set up our classrooms the way we wanted them, the walls had to be a certain color, there was this big control thing and we’re being forced to do education in one way.”

“I love being able to think of my own activities and sculpt them, in order to fit my population.”