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Teacher Experiences with Increased Attrition Post-COVID-19 Pandemic

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Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Stacy Baker

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

Teacher Experiences with Increased Attrition Post-COVID-19 Pandemic

by

Stacy Baker

MEd, Belhaven University, 2009

BS, Mississippi State University, 2001

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Walden University

May 2024

Abstract

The problem addressed was a post-COVID-19 pandemic increase in teacher attrition at an A-rated suburban middle school in a southern U.S. state. The increased attrition placed additional strain on local schools, teachers, and district personnel and affected the academic progress of students. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore middle school teachers' experiences with the increasing attrition and obtain recommendations for improving teacher retention. The conceptual framework was the jobs-demands-resources theory. The two research questions concerned middle school teachers' experiences related to the increasing teacher attrition and their recommendations for improving teacher retention, respectively. The study used basic qualitative methods and multistep qualitative coding to examine data gathered from semistructured individual interviews with 13 current middle school teachers, each with a minimum of 3 years of teaching experience, 2 years in Grades 6–8 and 2 years at their current school site. The key findings of the study indicated that job demands postpandemic outweigh the resources provided to meet them, resulting in teachers feeling the onset of burnout and attrition intentions. Teacher recommendations are provided to promote the retention of quality teachers postpandemic. These included increased structure, consistent student discipline practices, fewer distractions during the school day. Recommendations for future research include the replication of the study in a more high-risk school environment to determine whether there is consistency with these findings. The social change implications of the study stem from the recommendations offered to school and district administrators on strategies to improve the physical and emotional quality of the environment for teachers to promote teacher well-being and retention.

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Dedication

My work here is dedicated to a man who has had an incomparable influence on my life. I grew up sitting beside him at the kitchen table as he graded papers after basketball games. I can remember him telling me to be a doctor, a lawyer, a nurse. He encouraged me to be anything other than a teacher, and I had every intention of taking that advice. I thought I knew exactly what my future would hold, but as life often does, mine veered off path. At 19, I found myself floundering to find my place in the world, and somehow, I landed as an education major. There were very few people in my life who supported that decision, but oddly enough, my biggest supporter was the very same man who had spent my life trying to steer me in other directions. Once I decided to teach, he was the first one to tell me that it was going to be a hard path, but it would be worth it. He made it clear that I would need to get a master's degree and a doctorate. As far as he was concerned, there was never another option. It was just what was expected of me. It has taken me 25 years after that initial conversation to get to this point, but he has been there every step of the way to encourage and support me. I can honestly say that I would have never attempted this without his influence. He is known by many as an incredible teacher and basketball coach, and there is no doubt that he was. However, to me, he is the man who raised me when he did not have to. He is the man who told me stories at night until I went to sleep. He is the voice of the Lone Ranger and the troll under the bridge crossed by the Three Billy Goat's Gruff. All I have ever wanted was to make him proud. He answers to many names: Mack, Malcolm, Coach Robinson...but, to me, he's Pop. He is unwavering support and unconditional love. I hope I have made him proud in this endeavor. I love you, Pop! Thank you for pushing me.

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There are so many individuals who have helped me reach this point in my academic career. I would first like to say a special thank-you to my doctoral committee, Dr. Deborah Focarile and Dr. Sunddip Aguilar, for their invaluable feedback, support, and encouragement throughout this process. I would also like to thank my children for taking on extra responsibilities to allow me the time needed to chase this dream. I have always been surrounded by family and friends who believe in and support me with reckless abandon. Without them, I would never have possessed the courage to begin this journey, much less the perseverance to see it to completion.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Teacher attrition rates in the United States have been on the rise for well over a decade (Dicke et al., 2018). Teaching is recognized as one of the most stressful professions (Ansley, 2019; Dicke et al., 2018; RAND Survey, 2021), and the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic resulted in increased demands for teachers (States News Service, 2021). Current teacher attrition rates are at their highest (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Madigan & Kim, 2021; Redding & Henry, 2019), and the continuing loss of teachers places increased strain on the public school system in the United States. There are long-term consequences for the quality of instruction in classrooms and student achievement (Herman et al., 2020; Redding & Henry, 2019). In the current study, I explored the experiences of suburban middle school teachers in an A-rated school in a southern U.S. state on the rising attrition rates postpandemic. The results of this study are the basis for recommendations to building and district administrators on potential ways to support the mental and physical well-being of teachers to promote retention.

In the Background section, I explore some of the many factors that influence teacher attrition. These factors are divided into environmental, social, and personal categories (Madigan & Kim, 2021). The section also contains some discussion of the physical, emotional, and psychological toll that exposure to prolonged stress takes on teachers (see Herman et al., 2020). It concludes with an introduction to burnout, its symptoms, and effects. I also discuss the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The problem statement follows. I explain that attrition rates have risen postpandemic at the national level (Lücker et al., 2022) as well as locally, according to the assistant director of personnel at the study site. I then state the purpose of this basic qualitative study, which was to explore middle school teachers' experiences with the increasing attrition in their school and obtain their recommendations for improving teacher retention. Middle school teachers' experiences with rising attrition and recommendations to promote retention were addressed by the research questions (RQs), which follow the problem and purpose statements.

I then discuss the conceptual framework that formed the foundation of this study. This section includes a brief explanation of the jobs-demands-resources (JD-R) theory and the ways that it is integral to understanding teacher attrition. The JD-R theory is based on the idea that job characteristics influence the well-being of employees. Jobs with high pressure, emotional demands put employees at risk for burnout if the demands are not balanced by the proper job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Teacher burnout is strongly linked to rising attrition (Herman et al., 2020; Kotowski, 2022; Garcia-Carmona et al., 2019).

The Nature of the Study section of this chapter includes a description of the basic qualitative design of the study and a brief explanation of data collection and analysis. The most important terms are defined in the Definitions section. In the Assumptions section, I explain the logical presuppositions that informed this study. The scope and delimitations of this study are then addressed. These included the experiences of suburban middle school teachers in an A-rated school in a southern state about the rising teacher attrition rates. In the Limitations section, I explain the limited amount of data that can be released by the school district's human resources department about teachers who have left, the gap in data regarding teachers who may have simply transferred within the district, and the one-time data collection of this study. Before concluding the chapter with a summary and transition to Chapter 2, I discuss the significance of this section. I explain the potential role of this study in informing future practice at the local school and district level through the offering of recommendations to promote retention post-COVID-19.

Background

Teacher attrition is a complex topic because a teacher's choice to leave, whether a particular school or the profession entirely, is influenced by multiple factors. In this brief background summary, I introduce topics that are explored in depth in the review of literature found in Chapter 2. Although a plethora of research has been conducted on teacher attrition, the specific causes remain elusive. The ambiguity leaves a gap in the research literature on effective strategies to reduce or prevent teacher attrition.

Madigan and Kim (2021) divided the factors that influence teacher attrition into three categories: environmental, social, and personal. Commonly cited environmental and

social factors include school climate, perceptions of administrative and collegial support, classroom management, and a perceived lack of support to address student discipline (Duran et al., 2022; Hester et al., 2020; Perrone et al., 2019; Ramos & Hughes, 2020). The personal factors affecting a teacher's attrition intentions are most commonly cited as prolonged job stress leading to physical and psychological symptoms and burnout syndrome (Ansley et al., 2019; Christian-Brandt et al., 2020; Dicke et al., 2018; Dunn, 2020; Gutentag & Asterham, 2022; Herman et al., 2020; Hester et al., 2020; Madigan & Kim, 2021; Perrone et al., 2019).

Recent survey results revealed that teachers are twice as likely as the general population to experience frequent job-related stress (RAND Survey, 2021). Roeser et al. (2022) stated that stress is increasing across all levels of the education system. Emerging research indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown added additional stressors for teachers due to the rapid shift to online learning and disruption of the work-life balance that resulted (Savchenko et al., 2022). The prolonged exposure to stress can result in physical and psychological symptoms related to negative emotions such as anxiety, anger, and frustration (Herman et al., 2020). Without early and effective intervention this chronic stress can lead to the development of burnout (Bottiani et al., 2019).

Maslach and Leiter (2016) described burnout as a psychological syndrome that emerges as a result of chronic job stress. Burnout is categorized by three dimensions: feelings of overwhelming exhaustion; depersonalization, often referred to as cynicism; and a sense of inefficacy in one's ability to perform job-related tasks (Maslach & Leiter,

2016, 2021). Burnout is linked with more serious physical symptoms such as fatigue, headaches, hypertension, cardiovascular disorders, and gastrointestinal disorders. In addition to the physical toll of burnout, serious psychological consequences such as malaise, depression, and a tendency toward substance abuse, can emerge (Camacho et al., 2021; Edú-Valsania et al., 2022; Garcia-Carmona et al., 2019; Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Shakeel et al., 2022). Burnout has been shown as a predictive factor in teacher attrition (Bottiani et al., 2019; Kotowski et al., 2022; Shaalvik & Shaalvik, 2020; Vargas Rubilar & Oros, 2021).

Gutentag and Asterhan (2022) concluded that burnout is correlated to a teacher's overall well-being. They found that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly added to the number of teachers who were experiencing burnout. The pandemic caused extensive interruptions to the U.S. education system and introduced new techno-stressors for teachers. The additional technology-based stressors were compounded by a lack of training and resources to meet the demands that emerged overnight (Gutentag & Asterhan, 2022). Postpandemic burnout is cited as a worldwide epidemic in elementary and secondary schools (Califf & Brooks, 2020). The pandemic created new demands for teachers that included increased time needed to prepare lessons and grade student work and decreased time for face-to-face instruction (Kotowski et al., 2022). These factors combined with a lessening ability to separate work and family life due to quarantine circumstances contributed to higher levels of burnout and teacher attrition (Kotowski et al., 2022).

The rising attrition rates are affecting southern states more than other areas of the United States. In 2018, the national teacher attrition rate was 8% annually, whereas the attrition rate for southern states fell between 16% and 17% (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). A definitive cause for this discrepancy is currently unknown; however, the factors suspected of contributing to this include teacher salary, characteristics of students, working conditions, and the experience level of teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). There is a gap in practice resulting in rising attrition rates postpandemic. With numbers continuing to rise, this study was needed to identify teacher experiences with the postpandemic teacher attrition and to obtain valuable data about their recommendations to increase teacher retention.

Problem Statement

The problem was a postpandemic increase in teacher attrition at an A-rated suburban middle school in a southern state. School ratings are assigned based on overall student achievement, individual student growth, graduation rate, and participation percentages. Weißenfels et al. (2022) indicated that depersonalization and lack of personal accomplishment increased significantly from prepandemic to postpandemic. The implications were that this was not due to online learning itself but to an overall lack of resources felt by teachers during the pandemic. These factors are cited as precursors to teacher attrition. Lückner et al. (2022) found that teacher attrition is rising postpandemic, and they cited burnout as a perceived factor in this phenomenon. Vargas Rubilar and Oros (2021) found that uncertainty about the outcome of the pandemic led to higher amounts of stress for teachers. This increased stress led to greater manifestation of

physical, mental, and emotional symptoms. These symptoms have contributed to higher attrition rates among teachers.

The rising attrition rates postpandemic have also been seen at the local level. Attrition rates for the suburban middle school and the district it belongs to are shown in Tables 1 and 2. The data in both tables were provided by the assistant director of personnel.

Table 1

Attrition Rates in the Suburban Middle School

School year	Total no. of teachers	Total attrition (<i>f</i>)
2017–2018	70	0
2018–2019	68	2
2019–2020	80	7
2020–2021	79	7
2021–2022	79	14

Table 2

Attrition Rates in the Suburban Middle School's District

School year	Total no. of teachers	Total attrition (<i>f</i>)
2017–2018	1131	144
2018–2019	1137	144
2019–2020	1217	263
2020–2021	1333	197
2021–2022	1341	207

The increased attrition shown in Tables 1 and 2 has placed additional strain on the local schools, teachers, and district. As Madigan and Kim (2021) noted, attrition affects the academic progress of students (Madigan & Kim, 2021). These data indicated a gap in

practice leading to increased teacher attrition postpandemic. The local gap in practice aligns with the gap in the research literature on effective methods to reduce teacher attrition.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore middle school teachers' experiences with the increasing attrition in their school and to obtain their recommendations for improving teacher retention at an A-rated suburban middle school in a southern state. The participants for this study were current middle school teachers in a high-income, A-rated, suburban middle school in the U.S. South. The suburban middle school is part of a multifacility, A-rated school district that serves a suburban area located on the outskirts of a large, southern city. I interviewed the participating teachers about their experiences with the rising teacher attrition postpandemic and their recommendations to promote teacher retention. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed for themes about attrition and retention using the contextual lens of the JD-R theory.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are middle school teachers' experiences related to the increasing teacher attrition at an A-rated suburban middle school in a southern state?

RQ2: What are middle school teachers' recommendations for improving teacher retention at an A-rated suburban middle school in a southern state?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that supported this study was Bakker and Demerouti's (2007) JD-R theory. The JD-R theory is based on the principle that job characteristics heavily influence the well-being of employees. High-pressure work environments with emotional demands may lead to mental, emotional, and physical consequences for employees if they are not balanced with job resources such as timely performance feedback, autonomy, task identity, task significance, and skill variety (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The JD-R theory has renewed relevance postpandemic because teachers have faced so many unpredictable challenges that may pose new job demands. These new and increased demands have contributed to higher attrition rates postpandemic (Lücker et al., 2022).

The JD-R theory is most effectively used to determine how a work environment affects the well-being and performance of employees. Like most jobs, teaching can be broken down into job demands and job resources. Job demands are the parts of teaching that require long term mental, emotional, and/or physical effort, and job resources are the things provided to teachers to assist in attaining work-related goals. Personal resources also assist in goal attainment and include personality traits such as self-efficacy and optimism (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). In the JD-R theory, burnout is likely when job demands exceed the job and personal resources available to an individual (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Teacher burnout is strongly linked to rising attrition (Garcia-Carmona et al., 2019; Herman et al., 2020; Kotowski, 2022). The attrition rate for teachers more

than doubled during the COVID-19 pandemic, and that trend has continued even after the official end of the pandemic in May of 2023 (Kotowski et al., 2022).

In this basic qualitative study, I explored the experiences of suburban middle school teachers in an A-rated school in a southern U.S. state with the increased attrition at their school postpandemic. I did so by conducting interviews with teachers. The JD-R theory provided the contextual lens used to classify teacher experiences as job demands, job resources, or personal resources and whether an imbalance in demands and resources may have contributed to increased attrition postpandemic. Chapter 2 provides a more detailed examination of the JD-R theory.

Nature of the Study

I employed basic qualitative methods to explore the experiences of southern middle school teachers in an A-rated school in a southern U.S. state regarding factors that affect postpandemic attrition. Individual interviews were conducted with 13 current teachers to obtain descriptive data on their experiences with factors that affect postpandemic teacher attrition and their recommendations to promote retention. The interviews were semistructured and followed an interview protocol to ensure consistency of the data gathered. Qualitative interviewing is the best way to obtain data on the experiences of an individual (Burkholder et al., 2019; Ravitch & Carl, 2019; Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Each interview was recorded and transcribed for analysis. The analysis of the transcripts involved a standard multistep coding process for qualitative data analysis to identify concepts and themes of importance. The design and method were appropriate for this study because qualitative strategies are best suited to explore experiential data

and gather an accurate picture of the totality of the respondents' experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2019).

Definitions

The following terms and definitions are aligned to the content of this study:

Academic progress: The way that school officials measure student growth towards promotion to the next grade level. Often standardized-test scores are at least part of the data considered (Kim, 2021).

Attrition: A term that refers to when a teacher leaves a job they previously held (Madigan & Kim, 2021; Ramos & Hughes, 2020).

Burnout: A syndrome caused by chronic, long-term stress experienced at work. It consists of three parts: (a) emotional exhaustion, (b) depersonalization/cynicism, (c) reduced feelings of personal accomplishment (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022; Maslach & Leiter, 2016, 2021; Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993; Moss, 2019; Savchenko et al., 2022).

Cynicism: An attitude correlated with negative thoughts and emotions towards others that reduces a teacher's capacity to respond to needs of the job (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020).

Depersonalization: Mental distance from a job or negative feelings and emotions about one's job, often called cynicism (Maslach & Leiter, 2021).

Environmental factors: Aspects within the school or classroom that can affect a teacher's physical or emotional well-being (Madigan & Kim, 2021).

Job demands: Aspects of the work environment that require sustained physical or psychological effort (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; de Vine & Morgan, 2020; Vargas Rubilar & Oros, 2021).

Job resources: Aspects of the work environment that help employees to accomplish work-related goals or meet job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; de Vine & Morgan, 2020; Vargas Rubilar & Oros, 2021).

Online learning: The time during the quarantine for the COVID-19 pandemic where students received all instruction and resources from their teachers in an online platform (Califf & Brooks, 2020; Kotowski et al., 2022; Savchenko et al., 2022).

Overwhelming exhaustion: Feelings of depleted energy and inadequacy in coping with the stress of the job (Maslach & Leiter, 2021; Robinson et al., 2019).

Personal accomplishment: Internal, positive feelings about one's ability to perform a job well (Skaalvik & Slaalvik, 2020).

Personal factors: Individual personality or character traits that can determine how a teacher acts or reacts to stressful situations (Madigan & Kim, 2021).

Personal resources: Aspects of an individual's personality that can help in meeting personal and job demands, such as self-efficacy and optimism (Weißenfels et al., 2022).

Retention: A term that refers to when a teacher returns to the same school for consecutive years (Hester et al., 2020; Lane et al., 2019; Torres, 2020)

School climate: Aspects of the physical and emotional environment that are often individualized to one specific location. These aspects often consist of factors such as

workload, control, reward, community, fairness, values, and personal relationships (Maslach & Leiter, 2021; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020).

Self-efficacy: The confidence a teacher has in their ability to perform their job well (Savchenko et al., 2022; Shakeel et al., 2022).

Social factors: Factors relating to interpersonal relationships that can affect a teacher's physical or emotional well-being. Such factors include student behavior, relationships with colleagues, and interactions with administrators (Madigan & Kim, 2021).

Stress: Negative, unpleasant emotions such as anxiety, frustration, or depression that are linked to environmental triggers and that affect a teacher's daily life (Herman et al., 2020; Kotowski et al., 2022).

Assumptions

In conducting this study, I assumed that the participating teachers did so willingly and that they were open and honest about their experiences with the rising attrition rate. I also assumed that the suburban middle school that served as the site of the study was similar to other suburban middle schools in southern U.S. states. These assumptions were necessary because teacher participation was voluntary and attrition rates are trending higher in southern states than in other areas across the United States (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). The rising attrition rate postpandemic is an important problem to address in schools across the United States. The 13 participants for the study were current teachers with at least 2 years of experience in their current position.

Scope and Delimitations

In this qualitative study, I focused on the experiences of middle school teachers about the rising attrition rate and their recommendations to promote teacher retention. The 13 participants were current Grades 6–8 teachers in a suburban A-rated school in the South. The delimitations were that the participants had taught in a suburban middle school in the South with a current A rating for at least 2 years.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was that there were restricted types of data that the human resources department of the school district was willing to release; therefore, there was no way to determine why teachers chose to leave their school or district. In addition, the school district did not maintain a database of teachers who transferred from one district school to another, so the actual attrition rates may be higher than shown if teachers simply transferred to another school and were replaced by an in-district transfer. I collected the data for the study at one point in time. The data represent the experiences of existing suburban middle school teachers in an A-rated school in a southern U.S. state. The findings of the study are not transferrable to other contexts; the data regarding participants' experiences and recommendations are specific to a particular school climate.

Significance

This study is significant in that it may foster positive social change by providing school and district administrators with recommendations on ways to improve the retention of teachers. In a post-COVID-19 society, the mental and physical well-being of teachers has been revealed as an area that needs to improve to prevent attrition. Teacher

attrition is rising at an alarming rate, and many have cited frustration and a lack of support to meet their needs as a reason (Lücker et al., 2022). Although this study may not foster a changed work environment for all teachers, it may highlight recommended changes that administrators can make to support the well-being and promote retention of individual teachers in a particular school and district. These outcomes may be an important form of social change for the affected teachers.

Summary

Schools around the United States are experiencing rising teacher attrition postpandemic (Lücker et al., 2022). The rising attrition rate is detrimental to the academic progress of students (Madigan & Kim, 2021). It was important to study the experiences of teachers with this attrition to gain insight into their recommendations to promote retention, particularly in the South, where attrition rates are nearly double that of other areas of the United States (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). In Chapter 2, I will review current literature on teacher attrition and the factors most commonly linked to attrition. I also discuss how the JD-R theory was a pertinent framework for understanding teachers' experiences and recommendations to promote retention.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The current study addressed the increase in postpandemic teacher attrition at an A-rated suburban middle school in a southern state. The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of middle school teachers with the rising attrition rate to gain insight into their recommendations for improving teacher retention. The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown forced the closure of schools nationwide. A rapid shift was made to online learning in order to attempt to provide appropriate education to all students. The full impact of the pandemic on education is still unfolding, but several factors have been documented as contributing to the rising teacher attrition rates postpandemic (Gillani et al., 2022; Gutentag & Asterhan, 2022; Kotowski et al., 2022; Lückner et al., 2022; Savchenko et al., 2022; Vargas Rubilar & Oros, 2021; Weißenfels et al., 2022).

The factors that impact teacher attrition can be divided into three general categories: (a) environmental, (b) social, (c) personal (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Since teaching is a profession that requires intense social interaction in the workplace, many of the environmental and social factors influencing attrition are complicated to untwine; however, this study separated school climate, perceptions of administrative support, and burnout as environmental factors, with colleague support and classroom management/student discipline categorized as social factors (Duran et al., 2022; Hester et al., 2020; Perrone et al., 2019; Ramos & Hughes, 2020). The personal factors that were examined for this study are prolonged job stress resulting in physical and psychological effects and work–life balance (Ansley et al., 2019; Christian-Brandt et al., 2020; Dicke et

al., 2018; Dunn, 2020; Gutentag & Asterham, 2022; Herman et al., 2020; Hester et al., 2020; Madigan & Kim, 2021; Perrone et al., 2019; Savchenko et al., 2022). Each of these topics are explored in the literature review.

The literature search strategy portion of this chapter identifies the databases searched to yield current literature about teacher attrition. The Conceptual Framework section details Bakker and Demerouti's (2007) JD-R theory and its renewed relevance postpandemic. Finally, the literature review details the common themes identified from current literature about teacher attrition and the many contributing factors.

Literature Search Strategy

I searched multiple databases and search engines for current literature on teacher attrition to review for this study. These databases and search engines were Education Source, ERIC, ProQuest, SAGE Journals, Thoreau (a Walden University Library multidatabase search tool), and Google Scholar. The terms searched were variations and combinations of *United States*, *teacher attrition*, *teacher turnover*, *COVID-19*, *teacher retention*, and *teacher burnout*.

Conceptual Framework/Theoretical Foundation

The conceptual framework for this study was the JD-R theory). The JD-R theory is best used to examine how a work environment impacts an employee's well-being and performance, as most elements of a job can be divided into demands or resources (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). The JD-R theory was developed in 2007 by Bakker and Demerouti, and they found that common job demands included high pressure work environments, heavy emotional demands on employees, and job role ambiguity. Job

resources are things provided to the employee to help them accomplish or meet job demands. Balanced properly, these resources can promote engagement, learning, and deeper commitment to the organization (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). An imbalance between job demands and resources puts teachers at an increased risk of burnout, contributing to increased teacher attrition (Clarà et al, 2022; Tummers & Bakker, 2021).

The JD-R theory is best used for professions that care for others for a living. The sustained, long-term demands of caring professions, such as teaching, often impact the well-being of employees by exposing them to prolonged periods of stress resulting in negative emotions, tension, general discontent, and physical symptoms. In optimum work environments these demands are buffered by resources that help employees counteract the long-term demands. For teachers these resources include timely performance feedback, effective and supportive leadership, colleague support, and relevant professional development (Affrunti et al., 2018; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Dicke et al., 2018; Sokal et al., 2020; Tummers & Bakker, 2021). Without proper resources, teachers are placed at high risk for developing burnout and contemplate attrition.

The JD-R theory has been successfully applied to education research for the past 15 years. Clarà et al. (2022) used the JD-R theory to examine the role of work demands on teacher burnout and found that the quantity of work demands can predict emotional exhaustion and cynicism, precursors to burnout leading to attrition. The same study found the cognitive demands played a protective role against both of these facets of burnout, leading to the conclusion that reducing the number of tasks while ensuring that demands are cognitively engaging could reduce the prevalence of teacher burnout leading to

attrition. Weißenfels et al. (2022) used the JD-R theory to examine changes in teacher burnout during the pandemic and their relationship to teacher self-efficacy. The study found that the pandemic posed new and different job demands, but high teacher self-efficacy resulted in more enthusiasm about teaching, better teaching performance, and higher instructional quality that served as a protective factor against burnout and potential attrition. Sokal et al. (2020) also used the JD-R theory to determine the best ways to support teachers during the pandemic and determined that collegial support, administrative support, targeted and relevant professional development, and physical and emotional self-care were key resources that helped reduce the impact of the demands placed on teachers during the pandemic. Dicke et al. (2018) applied the JD-R theory in their longitudinal study of teachers' occupational well-being and found that teacher self-efficacy served a buffering role for job demands. The current study benefited from this framework in its application to examine the experiences of teachers about the factors influencing the rising attrition rate postpandemic.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variables

Conducting this literature review, I found that the factors that influence teacher attrition can be divided into three general categories: (a) environmental, (b) social, (c) personal (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Teaching requires intense social interaction in the workplace, and many of the environmental and social factors influencing attrition overlap; however, this study separated school climate, perceptions of administrative support, and burnout as environmental factors, with colleague support and classroom management/student discipline categorized as social factors (Duran et al., 2022; Hester et

al., 2020; Perrone et al., 2019; Ramos & Hughes, 2020). The personal factors that were examined for this study are prolonged job stress causing physical and psychological symptoms and work–life balance (Ansley et al., 2019; Christian-Brandt et al., 2020; Dicke et al., 2018; Dunn, 2020; Gutentag & Asterham, 2022; Herman et al., 2020; Hester et al., 2020; Madigan & Kim, 2021; Perrone et al., 2019; Savchenko et al., 2022). My review of the literature did not reveal specific or consistent recommendations for use on-site to reduce the rising attrition rates postpandemic.

School Climate

The first environmental factor influencing teacher attrition was school climate. School climate refers to aspects of the physical and emotional environment that have a direct impact on the individuals who comprise the school. School climate varies between individual school sites, and for this review of the literature, it encompasses a teacher's workload, ability to exert control, perceptions of rewards and recognition, sense of community, and the perceived fairness and safety of the daily work environment, along with school context factors such as class size, socio-economic status of students, and availability of resources (Camacho et al., 2021; Maslach & Leiter, 2021; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020). Teaching is a profession associated with high levels of occupational stress (Dicke et al., 2018; Duran et al., 2022; Herman et al., 2020; Rand Survey, 2021). If not managed well, this high stress level for employees can negatively impact the school climate and overall job satisfaction. (Duran et al., 2022; Herman et al., 2020; Perrone et al., 2019; Roeser et al, 2022).

Teaching is strongly associated with a highly demanding workload. Teachers are often assigned to teach multiple subjects and/or grade levels and given minimal time in the day to plan, prepare, or grade student work, leading many teachers to spend time outside of school hours devoted to these tasks (Bottiani et al., 2019; Duran et al., 2022; Edú-Valsania et al., 2022; Kotowski et al., 2022; Savchenko et al., 2022; Tye & O'Brien, 2002; Vargas Rubilar & Oros, 2021;). The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic forced teachers into an overnight transition to online learning that added to their workload and reduced their sense of community. These factors resulted in a shifting school climate that lowered overall teacher morale and job satisfaction contributing to teacher attrition (Califf & Brooks, 2020; Gillani et al., 2022; Gutentag & Asterhan, 2022; Kotowski et al., 2022; Pellerone, 2021; Sokal et al., 2020; Vargas Rubilar & Oros, 2021; Weißenfels et al., 2022).

A teacher's ability to exert control in the work environment is a key element of school climate. A lack of autonomy and role ambiguity can lead to teachers feeling devalued and increases the likelihood of burnout and thoughts of attrition (Dunn, 2020; Edú-Valsania et al., 2022; Savchenko et al., 2022; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020; Vargas Rubilar & Oros, 2021; Whiteoak, 2021). Teachers who do not feel their input is valued within the school climate tend to be more authoritative and punitive in their relationships with students resulting in a more tense classroom environment and lower performance outcomes for students (Camacho et al, 2021; Clarà et al., 2022; Herman et al., 2020; Lücker et al., 2022; Robinson et al., 2019; Savchenko et al., 2022; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020).

Perceptions of Administrative Support

Teacher perceptions about the support of administration have a significant impact on thoughts of attrition. Tummers and Bakker (2021) found that school leadership can directly influence job demands, job resources, and even the personal resources that teachers can access. Their study also found that good leadership can moderate the link between job demands and burnout, leading to lower attrition. One of the top reasons teachers give for leaving their job and/or the profession is a lack of administrative support (Ansley et al., 2019; Hester et al., 2020; Lane et al., 2019; Perrone et al., 2019; Ramos & Hughes, 2020; Robinson et al., 2019; Tye & O'Brian, 2002). Moss (2019) asserted that the well-being of individuals suffers if employers do not have specific strategies in place to support employees and that burnout is preventable.

Teachers with higher job satisfaction are less likely to consider leaving their position or the education field. Robinson et al., (2019) concluded that low job satisfaction was one of the main precursors to burnout and teacher attrition. To improve job satisfaction, perceptions of administrative support is vital. Benita et al. (2019) found that principal support and a felt sense of community helped teachers become more engaged and improved job satisfaction. Lane et al., (2019) also stated that teachers have higher job satisfaction when they have positive perceptions about the support of leaders and that job satisfaction is positively linked to teacher retention. This finding was confirmed by Perrone et al. (2019), who also concluded that the better a teacher's perceptions of their relationship with administration, the more likely they are to remain at a school. Ramos and Hughes (2020) found that the factors with the greatest impact on attrition were

student discipline and administrative support. Whiteoak (2021) concluded that teachers who perceive their administrators as uncaring are prone to cynicism and more likely to consider leaving the profession.

Burnout

Professional burnout has long been cited as a risk for teachers at all grade levels, but its effect has been heightened postpandemic (Kotowski et al., 2022). Burnout is a syndrome that is now recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO) as an often-inevitable response to prolonged job stress. Burnout is described in three dimensions: (a) exhaustion leading to fatigue and mental depletion; (b) cynicism and detachment, formerly known as depersonalization, causing negative attitudes towards others in the work environment; and (c) lack of personal accomplishment leading to diminished productivity and morale (Camacho et al., 2021; Edú-Valsania et al., 2022; Garcia-Carmona et al., 2019; Maslach & Leiter, 2016, 2021; Robinson et al., 2019; Savchenko et al., 2022; Shakeel et al., 2022). Two aspects of burnout, exhaustion and cynicism, are positively correlated to a teacher's intention to leave the profession (Madigan & Kim, 2021).

The prevalence of burnout in teachers increased during and postpandemic, and much research has been conducted on the topic. Camacho et al. (2021) found that older, more experienced teachers were better able to cope with the stress of the job and less likely to experience severe burnout symptoms or consider leaving the field. The same study identified environments with high demands and low resources as a major contributor to chronic job stress. Self-efficacy and effective classroom management

strategies were found to serve as a protective factor against burnout. This finding was consistent with the conclusions of de Vine and Morgan (2020). Garcia-Carmona et al. (2019) focused on identifying factors that contribute to the development of burnout. The major contributing factors for secondary teachers included work overload, time pressure, role ambiguity, student disciplinary issues, and inadequate quality and quantity of training as significant risk factors for developing burnout.

de Vine and Morgan (2020) investigated the correlation of personality traits to the development of teacher burnout. The findings indicated that neuroticism was the personality trait most heavily correlated to the development of burnout and intentions for attrition. It is unclear whether a teacher's natural tendency to experience strong negative emotions plays a larger role than environmental factors. Individuals who were open to new experiences also showed a positive correlation with burnout. de Vine and Morgan (2020) theorized that these individuals may have a tendency to overextend themselves in an effort to be creative and/or experience a variety of things, leading to additional job-related stress.

Lücker et al. (2022) used a digital survey to assess the well-being of teacher's postpandemic. The survey results revealed an increase in the number of teachers reporting chronic job stress and burnout. Teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy and stronger coping skills were less likely to experience symptoms and more likely to overcome the feelings if they were experienced. Morale and job satisfaction were both identified as direct indicators of a teacher's intention to quit. The role of self-efficacy was also emphasized by Shakeel et al. (2022) in moderating the effects of burnout. Their

study determined that self-efficacy was a better moderator than a positive school climate. This finding is in opposition to the assertions of Moss (2019) who focused on the importance of providing a working environment with an effective support system in place to assist those experiencing burnout symptoms. Role clarity, a manageable workload, and communication and support from leaders were also identified as potential moderating components of the environment. Clarà et al. (2022) recommended decreasing the quantity of demands on teachers while increasing the quality of the cognitive demands, as engagement was identified as the opposite of burnout. Teachers who are actively engaged in their work present less attrition risk.

Colleague Support

Teaching is noted as one of the most stressful occupations, and teachers face unexpected and unpredictable challenges throughout each school day. Shared experiences often provide a basis for forming deep and meaningful relationships among teachers. For many educators, colleagues comprise most of their social and emotional support system (Camacho et al., 2021). These relationships among colleagues are sometimes a professional mentorship, but many times they are simply a coping strategy to help improve the individual well-being of teachers. Moss (2019) identified positive work relationships as a key hygiene factor that can influence job satisfaction. If these factors are not in place, the result is often burnout leading to teacher attrition.

Savchenko et al. (2022) identified teaching as the profession with the highest rate of burnout compared to other caregiving professions. The assertion was made that the pandemic exacerbated an already stress ridden occupation. The isolation of teachers from

colleagues who comprise an integral part of most teacher's social and emotional support system left many void of usual coping mechanisms. The combination of higher workload due to the transition to online learning and minimal support from colleagues resulted in higher burnout rates and escalating attrition rates. Clarà et al. (2022) found that colleague and community support was closely correlated to a teacher's sense of personal accomplishment but did not predict the emotional exhaustion or cynicism components of burnout. In contrast, Benita et al. (2019) found that a teacher's perceived level of social and emotional support from administrators and peers partially counteracted the cynicism that accompanies burnout and thoughts of attrition.

Christian-Brandt et al. (2020) described the concepts of secondary traumatic stress and compassion fatigue and their potential effects on the mental and physical well-being of teachers. A strong support system was identified as a valuable coping strategy to overcome the emotional exhaustion that accompanies these factors. Duran et al. (2022) also identified these social supports as aiding the reduction of stress and potentially preventing burnout that can lead to teacher attrition. Whiteoak (2021) also found that support from colleagues was positively correlated to morale and job satisfaction and a teacher's sense of self-efficacy. Each of these components were cited as potential moderating factors against burnout and attrition. Bao et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of available emotional resources to balance the high emotional demands placed on teachers each day. For many educators, colleagues are their primary emotional resource. Addressing the mental and physical well-being of teachers was identified as more beneficial for retention than relevant effective professional development.

Classroom Management and Student Discipline

Effective classroom management is essential to the success of students under a teacher's instruction; however, learning to properly manage a classroom of 30 or more students often takes time and much trial and error. Whiteoak (2021) identified classroom management and disciplinary support from administrators as significant predictors of teacher turnover. Dunn (2020) also identified student disciplinary problems as a major contributor to teacher stress and retention, especially for teachers in the early stages of their career. Teachers are most at risk to leave within the first 5 years of their career, contributing to the current teacher shortage (Dunn, 2020). Robinson et al. (2019) found that student behavior was a significant source of chronic job stress that could lead to burnout. Teachers with burnout were more likely to have negative thoughts about and attitudes towards students leading to a break down in the teacher-student relationship reducing student confidence and motivation for learning.

Bottiani et al. (2019) identified teaching in public schools as one of the most stressful jobs in the United States and identified teacher self-efficacy as a key component of successful classroom management. A teacher's mental and emotional well-being was directly linked to classroom management and student achievement by Herman et al. (2020). Teachers who were experiencing the emotional exhaustion component of burnout were more likely to be harsh and punitive in addressing student behavior, often leading to an escalation of undesirable and disruptive outcomes. The potential damage to the student-teacher relationship was particularly impactful at the middle school level. Whiteoak (2021) proposed that frequent problems with student behavior was a strong

indication of a larger problem with the system of the school. Torres (2020) stated that schools with underserved populations are at higher risk for problems with student behavior, leading to higher stress for teachers and rising rates of attrition. Ramos & Hughes (2020) identified student discipline as a top reason given by teachers leaving the profession. These teachers listed inconsistent implementation of disciplinary policies as a source of frustration and stress, despite attempts to reform the programs used.

Prolonged Stress as a Cause of Physical and Psychological Symptoms

Teaching is cited as one of the most stressful occupations in the United States. This prolonged stress is known to cause a variety of physical conditions related to a decrease in overall well-being and a decrease in professional productivity (Camacho et al., 2021; Edú-Valsania et al., 2022; Garcia-Carmona et al., 2019; Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Shakeel et al., 2022). Lücker et al. (2022) found that postpandemic teachers experienced higher rates of depression and anxiety symptoms when compared to the rest of the population. Edú-Valsania et al. (2022) echoed this finding and added that physical symptoms were also notably higher. These physical symptoms included gastrointestinal and cardiovascular symptoms in addition to chronic fatigue, greater susceptibility to infectious illness, increased instances of high blood pressure and type two diabetes, chronic headaches, and insomnia. Robinson et al. (2019) emphasized that a teacher's effectiveness in the classroom diminishes as these symptoms become more pronounced.

Gutentag and Asterham (2022) indicated that two-thirds of teachers experienced psychological symptoms during and postpandemic that negatively affected their well-being and ability to perform their job effectively. Sokal et al. (2020) stated that these

symptoms were likely to escalate to teacher attrition if interventions did not address the well-being of teachers. Pellerone (2021) proposed that the isolation of the pandemic resulted in declining mental and physical health of teachers resulting in chronic absenteeism, early retirement decisions, and a decrease in self-efficacy contributing to the rising attrition rates. Garcia-Carmona et al. (2019) found that increased stress levels could lead to an increased risk of substance use and abuse and suicidal ideation that would further exacerbate the declining mental and physical well-being of teachers. The combination of these factors produced teachers who are struggling to cope with life and have fewer resources to devote to their students (Whiteoak, 2021).

Work–Life Balance

To cope with the demands of teaching, many educators have a set routine for work and home. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown forced teachers into an overnight transition from face-to-face instruction to working virtually from home. Many of them were also the primary caregivers for young children and/or aging parents. This forced work transition into their homes disrupted the routines and balance of roles, leaving them without clear boundaries for work or home life, producing higher levels of anxiety and reduced job satisfaction (Savchenko et al., 2022). Weissenfels et al. (2022) identified these factors as an additional job demand that was likely to increase the rates of burnout and attrition.

Gutentag and Asterham (2022) identified the disruption to work–life balance during the pandemic as a significant contributing factor to the increased burnout during the pandemic, leading many to consider leaving their jobs. Kotowski et al. (2022) found

that the rapid shift to working from home caused more family conflict and left teachers unable to balance the ever-changing demands made on them by both work and home responsibilities. This imbalance resulted in higher rates of anxiety and a significant decrease in the self-efficacy beliefs of teachers that directly impacted both their overall well-being and effectiveness in the classroom environment. Many teachers felt unprepared to meet the challenges presented during the pandemic, overwhelmed by the constantly changing demands, and mentally exhausted from trying to cope (Pellerone, 2021). While the cause and effects of the escalation of stress and declining well-being are widely agreed upon in the literature, the interventions to address the problems range widely. Mindfulness training and counselling programs are commonly suggested, but it is unclear of their long-term effectiveness to address the serious nature of the concerns.

Summary and Conclusions

The impact of the pandemic on teachers is well researched and documented. There is a clear connection made in the research literature between these effects and the rising attrition rates currently being experienced. The gap in the research lies in what can be done at the local level to stem this attrition. It is evident that the overall well-being of teachers must be addressed, but there is also evidence that the environmental working conditions may be a contributing factor that needs attention.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore middle school teachers' experiences with the increasing attrition in their school and obtain their recommendations for improving teacher retention at an A-rated suburban middle school in a southern U.S. state. This study may provide administrators valuable information regarding specific intervention strategies that could reduce the rising attrition rate seen at the local level. Chapter 3 of this study includes the research design and rationale, including the RQs, employed for this study, a description of my role as the researcher, the methodology that formed the foundation for the study, including participant selection procedures, a description of the study, instrumentation for data collection, and the data analysis plan, a description of the trustworthiness of the study and steps taken to ensure ethical conduct, and a chapter summary to revisit the main points addressed in the chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

The RQs for this study were

RQ1: What are middle school teachers' experiences regarding the increasing attrition at an A-rated suburban middle school in a southern state?

RQ2: What are middle school teachers' recommendations for improving retention at an A-rated suburban middle school in a southern state?

I employed basic qualitative methods to explore the experiences of suburban middle school teachers in an A-rated school in a southern state regarding factors that affect postpandemic attrition. Individual interviews were conducted with 13 current teachers to obtain descriptive data on their experiences with factors that affect postpandemic teacher

attrition and their recommendations to promote retention. The interviews were semistructured and utilized an interview protocol to ensure consistency of the data gathered. Qualitative interviewing is the best way to obtain data on the experiences of an individual (Burkholder et al., 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2019; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This method and design were appropriate for this study because qualitative methods are best suited to explore experiential data and gather an accurate picture of the totality of the respondents' experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2019).

In planning this study, I considered many research designs. Quantitative research designs are best suited to explain an issue among a large population of individuals using numerical data and statistical analysis (Burkholder et al., 2020). Since the goal of my study centered around the experiences of teachers, rather than numerical data, I ruled out the use of quantitative designs. Once I decided that qualitative research was better suited for my study, I considered several methods. I considered using a qualitative case study approach; however, case studies are best suited to closely examine a single instance of a social phenomenon (Babbie, 2017; Burkholder et al., 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Since rising teacher attrition post Covid is a phenomenon that is being recognized around the United States, I opted to eliminate this methodology. Ethnography is a type of qualitative research best suited to examine the way that cultures and societies function (Babbie, 2017; Burkholder et al., 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2019). While I am interested in the way that schools function, and an argument can be made for classifying a particular school as a "culture", I felt like this methodology would place additional limitations on the potential transferability of my findings.

Another form of qualitative research that I considered was action research. Action research designs focus on finding or testing actionable solutions to a problem (Babbie, 2017; Burkholder et al., 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2019). While the possibility of producing recommendations to combat teacher attrition was part of my study, a clear understanding of the experiences of individual teachers must be present prior to posing solutions. For this reason, I decided that action research was not the best option for the current study. The last type of qualitative research design I considered was a focus group. A focus group involves gathering participants for a group interview to prompt discussion about a topic (Babbie, 2017; Burkholder et al., 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2019). This method was heavily considered because the goal of my study could have been reached using data gathered from a focus group, and this would have reduced the amount of time needed to conduct interviews. I ultimately decided to use individual, semistructured interviews instead because I felt that teachers would be more likely to share specific details about their experiences with less trepidation in an individual setting, rather than in a group.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher in this basic qualitative study, my role was to obtain data regarding the experiences of the participants with the rising attrition rate at their school and their recommendations on ways to promote retention. Serving as the researcher and interviewer in this study meant that I was an observer-participant acting as the primary instrument in data collection (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). The study was conducted in the school where I am employed. Conducting research there meant that I had a prior professional relationship with the participants. I hold no supervisory role in the school;

therefore, no instructional or supervisory power differentials existed. My role as a colleague allowed me to capitalize on the relationships of trust that existed prior to the study, and participants felt more comfortable sharing their honest experiences with me. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants were ensured confidentiality, as the study results were shared based on the totality of the data rather than individual responses.

To manage personal biases and address potential ethical concerns, I took a neutral position in the interviews. Participants were provided with a copy of the interview protocol prior to the interviews. All interviews were audio recorded, and the participants were asked to review the transcripts of the interviews and given the opportunity to clarify any points they felt were not communicated clearly prior to data analysis. No incentives were offered for participation in this study, but each participant was written a thank you note for their participation.

Methodology

The methodology employed for this study was qualitative. Qualitative research is particularly useful when the goal is to obtain and analyze data about the experiences of the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). In this study, I sought to gather data from the participants in their own words about their experiences with the rising attrition rate at their school postpandemic and obtain their recommendations about strategies to promote teacher retention. Data were gathered by conducting an individual, semistructured interviews with each participant. Qualitative interviews are the most appropriate method

to obtain data on the experiences of an individual (Burkholder et al., 2019; Ravitch & Carl, 2019; Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

Participant Selection

The participants for this study consisted of 13 current, middle school teachers working in an A-rated middle school in a southern state. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants. Purposeful sampling was particularly useful to select participants with experiential data useful in addressing the RQs for this study (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). The criteria that I used for selection were (a) a minimum of 3 years of teaching experience, (b) a minimum of 2 years of experience teaching students in Grades 6–8, (c) a minimum of 2 consecutive years taught at their current school site, and (d) previously worked with at least one individual who had left the school or the profession.

In qualitative research, identifying and selecting participants with knowledge and insight into the phenomenon being studied is vital to the success of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). I chose participants as a representative sample, having experience at the middle school level and knowledge of the circumstances leading to the attrition of former colleagues. Participants self-reported their total years of experience, number of years in their current school, and familiarity with colleagues who have left in a prospective participant survey that was administered digitally. The survey was sent out to all teachers in the school, and the follow-up communication was done through email. Participants were notified by email of their selection as a study participant and provided with an informed consent form to sign and email to me as a response.

Thirteen participants were selected for the study. The sample size was appropriate for this study because it provided a variety of experiences related to the rising attrition rate. The goal of qualitative research is to provide a contextual, ethical, and thorough answer to the RQs posed by the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Because results are not generalizable, and rarely transferable to other contexts, the small sample size was appropriate to the current study and research site. Individual interviews with the 13 participants provided rich, contextualized experiential data about the rising attrition rate at their school. Confirmation was provided when data saturation was reached.

Instrumentation

For this basic qualitative study, 13 selected participants completed individual, semistructured interviews based on a researcher-developed interview protocol. The interview guide and protocol were reviewed by the chair of the doctoral committee, the school district director of research and development, and the principal of the research site to obtain their feedback on the questions. The interview questions were then piloted with three nonparticipant colleagues to establish their validity prior to conducting interviews with participants. Audio recordings were made for each interview. These recordings were transcribed, and the transcripts along with interviewer notes were compiled for analysis. The interview protocol was developed as a series of open-ended questions to guide the interviews and provide consistency among the data collected but not limit the quality of experiential data collected from participants (Burkholder et al., 2019). The interview protocol was approved by Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB; approval no. 02-20-24-1088883) and the school district in charge of the local site prior to

the collection of data. Ultimately, content validity of the interview protocol was established by examining participant responses to ensure the questions elicited the type of data required for the study.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

After obtaining permission from Walden University's IRB (approval no. 02-20-24-1088883) and the local school district, I developed an online survey for potential participants to collect data for the purposeful sampling. Selected participants were notified of their selection through email. This introductory email identified the purpose of the study, the procedures that would be used, and an explanation of the risks and benefits of participation in the study. The school district and participants were provided notice that the interviews were conducted outside of school hours and were audio recorded for the purpose of transcription. Participants were provided with a letter of informed consent saying that participation was voluntary, no compensation was provided, all research data remained confidential, and they retained the right to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty. Participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions or address any concerns prior to signing the document.

After receipt of a signed informed consent, interviews were scheduled with the participants based on their availability after school hours. Participants were provided with a copy of the interview protocol at least a week in advance of the scheduled interview. Interviews were conducted in 45-minute time slots. Follow-up interviews were offered at the request of the participants to ensure that the totality of their experiences was accurately captured by the interview. Audio recordings were made during each interview

so that transcription was possible. Participants were shown the transcript from their interview and given the opportunity to clarify any points they felt were not accurately communicated to address internal trustworthiness of the data collected (Burkholder et al., 2019). In accordance with IRB guidelines, all data from the study will be stored for 5 years in a digital, password-protected file and then destroyed.

Upon confirmation of the trustworthiness of the data provided in their interview(s) and its analysis, participants completed a digital survey to conclude their input into the research study. This exit survey provided participants the opportunity to offer feedback on the interview protocol, the individual interviews, and the analysis of the data provided in the transcripts. No follow-up procedures were followed after this point because none were specifically requested by the participants.

Data Analysis Plan

The interview transcripts were compiled, and a multistep coding process for data analysis was used to identify concepts and themes of importance in the qualitative data (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). This process included reading each transcript from beginning to end and making notes of the major concepts discussed by the participant. The second round of qualitative coding involved the examination of each section of text to identify the meaning intended by the participant and assigning each a descriptive code. The third round of qualitative coding sought to identify patterns in the words or phrases frequently used to describe their experiences. The codes were then organized into larger themes, which involved the merging of similar content and elimination of repetitive concepts. The last step in coding was to identify themes that consistently emerged from each set of data

(Burkholder et al., 2019; Ravitch & Carl, 2019; Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Discrepancies in the themes among the interviews were identified and reported to account for any outliers.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research ensures the integrity and validity of the study and its findings. The four essential parts to establishing the trustworthiness of a study are (a) dependability, (b) credibility, (c) transferability, and (d) confirmability (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). The dependability of the study was ensured through an inquiry audit, which documented data collection and analysis in rich detail. The inquiry audit ensured consistency in the collection, analysis, and reporting of data throughout the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). The credibility of the study was addressed through peer debriefing, persistent observation, member checking, and reflexivity. Peer debriefing with an off-site colleague with qualitative research experience helped check for researcher bias and brought clarity to the conclusions drawn. Persistent observation, member checking, and reflexivity helped ensure the data collected and conclusions drawn from it were the intent of each participant. The transferability of the results was addressed using detailed, rich descriptions of the setting, assumptions of the study, and diversity of the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Confirmability for this study focused on the use of an audit trail to ensure that the methods were based on sound research and analysis principles (Ravitch & Carl, 2019).

Ethical Procedures

Ethical conduct in qualitative research is essential to protect participants. All participants were treated equitably and with respect. Prior to conducting the study,

approval was obtained from Walden University's IRB (approval no. 02-20-24-1088883). After receipt of IRB and the school district's approval, participants were recruited using an email invitation. Participants completed an online survey for prospective participants and were notified of selection by email. All participants received an informed consent form explaining their rights, the study's purpose, and the procedures that were followed in the study. Participants were informed of the potential risks and benefits of participating in the study and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses, and all documentation was completed without identifying information.

Participants were identified in all documentation by a code to ensure confidentiality. All data collected from or about participants is stored electronically on the hard drive of my personal laptop that is password protected. The laptop will remain in a locked cabinet when not in use. The data is stored for 5 years and then deleted, according to IRB guidelines. These steps helped protect the rights and confidentiality of the participants.

Conducting research in the school where I currently teach was a potential risk to the ethical procedures of the study. To ensure ethical conduct on my part, safeguards were put in place to protect the rights of the participants. I do not hold a supervisory position over any of the potential participants; therefore, no power differential or conflict of interests exist. Incentives were not offered in return for participation in the study. Member checking ensured that the transcribed interviews were an accurate reflection of each participant's intent. Participants retained the ability to withdraw from the study at

any time prior to submission without penalty, and a peer served as an intermediary and point of contact for participants. This ensured that participants felt comfortable expressing any concerns openly and confidentially. All data disseminated upon conclusion of the study focused on the findings of the group of participants to avoid breaching the confidentiality of the individual participants.

Summary

For this basic qualitative research study, I collected and analyzed data pertaining to middle school teachers' experience with the increasing attrition rates in their school postpandemic and their recommendations for improving teacher retention at an A-rated suburban middle school in a southern U.S. state. Thirteen current middle school teachers were selected to participate in the study based on their response to an online survey. Data were collected from interviews conducted with the participating teachers and from my observation notes. I engaged in multistep qualitative coding of interview transcripts and my notes to identify themes to answer the RQs posed in the study. In Chapter 4, I present the findings of the data analysis.

Chapter 4: Results

In this basic qualitative study, I explored the experiences of middle school teachers related to the increasing rate of attrition in their school, an A-rated suburban middle school in a southern state. I also sought participants' recommendations for improving teacher retention at their school. Teacher attrition is not a new phenomenon; however, the attrition rates continue to rise at an alarming rate postpandemic. This continued loss of qualified teachers in the classroom places additional pressure on the teachers and administrators who remain, often leading to detrimental outcomes for student achievement. This study was guided by the following RQs:

RQ1: What are middle school teachers' experiences related to the increasing teacher attrition at an A-rated suburban middle school in a southern state?

RQ2: What are middle school teachers' recommendations for improving teacher retention at an A-rated suburban middle school in a southern state?

This chapter presents the results of this basic qualitative study. It includes a description of the setting, including personal and organizational factors that could have influenced participants' perceptions or experiences at the time of the study. The setting also provides a description of the demographics of the school and participants that were relevant at the time of the study. The collection and analysis of data are described in their respective sections, and the Results section presents the data grouped by RQ. Figures and tables are provided to facilitate understanding of the results. In the section on evidence of trustworthiness, steps taken to promote credibility, dependability, transferability, and

confirmability are outlined. The summary concludes the chapter with an overview of the critical points contained in Chapter 4.

Setting

I conducted this basic qualitative study in an A-rated suburban middle school in a southern U.S. state. The middle school is part of a large, multifacility district that serves both suburban and rural students on the outskirts of a large southern city. The site selected is a public middle school with approximately 85 certified teachers and 1,100 students; therefore, the student to teacher ratio was approximately 13:1, at the time of the study.

The personal and organizational factors with the potential to exert influence over the experiences of the participants included the timing of data collection and fairly recent administrative changes in the school. Interviews with participants were scheduled over a 2-week period leading up to spring break for students and staff. The possibility exists that student behavior problems escalate while teacher patience declines during this period resulting in an increase in frustration for everyone in the school. The school also had administrative changes occur prior to the start of the 2023–2024 school year. This change resulted in three new administrators joining the staff alongside two returning administrators.

The participants in this study included 13 current middle school teachers. The participants taught a variety of subjects and had varying levels of experience and education. Each participant had a minimum of 3 years of experience as a teacher, a minimum of 2 years teaching middle school (Grades 6–8), a minimum of 2 consecutive

years teaching at their current school site, and had previously worked with at least one individual who had left the school or profession. All participants consented to engage in this study and agreed to audio recording of their interviews as explained in the consent form.

I assigned each participant a unique alphanumeric identifier ranging from B10 to M11. This identification code was used throughout the collection and analysis of data to maintain confidentiality and minimize any potential risks to participants. Table 3 contains participant demographics, including total years of experience, years of middle school experience, and highest degree held. Subject area taught, gender, and race were intentionally excluded to protect the identity of the participants.

Table 3

Participant Demographics

Participant	Total years of experience	Years of middle school experience	Highest degree held
B-10	7	7	BA
B-12	15	6	BA
C-1	20	14	BA
C-2	16	16	BA
C-3	10	10	BA
C-4	9	9	BA
C-5	10	9	EdS
C-6	20	15	MEd
C-7	12	12	BA
C-9	16	16	MAT
C-13	6	6	BS
M-11	13	7	MA
M-14	12	12	MS

Note. BA = bachelor of arts degree; EdS = education specialist degree; MEd = master of education degree; MAT = master of arts in teaching degree; BS = bachelor of science degree; MA = master of arts degree; MS = master of science degree.

Data Collection

The participants for this basic qualitative study were selected using purposeful sampling. The 13 teachers voluntarily supplied data to answer the RQs through a single semistructured interview, guided by open-ended questions in the researcher-developed interview guide. The participants were certified classroom teachers with a minimum of 3 years of experience, a minimum of 2 years of experience teaching middle school (Grades 6–8), a minimum of 2 consecutive years at their current school site and had previously worked with at least one person who had left the school or profession. These criteria were chosen to ensure that participants had a firm knowledge of the school and the way it functions, an understanding of the unique day-to-day responsibilities associated with teaching middle school, and enough experience to offer valuable insight into the problem of rising attrition rates in an A-rated suburban middle school in a southern state.

The primary instrument for data collection was an audio-recorded interview. I developed an interview guide and protocol (see Appendix A) to structure data collection. The interviews were semistructured, and the questions were mostly open-ended. This allowed me to ask clarifying and/or probing follow up questions as needed to obtain the depth of responses necessary for analysis. Interviews were conducted individually in a face-to-face session lasting for 30-45 minutes. All interviews were conducted outside of school hours, and the location was determined by the participant. Ten of the interviews

were conducted on site at the school in an empty classroom after the conclusion of the school day, but three interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants because they were more comfortable sharing information in a private setting.

Each interview was audio recorded using an online platform that facilitates audio and video conferencing. Only audio was recorded, and the participants were not asked to sign into the platform to ensure confidentiality was maintained. Interviews were transcribed by the online platform. I converted these transcripts to a word processing document and listened to the recordings while reading the transcripts and made edits where necessary to ensure accuracy. Member checking was employed by providing each participant the opportunity to read their interview transcript and make edits to ensure the data were an accurate representation of their intent. Cresswell (1998) describes the value of member checking as testing the interpretations and conclusions of the data with those who provided it as a method of establishing validity. The recordings and transcripts were saved on my password protected laptop computer that is kept locked in a cabinet when it is not with me or in use.

All participant selection and data collection were conducted after approval was received from the school district, school site, and Walden University's IRB and in compliance with the regulations of each party. The collection of data occurred as outlined in Chapter 3, and no unusual circumstances were encountered during the collection of data. After transcription and member checking were complete. The data were compiled for analysis.

Data Analysis

Ravitch and Carl (2021) describe qualitative coding as a strategy that can be used to organize data into manageable sections making it possible to identify overarching themes. The data collected from interviews with middle school teachers were transcribed and assembled. The data represented their experiences with teacher attrition and recommendations to promote retention. Qualitative coding is a multistep process that was used to analyze the descriptive data provided by participants in this study. To begin this process, I first read each transcript individually.

Round 1 Coding

I began Round 1 of the coding process by reading each transcript individually from beginning to end. After an initial read, I revisited each transcript and read each section of text and identified the meaning and intent of the response. These selected or paraphrased parts of the participant's response were transferred into my coding chart which is included in its entirety as Appendix B. These became my concept codes, and for RQ1, they included revelations such as personal autonomy in the classroom, lack of consistency and messaging about discipline and expectations, lack of work ethic by students, shift of accountability to teachers rather than students, and support from colleagues. For RQ2, the concept codes that emerged were mental health support, support from administration on discipline, consistency, increased pay, and teacher feedback. Several key words and phrases began to emerge from the Round 1 codes. These led naturally to the categories used for the next step of the coding process.

Round 2 Coding

During the second round of coding, the patterns identified from each concept in round one was assigned into a broader category. The categories used for RQ1 were autonomy, colleague support, lack of consistency, student discipline, student accountability, positive atmosphere, lack of support, and unreasonable expectations. To address RQ2, teachers' direct responses were used in the category of recommendations. Because RQ2 asks specifically for teacher recommendations, I chose to leave those as given by the teachers so that the question would be answered by their words, rather than my paraphrasing or interpretation of intent.

Round 3 Coding

The coding for Round 3 involved analyzing the categories identified in Round 2 and deciding whether each should be classified as job demands or job resources. The conceptual framework for this study was Bakker and Demerouti's (2007) JD-R theory. Viewing the data through this lens, I labeled each category as a *resource*, *demand*, or *demand(new)*. The resources indicate things that would help teachers fulfill the requirements of their jobs. The demands are things they are required or expected to address throughout the day, and the new demands are things that have emerged postpandemic and comprise additional challenges faced postpandemic. The resources, demands, and demands(new) were all factors used to address RQ1. The recommendations were again left in each teacher's words, and were responses used to answer RQ2. Table 4 provides an overview of the coding process used for Rounds 1 through 3 of data analysis. The complete coding chart is shown in Appendix B.

Table 4*Data Analysis Overview*

First-round coding (Concept)	Second-round coding (Category)	Third-round coding (Theme)	RQ alignment
Support from colleagues	Colleague support	Resource	RQ1
Lack of consistency and messaging about discipline and expectations	Lack of consistency	Demand	RQ1
Would like to see mental health supports for kids.	Recommendations	Recommendations	RQ2
Kids now lack the ability to self-start and self-manage.	Student accountability	Demand (new)	RQ1
Parents are now more likely to defend kids or make excuses.	Lack of support	Demand (new)	RQ1
Would like to see a teacher feedback pipeline to central office or school board.	Recommendations	Recommendations	RQ2

Note. RQ = research question.

Results

For this basic qualitative study, I conducted individual, semistructured interviews with 13 middle school teachers in an A-rated suburban school in a southern U.S. state. The two RQs for this study centered on the experiences of teachers with the rising attrition rate in their school and obtain their recommendations for improving teacher retention. The RQs were as follows:

RQ1: What are middle school teachers' experiences related to the increasing teacher attrition at an A-rated suburban middle school in a southern state?

RQ2: What are middle school teachers' recommendations for improving teacher retention at an A-rated suburban middle school in a southern state?

The themes identified represent the job resources and job demands experienced by these individual teachers. New job demands have emerged postpandemic, but no new resources were identified to help combat these. Figure 1 provides the job resources identified by teachers, and Figure 2 shows the job demands and new job demands that teachers have experienced postpandemic. Both Figures 1 and 2 address RQ1.

Figure 1

Job Resources

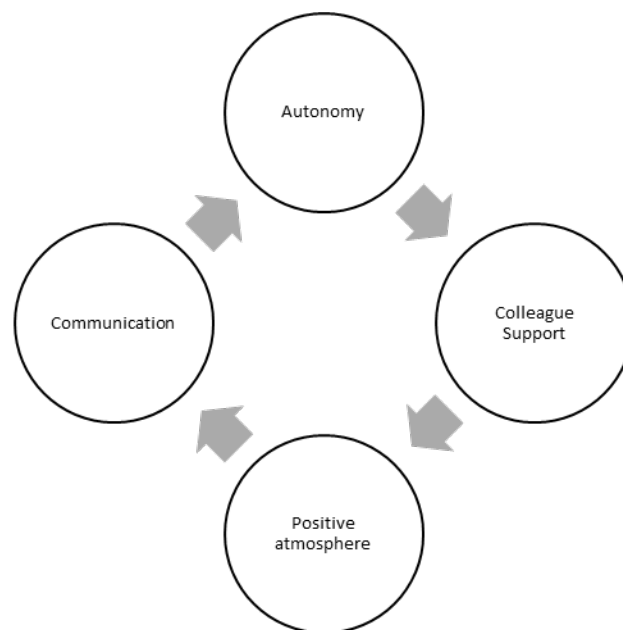


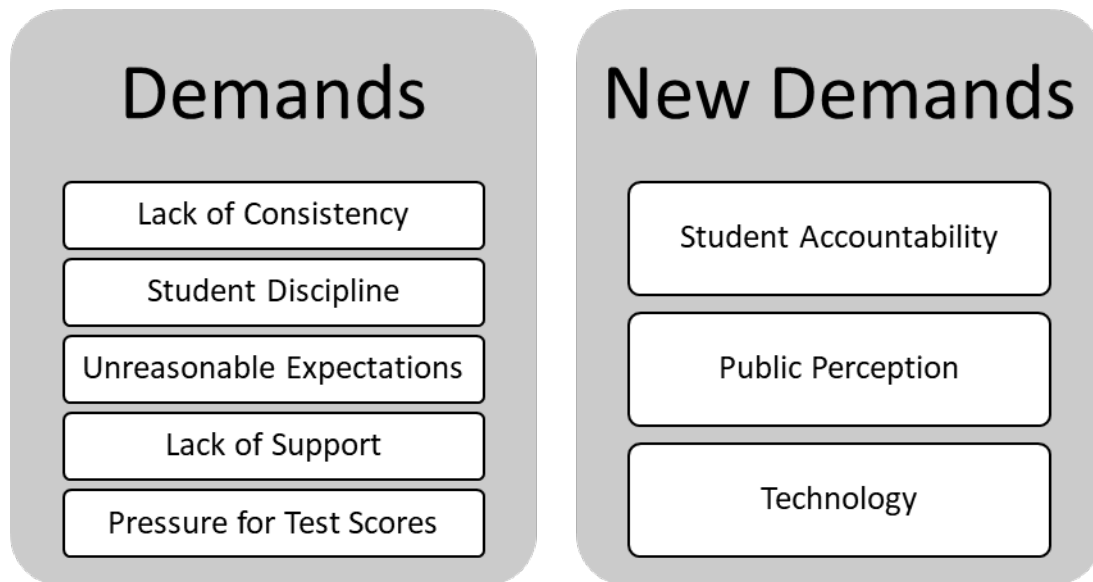
Figure 2*Job Demands*

Figure 3 addresses RQ2 and identifies the most common recommendations provided by participants to promote retention and stem the continuing loss of valuable teachers at the school.

Figure 3*Participant Recommendations for Promoting Teacher Retention*

Promoting Teacher Retention	Structure: Clear Expectations, Tanible Consequences, Consistent Follow-through
	Consistent Student Discipline Practices
	More Responsibility & Accountability Placed on Students
	More Focus on Academics & Less on Entertainment
	Increased Pay
	Smaller Class Sizes
	Teacher Feedback to Central Office & School Board
	More Mental & Emotional Support for Students & Staff
	Fewer Distractions
	Listen to Feedback & Provide Responsive Support

Research Question 1

The first RQ focused on exploring the experiences of middle school teachers with the rising attrition rate at their school. Based on the conceptual framework, the JD-R theory, experiences were separated into job demands or job resources. The resources will be presented first.

Job Resources

Job resources refer to aspects of the work environment that help to accomplish work-related goals, or meet job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; de Vine & Morgan, 2020; Vargas Rubilar & Oros, 2021). Listening to and analyzing the experiences

of the teachers in this school, there were a few consistencies among their experiences. Each participant described feeling a sense of freedom or autonomy in their own classroom. C-5 stated, "I get to make my decisions for how my classroom is structured and what I'm going to do if I can justify my choices." This sentiment was echoed by C-1 saying, "I have the option to choose my own materials and methods. I don't have a prescribed, scripted curriculum." C-6 shared, "I have the freedom to do what I want within a unit as long as I am on standard." C-4 took that a step further saying, "I have rarely considered taking another job, and that's because I have a lot of autonomy here." Each of the 13 participants expressed a thankfulness and gratitude for having this sense of autonomy, and their experiences clearly identified this as a valuable resource and strength of the school.

The second consistent resource identified by all 13 participants was colleague support. The participants expressed a sense of comradery among the teachers. C-13 described these relationships as "positive and professional during school hours, and then after hours, we can be silly and vent about the school day if necessary." C-7 told me "We take care of each other. I think it helps that we all communicate well and often." B-12 stated, "I couldn't imagine doing this without the people that are here." C-5 described experiencing "a lot of peer support from colleagues." The positive relationships among colleagues also contributed heavily to the overall atmosphere of the school feeling positive for them most of the time.

That positive atmosphere was the third resource identified by the participants. B-10 stated that "I do feel like the atmosphere is light." M-11 expressed that one of the

positive aspects of working here was “the atmosphere”. C-4 described feelings about the school atmosphere this way. “The baseline is the positive acquaintance. That’s a really rare thing in a professional space.” The positive and encouraging aspect of the school atmosphere was consistently identified as a vital resource for them personally and professionally.

The last consistent theme identified as a resource was communication. While some participants clearly viewed communication with administration differently, many expressed a sense of freedom to share honest feedback. C-1 stated, “we are at a point where we can have conversations, and I’m not feeling like I have to just rubber stamp everything.” C-4 told me, “I feel heard by them when I have a concern.” While not everyone shared the same sentiment about communication with administration, each participant identified communication in some form as a strong resource. The school has started using a new program to document contact with parents, and C-9 described it as helping promote communication stating, “more often than not, the response is positive”. Each of these resources were acknowledged by the participants in this study as helping them meet the often overwhelming demands of being a teacher.

Job Demands

Job demands are described as aspects in the work environment that require sustained physical or psychological effort (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; de Vine & Morgan, 2020; Vargas Rubilar & Oros, 2021). The parts of participants’ experiences that took a large amount of time to address or manage were categorized under the theme of

demands. The categories classified as demands consisted of: *lack of consistency, student discipline, unreasonable expectations, lack of support, and pressure for test scores.*

The categories of lack of consistency and student discipline were heavily linked in the experiences of the participants. An example of this link was shared by C-5.

The discipline of students is handled entirely based on which principal gets it and which student it is, and what mood the principal is in. There's no consistent policy. The same behavior is not punished or handled in the same way throughout the day, throughout the grade, throughout the school. Different grade level principals handle it differently.

This sense was echoed by C-9 who stated, "there's a lack of consistency when it comes to discipline." C-6 explained one of the challenges for teachers as, "the lack of continuity with discipline, and it doesn't feel like the discipline is the same for everybody." Participant C-2 also expressed frustration on this topic explaining that the expectations and discipline are "inconsistent from here to the middle school across town". The 13 participants in this study each expressed a desire to have more consistent and reliable follow-through on student discipline.

Another area that teachers expressed frustration was in trying to meet the unreasonable expectations that are placed on them daily. Teaching middle school is a demanding job under the best circumstances, but many expressed sentiments aligned with C-5, "You're the teacher. Handle it. Teach them everything. Teach them how to read. Teach them how to act." C-9 stated that, "It feels like there's always something new added, and we are just to do this new thing." C-1 mentioned feeling that, "teachers are

pressured to make sure kids are on A/B honor roll, whether they really deserved it or not.” C-13 voiced frustration with the number of school-based activities and events that are distracting and take away instructional time, saying, “they just expect the top results but aren’t giving us the top time to produce.” This experience quickly emerged as a common theme, especially from teachers responsible for a state-tested content area.

Many of the expectations teachers expressed feeling were unreasonable centered around the pressure to produce high state test scores in the midst of an overall lack of support. C-13 told me, “I feel like our time is not always respected.”, and added, “let’s see how many days we can take these kids out of the classroom before they have to take a state test, but then you’re going to hold my feet to the fire when they missed being a level five by one question?” C-7 stated, “There is a lot of talk about increasing test scores and pressure to do that, but with decreasing accountability for students, so that is not moving in the same direction, and it’s a lot of demand on us.” B-12 shared similar sentiments in saying, “Pressure is put on us for these scores and having everyone in a certain category, saying everyone should be proficient, but that’s not real life.” The frustration the teachers expressed about pressure for high test scores bothered them so much because they just wanted to be able to meet kids where they were and help them learn and grow based on their individual needs.

It is not uncommon for teachers to express feeling like they are not supported by administration or parents on occasion; however, this group described an increase in these incidents postpandemic. B-10 described this shift with parents.

It was very rare before the pandemic that I got an email in an accusatory tone, or if I called about an in-class discipline issue, it was very rare that a parent would not take my side. Now it feels like a coin flip. It's about 50/50 as to whether the parent is going to keep confidence in me and understand I'm doing what's in the kid's best interest, or if they're going to be immediately defensive and take their kid's side.

This postpandemic shift in support was also notably expressed by this group of teachers in student accountability. C-6 stated, "They want everything on the computer, some of them just click through without doing the assignment because during the pandemic they basically just had to complete the assignment, not worry about the accuracy." C-9 has noticed, "a lack of work ethic on the student's part" and stated that "none of the accountability is put on the student at all". C-5 described seeing, "not just a lack of effort, but the children don't even know how to make an attempt by themselves anymore. It's like a learned helplessness." B-12 explained that after the pandemic, "the kids do not want to do any work at all. They did nothing for so long, and now they are devastated when they have to do schoolwork at school." C-13 described this shift in students who, "want to know what's the shortcut? What's the bare minimum? Kids are also absent a lot more now." Many of the participants expressed feeling that increased accountability had been placed on them, while less accountability had been placed on students. B-12 expressed that, "if the kids don't do the work, it's the teacher's responsibility." This combination had about half of the participants teetering on the edge of an expressed sense of burnout.

Although the battle over technology in schools is certainly not new, this group of participants shared seeing a marked increase in student dependence on their devices. M-14 shared these thoughts.

I feel like kids are less focused, and I think that has something to do with so much more time on devices. Kids are a whole lot more addicted to watching some kind of social media or the TV, videos, playing computer games. I think that's something that has made things worse, the availability of this technology.

C-1 echoed this point saying, "I do feel like this current generation is addicted to technology. They won't do anything without earbuds in." This increased dependence on technology and the use of social media has also led to teachers expressing an increased administrative focus on public perception. B-12 described feeling like administrators, "just don't want any waves, so if a parent complains about something, they will change an entire department." C-2 expressed that avoiding, "bad PR in the school" had become more important postpandemic. C-1 stated that the pressure on teachers to keep kids on A/B honor roll felt "100% to placate parents and avoid getting talked badly about on social media." Considering the daily demands placed on middle school teachers, some of whom teach over 150 students, were already high prior to the pandemic, the addition of new demands in the form of student accountability, technology dependence, and an increased focus on public perception brings some clarity to the possible reasons teachers are leaving the school and/or profession.

Research Question 2

The second RQ for this study sought to obtain teacher recommendations to promote the retention of teachers in an A-rated, suburban middle school in a southern state. The 13 participants in this study were uniquely qualified to provide recommendations because each has been teaching in this same location for at least 6 years. They expressed feeling a great sense of loss in watching so many highly qualified, skilled teachers leave. Many of them also described feeling helpless to do anything about it because they felt the changes needed would have to come from either school or district administrators. Several teachers recommended things that have come to be expected in the field of education: increased pay, smaller class sizes, removing state-mandated tests, and more frequent breaks to help combat burnout. It was commonly stated among the participants that these things are valuable and could play an important role in helping to retain quality teachers; however, most of them expressed feeling like these goals were too lofty to be practical.

The first thing recommended by each participant was to provide a more structured environment in the form of setting clear expectations, tangible consequences, and following through with consistent student discipline. The participants wanted to see fewer school-based distractions and more focus on rigorous academics. It was also suggested that placing more responsibility and accountability on the students for grades and completion of work would relieve a lot of teacher frustration. Teachers expressed a need to have administration hear their concerns and feedback and respond with practical support strategies. It was also suggested that the school establish a teacher feedback

pipeline to central office and the school board so that their experiences and concerns could be heard by those with decision-making power. The final theme that emerged among the recommendations was to provide more mental and emotional support for students and staff. While the school district has given employees access to four visits per year with a local mental health provider, the consensus was that this was not nearly enough. The participants suggested at least one visit per month to place the appropriate level of importance on their mental health.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research ensures the integrity and validity of the study and its findings. The four essential parts to establishing trustworthiness in a study are (a) dependability, (b) credibility, (c) transferability, and (d) confirmability (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). The dependability of the study was ensured through an inquiry audit, which documented data collection and analysis in rich detail. The inquiry audit ensured consistency in the collection, analysis, and reporting of data throughout the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). The inquiry audit involved ensuring the transcripts were accurate representations of the data collected in each interview and that the analysis and reporting of data were accurate and consistent with the data collected. These measures did not deviate from the planned implementation. The credibility of the study was addressed through peer debriefing, persistent observation, member checking, and reflexivity. Peer debriefing with an off-site colleague with qualitative research experience helped me check for bias and bring clarity to the conclusions drawn. Persistent observation, member checking, and reflexivity helped ensure the data collected and conclusions drawn from it

were the intent of each participant. Each participant reviewed their interview transcript and had the opportunity to make additions or clarifications prior to data analysis. There were no adjustments made to the planned strategies implemented. The transferability of the results was addressed using detailed, rich descriptions of the setting, assumptions of the study, and diversity of the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). This did not deviate from the planned implementation. Confirmability for this study focused on the use of an audit trail to ensure that the methods were based on sound qualitative research and analysis principles (Ravitch & Carl, 2019).

Summary

Teacher attrition is a complex problem that has proven difficult to effectively address over the years. This basic qualitative study explored the experiences of middle school teachers in an A-rated, suburban middle school in a southern state with the rising attrition rate, in the hopes of being able to gain some insight into the nature of the problem and offer recommendations to promote retention. Thirteen teachers participated in the study by sharing their experiences and recommendations through individual, semistructured interviews.

The participants identified both resources and demands in this suburban middle school in a southern state. Teachers identified a sense of autonomy, colleague support, a positive atmosphere, and effective communication as the resources used each day to help them meet the demands of the job. The demands were identified as a lack of consistency, student discipline, unreasonable expectations, a lack of support, and pressure for test scores. In addition to these existing demands, teachers identified student accountability,

public perception, and the increased dependence on technology as new demands that have emerged postpandemic.

The recommendations offered by the participants to help promote retention included adding additional structure and consistent disciplinary policies, shifting the focus of the school to the academics with more responsibility and accountability placed on the students, providing an effective method of feedback for teachers to share concerns with central office and the school board, increasing pay and providing support for mental and emotional health, and reducing class sizes. While some of these recommendations are more difficult to accomplish, many of them are simple and practical to implement. The 13 participants expressed a desire to see steps taken to combat burnout and stem the flow of teachers leaving the school each year.

Chapter 5 will restate the purpose of the study and provide a discussion of the results and their potential to advance knowledge about teacher attrition. Conclusions drawn from the study will be identified and the limitations of the study will be revisited. Recommendations for further study will be provided, and this study's effect on positive social change will be examined.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore middle school teachers' experiences with the rising attrition rate in their school postpandemic and obtain their recommendations to promote retention. The study included 13 current teachers from an A-rated suburban middle school in a southern state who provided descriptive data through individual, semistructured interviews. Transcripts of those interviews were analyzed using multistep qualitative coding to identify patterns and themes that emerged from their experiences.

RQ1 asked for the experiences of middle school teachers with the rising attrition rate postpandemic. The key findings of this basic qualitative study for RQ1 revealed the positive aspects or resources commonly experienced by the participants as teacher autonomy, colleague support, a positive atmosphere, and effective communication. The challenges or demands of the participants' experiences emerged as a lack of consistency, particularly in student discipline, a lack of support, pressure for test scores, and unreasonable expectations. Data analysis also identified new or increased challenges that had presented postpandemic. The new demands were a decrease in student accountability, an increased dependency on technology/entertainment, and an increased focus on maintaining a positive public perception.

RQ2 asked for teacher recommendations to improve teacher retention at an A-rated suburban middle school in a southern state. The key findings for RQ2 included a few general recommendations common to the field of education, including increased pay and smaller class sizes. The participants also provided recommendations that were

specific to their environment and school that they felt would be valuable to retaining quality teachers. Those recommendations included an increase in structure to provide clear expectations, tangible consequences, and consistent follow-through on student discipline, fewer distractions in the form of celebratory events during school hours with an increased focus on academic rigor, more mental and emotional support for students and staff, placing more responsibility and accountability on students, and providing an effective method for teacher feedback resulting in responsive support.

Interpretation of the Findings

Many of the findings of this basic qualitative study confirm those found in the research literature. One of the most interesting points for this environment is that while research on school climate suggests that a strong sense of autonomy is a linked to a buffering effect that provides some protection against burnout and thoughts of attrition, it also concludes that role ambiguity can have the opposite effect (Dunn, 2020; Edú-Valsania et al., 2022; Savchenko et al., 2022; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020; Vargas Rubilar & Oros, 2021; Whiteoak, 2021). While the participants described feeling a valuable sense of autonomy in their environment, they also identified a lack of consistency and a lack of support from administration that may be preventing them from the full benefit of the autonomy they are given.

The research literature also identified a strong link between the perception of administrative support and burnout leading to teacher attrition (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). The literature indicated that a lack of administrative support is among the leading reasons given by teachers leaving their job (Ansley et al., 2019; Hester et al., 2020; Lane

et al., 2019; Perrone et al., 2019; Ramos & Hughes, 2020; Robinson et al., 2019; Tye & O'Brian, 2002). The findings of this study indicated that participants do not perceive a strong sense of administrative support. Many expressed feeling that public perception of the school was prioritized over supporting them in academic and discipline related concerns with students and parents. This may provide significant insight into the recent and continuing rise of teacher attrition.

Although the concept of teacher burnout was not explicitly studied within the parameters of this basic qualitative study, the link between teacher burnout and attrition is well documented in the research literature (Madigan & Kim, 2021). The participants in this study expressed personal feelings of burnout that they did not feel were being effectively addressed. These were linked to their experiences with lack of administrative consistency and support, and part of the reasoning behind their recommendation for more mental and emotional support for teachers.

Another factor identified in the research literature to serve a protective role against burnout and teacher attrition was colleague support. Camacho et al., (2021) asserted that shared experiences forge meaningful relationships among colleagues that for many teachers serve as a large part of their social and emotional support system. This assertion was confirmed by the findings of this study. Each of the 13 participants identified colleague support as a strength of the school environment. Many of them explicitly stated they would not be able to do this without the team of colleagues supporting them. For the teachers who have remained, their colleagues were credited with influencing their decisions to stay at this school.

The research literature indicated classroom management and support from administration on student discipline were significant predictors of teacher turnover (Whiteoak, 2021). Herman et al, (2020) expounded on that by saying that a teacher's mental and emotional well-being were directly linked to classroom management and student achievement. The findings of this study indicated that the participants perceived their classroom management skills as strong, and many expressed feeling that they would just rather deal with disciplinary problems themselves than seek administrative support because they felt their own actions would be more consistent than those of administration. This reveals another area where a concept like classroom management that should be a strength and serve as a protective factor may be counteracted by the perception of lack of administrative support contributing to the increasing attrition rate postpandemic.

Bakker and Demerouti's (2007) JD-R theory formed the conceptual framework for this basic qualitative study. The JD-R theory asserts that job characteristics influence the well-being of employees. High-pressure work environments can lead to mental, emotional, and physical consequences for employees if they are not balanced by adequate resources. New job demands postpandemic may be contributing to increased burnout and higher attrition rates, and resources must be provided to combat new and emerging demands in order to reduce attrition (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Tummers & Bakker, 2021). The findings of this study align with the assertions of the JD-R theory on each of these points. The participants identified new demands that have emerged postpandemic in their environment as a reduced level of student accountability, an increased level of

importance placed on public perception, and an increased student dependency on technology. The recommendations provided by the participants would provide valuable resources to them to combat these new job demands, and they have the potential to promote teacher retention in this environment.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this basic qualitative study remained consistent. One of those limitations was that were limited types of data that the human resources department of the school district was willing to release; therefore, there was no way to determine why teachers chose to leave their school or district. In addition, the school district does not maintain a database of teachers who transfer from one district school to another, so the actual attrition rates for this school may be higher than shown if teachers simply transferred to another school and were replaced by an in-district transfer. This limitation was confirmed by the participants of the study as each revealed having multiple former colleagues who had transferred to another district school and would not be accounted for in the numbers supplied by human resources. Data for the study was only collected at one point in time and represented the experiences of these 13 existing suburban middle school teachers in an A-rated school in a southern state. The findings of the study are not transferrable to other contexts because the qualitative experience data is specific to this school climate; therefore, many of the recommendations provided were aimed at improving retention in this school alone.

Recommendations

Rising teacher attrition is a documented challenge faced by many schools throughout the United States, and this phenomenon is known to have a larger impact on struggling schools (Ansley et al., 2019; Camacho et al., 2021). This study was conducted in an A-rated, suburban middle school situated in a comparably affluent community. One participant expressed this by saying, “this school should be a destination job”. Part of the reason this study was so interesting to me was exactly that. This was a school that looks ideal on paper, and I wanted to delve into the experiences leading to such high turnover rates. If this school is experiencing so many challenges, I must wonder how other schools are being impacted. I would recommend repeating this study, using the same parameters, in a rural or urban setting serving a lower socioeconomic population to determine whether there are similarities in the postpandemic teacher experience. I would also recommend replicating this study in a different setting with a larger sample size to determine whether there are findings consistent with this study. It would provide additional insight to conduct a follow up study with these participants after several years to evaluate the evolution of their experiences and perceptions.

The research literature indicated that teachers are most at risk for leaving the profession in the first 5 years (Dunn, 2020). This study included participants who each had at least 6 years of experience. I would recommend repeating this study with teachers who have less than 5 years of classroom experience and compare those results to the results of this study to determine whether the experience level of veteran teachers may in fact serve as a protective factor in teacher attrition.

Implications

The implications of this basic qualitative study for positive social change are its ability to provide insights for school and district administrators into the possible sources of frustration for teachers in the local environment that may be contributing to the increased teacher attrition postpandemic. The findings of the study also provide recommendations about practical, teacher recommended strategies to help promote teacher well-being and retention during this uncertain and challenging time. While the findings are limited to a specific environment, these changes could offer valuable social change for this school and its teachers and students.

The theoretical implications of this basic qualitative study are that Bakker and Demerouti's (2007) JD-R theory appears to hold true in this environment. The demands placed on this group of teachers are double the resources perceived as available to combat them. Bakker and Demerouti (2007) assert that an imbalance between job demands and job resources puts teachers at increased risk of developing burnout which can contribute to increasing thoughts of attrition. Many of the participants explicitly talked about the sense of burnout they felt frequently. The recommendations for practice based on the results of this basic qualitative study include the following:

- Develop a system including clear expectations, tangible consequences, and consistent follow-through on student discipline to decrease the frustration felt by teachers and the demands placed on them.
- Place more responsibility on students, rather than teachers, and hold students accountable for their action or inaction.

- Provide an environment with a focus on academic rigor that respects classroom instructional time by reducing the number of events, parties, celebrations, and trips that compete for the attention of students during school hours.
- Develop a system for teacher feedback to school and district administration and the school board to allow the experiences and frustrations of classroom teachers to be heard and addressed in an appropriate and timely manner.
- Develop a system for the mental and emotional support of teachers and students.

Conclusion

I conducted this basic qualitative study in a school considered good by many standards. This was an A-rated, suburban middle school situated in an affluent community on the outskirts of a large southern U.S. city. This was a school and district with high academic standards and a reputation of excellence. The participants of this study expressed a love and appreciation for their school, their students, and their community. They did not want to come across as ungrateful for the many benefits of working there. However, the findings of this study indicate that even “good” schools can do things to improve the environment for their teachers and students. It is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a marked impact on all who endured it. The overall sense among these educators was that things were not ever going to go back to “normal”. We appear to have entered into a new, postpandemic era in education. This study highlighted some of the new demands that are experienced by educators today and sought to provide

some practical recommendations to address some of these new and emerging demands in an effort to improve the well-being of teachers and the academic quality of the experiences of the students they serve. The question must be asked: If this is a glimpse into what is happening in a school considered to be good, what must be faced daily by those in struggling schools and communities, and what can be done to address those challenges to continue provide an adequate, free, and public education to all American students?

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Protocol

Each interview will begin with greeting the participants and introducing myself as the interviewer. Participants will be seated, and it will be explained that audio of the interview will be recorded for the purpose of transcription. Participants will be told that confidentiality will be maintained by using a code in place of names, and they will have the opportunity to read the transcription and provide any clarifications needed to ensure the accuracy and intent of their words are conveyed.

Introductory Comments

Welcome! Thank you for agreeing to be a participant in my research study. I am interested in learning about you, your career, and your experiences with the rising attrition rate of teachers postpandemic. Your interview, along with the interviews of other teachers, will be used to complete my dissertation for Walden University. The information shared here will remain confidential. I will use a code in place of your name, and results will be analyzed and reported as a group to ensure that no individual is identifiable. I hope that by gaining insight into the experiences of teachers like you, we can begin to understand why teachers are leaving at higher rates postpandemic and provide recommendations for improving the retention rate of teachers.

Questions

1. I would like to begin by obtaining some background information.
 - a. How long have you been teaching?
 - b. What grade level do you teach?

- c. What subject area do you teach?
 - d. Is your class in a state-tested area?
 - e. How long have you been teaching at your current school?
 - f. How long have you been teaching your current subject and grade level?
 - g. Were you an education major in college? If not, what was your original degree?
 - h. What is the highest degree that you have completed?
 - i. Are you National Board certified or currently working toward certification?
 - j. Have you worked closely with a teacher that has left the school or profession postpandemic?
2. Now that you have told me about your teaching career, I would like to ask about your experiences of teaching postpandemic.
- a. As a middle school teacher, what are your experiences with the increasing attrition at your school?
 - i. Describe the positive aspects of teaching in your school.
 - ii. Describe the challenges faced by teachers at your school.
 - iii. Describe your relationship with students.
 - iv. Describe your relationship with parents.
 - v. Describe your relationship with colleagues.
 - vi. Describe your relationship with administrators.

- vii. Do you experience discipline problems in your class? If so, how are those addressed?
 - viii. Do you perceive the discipline of students as handled effectively? Why or why not?
 - ix. Have you experienced new challenges in the classroom postpandemic? If so, please describe them.
 - x. What types of resources have been provided to address these challenges?
 - xi. Has your perception of teaching changed since the pandemic? If so, please explain how.
 - xii. What do you perceive as the major problems that contribute to teachers wanting to leave your school?
- b. As a middle school teacher, what would you recommend to improve the retention of teachers at your school?

Appendix B: Data Analysis and Coding Chart

Participant ID (interview date)	1st-round coding Concept	2nd-round coding Category	3rd-round coding Theme	RQ alignment
C-5 (2/29/24)	Personal autonomy in the classroom	Autonomy	Resource	RQ1
	Support from colleagues	Colleague support	Resource	RQ1
	Lack of consistency and messaging about discipline and expectations	Lack of consistency	Demand	RQ1
	Grading policy is insane. Make sure kids aren't failing. Bump their grades. Change their grades.	Unreasonable expectations	Demand	RQ1
	Classroom is safe space for students.	Positive atmosphere	Resource	RQ1
	Most parents are supportive.	Positive atmosphere	Resource	RQ1
	Verbal support from administration, but lack of consistency/follow-through	Lack of consistency	Demand	RQ1
	Pointless to go through the steps for student discipline, no follow-through with consequences	Student discipline	Demand	RQ1
	Postpandemic kids don't know how to make an attempt by themselves/learned helplessness.	Student accountability	Demand (New)	RQ1
	Lack of support from admin/parents	Lack of support	Demand	RQ1
	You are the teacher, teach them how to read, how to act, this is all your job	Unreasonable expectations	Demand	RQ1
	Current expectations are unreasonable.		Demand	RQ1
	Would like to see: PBIS revamped	Recommendations	Recommendations	RQ2

Participant ID (interview date)	1st-round coding Concept	2nd-round coding Category	3rd-round coding Theme	RQ alignment
	Mental health supports for kids Education for counselors Admin to follow the handbook			
C-9 (2/29/24)	Colleagues focus on their jobs and are supportive.	Colleague support	Resource	RQ1
	Students are generally easy to deal with.	Positive atmosphere	Resource	RQ1
	Lack of support from admin on discipline	Student discipline	Demand	RQ1
	Admin want things to be fun instead of academic oriented.	Student accountability	Demand	RQ1
	Good rapport with students	Positive atmosphere	Resource	RQ1
	Parents are more positive than not.		Demand	RQ1
	Relationship with admin is not consistent/depends on their mood.	Lack of consistency	Demand (new)	RQ1
	Always something new added for us to do.	Unreasonable expectations	Demand	RQ1
	Handbook is not followed consistently.	Lack of consistency	Demand (new)	RQ1
	Kids developed a dependence on fun and games/constant entertainment. Kids think they should pass even if they don't do the work.	Student accountability	Demand	RQ1
	I'm expected to just teach my standards, make these kids learn and do and perform on a state test.	Unreasonable expectations/Pressure for test scores	Demand (new)	RQ1
	Lack of work ethic by students	Student accountability	Demand	RQ1
	Admin puts all responsibility on the teacher. Less			

Participant ID (interview date)	1st-round coding Concept	2nd-round coding Category	3rd-round coding Theme	RQ alignment
	responsibility and accountability are placed on the students.	Unreasonable expectations		
	They just want to maintain a high public perception.	Public perception	Demand	RQ1
	Would like to see: Support from admin on discipline PBIS retrained	Recommendations	Recommendations	RQ2
C-1 (3/2/24)	A lot of autonomy in the way I teach	Autonomy	Resource	RQ1
	Good relationship with students	Positive atmosphere	Resource	RQ1
	Most parents are supportive, but some are leaning more defensive.			
	Support from colleagues	Colleague support	Resource	RQ1
	Feel like I can be honest with admin	Communication	Resource	RQ1
	There are so many distractions.	Distractions	Demand	RQ1
	Kids want to take the easy way out, not willing to work/struggle.	Student accountability	Demand	RQ1
	Less able to identify facts from claims	Student accountability	Demand	RQ1
	Kids are supposed to have fun and be successful.	Unreasonable expectations	Demand	RQ1
	Teachers are pressured to make sure kids are A/B honor roll.	Pressure for test scores	Demand	RQ1
	Teachers don't go through the trouble of discipline steps because consequences are not going to be followed through on.	Student discipline Lack of consistency	Demand Demand	RQ1 RQ1

Participant ID (interview date)	1st-round coding Concept	2nd-round coding Category	3rd-round coding Theme	RQ alignment
	Admin wants to avoid negative comments on social media from parents/want everyone to be happy/placate parents.	Public perception	Demand(new)	RQ1
	Shift of accountability to teachers rather than the students	Student accountability	Demand	RQ1
	Would like to see: Consistency from admin on discipline Support from admin Fewer distractions Less focus on scores/more on growth of kids Thoughtful placement of kids for advanced classes	Recommendations	Recommendations	RQ2
C-4 (3/6/24)	I have a lot of autonomy in the classroom.	Autonomy	Resource	RQ1
	Doesn't seem to be a problem-solving component to conversations.	Lack of consistency	Demand	RQ1
	Good relationship with students	Positive atmosphere	Resource	RQ1
	Community and culture of the staff are strong.	Colleague support	Resource	RQ1
	Kids are more handsy with one another.			
	Kids seem to be more apathetic now. It's hard to get students to recognize an inherent value to something.	Student accountability	Demand (new)	RQ1
	Lack of consequences for students even when I followed all of the steps to get there	Student discipline	Demand	RQ1
	Some feel an overall lack of administrative support.	Lack of support	Demand	RQ1

Participant ID (interview date)	1st-round coding Concept	2nd-round coding Category	3rd-round coding Theme	RQ alignment
	Would like to see: Emotional support for teachers Building a culture of relationships among teachers both professionally & personally More structure...year after COVID was great	Recommendations	Recommendations	RQ2
C-6 (3/6/24)	I like the freedom to choose the approach I use in my classroom.	Autonomy	Resource	RQ1
	Lack of continuity with discipline	Lack of consistency Student discipline	Demand	RQ1
	Most parents are supportive verbally, but follow-through is unpredictable.	Lack of consistency	Demand	RQ1
	Sometimes frustrated by decisions of administration	Communication	Demand	RQ1
	Lack of consistency in student discipline	Lack of consistency Student discipline	Demand	RQ1
	We need to do a better job of handling the small things.	Student discipline	Demand	RQ1
	Kids are less likely to do assignments if they are not on the computer.	Student accountability	Demand (new)	RQ1
	Less focus and care given to assignments	Student accountability	Demand	RQ1
	Technology has given kids new ways to cheat or take the easy way out.	Student accountability	Demand (new)	RQ1
	We focus heavily on test scores rather than filling in gaps for individual students.	Pressure for test scores	Demand	RQ1
	Kids are less likely to come to school/attendance is a bigger issue.	Student accountability	Demand (new)	RQ1

Participant ID (interview date)	1st-round coding Concept	2nd-round coding Category	3rd-round coding Theme	RQ alignment
	We need to do a better job of listening to teachers and being responsive.	Teacher support	Demand	RQ1
	Would like to see: Listen to the needs of people Rotate responsibilities Time each day to have a break from students/have adult conversations/treated as adults	Recommendations	Recommendations	RQ2
C-3 (3/7/24)	Good community of teachers	Colleague support	Resource	RQ1
	Kids are really great to work with.	Positive atmosphere	Resource	RQ1
	Admin support is lacking.	Lack of support /consistency	Demand	RQ1
	Follow-through and consistency on discipline lacking	Student discipline	Demand	RQ1
	A lot of issues get swept under the rug or not addressed, especially for younger teachers.	Lack of support	Demand	RQ1
	No student accountability/everything gets put on the teacher	Student accountability	Demand	RQ1
	Relationships with admin are frustrating/not feeling heard or supported.	Lack of support	Demand	RQ1
	Focus on where kids are and helping them grow rather than a state test score	Pressure for test scores	Demand	RQ1
	Would like to see: Meeting with teachers and listening to them. Find ways to help with the areas of frustration	Recommendations	Recommendations	RQ2
C-13 (3/7/24)	Good community and district has high standards.	Positive atmosphere	Resource	RQ1

Participant ID (interview date)	1st-round coding Concept	2nd-round coding Category	3rd-round coding Theme	RQ alignment
	Colleagues are a great source of support professionally and personally.	Colleague support	Resource	RQ1
	Challenge is to get kids to care and put in effort.	Student accountability	Demand	RQ1
	It feels like kids rarely see consequences for actions.	Student discipline	Demand	RQ1
	Kids have gotten lazier, look for a shortcut.	Student accountability	Demand (new)	RQ1
	Expectations have been lowered for kids. They are allowed to do the bare minimum and still get an A.	Unreasonable expectations	Demand (new)	RQ1
	Expectations have been lowered in every aspect of the school	Lack of consistency	Demand (new)	RQ1
	Level of care has gone down	Student accountability	Demand	RQ1
	Students just don't care, no support from parents or admin to address that	Student accountability	Demand	RQ1
	Too many school-based distractions/lost instructional time	Distractions	Demand	RQ1
	They expect top results but aren't giving us the top time to produce.	Unreasonable expectations	Demand	RQ1
	More accountability placed on me for student test scores but less placed on the students	Pressure for test scores	Demand	RQ1
	Would like to see: Structure/expectations, consequences, follow-through Consistency and support More responsibility placed on the students	Recommendations	Recommendations	RQ2

Participant ID (interview date)	1st-round coding Concept	2nd-round coding Category	3rd-round coding Theme	RQ alignment
	More thought and planning put into scheduling			
M-11 (3/7/24)	Atmosphere with admin and teachers is great.	Positive atmosphere	Resource	RQ1
	We are not micromanaged.	Autonomy	Resource	RQ1
	We have a lot of freedom to teach the way we feel is best.	Autonomy	Resource	RQ1
	Some inconsistency with discipline	Lack of support	Demand	RQ1
	Challenging to get students to want to learn	Student accountability	Demand	RQ1
	Some feel a lack of support from admin.	Lack of support	Demand	RQ1
	Would like to see: Start with self...do you want to teach/why are you here Focus on the kids/best interest first	Recommendations	Recommendations	RQ2
C-2 (3/7/24)	I have close relationships with coworkers.	Colleague support	Resource	RQ1
	We need more discipline support.	Student discipline	Demand	RQ1
	Class sizes are large, especially in the afternoons.	Class size	Demand	RQ1
	I try to appeal to the morality of students. I don't disrespect you, so I do not expect to be disrespected.	Student discipline	Demand	RQ1
	I don't think the discipline is equitable. Some are handled harshly for small things, others can get away with anything.	Lack of consistency	Demand	RQ1
	Students lack motivation.	Student accountability	Demand	RQ1
		Student accountability	Demand (new)	RQ1

Participant ID (interview date)	1st-round coding Concept	2nd-round coding Category	3rd-round coding Theme	RQ alignment
C-7 (3/8/24)	Increased sense of entitlement, laziness, and aptitude to talk back	Student discipline	Demand	RQ1
	Disciplinary issues lead to teacher frustration.	Lack of consistency	Demand	RQ1
	Behavior expectations are inconsistent among schools in the district, not a healthy public perception	Recommendations	Recommendations	RQ2
	Would like to see: Network of moms to cover classes to allow flexibility to go to things for my child Consequences for student behavior Breaks more frequently to help reduce burnout Pay increase Discipline support/effective			
	Great colleagues that have the best interest of kids in mind	Colleague support	Resource	RQ1
	We need more parental support in a way that places accountability on kids	Student accountability	Demand	RQ1
	Feel like you're not backed up sometimes	Lack of support	Demand	RQ1
	Nonstop decisions and constant demand	Unreasonable expectations	Demand	RQ1
	Parents are more supportive when they feel I am proactive and not reactive	Positive atmosphere	Resource	RQ1
	Most of the time I feel like admin are accessible	Positive atmosphere	Resource	RQ1
Kids are more dependent on cell phones/technology	Student accountability/technology	Student accountability	Demand (new)	RQ1
			Demand (new)	RQ1

Participant ID (interview date)	1st-round coding Concept	2nd-round coding Category	3rd-round coding Theme	RQ alignment
	Lack of understanding social cues/wide range of maturity	Positive atmosphere	Resource	RQ1
	I feel thankful to have a safe in person environment where kids can interact	Pressure for test scores	Demand	RQ1
	A lot of talk about increasing test scores and pressure, but decreasing accountability for students	Unreasonable expectations	Demand	RQ1
	There are blocks on giving deadlines, chasing incomplete work, rewarding things that are not academically beneficial	Lack of consistency	Demand	RQ1
	Too many parties and events that interfere with instructional time	Lack of consistency/discipline	Demand	RQ1
	Lack of follow-through on discipline and technology policies	Recommendations	Recommendations	RQ2
	Would like to see: Focus on work-life balance Support & consistency from admin on discipline Help motivating kids			
B-12 (3/8/24)	I enjoy the kids	Positive atmosphere	Resource	RQ1
	I have the freedom to choose what and how I teach as long as I'm on standard	Autonomy	Resource	RQ1
	Isn't a lot of accountability for the kids, so it comes back on us	Student accountability	Demand	RQ1
	If the kids don't do the work it's the teachers responsibility	Unreasonable expectations	Demand	RQ1
	Admin feels like test scores are more important than filling in gaps for kids	Pressure for test scores	Demand	RQ1
		Student discipline	Demand	RQ1

Participant ID (interview date)	1st-round coding Concept	2nd-round coding Category	3rd-round coding Theme	RQ alignment
	Discipline issues get swept under the rug & not dealt with			
	Kids do not want to do any work at all	Student accountability	Demand (new)	RQ1
	Sometimes it doesn't feel like school, just one party and event after the other	Lack of consistency	Demand	RQ1
	Teachers have their feet held to the fire on test scores, but not the students, in the midst of chaos	Unreasonable expectations	Demand	RQ1
	Not feeling backed by admin			
	If a parent complains about something, they change the rules for us	Lack of support	Demand	RQ1
		Public perception	Demand	RQ1
	Would like to see: Strong expectations for students Move focus to academics instead of entertainment. Clear expectations, tangible consequences, follow-through with consistency Focus shift on growing kids rather than test scores	Recommendations	Recommendations	RQ2
M-14 (3/8/24)	I like that I am not micro-managed.	Autonomy	Resource	RQ1
	I have the autonomy to do what I think is right in my classroom.	Autonomy	Resource	RQ1
	Inconsistency on expectations/set but not followed through on	Lack of consistency	Demand	RQ1
	Inconsistency on the way discipline is handled	Lack of consistency/ Student discipline	Demand	RQ1
		Student accountability	Demand (new)	RQ1

Participant ID (interview date)	1st-round coding Concept	2nd-round coding Category	3rd-round coding Theme	RQ alignment
	Less student accountability after the pandemic.			
	I feel like kids are less focused.	Student accountability	Demand (new)	RQ1
	They are more addicted to a screen/technology is more available.	Technology	Demand (new)	RQ1
	I think teachers have been placed in more of a parental role.	Unreasonable expectations	Demand (new)	RQ1
	Teachers are undervalued.			
	Sometimes hard to get support from admin and parents	Lack of support	Demand	RQ1
	Would like to see: Increased pay Increased time off/breaks to combat burnout Smaller class sizes	Recommendations	Recommendations	RQ2
B-10 (3/8/24)	I am not micro-managed.	Autonomy	Resource	RQ1
	The atmosphere is light and friendly.	Positive atmosphere	Resource	RQ1
	Top-down ideas are often implemented without feedback from teachers.	Lack of communication	Demand	RQ1
	Lack of consistent disciplinary practices, lack of teacher support	Lack of support /consistency	Demand	RQ1
	In the face of a conflict or disagreement with parents, teachers do not feel like they will be supported.	Public perception Lack of support	Demand	RQ1
	Student grades feel like the responsibility of the teacher. Accountability is not placed on the student to work for grades/success.	Student accountability	Demand (new)	RQ1

Participant ID (interview date)	1st-round coding Concept	2nd-round coding Category	3rd-round coding Theme	RQ alignment
	Teachers are trying to focus on the academics of content areas but undermined by the message that the kids are there to have fun.	Unreasonable expectations	Demand	RQ1
	We undermine and discredit the goal of producing children that are capable of competing in the real world.	Lack of support	Demand	RQ1
	Kids lack ability to self-start and self-manage.	Student accountability	Demand (new)	RQ1
	Parents are more likely to defend kids/make excuses.	Lack of support	Demand (new)	RQ1
	We should be a destination job and the fact that we continue to lose so many teachers each year you have to stop and assess why.	Lack of consistency	Demand	RQ1
	Would like to see: Increased pay Teacher feedback pipeline to central office/school board Increased access to mental health resources	Recommendations	Recommendations	RQ2

Note. RQ = research question; PBIS = positive behavioral interventions and supports.