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## Teachers and Administrators' Perspectives of Teacher Retention Rates During the First 5 Years of Employment

Seth Hay  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Seth Hay

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.

Review Committee

Dr. John Harrison, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty

Dr. John Johnson, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost

Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University

2026

Abstract

Teachers and Administrators' Perspectives of Teacher Retention Rates During the First 5

Years of Employment

by

Seth Hay

M. Ed. Tarleton State University, 2009

BS, University of Texas at Arlington, 2007

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Education Administration

Walden University

May 2026

## Abstract

The problem that was addressed through this study was the high percentage of novice teachers leaving the profession during the first 5 years of teaching in a Southwestern state. Grounded in Mitchell et al.'s job embeddedness theory, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore K-12 teachers' perspectives on factors influencing their decision to remain in the education profession, as well as K-12 administrators' perspectives on influencing novice teachers' decisions to persist in the education profession in a Southwestern state. For this basic qualitative design, data were collected from 10 teachers and three administrators and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase inductive thematic analysis. With six themes emerging: relationship embeddedness as the primary foundation - reflecting strong interpersonal connections with colleagues, administrators, and students; teaching as identity and calling - viewing teaching as a core part of personal identity rather than simply employment; values and moral alignment - the alignment between personal beliefs about service and the moral purpose of education; daily student impact - the meaningful influence teachers experience through everyday interactions with students; moral and relationship loss - the emotional and relational sacrifices associated with leaving the profession; and lack of career mobility - perceptions that teaching skills and identity do not easily transfer to other careers. The implications for positive social change are that district leaders could focus on teachers as whole persons, personally, professionally, and morally. Improving teacher retention could benefit the entire school community, particularly students who thrive with consistent and stable relationships that experienced teachers provide.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the teachers and administrators who survived the challenges of my formative and preadolescent years. Many of you may be surprised to see where this journey has led, not only that I became a teacher and administrator myself, but also to the completion of a doctoral program. Your patience, grace, and steady belief in me during those early years left a lasting imprint on my life. The impact of what you gave so freely then continues to shape who I am today. Thank you for never giving up on me.

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It is impossible to thank everyone who has contributed to my reaching this milestone, so I'll mention those closest to me. Above all, I give thanks to Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior. This achievement is not mine alone, but a reflection of His faithfulness and provision. To Him be all glory and honor.

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and I am forever grateful for the role you have played in making this accomplishment possible. Thank you, I love you!

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

One of the long-standing concerns for policymakers and educational leaders alike has been teacher attrition (Madigan & Kim, 2021b). This concern is alarming when considering novice teachers or those with less than 5 years of continual service. Teacher attrition among novice teachers is not unique to the United States and is a persistent problem in many countries (Madigan & Kim, 2021b). Student achievement is directly affected when a school campus experiences a high percentage of teacher turnover yearly (Young, 2018). This study was necessary because understanding the impact of teacher turnover on student achievement is crucial for retaining effective teachers, a task that keeps even the best school administrators awake at night. Finding quality teachers is difficult for any school (Ford et al., 2019).

The findings of this study have the potential to shape educational leaders' efforts to retain their teaching staff long term. If they can retain their teaching staff long-term, the teacher attrition rate will decrease, leading to positive student achievement. Retaining teachers long-term would also free up time currently used on the hiring process and allow campus administrators time for other tasks, such as coaching teachers. The knowledge gained from the study has the potential to create positive social change by providing insight into how to retain teachers, which stabilizes student instruction by reducing teacher attrition seen across the United States.

This chapter includes a description of the study's background, problem statement, purpose, research questions, conceptual framework, nature, definitions of key terms,

assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and the significance of the study. The chapter concludes with a summary that synthesizes the details presented.

### **Background**

A long-standing issue facing education administrators that has only grown in recent years is the challenge of finding teachers for classrooms nationwide (Goldhaber et al., 2021). Since 1983, most presidents have attempted to pass legislation to address the many needs facing public education. In 1984, President Reagan passed the Education for Economic Security Act, and President Clinton followed in 1994 with legislation when the Goals 2000: Educate America Act was passed. President Bush passed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001, and President Obama passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This legislation attempted to shift teacher evaluation, low-performing schools, and testing oversight back to the states. However, federal oversight remains to ensure that the estimated \$16 billion the federal government spends on education yearly is well spent (Hess & Eden, 2021).

With the COVID-19 pandemic affecting every school in America during the spring and fall of 2020, the staffing challenges facing educational leaders were pushed to the forefront of public education. Teachers who leave the profession profoundly impact the education system, the economy, and, ultimately, the students (Madigan & Kim, 2021b). There is a need to understand why teachers with less than 5 years of experience remain in the profession. This study was necessary because if K-12 educational leaders can understand why teachers stay, they can retain more teachers, improve the quality of classroom instruction, and ultimately enhance student achievement.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem that was addressed through this study was the high percentage of novice teachers leaving the profession during the first 5 years of teaching in a Southwestern state. While high percentages of novice teachers leave the profession, little research has studied what most frequently contributes to teacher retention within the same period (Gundlach et al., 2024). When novice teachers leave the profession before 5 years of continual service, student learning is destabilized, and districts are left with a substantial cost in efforts to replace teachers (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). According to the State Education Agency (SEA), teachers completing certification by an alternative teacher certification program in a southwestern state, 36% left the profession before completing 5 years of service. For teachers completing a university-based post-baccalaureate program, 31% left the profession before reaching 5 years of service. Of teachers completing a university undergraduate program, 23% left the profession before 5 years of continual service ([SEA, 2024]).

In the Southwestern state where this study was conducted, the trend continued into 2019, with 10% of teachers leaving the profession after their first year, and the percentage rising to 30% for teachers within the first 5 years of earning a teaching certificate (Zelinski, 2019). More importantly, what is missing from the literature is an explanation for the sustained and growing attrition among new teachers in American public schools (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). Madigan and Kim (2021b) suggested that it takes 3 to 7 years for a novice teacher to become highly qualified, highlighting that teacher attrition directly affects student learning. Frahm and Cianca (2021) noted that one

in three new teachers leave the profession within 5 years. However, they provided no insights into the possible recurring factors driving teacher attrition.

Research by Trinidad (2021) and others has shown that teacher staffing has been a challenge for many years. Empirical data indicates that staffing challenges have evolved into critical teacher shortages, as many states have allowed additional licensure options, such as emergency licensures, to expand candidate pools (Mobra & Hamlin, 2020). Emergency licensures, Mobra and Hamlin (2020) noted, permit candidates with bachelor's degrees to become teachers without additional training. Trinidad (2021) conducted a study after the COVID-19 pandemic assessing how teacher attrition changed. Trinidad found that one-fifth (20%) of teachers intended to leave the profession at the end of the current school year.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore K-12 teachers' perspectives on factors influencing their decision to remain in the education profession, as well as K-12 administrators' perspectives influencing novice teachers' decisions to persist in the education profession in a Southwestern state. Madigan and Kim (2021a) found that roughly half of the new teachers leave the profession within their first 5 years. With early career teachers leaving the profession, middle career teachers departing for other jobs, and those eligible to retire doing so, administrators' pool of applicants for hiring replacement teachers is shrinking at an alarming rate (Tran et al., 2020).

The shrinking pool of applicants leaves local school districts with little hope of finding enough certified individuals to fill all the open positions. One solution to this

issue is to allow teacher candidates to serve as teachers of record while still completing their degree and certification requirements (Rich et al., 2020). Although this approach addresses the immediate need for a teacher in every classroom, the long-term impact on student success is still uncertain. Rich et al. (2020) found that for teacher candidates to succeed as teachers of record, they must have been well prepared by their university and receive strong support from campus staff such as mentor teachers. Even this option introduces additional costs to the campus by ensuring that teachers of record have strong and supportive mentor teachers.

Hall and Gilles (2022) identified several common factors that contribute to teachers leaving the profession. These include low salary, work-life balance issues, administrator behaviors, class sizes, autonomy, and overall satisfaction with their careers. These reasons highlight the importance of exploring the perceptions of administrators and novice teachers about why teachers choose to stay in the profession. A qualitative study was the most suitable design to understand the perspectives of novice teachers and administrators regarding why teachers remain in the field. I interviewed 10 teachers and 3 campus principals to gain insights into why novice teachers decide to stay. As a result, administrators can better address the issues that cause teachers to leave by understanding and promoting reasons for staying.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions (RQs) of this study were as follows:

RQ 1: What are K-12 novice teachers' perspectives on factors influencing their decision to remain in the education profession in a Southwestern state?

RQ2: What are K-12 administrators' perspectives on influencing novice teachers' decisions to persist in the education profession in a Southwestern state?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was job embeddedness, as defined by the job embeddedness theory developed by Mitchell et al. (2001). Job embeddedness theory grew from the concepts of embedded figures and field theory. Embedded figures are so ingrained in their work that it is nearly impossible to distinguish them from their surroundings. Field theory explains how all parts of a person's life are interconnected. Job embeddedness describes how someone becomes so entangled with their work that it is almost impossible to leave. Job embeddedness explains why people stay in their current situations rather than depart (Rubenstein et al., 2019). According to job embeddedness theory, the more connected a person is to their work and the community, the harder it is for them to leave (McCluskey, 2023).

While a teacher might leave because of low pay or unsafe working conditions, the same teacher might stay in the current role because they are connected to the local community (Grillo & Kier, 2021). Understanding teachers' reasons for remaining in the profession could help campus and district leaders develop strategies to improve teacher retention. The components of job embeddedness will be explained more thoroughly in Chapter 2.

### **Nature of the Study**

A qualitative study supports the development of questions, procedures, and data analysis from specific details to broader themes, allowing for interpretation of meaning in

the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Since the RQs generated data that required interpretation, a qualitative approach was suitable for the study.

Other types of methodology and research designs were considered for this study; however, they were found to be unsuitable based on the data collected and analyzed to answer the RQs. Case study research, for example, examines the specifics and complexity of a bounded case (Ercan et al., 2022). Teacher retention is not unique or limited to a single location; it is a nationwide concern (Trinidad, 2021). A quantitative research study aims to measure the relationship between variables (Leavy, 2023). This study sought the perspectives of novice teachers and administrators, which are not variables that can be measured through the data collected in a qualitative study.

In a profession where half of those entering leave within the first 5 years, teacher retention is a concern that education leaders must focus on (Madigan & Kim, 2021b). This study included 10 teachers with 2 to 7 years of experience in education, and three campus principals. The framework guiding this study was Mitchell et al. (2001), job embeddedness theory. Using this theory, the study was focused on the phenomenon of teacher retention, specifically why teachers stay in the profession beyond 5 years of service.

### **Definitions**

The following terms were used frequently in this research study. Therefore, their definitions have been provided.

*Burnout.* Burnout is the process of gradual exhaustion and loss of commitment (Madigan & Kim, 2021a).

*Job Embeddedness.* Job embeddedness explains why people stay in their current situations rather than leave (Rubenstein et al., 2019).

*Novice Teachers.* Novice teachers are full-time teachers with 5 years or less of teaching experience (Keese et al., 2022).

*Teacher Attrition.* Teacher attrition refers to qualified teachers who leave the profession for reasons other than retirement (Mitani et al., 2022).

*Teacher Induction* is intentional support provided to teachers in their first and sometimes second year of teaching to help them learn pedagogical skills and develop their professional practice (Kwok et al., 2021).

*Teacher Shortage.* Teacher shortage is the inability to fill vacancies at the current wages with individuals qualified to teach in the needed fields (Koch, 2024).

### **Assumptions**

I assumed the responses from teachers and administrators were honest and truthful. The second assumption was that, after the study and consent forms were explained to the participants, they felt comfortable sharing their perspectives. These assumptions were fundamental to the study's design, methodology, and overall outcomes.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This study focused on a single Southwestern state, where 10 teachers and 3 campus principal participants were recruited. The research used a semistructured interview protocol, asking each participant predetermined questions along with follow-up probes to explore their perspectives. The findings may, or may not, be applicable to other U.S. states, as teacher attrition is a widespread issue nationwide. When administrators

better understand why novice teachers decide to stay in the profession, even as many are leaving, they can address the factors that encourage teachers to remain beyond 5 years of service.

### **Limitations**

There were several limitations in this study. The first is that the study used purposive sampling, with all participants selected from one metropolitan area in a southwestern state. Another limitation is that the selected participants were teachers who remained in the profession; the sample did not include any teachers who had already left. An additional limitation is that the study relied on self-reported perceptions, which could introduce bias. Bias in research is unavoidable, as it exists in all three types of studies (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). According to Ravitch and Carl, when qualitative research is completed, one of the ethical responsibilities is to be aware of bias and limitations. To help reduce bias, the employer of the selected teacher and administrator was considered in the selection process. This consideration prevented any assumed bias from the teacher or administrator participating due to working with a known sample.

### **Significance**

This study was important to conduct because during difficult times, when teachers are leaving the profession in record numbers, there was limited knowledge about why novice teachers choose to stay (McCluskey, 2023). The challenge of retaining new teachers is significant because attrition negatively affects overall student achievement (Young, 2018). Teacher attrition and the lack of an established daily craft among new teachers can also harm student success (Young, 2018). A clearer understanding of the

factors associated with teacher persistence allows administrators to provide more effective support and reduce attrition.

Research by Williams et al. (2022) and others indicates that it takes new teachers 3 to 7 years to reach optimal instructional performance. If school districts aim to maintain or improve student achievement, prioritizing the methods for hiring, retaining, and supporting teacher integration is essential (Young, 2018). Greater understanding of teacher retention may contribute to positive social change by informing practices that support teacher persistence and promote stability in student instruction.

### **Summary**

Chapter 1 contained an introduction to the study's purpose, which was to examine administrators' and novice teachers' perspectives on factors influencing why novice teachers stay in the education field. Several key topics were introduced and provided the background upon which the study was based. Additionally, presented within Chapter 1 was the problem statement and the study's purpose. Within Chapter 1, the two RQs that guided the study were identified. The study's conceptual framework, describing the nature of the research, and terms specific to this study were outlined in Chapter 1. Chapter 1 included an outline of some assumptions and limitations encountered during data collection. Chapter 2 will contain a review and analysis of scholarly work related to the study's topic.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

There has been extensive research published on teacher attrition and the long-term challenges that educational leaders face in retaining their teaching staff. The problem that was addressed through this study was the high percentage of novice teachers leaving the profession during the first 5 years of teaching in a Southwestern state. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore K-12 teachers' perspectives on factors influencing their decision to remain in the education profession, as well as K-12 administrators' perspectives influencing novice teachers' decisions to persist in the education profession in a Southwestern state. Based on a review of the current literature, a gap exists in recently published research regarding the perspectives of teachers and administrators on why novice teachers remain in the education profession. Additional research is necessary to understand why teachers might remain in their current instructional positions despite pressures to leave. Understanding why novice teachers stay in their current positions may inform policymakers and administrative practices about how to retain teachers.

In the remainder of Chapter 2, I provide a detailed review of the current literature on the critical terms correlated to the study's topic. The following sections provide a conceptual framework that focuses on the theory's components. This literature review organizes four key themes: teacher retention, teacher burnout and effects on student learning, teacher shortages, and teacher preservice preparation.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The research process incorporated several library databases and search engines including: Thoreau, Google Scholar, and Academic Search Complete. A review of the

State Education Agency (SEA) website provided statewide publicly accessible archival data. A review of ProQuest identified parallel studies and similar dissertations for reference. To conduct the review, the following keywords were searched: *job embeddedness, educational leadership, administrators, principals, teacher retention, teacher attrition, teacher motivation, teacher burnout, staffing challenges, and preservice teacher programs*. The search terms yielded thousands of articles focused on teacher retention. A strategic effort was made to ascertain the most current and relevant scholarly research on the subject; however, some earlier sources were included to provide depth to the present study. The literature search parameters were peer-reviewed journal articles published from 2020 to 2025.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework guiding this basic qualitative study was job embeddedness, developed in 2001 by Mitchell et al. Mitchell et al. (2001) introduced two research ideas into the concept of job embeddedness. The first idea is embedded figures, and the second is field theory. According to Mitchell et al. (2001) embedded figures are tied to their backgrounds, making it difficult to separate them from their surroundings. Additionally, as proposed by Mitchell et al., field theory suggests that people have a perceptual life space in which different aspects of their lives are represented and interconnected. Mitchell et al. (2001) found that these connections can vary in number and proximity. Therefore, Mitchell et al. (2001) described job embeddedness as a net or web in which an individual can become entangled.

Job embeddedness theory asserts that employees who are embedded in their work will often remain with their employer instead of leaving (Treuren, 2019). In the 1970s, research attempted to explain voluntary turnover by investigating employee attitudes (DeMatthews et al., 2023). This research reveals that employee attitudes form a predictable cycle: employees become dissatisfied, search for alternatives, compare job options, and ultimately determine the best choice. Research conducted in the 1990s, prior to Mitchell et al. (2001) work, investigated why employees leave, focusing on hiring practices, managerial style, lack of recognition, inadequate competitive compensation, and the toxicity of the workplace environment (Abbasi & Hollman, 2000). However, Mitchell et al. (2001) described a significant factor that influences why people stay at their jobs, which is often overlooked and is known as job embeddedness.

Halvorsen et al. (2015) expanded on Mitchell et al. (2001) two research ideas, with job embeddedness being both a theory and a retention model. Job embeddedness is a broad constellation of influences on employee retention (Zhang et al., 2012). These influences can be psychological, social, or financial in nature. These influences can come from either on-the-job or outside-the-job sources.

Embedded figures represent those that have become so attached to their surroundings that it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate them from their surroundings. Embedded figures often become so intertwined with on-the-job or outside-the-job influences that they form a network or web, becoming stuck and unable to disentangle themselves (Mitchell et al., 2001). Mitchell et al. (2001) found three critical components to the job embeddedness theory. The first component of links is how a

person connects to another person or activity. The second component of fit is the extent to which their job aligns with or complements other areas of their life, and the last component of sacrifice is the difficulty it takes to break these connections.

### **Links**

Fuchs (2022) described links as the formal and informal connections among people, organizations, and others. These links form the web a person creates, linking them to their work. The more links a person makes within their web, the more bound they become to the job or organization (Sessa & Bowling, 2021). Depending on the nature of the link, a person may value one connection more than another within the same web. If breaking the link incurs a financial cost, the person might choose to stay. If an employee is offered a financial raise but believes their current position offers greater social good, they may be hesitant to leave, even though it would be financially better for them.

Of the three components (links, fit, and sacrifice), those embedded by links may have the most challenging time leaving their current position. These employees are often referred to as embedded engaged stayers (Kiazad et al., 2019). Embedded engaged stayers are more likely to stay because they are deeply aligned with their current work and often take on additional tasks that provide extra value to their employer. Holtom et al. (2006) also found that when organizations can establish strong links between their employees and their work projects, these connections can have a powerful retention effect. These employees can efficiently take on these additional tasks by leveraging their connections within the organization. Organizations seeking to develop connections with their employees include listening to and addressing employees' concerns, hosting "get-to-

know-you dinners” for new hires and sponsoring social events outside the workplace (Holtom et al., 2006). One area in which organizations have struggled to build links with their employees is links to their employees' community. However, organizations can help facilitate and strengthen these links by promoting and sponsoring events, allowing the use of facilities of outside organizations with which employees are involved, or providing employees with paid time off to volunteer in support of community events or organizations.

### **Fit**

Fuchs (2022) defined fit as an employee's compatibility or comfort within the organization's environment. With the fit component, employees judge their similarities with the organization and community (Sessa & Bowling, 2021). This definition concludes that a person's values, career goals, and plans for their future must align with the culture and demands of their job. Only individuals who align with the established culture and climate or who can help bring about the desired change should be recruited and hired to join the organization. Employees who are highly embedded in the fit of their organization are less likely to quit. According to Peltokorpi and Allen (2023), those who are highly embedded might be more concerned about losing their work-related resources. This possibility of loss can make the search for other employment opportunities less attractive than staying in their current positions.

When a person is embedded in an educational organization, their fit is vital to their success. Schools often reflect the values, priorities, and culture in which they are found. School employees, especially school leaders, can deal with community tensions

more successfully when they have a deeper fit within their community. Superintendents report placing a high value on the ability of their campus leaders to understand and fit into the local community context in which their school is located (DeMatthews et al., 2023). Feeling supported by the local community through one's fit with the organization can often lead the educational leaders to overlook other flaws with the school, such as limited resources. When some might see obstacles they cannot overcome, others might see the value in remaining in a place with the same values and priorities.

There are several ways to help judge a person's fit during the recruitment and hiring process. Research completed in 2006 by Holtom et al. provides several examples of employers attempting to understand a person's fit before being hired. The first employer conducts pre-employment surveys that collect data about their personality, motivation, and honesty. These data points were used to help ensure the employee would fit with the organization's workplace environment. Another employer studied by Holtom et al. (2006) provided their employees with industry-leading training. Once their employees completed the training program, they possessed the skills and abilities to perform their jobs at a high level, and the employer trusted them to work effectively with minimal management oversight. This allowed the employees to feel valued by their employer and that the decisions they made while performing their jobs would be supported.

When an employee evaluates their fit with a position, they consider both on-the-job and off-the-job fit. On-the-job fit encompasses how a person's skill set aligns with their job requirements and their relationship with their immediate supervisor (Sessa &

Bowling, 2021). When considering on-the-job fit, employees also consider future career development or advancement, future job demands, and organizational value alignment (Holtom et al., 2006). Off-the-job fit is how a person fits within the broader community of where they live and work. Sessa and Bowling found this includes job location, local climate, educational options for themselves or family members, the political or religious climate of the area, entertainment options, availability of health care, and other amenities.

### **Sacrifice**

Sacrifice compares the cost, both physical and emotional, of a position (Nguyen et al., 2023). Fuchs (2022) defined sacrifice as the psychological and material benefits employees would lose if they left their organization. A simple way to define sacrifice is to determine what an employee has to surrender to stay in or leave their position. When a person leaves a position, job-related losses occur. These losses often include giving up working with favorite colleagues, projects they might find personally engaging, and financial or non-financial perks that come with their current position (Sessa & Bowling, 2021). Employers often focus solely on salary as a means to retain employees. However, while higher wages are always helpful, they are typically not enough to retain employees over the long term. Employers must find ways to differentiate themselves from their competitors by offering unique perks that are exclusive to their organization. These perks have included providing on-site services such as childcare, automobile services (including oil changes and detailing), affordable healthcare, professional services, and chef-made take-home dinners, all designed to differentiate themselves from other employers.

Another sacrifice one might consider is the difference in salary and benefits, such as health insurance, pension, or retirement plans. If a job change requires relocation, additional community costs must also be considered (Fuchs, 2022). Relocation often requires finding new health care, places of worship, entertainment options, and a desirable neighborhood. Holtom et al. (2006) found that one critical factor in lowering an employee's sacrifice cost is to offer the highest value based on the unique and diverse needs of the employees.

When considering the required sacrifice to leave an organization, an employee can become a reluctant stayer. According to Holtom et al. (2006), reluctant stayers want to leave their organization but are unable to do so. While the reasons one might not be able to leave are numerous, these reasons include being too close to retirement to start over, finding a position with a comparable starting salary, and inability to relocate for a new position. When reluctant stayers find a position that allows them to leave their current one, they will do so. While reluctant stayers continue to perform their job duties, the quality of their work often decreases over time, as they are not fully committed to the organization.

### **Literature Review Related to Key Concepts**

Most research on teacher retention focuses on reasons teachers leave the profession rather than remain. The present study addressed teacher retention, by focusing on factors associated with teachers remaining. A review of the current literature identified several common themes, including teacher retention, burnout and attrition, teacher

shortages, and teacher preservice preparation. The remainder of Chapter 2 provides a detailed examination of these theme and its relationship to teacher retention.

### **Teacher Retention**

Teacher retention is a critical issue affecting the educational system (Garcia et al., 2022). A stable, experienced teaching workforce is vital to improving educational quality. However, teacher attrition remains a persistent challenge within the United States. Many research studies indicate that teachers leave the profession early in their careers, often due to factors such as burnout, stress, inadequate support, and compensation (Seeling & McCabe, 2021).

For many years, the ability to develop and maintain a stable teacher workforce has been a central concern for educational leaders and policymakers (Seeling & McCabe, 2021). Several factors are important to educational leaders and policymakers when considering teacher retention. The first factor is knowing the size of the problem to retain teachers. Secondly, is understanding the factors that cause teachers to remain in the profession instead of leaving. The last factor is the impact that retaining teachers has on student learning.

### ***Statistics on Teacher Retention***

Pivovarova and Powers (2022) estimated that nearly 500,000 teachers leave the profession yearly. Turnover rates among states vary greatly as well. In New York, some 24% of teachers leave each year, the highest being in Illinois at 43%. Pivovarova and Powers (2022) noted that teachers working in lower socioeconomic schools, minority-

majority schools, or low-performing schools were likelier to leave the profession than those working in affluent and high-performing schools.

While the workforce nationwide in the United States comprises a significant number of veteran teachers, they only account for a small percentage of those who leave the profession each year (Seeling & McCabe, 2021). Seeling and McCabe estimated that 44% of teachers leave the profession before 5 years of experience. The reasons provided for these novice teachers leaving have been noted in research after research, as they include student behavior, salary, lack of resources for their classrooms, poor school leadership, and lack of input in the decision-making process.

Many factors contribute to teacher retention in today's educational climate. However, one of the most important predictors of teacher retention is student demographics and behavior, according to Farahmandpour and Voelkel's (2025) study. Farahmandpour and Voelkel's study indicated that when students mistreat their teachers on a regular basis, teachers leave the campus. Farahmandpour and Voelkel's (2025) study found that when teachers and students are from the same ethnicity, teachers tend to remain on the campus. Farahmandpour and Voelkel's (2025) also found that schools with higher proportions of students of color were more prone to teacher attrition.

### ***Why Teachers Stay***

When school started becoming standardized in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, developing and maintaining a stable teacher workforce was a concern of policymakers and educational leaders (Seeling & McCabe, 2021). According to Seeling and McCabe's study, teachers tend to stay in their current positions for four reasons: commitment to

students, opportunities for leadership and collaboration, connections to the community, and personal and or professional ties to the position. When teachers describe their classroom environments, they always do so relationally. Teachers are concerned with having the ability to meet the needs of their students instead of describing some academic outcome. When considering their colleagues and campus leadership, they described how supportive relationships were important for them to remain in their current positions (Rhinesmith et al., 2023). For relationships with campus leadership to feel supportive, it was not just being allowed to do something. It was also being provided with the needed tools to reach their goals.

When teachers pointed to respected dual roles within the community. The community valued them as important in educating the local youth and their ability to serve the cultural and social functions of the broader community. The school was the center of the community, and the community supported it as such. Teachers' personal and professional ties went beyond their classroom. Teachers remained in their current positions oftentimes because they felt that their own personal children were receiving an excellent education, and they were able to make connections to the local community (Seeling & McCabe, 2021). The connections with the local community were tied to outdoor recreational options, youth sports, and religious options. The reasons teachers stay in their current position are based on the relationships and connections they can build between themselves, the campus, and the local community.

Teachers tend to stay in their current positions because of their principal. Buckman's (2021) study found a clear relationship between teacher retention and

principal retention. The study showed that the percentage of returning teachers increased when the same principal remained at the school. Buckman (2021) noted that reducing the teacher shortage is not a quick fix, and the blame for the shortage can be found within many areas. One solution that appears to help address the teacher shortage is providing stable principal leadership on campus.

### ***Teacher Retention's Impact on Student Learning***

Students' academic success is not determined by their skin color or their parents' income level. Student success is determined by the person standing in front of their classroom — their teacher (Warren, 2021). The classroom teacher, Warren asserted, directly impacts student performance, and the quality of teachers in the classroom is crucial to determining a student's success in school. Warren stated that learners taught by experienced educators are more likely to achieve their academic goals than those taught by novice teachers.

Excessive teacher turnover and voluntary attrition are problematic for many school districts across the United States (Garcia et al., 2022). The significant problem teacher turnover creates is the use of resources for continually recruiting new teachers. These resources could be used for other and more productive purposes besides staff recruitment. Garcia et al. (2022) noted that there is also a gap between the number of qualified teachers and the number of teachers needed. The need outpaces the available candidates to hire. The gap is even more significant if you consider that some current teachers lack the credentials to be effective teachers (Levitan et al., 2022).

## **Teacher Attrition**

One of the policymakers' and educational leaders' long-standing and sustained concerns has been teacher attrition at the elementary and secondary levels. (Amitai & Van Houtte, 2022). Teacher attrition among novice teachers is not unique to the United States, persisting in many countries (Shuls & Flores, 2020). Unfortunately, for U.S. schools, teacher attrition is predicted to worsen before it improves (See & Gorard, 2020). According to See and Gorard, one of the most basic functions of an educational system is to provide citizens with a quality education. Teacher attrition can put this essential function in great peril if not addressed. The biggest impediment to quality education is having enough qualified and knowledgeable teachers to fill all vacancies (See & Gorard, 2020).

Research has shown that every profession experience employee attrition. However, this evidence indicates that teaching may be an extreme outlier compared to almost any other occupation (Madigan & Kim, 2021b). This perpetual turnover results in new teachers needing to be recruited to join the profession, which costs districts monetarily and potentially decreases student achievement due to instructional inconsistencies. Teacher attrition has both academic and economic costs. When teacher attrition leads to teacher shortages, schools often respond by filling positions with inexperienced or unqualified teachers (Mitani et al., 2022). This produces a tremendous academic cost to students, as Madigan and Kim found that it takes teachers 3 to 7 years before they typically become highly qualified teachers.

While teachers provide many reasons for their departure from the profession, not all attrition among novice teachers is negative. Modest annual teacher attrition rates can benefit schools if those leaving are ineffective, uncooperative, or unable to deliver culturally responsive instruction that aligns with state and local standards (DeMatthews et al., 2022). Some beginning teachers may have chosen the wrong career path and should not be instructing students. DeMatthews et al. (2022) observed that some attrition is expected among early-career teachers; as attrition rates rise, the financial and organizational costs can disrupt the learning environment. Starting a professional career in education can be overwhelming and stressful for any new teacher. Educators are expected to be experts in their content area and pedagogy while also being engaging performers and proficient in classroom management, all while collaborating with a team of other professionals (Van den Borre et al., 2021). Developing these skills- expertise in content, mastery of pedagogy, and excellent classroom management- takes time; however, teachers are expected to perform competently from day one.

Research provides substantial empirical data showing that teacher quality is the most significant factor in student achievement. Before a teacher begins employment within the public school system, a considerable investment has already been made in their career (Mitani et al., 2022). Mitani et al. investigated teacher preparation programs to better understand this investment. This study compared traditional and non-traditional preparation programs. Traditional programs were university-based, where teachers received training as part of their undergraduate degree program. In non-traditional programs, teachers complete their training after obtaining their undergraduate degrees.

Mitani et al. (2022) study found that the types of preparation programs are crucial during teachers' initial years in the profession. Teachers who completed non-traditional programs were less likely to leave both the profession and the campus that hired them within the first 4 years. After the fourth year, however, their results indicated no significant difference between traditional and non-traditional programs. Among all non-traditional program types researched, those enrolled in programs operated by the local district had the lowest turnover rates. Mitani et al. (2022) believed this is likely due to the local district's vested interest in ensuring the program's success. Furthermore, local districts provide participants with access to classrooms that best suit their abilities.

In addition to the investment made in teachers, Goldhaber's (2019) study also found a positive relationship between teacher retention and teacher effectiveness. Most studies on teacher effectiveness focus on student achievement based on standardized testing. However, studies, including Van den Borre et al. (2021), Madigan and Kim (2021b), and Williams et al. (2022), have found that teachers become more effective the longer they remain in the profession. Thus, the preparation and training teachers receive before their first day on the job are vital.

In addition to the usual reasons teachers leave the profession, the spring of 2020 struck the world with the COVID-19 pandemic. This led to teacher shortages that impacted schools across America (Rosenberg et al., 2021). Public education was left with unstaffed classrooms, uncertified teachers, and students deprived of quality instruction (Devers et al., 2024). Teaching has long been recognized as a profession that can negatively affect educators' health. During the pandemic, educators faced the challenges

of isolation and concerns for their health while trying to provide quality instruction remotely without any training, preparation, or resources. As Devers et al. (2024) noted, educators also became frontline workers with the return of in-person education while being used as political pawns by parents, community leaders, and politicians. Simply put, teachers are being asked to do too much with too little. Today, as Devers et al. (2024) noted, teachers are expected to cure society's ills and prepare students for an ever-changing world, all for a salary not commensurate with their education and training.

### **Teacher Burnout and Attrition**

Teacher burnout has become an increasing concern in education throughout the United States. Burnout is generally defined as exhaustion resulting from ongoing exposure to work-related stressors while having sufficient resources to manage these stressors (Nadon et al., 2022). Understanding teacher burnout has attracted significant attention in recent years. Teachers who have become emotionally exhausted may lack the psychological and physical resources needed to address students' academic needs (Granziera et al., 2023). Saloviita and Pakarinen (2021) discovered that teacher burnout has led to higher rates of absenteeism, retirement, turnover, and lower job performance quality among teachers.

While burnout can occur in any profession, it is significantly more prevalent among teachers (Madigan & Kim, 2021a). This is certainly expected when considering the stressful workload teachers endure, which includes student misbehavior, multiple performance evaluations, and insufficient administrative support. Preventing teacher burnout is crucial for the health and well-being of the educators; burnout also impacts the

students taught by an exhausted teacher. Madigan and Kim's (2021a) research discovered that students of burned-out teachers perform worse on exams and tests, receiving lower cumulative grades compared to students in classrooms where teachers did not report experiencing burnout.

When considering the different demographics of teachers, Saloviita and Pakarinen (2021) found that each group is affected differently by burnout. They discovered that female teachers experience burnout more than their male counterparts, while veteran teachers report feeling burnt out more often than younger teachers. Additionally, the older the grade level, the more likely teachers are to experience burnout. Saloviita and Pakarinen (2021) also found that special education teachers experience burnout more frequently than their general education counterparts. Understanding the factors that lead to burnout can enhance teacher retention and improve the quality of education that students receive.

### ***Challenges of Post-COVID-19 Education***

It is unnecessary to say that the COVID-19 pandemic radically altered the educational landscape in the United States. In the spring of 2020, teachers encountered the greatest disruption in the history of education due to the pandemic (Pressley et al., 2024). When teachers returned to their classrooms in the fall of 2020, they faced socially distanced classrooms, hybrid learning, and students who had to learn virtually during school closures (Pressley, 2021).

Before the start of school in the fall of 2020, districts had just months to review their current practices and develop new strategies to keep students, staff, and the

community safe from an invisible threat (Miller & Langerhans, 2025). Districts were required to form new teams to complete the review, decide on any necessary changes, implement them, and communicate them to interested parties, all while continuing to fulfill their original responsibilities. According to Miller and Langerhans (2025), an often-repeated narrative in the fall of 2020 and into the spring of 2021 is that teachers' working conditions deteriorated due to COVID-19 and the policies and procedures established to protect students and staff. In the spring of 2020, when all public United States schools shut down, many teachers felt disconnected and lacked resources to cope with online learning (Baker et al., 2021). However, this was not a universal truth. Some teachers viewed the shift to remote learning as an improvement in their working conditions. If teachers considered this an improvement, it often corresponded to the resources and support their district provided during this time. Another factor was teachers' comfort level with using technology. Those teachers who felt tech-savvy often reported improved working conditions compared to their less comfortable colleagues (Miller & Langerhans, 2025).

Many of the changes schools implemented were beyond their control. The decisions regarding in-person learning, contact tracing, and mask-wearing were all made by local, state, or federal health or educational agencies rather than local district leaders. Implemented policies, such as social distancing and ventilation, were critical in alleviating or exacerbating teachers' concerns (Diliberti et al., 2021). Diliberti et al. also found that teacher dissatisfaction with health policies and unenforced mitigation

strategies were among the top reasons teachers left the profession. Nearly 20% of their respondents cited this as a factor in their decision to leave the education field.

### ***Steps Taken by Government Agencies to Reduce Attrition***

Educational agencies and leaders at every level (federal, state, and local) have had to reexamine, rethink, and research actionable steps to attract prospective teachers and retain current ones, reduce teacher absenteeism, increase job commitment, and lower turnover intentions (Madigan & Kim, 2021a). Koch (2024) outlined several steps that could be taken to attract and retain teachers. The first step is to offer teachers a livable and competitive wage. When U.S. teacher wages are compared to those in other countries that are part of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United States ranks below at least 28 other countries. Another important step is to provide professional development; teachers need to feel supported while learning on the job. The final step mentioned is to add support staff to assist teachers as they complete daily tasks such as grading student work, attending parent and campus meetings, planning lessons, and working one-on-one with their students.

### **Teacher Shortages**

While the teacher shortage predates the COVID-19 pandemic, the pandemic has exacerbated the issue to the point where nearly half of public schools reported teacher vacancies, according to a National Center for Education Statistics report (Schmitt & DeCourcy, 2022). This situation has resulted in non-instructional staff filling the gaps caused by the teacher shortage in many classrooms across the United States (Koch, 2024). One of the primary concerns is that most teachers are drawn from a single

demographic. The vast majority of teachers in the United States are white females (Ingersoll et al., 2021). The data indicates that school districts and educator preparation programs struggle to recruit, attract, and retain teachers from diverse populations (Koch, 2024). Teacher shortages closely resemble school district boundaries, which often begin and end at arbitrary lines based more on privilege and zip codes than on student needs.

These arbitrary lines have ignited a debate regarding the teacher shortage. This debate centers on whether the shortage is a national or local issue (Nguyen et al., 2024). Schools in affluent, low-crime areas are significantly less likely to report teacher shortages compared to their counterparts in impoverished, high-crime areas (Koch, 2024). These disagreements are crucial, as the answers will influence the policies implemented to address the issue. For instance, if the problem is nationwide, a policy to increase teacher salaries or reduce educational costs may help tackle it, according to Nguyen et al. (2024) Conversely, if the issue is more localized, policies need to be tailored to address specific local concerns.

Tracing the teacher shortage to its origin is difficult. In the United States, education is a state-level responsibility, making it nearly impossible to monitor the shortage at the national level (Craig et al., 2023). Craig et al. suggested that the issue may stem from the factory model upon which schools were designed. They also noted that the United States has never invested the same resources as other high-performing countries. Additionally, the working conditions of American teachers were cited by Craig et al. (2023) as factors contributing to the teacher shortage, which include the average American teacher instructing 200 more hours per year than their global counterparts. The

influence of political polarization on education by state leaders and the growing concern for school safety also play a role. Rarely does a day go by without some school safety issue in America dominating media coverage.

### ***Teacher Preparation Strategies that Enhance Retention***

Teachers' commitment to professionalism is directly related to the quality of their pre-service preparation and early teaching experiences (Cavendish et al., 2021). This connection is especially significant for teachers who start their careers in urban schools. Ongoing debates surround the effectiveness of preservice preparation programs in promoting teacher success in urban communities (Martin & Mulvihill, 2023). Cavendish et al. (2023) found that preservice preparation programs that partner with urban schools and offer placements for their preservice teachers on those campuses yield higher retention rates among novice teachers. These partnerships enable preservice teachers to gain firsthand experiences in urban environments, allowing them to dismantle any misconceptions they may have held about these settings. This understanding is crucial for their success, as many first-year and early-career teachers find employment in high-needs schools, frequently situated in urban areas (Martin & Mulvihill, 2023).

Not many teachers in the United States choose teaching as their primary career option (Martin & Mulvihill, 2023). With over 1,500 teacher education preparation programs available, predicting the quality of these programs can be quite challenging (Martin & Mulvihill, 2023). Therefore, the support provided by local campuses and districts to teachers during their first 5 years is crucial for their long-term success. Given the variety of preparation programs and the diverse backgrounds of novice teachers, in-

service support has long been recognized as a necessity for them (Mosley & McCarthy, 2023). One effective way to provide this support is through mentoring for beginning teachers. Mosley and McCarthy (2023) found that mentoring offers personalized attention to each teacher as they acclimate to their new work environment and culture. Maready et al.'s (2021) study found that most mentoring programs resulted in teachers remaining in the profession through their fifth year. The earlier novice teachers received a mentor, the higher the likelihood they would continue into their fifth year. The likelihood increased even more if their mentor had taught the same grade or subject as the mentee.

### ***New Teacher Induction Programs***

Overwhelmed and unsupported, novice teachers leave their schools and the profession at an alarming rate (Mullen & Fallen, 2022). Mullen and Fallen's research study showed that up to 50% of teachers leave the profession within their first 5 years. New teacher induction programs can potentially decrease the mass exodus from the profession. According to the National Education Association (NEA, 2022), quality comprehensive induction programs have reduced new teacher turnover rates by half within the United States.

A new teacher induction program conducted by Reeves et al. (2022) identified several induction activities as statistically significant. These activities included participation in virtual communities, team teaching with experienced teachers, and the creation of portfolios or journals. All of these activities align with prior research indicating that a teacher's reflective practice is vital. Being part of a virtual community, team teaching with an experienced educator, and producing a portfolio or keeping a

journal enables a novice teacher to reflect on their work and learn from others to enhance their classroom skills.

One of the most common induction practices identified by Kwok et al. (2021) is the coaching model. While this model has proven successful, Kwok et al. (2021) highlighted several factors that are crucial to the effectiveness of the coaching model. These factors include the coach's experience with the novice teacher's assignment and familiarity with the district's resources. Another significant factor is the frequency and duration of meetings between the coach and novice teacher. Those who met more often and dedicated enough time to share sufficient resources experienced a much more positive outcome compared to their colleagues who rarely met with their coach or whose meetings were brief and insufficient in providing helpful resources for the novice teacher.

The last significant factor noted in the work of Kwok et al. (2021) was the relationship between the coach and the novice teacher. Although defining the ideal match between a coach and a teacher is complex and practically impossible, several elements of this match seem to enhance the connection between them. These elements include similar school sites, knowledge of student diversity, and possibly the most important factor, teaching philosophies.

Many research studies have explored the pre-service and in-service education of teachers; however, the transition between these two stages of the profession has received less attention (Reeves et al., 2022). Teachers' ability to successfully transition from being students of teaching to being teachers of students depends significantly on their induction (Reeves et al., 2022). While many aspects can be part of a teacher induction program,

several factors appear to significantly impact teacher retention. Teachers who constructed portfolios, diaries, or journals attended online courses or seminars, and had a reduced teaching load compared to their veteran counterparts experienced lower attrition rates (Reeves et al., 2022).

### **Teacher Preservice Preparation**

Teacher quality is not a new debate in education. However, the debate intensified with the passage of NCLB in 2001 and the 2015 passage of the ESSA (Brown et al., 2021). More often than not, a typical preservice preparation program includes a student teaching experience that is a capstone to the program. The authors noted that student teaching experience is often completed at the end of the bachelor's degree, with preservice teachers taking on more and more teaching responsibility each week under the direct supervision of a mentor teacher. Livers et al. (2021) found that there are three factors that influence a preservice teacher's perceived readiness for the classroom. These factors were teacher preparation program coursework, field experiences, and the ability to handle classroom management.

#### ***Teacher Preparations Program Course Work***

Preservice teachers often take courses on topics such as teaching children, language arts, social studies, addressing children's reading difficulties, child development, classroom management, science education, mathematics education, and teaching children to read (Brown et al., 2021). Livers et al. (2021) found that preservice teachers felt most prepared when their coursework included practical strategies and activities. As preservice teachers neared the end of their programs, they found the

coursework to be relevant to the classroom. Near the end of the program is when Livers et al. (2021) found preservice teachers covered topics such as 5 E lesson plans, critical thinking and growth mindset.

Not all preservice coursework is deemed relevant by preservice teachers. Brown et al. (2021) found participants who were very frustrated with their program's coursework. One participant reported that their teaching science class was a great example of how not to teach science. Another reported that an undergraduate student should not have more experience teaching math to children in a classroom than the professor. The ability to teach reading was the area in which most preservice teachers found that their preservice program failed the most (Brown et al., 2021). Because of this, preservice teachers often reported that they shied away from being willing to teach lower grade levels as they thought they would do a disservice to their students.

### ***Field Experiences***

Over the past several decades, teacher residencies have become a popular model for training the next generation of educators (Truwit et al., 2024). Truwit et al. described teacher residencies as partnerships between teacher preparation programs and local school districts that provide highly qualified preservice teachers with a year-long clinical experience in settings serving the same student populations that these future teachers will later instruct as their own classes. These teacher residency models are inspired by the training prospective doctors receive in medical school (Chu & Wang, 2022). The goal noted by Truwit et al. (2024) was to expose teachers to authentic learning experiences through the residency. During these year-long programs, teachers are strategically

recruited and work under the mentorship of an experienced teacher while completing coursework closely related to their classroom experiences (Chu & Wang, 2022). With teachers strategically recruited for specific districts, they are more likely to be effective and retained longer, as noted by Chu and Wang (2022).

How one receives their teacher certification largely determines what their field experiences will look like. Matsko et al. (2022) found that for those who completed their certification through a residency, their field experience lasted more than 15 weeks, with 94% of the residency programs reporting clinical experiences of at least 15 weeks. In contrast, traditional programs, such as universities, reported that 63% had clinical experiences lasting at least 15 weeks. Alternative programs were the least likely to offer clinical experiences of 15 weeks or more, with only 8% of these programs requiring that duration.

### ***Classroom Management***

Classroom management preparation is crucial for teachers, administrators, and students, as misunderstood or poorly taught strategies can hinder student learning (Shank, 2023). According to the 2019 U.S. Department of Education's school and staffing survey, fewer than 44% of first-year teachers felt somewhat prepared for classroom management (Shank & Santiago, 2022). Shank and Santiago further noted that a lack of confidence in managing classroom behaviors can deter individuals from entering or remaining in the education profession. Many novice teachers complete their preparation programs without practicing adequate classroom management techniques; they often rely on short-term strategies and need training to develop stronger student-teacher relationships, as

highlighted by Shank and Santiago (2022). Despite the increase in resources for classroom management strategies, most university teacher preparation programs do not incorporate evidence-based practices (Shank, 2023). Shank emphasizes that novice teachers should practice evidence-based classroom management strategies to reduce problematic behaviors and enhance learning time.

Teachers play a pivotal role in promoting a positive classroom environment and facilitating student learning (Randolph et al., 2024). They also believe that educators are the primary influence on their students' social-emotional development and academic achievement. Therefore, according to Randolph et al. (2024) all teachers must be well-prepared to confront the realities of teaching, particularly in managing student behaviors. Unfortunately, classroom management is a skill often overlooked in teacher preparation programs (Shank, 2023). In researching teacher preparation programs, Shank (2023) found that when the topic of classroom management was addressed, participants were often assigned a text to read independently, followed by a discussion in the next class meeting. There was very little to no hands-on experience with classroom management. One participant in Shank's (2023) study reported that they lacked hands-on experience in classroom management and felt this was a crucial element for being successful in the classroom.

For teachers who instruct the youngest learners, being well-equipped in classroom management is essential for students' long-term success. Ross et al. (2023) found that students who display challenging behaviors in their early years are more likely to encounter difficulties later in life, including academic struggles, failures, socioemotional

maladjustments, and mental health challenges. Given the high stakes of classroom management, teacher preparation programs must provide well-designed behavior and classroom management courses that incorporate hands-on activities for preservice teachers to complete (Randolph et al., 2024). Teachers who feel prepared and proficient in classroom management experience lower levels of burnout and are more likely to remain in the profession (Madigan & Kim, 2021b).

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Teacher attrition and the long-term challenges education leaders face in retaining teachers have been well-researched areas. What remains to be understood in education is why teachers choose to stay despite many challenges. In Chapter 2, the conceptual framework of job embeddedness study was discussed, along with its three major components: links, fit, and sacrifice. The literature review section of Chapter 2 examined the topics of teacher retention, burnout and attrition, teacher shortages, and preservice teacher preparation. These topics directly relate to the study's RQs, highlighting the current known factors contributing to teacher attrition.

The next chapter, Chapter 3, outlines the research method of the study. The method includes the design and rationale, the role of the researcher, participant selection, instrumentation, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. The elements of trustworthiness will be used to describe in detail how validity and reliability were established for the study. Ethical considerations will describe how safety measures and procedures were implemented to ensure the confidentiality of all participants in the study.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore K-12 teachers' perspectives on factors influencing their decision to remain in the education profession, as well as K-12 administrators' perspectives influencing novice teachers' decisions to persist in the education profession in a Southwestern state. This chapter contains a description of the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, the methodology, the instrumentation, the procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection, the data analysis plan, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the main ideas, and a transition to Chapter 4.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

Qualitative research incorporates inductive reasoning to decode individual encounters, emphasizing experiences and actions to infer assumptions or theories (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). There are various qualitative designs, including basic, grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenology (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology were not considered for use in this study. This study did not examine cultural groups or their lived experiences; therefore, an ethnographic design did not align with the study's purpose. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a grounded theory design entails developing a theory or conceptual framework that emerges from the data and does not align with my study.

Phenomenological studies, similar to case studies, enable the researcher to gain an understanding of a specific phenomenon from the participants' experiential perspective (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). This focus was not suitable for this study.

A basic qualitative design aligned with the RQs, which focused on K-12 novice teachers' and K-12 administrators' perspectives on the factors that influence teachers' decisions to remain in the profession. I collected data through interviews that allowed participants to express their perspectives on why K-12 novice teachers remain in the profession. Answers to the RQs were provided by analyzing the collected data. The results of this study have the potential to help administrators understand why teachers remain, enabling them to better support teachers and thereby reducing their attrition rate. The study took place among K-12 novice teachers and administrators in one Southwestern state.

A qualitative approach aligned with the phenomenon being explored in this analysis of why novice K-12 teachers remain in the profession. This study required participants to describe their perspectives, making a quantitative research design unsuitable. Quantitative studies focus on identifying cause and effect, predicting or analyzing the distribution of an attribute within a population (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Quantitative data is analyzed using various statistical or mathematical models, while qualitative data requires researchers to interpret and assign meaning to the information gathered from participants.

The RQs that guided this study were as follows:

RQ1: What are K-12 novice teachers' perspectives on factors influencing their decision to remain in the education profession in a Southwestern state?

RQ2

What are K-12 administrators' perspectives on influencing novice teachers' decisions to persist in the education profession in a Southwestern state?

### **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher plays a crucial role in a qualitative study. The researcher is responsible for data collection by conducting interviews, coding the gathered data, and often assigning meaning to it. Due to this unique position, there is a significant opportunity for researcher bias to be introduced into the study. Researcher bias occurs when the thoughts, emotions, and values of the researcher become part of the research study (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Another concern for the researcher in a qualitative study is using the researcher's so-called backyard as a location to study or a place to find participants. Creswell and Creswell (2023) described the researcher's backyard as being the researcher's organization they work for, friends or family members of the researcher, or their immediate working setting. Using the backyard as a source of data can lead to the data being compromised in some manner, especially if there is an imbalance of power between the researcher and the participant. This power imbalance is most often seen when a researcher has a superior role to the participant. Some links between my professional setting and a few of the participants; however, I was not in a supervisory role to any of the participants selected for the study.

## **Methodology**

When conducting a qualitative study, understanding the procedures involved is imperative. The study took place in a Southwestern state. This section includes a description participant selection, data collection procedures, and the analysis plan for the data.

### **Participant Selection**

Participants in this study were all from one Southwestern state. The teacher participants had between 2 and 7 years of teaching experience. The administrator participants had at least 2 years of administrative experience and have been at their current campus for more than one year. I used purposeful sampling to select both teacher and administrator participants. Purposeful sampling selects participants from locations that will best help the researcher understand the problem and RQs being studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). 10 teachers and 3 campus principal participants were recruited to take part in semistructured interviews.

### ***Population, Target Population, and Sample***

According to the state education agency ([SEA, 2024]), the state has 5.1 million students enrolled in public schools. These students are served by 320,000 teachers and more than 80,000 other professionals, such as principals and central office personnel. The region of the state from which the sample was drawn has almost 1.5 million students who are served by about 200,000 professional staff, which includes both teachers and administrators. Patton (2015) noted that there are no rules in qualitative studies regarding sample size determination. Data saturation occurs when the information becomes

redundant, and no new themes emerge from the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and it is essential to reach data saturation. To allow for saturation to occur, the sample included 13 total participants.

### ***Sampling Strategy***

When determining a sampling strategy, the researcher must understand the context and objectives of their study. Palys (2008) stated that there is not one best sampling strategy because the best sampling strategy will depend on the context in which the research takes place and the research objective. Purposive sampling was the primary sampling strategy used in this study. Within purposive sampling, the specific strategy employed is criterion sampling. Palys (2008) defined criterion sampling as searching for individuals who meet a specific criterion.

Snowball sampling was used as the backup sampling strategy for this study. Crouse and Lowe (2018) defined snowball sampling as a method for generating a pool of participants through referrals made by individuals who share the same characteristics. Snowball sampling may also be referred to as chain sampling. According to Crouse and Lowe (2018), these referrals most likely come from informal questioning, such as who their teacher/administrator friends are. Once new participants are identified, the referral process can be repeated with the new participants to find additional participants.

### ***Inclusion Criteria***

To qualify as a teacher participant, individuals must have been current educators with 2 to 7 years of teaching experience. When assessing years of experience, any involvement in student teaching that formed part of their preparation program was not

counted as part of their overall experience. For instance, if a teacher completed a semester of student teaching during their preparation program and is in their second year of full-time teaching, they would be considered to have 2 years of experience, not 2.5 years. To be included in the study, administrators must have held a position as a full-time campus principal and have served on their current campus for at least 1 year.

The criteria for teacher ineligibility as participants include teachers with less than 2 years of experience. Teachers who are not currently employed as full-time classroom teachers were not included in the study as participants. Administrators who were in their first year as a campus principal were also excluded from participating in the study.

### ***Rationale for Sample Size***

When determining sample size, saturation is the most common guiding principle in qualitative research for assessing whether your sample size is adequate (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Hennink and Kaiser defined saturation as the point at which additional data do not yield any new themes or insightful information. Their review of qualitative studies found that saturation was typically reached with 5 to 24 participants. This study's use of 13 total participants fell within the range necessary to achieve saturation.

### ***Participant Identification and Selection***

Participants were selected from a network of known novice teachers and identified through social media postings on the Facebook group DFW Teachers' Lounge. This Facebook group currently has 45,600 members. It is unknown how many of the 45,600 members met the criteria; therefore, participants identified through social media were screened after receipt of consent to ensure they met the teacher criteria. A recruiting

flyer was created for distribution (see Appendix A). The following section provides a description of the recruiting procedures.

### **Instrumentation**

Data was collected using semistructured interviews using an interview guide (see Appendix B), which serves as an appropriate data collection tool in qualitative research methodologies (Patton, 2015). Patton recommended using open-ended questions in qualitative research to explore a phenomenon. To ensure that the interview questions effectively gather information to answer the RQs, alignment with the conceptual framework was confirmed by including key concepts related to the framework in the questions.

To begin the interview, introductory questions were asked to categorize and describe the sample of participants. For teacher participants, these questions inquired about their years of experience, the level they teach, and the subject they teach. For principal participants, these questions asked about their total years in education, years of experience as a principal, and years in their current role. To ensure that the transcribed data accurately reflected the participants' perspectives during the interview, transcripts were provided to each participant for review and correction as a form of member checking.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

#### ***Recruiting Procedures***

Initial participants were selected from a known network of eligible participants and those identified through social media postings. To eliminate perceived bias, the

novice teachers were drawn from at least two different campuses. Approval was obtained from the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before data collection began. Once IRB approval was secured, recruitment of participants commenced. A recruitment flyer was posted on Facebook (see Appendix A). An adequate sample size within the network of known novice teachers and administrators and Facebook posting was reached. Therefore, snowball sampling was not needed. Crouse and Lowe (2018) described snowball sampling as a sampling technique where the initial sample group is asked to recommend additional people as future participants. Participants recommended by the initial participants are termed the initial wave, while the second group of referrals is known as the second wave, and so on. This sampling method could be repeated as many times as needed to reach the required number of participants.

### ***Informed Consent***

Once participants were identified, they were informed about the purpose of the study. Prior to participating, each participant was provided with a consent document that they read and agreed to. This informed consent remained confidential until the study concluded and will be securely destroyed 5 years after the conclusion of the study, along with other participant data, following university guidelines.

### ***Data Collection Process***

Each participant underwent the interview protocol as outlined above. Interviews were conducted via Zoom to allow for transcription to capture participant data. Each session lasted approximately 30 minutes. Each participant was only interviewed once.

### ***Member Checking***

Member-checking is a process where participants review interview transcripts to provide feedback (Varpio et al., 2017). It became popular in 1985 when Lincoln and Guba used it as a way to establish credibility. During member checking, participants can correct any errors and remove data they prefer not to be included in the data set. Before sending the transcripts via email, obvious errors and stray words like “um” were removed. Participants were asked to return the transcripts with their corrections within 5 business days, after which the transcripts were considered accurate as transcribed.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

This study used Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase inductive thematic analysis process. Each of the six phases is defined in more detail below. Inductive thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke, is a method for reporting patterns within the data.

#### ***Phase 1: Familiarization with the Data***

The first phase is to become familiar with the collected data. Even if the researcher collects the data personally and approaches the analysis portion with some prior knowledge, time must be spent getting acquainted with the depth and breadth of the data. It is recommended to read through the entire data set before coding begins. This phase can be time-consuming and is therefore often skipped. However, Braun and Clarke (2006) strongly discouraged skipping this phase. The interviews conducted in this study were transcribed for data analysis. While this was another time-consuming step, it was not time wasted, as it informs the early stages of data analysis.

### ***Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes***

Once familiarized with the data and having ideas about what is interesting, Phase 2 is ready to begin. Phase 2 is when initial codes from the data are developed. Codes identify features of the data that the analyst finds interesting. Coding is part of the data analysis process as the data is organized into meaningful groups. At this phase, Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend coding as many potential themes/patterns as possible, since what will be interesting later is unknown at this point in the process. Semantic coding was used in the first cycle to identify initial codes. Latent coding was then used to combine and condense similar initial codes into secondary codes.

### ***Phase 3: Generating Initial Themes***

Phase 3 begins when all data has been coded and compiled. At this point, there was a long list of codes. During this phase, the codes were combined to help identify overarching initial themes. As this sorting process unfolds, a miscellaneous theme may temporarily emerge, as some codes might not seem to fit into any of the main themes. This phase concluded with a collection of candidate themes and sub-themes. At this point, significant themes started to emerge. An early thematic map of the data took shape in Phase 3, which was refined in each of the subsequent phases.

### ***Phase 4: Reviewing Themes***

Phase 4 begins with refining the candidate themes. During this phase, it became clear that some candidate themes did not qualify as true themes due to insufficient supporting data. Other themes merged with each other, while some needed to be divided into two distinct themes. The complete data set was reexamined to ensure that the data

supports the themes and to code any data that was overlooked in an earlier phase. This phase involves two levels of review: the first level analyzed the coded data, while the second pertains to the overall data set. In the first level of analysis, a candidate thematic map was completed, and the analysis process proceeded to level 2. Level 2 is similar to level 1; however, at this level, each theme was considered in relation to the entire data set for validity. During this level, the candidate thematic map was also reviewed to ensure it accurately reflects the data set as a whole. By the end of this stage, there was a clear understanding of the different themes and how they interconnect. The narrative conveyed by the data was fairly identifiable by the conclusion of Phase 4.

#### ***Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes***

Phase 5 begins with a comprehensive thematic map of the data. The themes selected for analysis were finalized. During this process, it is crucial not to paraphrase the content of the data, but to accurately identify what is of interest and why. Each theme requires a detailed analysis and written description. It is essential that the writing about each theme reflects the narrative that each theme conveys. The overarching story needs to be considered during this phase, along with how each theme relates to the RQs, to prevent significant overlap between themes. Therefore, each theme must be assessed individually and in relation to the others. By the end of this phase, the distinctions of each theme were clear. While provisional titles for the themes have been established, Phase 5 is when the final titles were crafted. The titles are concise, engaging, and provide immediate clarity regarding the theme's focus. The final themes were defined.

### ***Phase 6: Producing the Report***

Phase 6 includes the final analysis and write-up of the report. This phase begins with a set of thoroughly developed themes that convey the complex story of the collected data. The final write-up must convincingly present the merit and validity of the completed analysis. It includes sufficient data to illustrate the prevalence of each theme. Therefore, vivid examples are utilized to capture the essence of the points being made about the data. The final write-up encompasses more than just data; a compelling illustration is included that transcends the data and makes an argument related to the RQs. After the analysis is complete, the resulting final themes were used to answer the RQs.

### **Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, trustworthiness refers to the ability to produce high-quality research that accurately reflects participants' experiences in the setting (Baker, 2022). Qualitative researchers should ensure confidence, validity of results, and fairness of the findings based on the participants' experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure validity Lincoln and Guba's four elements of trustworthiness were observed.

### **Credibility**

Ensuring that findings and interpretations are credible is crucial in research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended engaging deeply over time, investing enough effort to gather comprehensive data. This extended engagement also helps build trust between participants and the researcher. It allows the researcher to identify and control for information that could be distorted or biased. Aside from extended engagement, the

technique of persistent observation should be used to enhance credibility. Persistent observation helps identify the most relevant aspects of the problem and enables focused examination of them. Lincoln and Guba's (1985) final recommendation for credibility is triangulation. Another way to understand triangulation is that data cannot be trusted unless it is verified by another person. Involving multiple participants during data collection facilitates triangulation.

### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the extent to which research findings can be applied to a broader context (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). To understand this broader context, a comprehensive literature review was conducted in Chapter 2. The review provided insights into what is currently known and identified areas where further research is needed. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability is a way to ensure external validity. This study is aligned and will be explained in a manner that allows another researcher to replicate it to confirm transferability.

### **Dependability**

Dependability begins with a systematic, reasoned design and alignment of methods to the study's RQs (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The research data must answer the RQs. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), if credibility is established, then dependability has been established as well. To establish dependability, reliance on triangulation as described above for credibility was used. The data was considered dependable when multiple participants could verify it.

## **Confirmability**

Confirmability is the degree to which a research study's conclusions are grounded in participants' data rather than the researcher's biases (Shenton, 2004). Burkholder et al. (2020) stated that the assumption is one cannot separate the researcher from reality. Often, there is more than one truth, and the truth is often subjective. To achieve confirmability, the role of the researcher was explained in a section above near the start of the chapter, data was triangulated, and external audits were conducted.

## **Ethical Procedures**

This study complied with the Walden University IRB process. Before data was collected, approval from the IRB was obtained. Participants were also asked to sign a consent form prior to data collection. Participants' confidentiality was protected by not using their names in the study.

Scientific research has provided substantial social benefits; however, it has also raised serious ethical concerns, especially when human subjects are involved and exposed to potential abuse. At all times during this research study the ethical principles as discussed in the Belmont Report (OHRP, 2025) were observed. These three principles are respect for persons, beneficence and justice.

Respect for persons states that individuals should be treated as autonomous agents, and those with diminished autonomy are entitled to protection. For the purpose of this study, respect for people was observed by allowing subjects the freedom not to participate once the purpose and procedures had been explained to them. Participants who agreed to the informed consent were treated as if they were participating voluntarily.

Beneficence involves respecting participants' decisions and shielding them from harm. The common mantra is “do no harm.” The Belmont Report established two principles for beneficence: 1) do not harm, and 2) maximize benefits while minimizing risks. Another key factor is when the benefits outweigh the risks. For instance, needing a life-saving operation provides a significant benefit; however, it also carries inherent risks associated with surgery.

Justice aims to decide who should receive research benefits and who should bear the burdens (OHRP, 2025). A helpful way to think of justice is the fair distribution of these benefits and burdens. Often, justice is linked to social practices like taxation or political representation. However, recently, justice has also become a concern in research. This is especially true when research participants come from vulnerable populations. In this study, participants were not from such populations, and all took part voluntarily. Code names were assigned to each participant to improve confidentiality. Participant privacy was protected by securely storing the collected data and consent forms by the researcher. At the end of the study, participants' data will be destroyed after 5 years, in accordance with university protocols.

### **Summary**

The underlying problem addressed in this qualitative study was the high percentage of novice teachers leaving the profession during the first 5 years of teaching in a Southwestern state. This qualitative study explored novice teachers' and administrators' perspectives on the factors that influence novice teachers' decisions to remain in the profession. In Chapter 3, detailed descriptions of the research design and rationale, the

role of the researcher, and methodology were provided. The chapter concluded by addressing trustworthiness and ethical procedures.

Chapter 4 contains a presentation of the findings of the study. The chapter will explain how the data was collected and analyzed. After presenting the results, trustworthiness during data collection and analysis will be explored.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore K-12 teachers' perspectives on factors influencing their decision to remain in the education profession, as well as K-12 administrators' perspectives influencing novice teachers' decisions to persist in the education profession in a Southwestern state. Understanding why teachers stay and promoting these factors, campus and district administrators can reduce teacher attrition. There were two RQs that grounded this study.

RQ1: What are K-12 novice teachers' perspectives on factors influencing their decision to remain in the education profession in a Southwestern state?

RQ2: What are K-12 administrators' perspectives on influencing novice teachers' decisions to persist in the education profession in a Southwestern state?

Following the chapter introduction, a description of the study setting, including participant demographics, is provided. The data collection process is also explained in this chapter. The data analysis covers the codes, categories, and themes that emerged from the data. The results of the study are then presented. The evidence of the trustworthiness of the study follows, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The final section of Chapter 4 is a summary and a transition to Chapter 5.

### **Setting**

This qualitative study was conducted in a single Southwestern state. The state has about 5.1 million students enrolled in public schools. It is estimated that 320,000 teachers and more than 80,000 staff members serve these students daily ([SEA, 2024]). The metro

area from which the study sample was taken has nearly 1.5 million students and 200,000 staff members, including teachers and administrators ([SEA, 2024]). The participants in this study consisted of 10 teachers and three campus administrators. The teachers ranged in experience from 2 to 7 years, while the principals ranged from 12 to 17 years in education and from 2 to 7 years as principals.

To maintain confidentiality throughout the study and ensure participants' privacy, alphanumeric codes were assigned to each participant. Table 1 contains participants' demographics, including type of participant (teacher or administrator), years in education, and if an administrator, the number of years as a campus principal. Gender and race of the participants were excluded to protect their identities.

**Table 1**

*Participant's Demographics*

Participant	Type	Years	
		Years in Education	As Principal
P1	Teacher	6	N/A
P2	Principal	12	2
P3	Principal	12	2
P4	Teacher	5	N/A
P5	Teacher	7	N/A
P6	Teacher	2	N/A
P7	Teacher	4	N/A
P8	Teacher	4	N/A
P9	Teacher	3	N/A
P10	Teacher	2	N/A
P11	Teacher	7	N/A
P12	Principal	17	7
P13	Teacher	7	N/A

### **Data Collection**

Purposeful and snowball sampling was used to select participants for this qualitative study. Data were collected by virtually interviewing participants, where they answered 15 open-ended, semistructured questions to share their perspectives on factors influencing novice teachers to stay in the education profession. The 10 teacher participants were state-certified with 2 to 7 years of experience, and the three administrator participants were current K-12 campus administrators with 2 to 7 years of administrative experience, also state-certified.

The primary data collection tools were two self-designed interview protocols, one for teachers and the other for administrators. Both protocols included open-ended questions with the option for additional probing questions as needed. Individual interviews occurred virtually through the Zoom videoconferencing platform. The schedule allotted 1-hour blocks for each interview. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes; and the 1-hour time frame ensured sufficient opportunity to capture all participants' responses.

The videoconferencing platform recorded the interview and generated a transcript for each session. While listening to the recorded interviews, I reviewed and edited the transcripts for accuracy. After this initial review and editing transcripts were sent to each participant for review and feedback. All transcripts were deidentified to protect participant confidentiality and privacy. Audio recordings and transcripts were stored on a password-protected USB device and kept in a locked safe in a home office. Data collection was approved by Walden University's IRB (IRB approval 09-24-02-0758964)

and followed the procedures outlined in Chapter 3. No unexpected issues occurred during data collection. Table 2 highlights the data collected from the participants.

**Table 2**

*Participant Interview Data Collection*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Date interviewed</b>	<b>Duration (min)</b>	<b>Pages of transcript</b>
<b>P1</b>	9/28/25	40	13
<b>P2</b>	10/29/25	22	12
<b>P3</b>	10/8/25	46	17
<b>P4</b>	10/17/25	38	13
<b>P5</b>	10/13/25	33	12
<b>P6</b>	10/31/25	23	12
<b>P7</b>	10/30/25	23	12
<b>P8</b>	11/2/25	20	11
<b>P9</b>	11/17/25	21	11
<b>P10</b>	11/17/25	20	11
<b>P11</b>	11/28/25	35	13
<b>P12</b>	11/29/25	25	11
<b>P13</b>	12/1/25	25	11
	<b>TOTAL</b>	6 hrs 11 mins	159
	<b>AVERAGE</b>	28.5 mins	12.25

### **Data Analysis**

This study used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase inductive thematic analysis process to analyze the collected data. The following sections describe each step of the process in greater detail.

#### **Phase 1: Familiarization with the Data**

Phase 1 followed the same process for both the teacher and administrator data sets. All transcripts were read from start to finish, marking the third time interacting with the data. The first interaction was during the initial interview. The second interaction was

when the transcripts were reviewed and edited for accuracy; and then a third time, reading the transcripts to familiarize oneself with the entire data set. After completing a thorough review of all transcripts, Phase 2 began with the generation of initial codes.

### **Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes**

During Phase 2, each teacher transcript was independently read and coded semantically to develop initial codes (see Appendix C). Table 3 presents a count of the initial codes generated for each teacher's transcript.

**Table 3**

*Teacher Initial Codes*

Participant	Initial Codes
P1	33
P4	28
P5	34
P6	29
P7	29
P8	28
P9	23
P10	21
P11	29
P13	23
Total	277
Average	28

The administrator transcripts were reviewed independently and were semantically coded to create initial codes (see Appendix E). Table 4 shows the number of initial codes generated for each administrator transcript.

**Table 4***Administrator Initial Codes*

Participant	Initial Codes
P2	40
P3	49
P12	35
Total	124
Average	41

After coding the transcripts, each one was reviewed again to confirm that all relevant data had been included. With confirmation that all relevant data had been included, the initial codes were reviewed and condensed using latent coding. The foundation of the latent coding was based on the study's framework, job embeddedness. The secondary codes were tied to one of the framework's components: links, fit, or sacrifice. The teacher's initial codes were condensed into 27 secondary codes (see Appendix D). The administrator's initial codes were condensed into 27 secondary codes (see Appendix F). Once the initial coding and secondary coding was complete, the data analysis moved on to Phase 3.

**Phase 3: Generating Initial Themes**

In reviewing the secondary teacher codes, themes began to emerge. Sixteen primary themes were identified for teachers. These were:

- Relational interdependence
- School as family communities
- Collective coping through shared struggles

- Mentorship
- Multilayered relationships
- Teaching as a personal identity
- Moral and values alignment
- Relationships over outcomes
- Personal connections with student population
- Meaningful daily impact
- Growth-oriented
- Relationship loss
- Identity loss
- Moral abandonment
- Work-life balance
- Career immobility

From the secondary administrator codes, themes also began to emerge based on the study's framework. Twenty preliminary themes were identified for administrators.

These were:

- Community affirmation
- Schools as family communities
- Integration of new teachers
- Relational leadership
- Collective ownership of school success

- Protection against isolation
- Trust-based communication
- Teaching is a core identity
- Moral and purpose alignment
- Expectations acceptance
- Safety for trying new things
- Mentorship
- Relationships over student growth
- Team compatibility
- Growth-oriented professional trajectory
- Relationship loss
- Identity loss
- Accumulated emotional investment
- Lack of exit burnout
- Disconnection

#### **Phase 4: Reviewing Themes**

For both the teacher and administrator data sets, several overarching themes emerged from the initial themes and could be supported by the entire data set. The sixteen initial themes for teachers were then reviewed and refined into final themes supported by data from each teacher participant. The twenty initial themes for administrators were similarly reviewed and refined into final themes. When teacher and administrator themes

were compared, it became apparent that many of the themes overlapped. The identified overlapping themes were

- Schools as family communities
- Teaching is a core identity
- Moral and purpose alignment
- Mentorship
- Relationship over student growth
- Growth-oriented professional trajectory
- Relationship loss
- Identity loss

Due to the significant overlap in themes, the resulting final themes for both teachers and administrators are the same and displayed in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Final Themes*

Theme Number	Theme
1	Relationship embeddedness as the primary foundation
2	Teaching as identity and calling
3	Values and moral alignment
4	Daily student impact
5	Moral and relationship loss
6	Lack of career mobility

## **Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes**

From the 277 initial teacher codes identified in Phase 2, they were then refined in Phase 3 into 16 initial themes, which later evolved into six final themes in Phase 4. The 214 administrator codes identified in Phase 2 were refined into 20 initial themes in Phase 3 and further refined in Phase 4 into six final themes. As stated in Phase 4, there was significant overlap in teacher and administrator initial themes that six identical themes could be identified. The six final themes are operationally defined below, along with supporting participant quotes.

### ***Theme 1: Relationship Embeddedness as the Primary Foundation***

Teachers remain in the profession because of connections with colleagues, students, administrators, families, and community members, which create strong social bonds that are hard to break. This was expressed by P4, who said, “The people in this building are truly special. We’ve had people retire, and I can genuinely say I miss them; there is a hole that I feel I miss seeing them every day.”

### ***Theme 2: Teaching as Identity and Calling***

Teaching is viewed as an extension of personal identity and purpose rather than just a job, so leaving it can feel like losing a part of one’s identity. P2 shared that teachers “recognize that leaving means losing a sense of impact and purpose. Teaching is a deeply relational profession.”

### ***Theme 3: Values and Moral Alignment***

Teachers stay in the profession when their personal morals and values align with the mission, culture, and leadership of their school. When P13 was looking for a teaching

position, their alignment with the district's core values is what attracted them. P13 noted, “when I read our district core values, I just remember thinking in the moment that’s what teaching is and what it should be and that’s the kind of place I want to be if that is what they focus on. So, I do really love and support our district’s core values.”

***Theme 4: Daily Student Impact***

Sustained commitment is fostered by small, visible moments of student growth, trust, and transformation rather than by external rewards or long-term incentives. P1 stated, “I feel like I am blessed with a job that I can come home from every day. Even if I’m stressed, I still feel like I’ve made a difference in at least one kid’s life today. Just showing up and not letting them down, every day like they’ve been used to. We are making a difference.”

***Theme 5: Moral and Relationship Loss***

Teachers feel that leaving would mean abandoning students, colleagues, and the community, rather than simply making a neutral career decision, which creates a strong moral barrier to leaving. P8 explained they knew the “impact of having a good teacher growing up. They wanted to be that for another child, and they deserve to have a teacher that cares, that shows up, that makes life a little extra fun and gets them to love learning.”

***Theme 6: Lack of Career Mobility***

Specialized preparation and uncertainty about other career options encourage teachers to remain in the profession even when they experience burnout. P13 mentioned, I think the biggest thing that has stopped me has been probably just the lack of confidence in what I would do instead.

## **Phase 6: Producing the Report**

With the final analysis of each data set completed, Phase 6 of Braun and Clarke's process is to produce the final report. The remaining sections of Chapter 4 present the study's results by RQ. The final themes will be used to answer each RQ. The results provide sufficient data and quotes from participants to present a vivid illustration of the data collected and how it answers the

### **Results**

The results of this qualitative study came from data collected through interviews with 10 teachers and three campus principals. The two RQs explored why novice teachers remain in the education profession. The narrative aims to improve understanding of the participants' perspectives by including descriptive quotes from the interviews. This method provides a thorough view of why novice teachers remain in the profession. This information is essential for answering both RQs in this study.

#### **RQ1**

RQ1 was, What are K-12 novice teachers' perspectives on factors influencing their decision to remain in the education profession in a Southwestern state? RQ1 was answered by all six final themes.

#### ***Theme 1: Relationship Embeddedness as the Primary Foundation***

Teachers frequently reported relationships as being the most influential factor in their commitment to stay. P13 shared, "I feel like in teaching, you form bonds that go beyond just colleagues or friendships. They really become like family members, and you're walking through the trenches together." Teachers interviewed discussed close

relationships with colleagues, students, administrators, families, and community members outside of their classrooms. Teachers described feeling emotionally safe and supported by these relationships, sharing understandings about their work, and relying on each other to cope with daily teaching challenges. They also referred to their colleagues as family, with whom they could struggle and problem-solve together.

Teacher participants mentioned working with others who understood what it was like to come to school each day, which helped them feel less isolated and more connected to their school. P9 stated “having that good rapport and friends with staff makes it fun to come into work. Teaching can be very isolating if you don’t have that.” Relationships with students and families contributed to teachers’ feelings of embeddedness as well. Participants discussed building relationships with students and families through daily interactions, trust, and getting involved in the community. These relationships formed over many years and were close connections that teachers described as the primary reason they felt anchored to their school and profession.

### ***Theme 2: Teaching as Identity and Calling***

Teacher participants talked about their work as being more than transactional; teaching was seen as a part of their identity. Teachers reported that they felt teaching was a calling and that it was who they truly were at their core. P5 illustrated: “If I didn’t care about the kids, it would just be a job. But it’s not just a job, and that’s why I stay.” Viewing teaching through an identity lens also shaped how long teachers persisted in the profession. Teachers discussed persistence as acting upon their sense of purpose, rather than simply tolerating work demands. Participants reported pride in sticking with

teaching despite difficulty, as longevity signaled care and resilience. A few teachers shared that if they stopped teaching, they would no longer feel like they knew who they were. P9 stated, “Teaching is what I’m meant to do. I can’t imagine myself doing anything else that would feel this meaningful.”

### ***Theme 3: Values and Moral Alignment***

Alignment of participants’ personal values with the moral purpose of teaching was another factor that contributed to teacher embeddedness. Several participants cited values such as building relationships, advocacy, service, or community involvement as reasons they stay in teaching. P13 explained, “kids are not going to learn from you if you don’t have that relationship with them. That’s what teaching should be.”

When schools or districts made building relationships and prioritizing kids the focal point of their schools, teachers felt affirmed and validated in their work. Many teachers mentioned needing to be in a school where leadership focused on relationships, kids thriving and growing as humans, rather than simply compliance. P9 expressed this about their administration in saying, “I really see the heart of our administration and their passion for relationships and kids. That lines up with my values.” Having a moral purpose aligned with their values validated teachers’ decisions to stay in the profession and to continue working through challenging days.

### ***Theme 4: Daily Student Impact***

Rather than regarding long-term incentives or advancement as primary reasons for remaining in the profession, participants regularly mentioned finding value through daily and tangible connections with students. Observing students improve academically or

behaviorally, demonstrate trust, or gratitude from families was mentioned as feeling rewarding on an emotional level. P10 shared, “it’s those small moments when a student finally gets it or feels supported that keep me going.” Teachers mentioned that being able to see these daily impacts kept them grounded in the purpose of their work. When students are able to thrive across grade levels, affirmed participants belief they were doing something worthwhile. These moments became internal rewards that could help push them through times of stress or burnout.

#### ***Theme 5: Moral and Relationship Loss***

Participants viewed quitting as a moral and relational loss rather than career event. Teachers worried about abandoning students, families, and coworkers who depended on them. P13 explained, “when you’ve poured into them for so long, it feels wrong to walk away.” Because of these factors, teachers felt as though they could not quit. They felt obligated to stick around for their students and be consistent adults. P7 mentioned, “I don’t want to be another adult that gives up on these kids.” Adults who give up on students were painted as unethical, which promoted persisting despite feeling exhausted. The ability to impact kids long-term, maintain trust, and have continual relationships influenced their decisions greatly.

#### ***Theme 6: Lack of Career Mobility***

Participants reported that they did not know what other career options existed outside of teaching. Highly specific training, emotions poured into careers, and relationships made teachers express feeling tied down. Many teachers struggled to identify ways their skills could translate to another career. P5 stated, “I wouldn’t even

know where to start outside of teaching. This is what I know.” Although teachers admitted to feeling burnt out or overwhelmed by their jobs, teaching was often seen as more meaningful than other careers. Identity-based commitment, moral purpose, and relational fulfillment gave teachers a lower sense of mobility.

## **RQ2**

RQ2 was, What are K-12 administrators’ perspectives on influencing novice teachers’ decisions to persist in the education profession in a Southwestern state? RQ2 was also answered by all six final themes.

### ***Theme 1: Relationship Embeddedness as the Primary Foundation***

Administrator participants named relationships as most important for novice teacher retention. Administrators noted that teachers stay when they truly feel connected to the campus. Relationship building was mentioned frequently as a preventative against attrition, especially when teachers experienced times of stress or doubt. P12 succinctly explained, “If they are connected and they have the support, they’re going to stay. No matter how hard it gets, if they are connected and they have support, they stay.” Administrators framed teacher retention as a relational outcome; teachers stay when they have support networks and feel they belong.

### ***Theme 2: Teaching as Identity and Calling***

Administrators noted repeatedly that teaching is identity-based work, particularly novice teachers. Teachers enter the field because they find meaning and purpose in teaching and it is a part of who they are. Administrators view novice teachers’ strong

identities as both a strength and a weakness. P12 noted, “I think they would lose a little bit of their identity. For most people, teaching is a calling. It is purpose driven.” P2 echoed this statement by describing how “people don’t come into teaching for the money. They do it because they want to make a difference.” P3 agreed with these statements and reported that teachers who tend to stay in the profession are those who “want to be there for kids, regardless of the circumstances they’re coming from.” From the administrators' view, teachers’ identities are a reason for teachers’ embeddedness.

### ***Theme 3: Values and Moral Alignment***

Alignment of teachers’ personal beliefs with the moral purpose of education was another theme that administrators felt impacted retention. Administrators noted teachers stay if they feel there is alignment between their personal beliefs about children, learning, and service to others and school leadership's values. P3 constantly framed decisions by stating, “We do what’s best for children, period. Regardless of what happens.” P12 framed retention supportive campuses as having high expectations and caring for students. “You have to have a culture where it’s about achievement and expectations, but fun and collaborating.” P2 echoed this when talking about how commitment is sustained if teachers feel they believe in what your school is doing. “If they believe in the mission of the campus, they’re going to push through those hard times.” Administrators believed moral alignment between a teacher and the school sustained teacher commitment during times of increasing demands.

***Theme 4: Daily Student Impact***

Administrators repeatedly shared daily student impact as a source of meaning for novice teachers. Rather than having teachers look at a distant reward, principals said teachers stayed committed when they witnessed tangible proof that they are doing was impactful to students. P3 shared that they purposefully pointed out student growth to encourage purpose: “Sometimes you just have to show them the impact, look at your data, look at how much better the kids are doing.” P2 agreed with this sentiment by responding, “Teachers stay because they see growth in students and feel like what they’re doing matters.”

***Theme 5: Moral and Relationship Loss***

Administrators portrayed teacher departure as a moral or relational failure rather than a career decision. Leaving teaching was difficult due to relational loss, identity loss, and long-term impacts on students. Administrators repeatedly emphasized the emotional difficulty of leaving. P12 illustrated this by stating, “leaving isn’t easy for them. It’s not just leaving a job; it’s leaving something they care deeply about.” P2 stated, “walking away means walking away from relationships, from impact, from community.”

Administrators believed this moral cost prevented teachers from leaving.

***Theme 6: Lack of Career Mobility***

Administrators recognized that novice teachers often see limited options outside of teaching, which further strengthens their embeddedness. Factors such as specialized preparation, emotional investment, and uncertainty about alternative career options were described as limiting teachers’ sense of choice. P3 highlighted the complexity of

teaching, noting, “It’s not plug-and-play. Teaching takes a lot of planning and prep, and some realize they weren’t prepared for that.” P2 added that without clear pathways for growth, “teachers can feel stuck or overwhelmed.” From the principals’ perspective, limited perceived mobility does not necessarily mean teachers are satisfied, but it helps sustain their persistence by increasing the perceived cost of leaving.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, trustworthiness refers to the ability to produce high-quality research that accurately reflects participants’ experiences in the setting (Baker, 2022). Qualitative researchers should ensure confidence, validity of results, and fairness of the findings based on the participants' experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ravitch and Carl (2021) asserted that a study’s rigor is verified by its trustworthiness or credibility. To ensure validity, Lincoln and Guba’s four elements of trustworthiness were followed. Each is discussed below.

#### **Credibility**

Ensuring that findings and interpretations are credible is crucial in research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended engaging deeply over time, investing enough effort to gather comprehensive data. This extended engagement also helps build trust between participants and the researcher. It allows a researcher to identify and control information that could be distorted or biased. Aside from extended engagement, the technique of persistent observation should be used to enhance credibility. Persistent observation helps identify the most relevant aspects of the problem and enables focused examination of them. Lincoln and Guba's (1985) final recommendation for credibility is

triangulation. Another way to understand triangulation is that data cannot be trusted unless it is verified by another person. Involving multiple participants during data collection facilitates triangulation. Participant responses were supported by each interview conducted with other participants from the same group of participants (teachers or administrators), and while traditional triangulation methods, such as those used in case study, were not used, the results from each data set were reconciled.

The final method used in this study to ensure credibility was member checking. After reviewing and editing their transcripts for accuracy, each participant received a copy to verify. Participants could review the transcript and confirm that the transcript accurately reflected their intended message. Only one participant requested a change. During their interview, they mentioned the name of one of their children. Originally, the child's name was spelled with a "C" as the first letter, but it should have been spelled with a "K." This change was made as they requested; however, the name was not used in the reporting of data.

### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to how well research findings can be applied to a wider context (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). This basic qualitative study may be transferable due to the detailed explanations of the problem, purpose, RQ, research method and design, participant selection, setting, data collection, and data analysis. The study sections are coordinated and can be replicated with fidelity.

**Dependability**

Dependability begins with a systematic, reasoned design and alignment of methods to the study's RQ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A rationale for the study was created, and the interview questions were field tested prior to being included in the interview protocol to ensure their appropriateness. During the data analysis process, the interview questions were aligned to the RQs. The data collection process outlined in Chapter 3 was followed.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability is the degree to which a research study's conclusions are grounded in participants' data rather than the researcher's biases (Shenton, 2004). Burkholder et al. (2020) stated that the assumption is that one cannot separate the researcher from reality. Often, there is more than one truth, and the truth is often subjective. To achieve confirmability, the role of the researcher was explained in Chapter 3, the data were reconciled, and external audits were conducted.

**Summary**

Teacher retention is a challenge that can keep even the best school administrators awake at night. This basic qualitative study examined the perceptions of novice teachers and administrators regarding factors influencing novice teachers' decisions to stay in the education profession. 10 teachers and 3 administrators from one Southwestern state participated in the study, sharing their views on why novice teachers remain in the education field.

Six themes were identified as factors of why novice teachers remain in the education profession. These themes were relationship embeddedness as the primary foundation, teaching as identity and calling, values and moral alignment, daily student impact, moral and relationship loss and lack of career mobility.

Chapter 5 will begin with an introduction that restates the purpose and nature of the study. Using the conceptual framework as a guide, the study's results will be explained and how they may advance knowledge in the field will be discussed. Chapter 5 will conclude with the study's limitations and recommendations derived from the findings. A discussion of positive social change that may be achieved from the results of this study will also be included.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore K-12 teachers' perspectives on factors influencing their decision to remain in the education profession, as well as K-12 administrators' perspectives influencing novice teachers' decisions to persist in the education profession in a Southwestern state. Analysis of the semistructured interviews addresses a gap in the literature by examining teachers' and administrators' perspectives on why novice teachers remain in the education profession. The findings provide insights that inform how campus and district administrators can support novice teachers in continuing their careers in education.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

Through interviews with teachers and administrators the decisions to persist are less about structural or financial factors and more about the relational moral fabric of embeddedness. Through the lens of job embeddedness theory, these findings highlight how links, fit, and sacrifice can exist concurrently and complement each other in the teaching profession. Together, these dimensions illustrate that sustained commitment emerges from deeply rooted relationships and shared purpose rather than from external incentives alone.

Relationships with colleagues were described as the strongest reason teachers stayed in their position. Teachers often used the terms family to describe colleagues and consistently noted the mutual efforts, understanding, and team dynamics within their relationships. These connections served as emotional anchors that helped teachers weather the daily stressors of the profession. The relationships with colleagues extend

current knowledge of why teachers stay in the profession. Buckman (2021) noted the relationship between teachers and principals as a reason teachers remain in the profession. Kwok (2021) mentioned the relationship between instructional coaches and teachers as a factor for teachers staying in the profession.

The findings of this study show that job embeddedness for teachers is rooted in relationships. While job embeddedness theory considers links to be connections with people and institutions, these findings extend that definition by emphasizing the emotional and moral significance of those connections in human-service industries. Teachers did not merely mention they had relationships; they described how those relationships held them up.

Teachers also described teaching less as a job and more as a reflection of who they are as people. Understanding teaching from this viewpoint may explain why so many participants continued to teach through burnout, stress, and general dissatisfaction with aspects of their job. Essentially, teaching appears to operate as a vocational identity where staying is part of how individuals see themselves. Peltokorpi and Allen (2023) also noted that the possibility of loss can make searching for other employment less attractive than staying in their current position. Job embeddedness theory supports this by considering this type of alignment as a strong form of fit. When someone's work fits with their identity moving on feels like losing a piece of who they are. While this strong sense of fit can encourage persistence, it can also cause teachers to remain in positions that cause them distress. When work fits with a person's sense of identity, criticism of the job can feel like a criticism of self. Teachers may stay despite challenges because they feel

they cannot be themselves elsewhere. Craig et al.'s (2023) study mentioned several challenges teachers face; however, it did not explore why teachers do not leave the profession because they cannot be themselves in another career. This finding broadens current knowledge of teacher retention.

When teachers felt they fit in with a school culture that prioritized caring for one another, relationships, and service to students, they remained committed to teaching. Teachers who feel their moral beliefs align with the school and students will feel a stronger sense of fit. If teachers believe they are in a school where they can do good and help others in ways that feel morally right, they will work hard to stay even under high levels of stress. Participants in this study stayed despite feeling stressed at times because they felt what they did was important and meaningful.

Participants reported gaining meaning from small daily interactions with students that they could see or feel, rather than future test scores. Teachers saw meaning in moments they could directly connect to their effort. Whether that be student growth they observed, trust from a student, gratitude from a parent. Meaning in teaching comes from the students, not the future payoff they may receive.

This finding aligns with Seeling and McCabe's (2021) study, where they found that teachers stay in the profession for four reasons: commitment to students, opportunities for leadership and collaboration, connections to the community, and personal and professional ties to the position. Job embeddedness theory would consider these interactions evidence that strengthen fit; teachers feel they should remain because their presence improves students' lives. When teachers are able to see why they are in the

classroom on any given day they are more likely to continue coming back, even if they do not like everything about the profession.

Teachers described quitting as more than a career change; it was tied to a moral obligation. Teachers worried about losing students, breaking bonds with colleagues they had built over the years, and not fulfilling what they saw as a promise or duty. Prior research by Rhinesmith et al (2023) reported similar findings about connections with colleagues. Rhinesmith et al. described how supportive relationships with colleagues and campus leadership were vital for teachers to stay in their current roles. This finding runs parallel to the sacrifice component of job embeddedness theory. However, unique to this study is that teachers described the majority of those sacrifices as moral and relationship based, not financial or logistical. Teachers might experience stress relief if they left teaching, but many stayed because they could not imagine quitting on their students.

Teachers remain in the profession because they feel it would be a moral injustice to leave. Teachers did not know what they could do for a profession besides teach. Teachers felt that they had invested too much in their current profession to pursue training and qualifications for something new. This feeling among teachers aligns with the findings of Mitani et al.'s (2022) study, which showed that a significant investment had already been made in their careers before they began teaching. Some also felt that they would not find meaning in another job like they did teaching. Similar to fit, this feeling of being stuck reinforces teachers' sense of embeddedness.

Not every teacher that felt stuck was content, but enough teachers believed that leaving may be riskier, or unrewarding, than staying. This kind of embeddedness

coincides with the sacrifice aspect of the theory and prevents teachers from seeking other opportunities. Remaining in teaching because teachers cannot imagine doing anything else may work for some teachers but can have disastrous effects on mental health.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study provides valuable insights into the factors influencing novice teachers to remain in the education profession. However, the study had limitations that should be considered when considering transferability of the results. I used purposive sampling to select teachers and administrators from one metropolitan area located in a southwestern state. Teachers and administrators outside of this area may have different experiences from the participants in this study.

Secondly, all teachers in the sample elected to stay in the profession, and administrators were supportive of teacher retention. No teachers who had left the profession were sampled. Factors may be overrepresented that cause teachers to feel embedded and underrepresented that cause teachers to leave the profession. The findings were based on self-reported data which can be biased. Participants may have placed too much emphasis on a particular factor.

### **Recommendations**

For future research, researchers should include teachers who have left the profession, especially those who left within the first 5 years. This may determine when job embeddedness decreases and identify turning points prior to teacher attrition. Another recommendation would be to conduct longitudinal studies to track when embeddedness occurs and how it progresses over time. If teachers were followed over multiple years, the

timing and ways relationships, identity, and value alignments shift could be more clearly understood within various career stages and leadership contexts. Last, there should be further investigation into identity-based and moral connections to job embeddedness.

Although job embeddedness theory considers fit and sacrifice, moral responsibility, calling, and identity surfaced in this study as important themes. Future researchers may wish to connect job embeddedness with other theories to better frame retention in human-service professions. Additional qualitative research could investigate administrator practices and campus conditions that contribute to embeddedness. Studies across different campuses may help to identify leadership behaviors, campus practices, or structural support that foster relational and moral embeddedness.

### **Implications**

There are several implications for practice based on the results of this study. First, teacher retention should be approached as a relational, moral, and identity-driven issue, rather than something that can be exclusively solved through structural or financial initiatives. The results suggest that retention efforts would benefit from centering on relationship building, identity-value alignment, and reducing the moral and relational costs of staying. One major implication would be to ensure we are making relational culture a priority in retention efforts. Relationships were cited by participants time and time again as their number one reason for staying in education.

Teachers in this study view teaching as part of who they are and what they were made to do. Schools must allow space for teachers to reflect on their sense of purpose, celebrate their impact, and feel like teachers again if we want them to stay, especially

early on in their careers. Additionally, results of this study showed us that teachers feel a significant weight of moral similarity between them and their school. School and district leaders must communicate their values and practice them daily.

Lastly, teachers in this study gained most of their meaning and motivation from small, visible moments of student impact. They did not focus on long term impact or external rewards. School leaders should take intentional measures to help teachers see, celebrate, and reflect on their impact. One important implication leaders can take away from this study is that teachers do not need them to take advantage of the moral weight of the profession. Participants stayed because leaving would have “felt wrong.” While moral care for students can help teachers feel rooted in their decision to stay, it can also normalize burnout and overworking.

Most participants explained that they did not feel like they had many options outside of education, which made them feel embedded but confined. One implication for practice would be to ensure there are visible paths for teacher growth without leaving the profession. These paths might include becoming an instructional coach, curriculum specialist, or a mentor to another teacher.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore K-12 teachers’ perspectives on factors influencing their decision to remain in the education profession, as well as K-12 administrators’ perspectives influencing novice teachers’ decisions to persist in the education profession in a Southwestern state. Guided by job embeddedness theory, the study sought a better understanding of teachers staying in the profession rather than

leaving. The findings from this study overwhelmingly suggest that teacher retention is relational and morally grounded and not one based on financial or transactional considerations.

Teachers stay because everything about persistence weaves into a network of interconnected relationships. Relationships were understood to be the primary drivers of embeddedness followed by shared experiences, trust, and ultimately feeling like they belong. Novice teachers continued to teach because they did not view teaching as just a job, but an integral part of who they are and felt like they were meant to teach. Staying or leaving was deeply personal and became a moral decision-making exercise. When teachers felt they were aligned with their school's values and culture, they stayed longer, particularly if they felt their work was significant and focused on students' best interests.

The work that teachers do matters to them because their purpose comes from daily relational interactions with students and seeing that they make a difference. When teachers decide to leave, they are not just quitting a job. Based on the study's results, teachers feel like they are losing relationships and being immoral to students, colleagues, and the community. Career mobility was also lacking for most participants, which contributed to their sense of embeddedness. When teachers cannot envision themselves doing anything else that is as meaningful, purposeful, and relationally rewarding, leaving the profession becomes unlikely.

The overarching message of this study is that teachers remain not because the work is easy, but because it is meaningful, relationally connected, and morally important. If schools and districts want to improve teacher retention, they should spend less time on

superficial fixes and focus on their people. If educational leaders create campuses based on relationships, value alignment, and support they will create schools where teachers can see themselves staying beyond the difficult early years of teaching. Ultimately, this study adds to the growing body of research calling for a new way of thinking about teacher retention. Instead of asking how much teachers can endure, educational leaders should focus on how schools can support teachers as whole persons personally, professionally, and morally. When teachers feel connected, valued, and aligned, remaining in the profession becomes not just about survival, but a sustainable and meaningful choice.

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## Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

# SEEKING DISSERTATION PARTICIPANTS

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to explore administrators' and novice teachers' perspectives regarding factors that influence novice teachers to remain within the education profession.

## TYPES OF PARTICIPANTS

- **Teacher Participation**
  - Must be a current K-12 Public Teacher in Texas with 2-7 years of experience
- **Administrator Participation**
  - Must be a current K-12 Public campus principal with at least 1 year of principal experience

## INTERESTED?

Please contact Seth Hay for more information at [seth.hay@waldenu.edu](mailto:seth.hay@waldenu.edu)

No compensation will be offered.

## PARTICIPATION PROCEDURES

- One virtual, audio recorded interview (approx. 45 to 60 minutes)
- Review emailed interview transcript for accuracy. Return transcript via email with any requested corrections. (Approximately 20 minutes)

## STUDY APPROVAL

This study has been approved by the Walden IRB.  
IRB Study #09-24-25-0758964

## Appendix B: Interview Guide

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. My name is Seth Hay, and I am conducting this research as part of my doctoral dissertation. I will be using the transcription feature embedded within Zoom to capture all of the perceptions you share during our conversation today. I am gathering your perceptions on why novice teacher remain in the education profession. Your input will help campus administrators better understand why teachers remain in the profession thereby reducing the attrition rate. Please know that your responses will be kept confidential. Any identifying information will be removed or altered, and responses will be aggregated with others to protect your identity.

### Teacher Questions:

How long have you been a full time K-12 teacher?

What level do you teach?

What subject do you teach?

Can you describe some of the relationships you have with colleagues, students, or community members that you feel contribute to your decision to stay in teaching? (Links)

How do your professional or personal relationships support your career in education? (Links)

In what ways does being involved in your school or local community affect your decision to remain in teaching? (Links)

How do your connections with students or families impact your commitment to teaching? (Links)

Do any of your professional relationships make you feel more connected to your school? (Links)

What aspects of your current teaching role feel like a good “fit” for you personally or professionally? (Fit)

How do your personal beliefs and values align with those of your school or district? (Fit)

In what ways do you feel your skills and personality are suited to the profession of teaching? (Fit)

How would you describe your sense of fulfillment in your current role? (Fit)

In what ways do you feel prepared for the demands of your teaching position?  
(Fit)

Do you feel that you were unprepared for some of the demands of your position?  
(Fit)

Have you ever considered leaving teaching? If so, what stopped you? (Sacrifice)

What would you miss the most if you left the profession? (Sacrifice)

If you left teaching, what would you lose? (Sacrifice)

Are there any long-term goals that influence your decision to stay? (Sacrifice)

What keeps you from considering other career options right now? (Sacrifice)

Taking everything into account, what are the most important reasons you’ve chosen to stay in teaching?

Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience that we haven't discussed?

*Both teachers and administrators will be asked follow-up questions, such as, Can you tell me more about..., Can you give me another example of..., What did you mean when you said... as appropriate for their provided answers to the scripted interview questions.*

Thank you again for taking the time to share your thoughts with me today. Within the next 24-48 hours, I will send you a copy of the transcript of our interview. I ask that you review the transcript for accuracy and provide any additional clarity to your answers. Please review the transcript and submit any corrections or clarifications within 5 business days. After 5 business days, the transcript will be considered accurate as transcribed.

Principal Questions:

How many years have you been education?

How many years have you been a K-12 campus principal?

How many years have you been in your current position?

How do principals perceive the role of community relationships in influencing novice teachers to stay in the profession? (Links)

What kinds of support systems or mentorship opportunities do principals believe help novice teachers feel connected and committed? (Links)

How do principals assess whether novice teachers feel a strong fit within their school's culture and mission? (Fit)

What strategies do you use to help new teachers adjust to the demands of their role? (Fit)

How do you match new teachers with positions or grade levels that support their strengths and interests? (Fit)

What do principals believe novice teachers perceive they would lose if they were to leave the profession? (Sacrifice)

How do principals believe novice teachers' emotional investment is connected to their teaching role? (Fit)

Based on their experiences, what factors do principals believe most influence novice teachers' decisions to remain in the profession? (Fit)

How do principals foster an environment that encourages novice teacher retention? (Links)

Can you describe how you support collaboration and communication among staff to increase their sense of connection to the campus? (Links)

What trends or patterns have principals observed among novice teachers who choose to stay versus those who leave? (Sacrifice)

How do you support new teachers in understanding long-term benefits like job security, professional development, and career growth? (Sacrifice)

What systems or supports do you have in place that help make staying more appealing than leaving? (Sacrifice)

Based on your experiences, what are the most influential factors contributing to novice teacher retention in your school?

Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience that we haven't discussed?

*Both teachers and administrators will be asked follow up questions, such as, Can you tell me more about..., Can you give me another example of..., What did you mean when you said... as appropriate for their provided answers to the scripted interview questions.*

Thank you again for taking the time to share your thoughts with me today. Within the next 24-48 hours, I will send you a copy of the transcript of our interview. I ask that you review the transcript

## Appendix C: Teacher Initial Codes

Reliance on colleagues for emotional support	Community inclusion through program involvement	Professional identity rooted in special education
Professional idea- sharing among teachers	Recognition and affirmation from students	Compassion aligned with student needs
Mutual venting as stress management	Alignment between personal history and special education role	Satisfaction with non- traditional school structure
Strong peer solidarity in high-stress settings	Teaching role consistent with lifelong caregiving identity	Fulfillment derived from daily student impact
Close-knit staff relationships in micro- school	Strong value congruence with school mission	Perceived competence in managing behavioral challenges
Family-like bonds among school staff	Preference for trauma- informed educational approach	Acceptance of role complexity and intensity
Frequent collaboration due to small faculty size	Comfort working in high-need environments	Loss of meaningful relationships with students
Social interaction beyond the workplace		Loss of daily sense of purpose
Integration with foster care staff		

Reduced opportunity to positively impact vulnerable youth	Emotional support from colleagues during transitions	Children's integration into the same school community
Separation from trusted professional community	Deep friendships extending beyond professional roles	Alignment with district emphasis on relationships
Loss of professional identity as an educator	Shared life milestones	Shared values of integrity, compassion, and kindness
Foregoing specialized skill application	strengthening coworker bonds	Belief in teaching life skills beyond academics
Strong collegial relationships across grade levels	Supportive administrative relationships	Professional satisfaction from cognitive challenge
Inclusive and welcoming school culture	Positive daily interactions with staff	Enjoyment of learning new content and systems
Family-like staff environment	Long-term relationships with students across grade levels	Preference for growth over complacency
Ease of forming connections when changing teams	Trust-based relationships with families	Compatibility between teaching role and personality
		Teaching fits current family life stage

Fulfillment from visible student growth over time	Strong, consistent teamwork across years	Community presence through student events
Loss of daily interaction with valued colleagues	Sense of camaraderie with grade-level teammates	Students' expectation of teacher consistency
Loss of strong school-based community	Instructional and emotional support from iCoach	Enjoyment of collaborative professional environments
Separation from trusted relationships with students	Mentorship during early teaching years	Comfort adapting to changing expectations
Disruption to family-aligned work schedule	Professional guidance from experienced colleagues	Pragmatic approach to job demands
Loss of work–life balance afforded by school calendar	Family support enabling early-career workload	Acceptance of imperfection in education systems
Giving up meaningful, observable impact on others	Long-term connection to one school campus	Alignment with inclusion and equity values
Abandonment of a long-term professional commitment to education	Familiarity with students and their siblings	Compatibility with special education philosophy
	Trust-based relationships with families	

Prior career experience supporting teaching resilience	Separation from a familiar school community	Positive and supportive work environment
Strong alignment with data-driven instruction	Giving up daily teaching interactions	Strong professional relationships with teammates
Technological competence supporting instructional work	Loss of professional identity as an effective teacher	Instructional support from curriculum coach
Love of learning aligned with teaching role	Abandonment of long-term school commitment	Behavioral support from classroom management coach
Satisfaction with daily instructional practice	Disruption to established work boundaries	Trust-based mentoring relationships
Confidence in classroom management abilities	Loss of school-based schedule flexibility	Family support for teaching demands
Enjoyment of student engagement and instruction	Giving up career stability during doctoral studies	Prior involvement as a parent volunteer
Loss of meaningful student relationships	Sacrificing enjoyment derived from teaching itself	Deep connection to school community
Loss of instructional fulfillment	Collaborative grade-level teamwork	Strong partnerships with parents
		Frequent and proactive family communication

Recognition from families for student impact	Passion for early childhood education	Sacrificing opportunity to influence students' futures
Preference for collaborative professional culture	Personal motivation rooted in own child's experience	Strong collegial support at current campus
Alignment with family-oriented district values	Fulfillment from laying educational foundations	Encouragement from coworkers during challenges
Teaching role compatible with family life	Commitment to continuous professional growth	Sense of professional belonging within teaching team
Prior administrative skills supporting organization	Loss of meaningful community connections	Supportive school leadership relationships
Fundraising background aiding relationship-building	Loss of long-term impact on students	Emotional support from spouse
Comfort using instructional technology	Separation from families and parents served	Encouragement from parents and family
Inclusive and team-oriented personality	Giving up flexible family-aligned schedule	Acceptance and authenticity among colleagues
	Loss of professional purpose and passion	Strong personal bonds with students

Relationships with students' families	Teaching provides meaningful daily purpose	Loss of meaningful daily interactions
Community involvement through student activities	Prior learning challenges informing teaching approach	Giving up long-term impact on students' lives
Trust built with parents through presence and care	Alignment with belief that every student needs advocacy	Loss of sense of purpose and calling
Collegial collaboration in curriculum planning	Satisfaction from being a trusted adult for students	Separation from supportive school community
Teaching aligns with empathetic personality	Curriculum mastery increasing professional confidence	Missing opportunities to mentor and advocate for children
Personal fulfillment from supporting struggling students	Team-based workload matching personal work style	Loss of emotional rewards tied to student growth
Value alignment with trauma-informed school mindset	Loss of close relationships with students	Collaborative grade-level teaching team
Comfort integrating students' lives into instruction		Idea-sharing and instructional collaboration

Strong collegial communication and support	Shared responsibility for student success	Confidence built through extensive student-teaching experience
Integration into school community culture	Teaching aligns with extroverted personality	Acceptance of testing and accountability demands
Positive relationships with parents	Family background in education reinforcing career choice	Professional identity strongly rooted in teaching
Active and supportive PTO involvement	Value alignment with character-focused school culture	Loss of daily connection with students
Partnerships with local businesses	Emphasis on teaching life skills beyond academics	Loss of classroom stability and routine
Trust-based professional relationships with leadership	Enjoyment of creative and flexible instruction	Separation from supportive school community
Personal connections facilitating school transition	Comfort adapting instruction to student needs	Giving up meaningful student impact
Ongoing friendships with fellow educators	Fulfillment from observable student growth	Abandonment of teaching identity and purpose
Mutual understanding among teachers		

Loss of professional foundation for future leadership goals	Connection to broader school community	Pedagogical alignment with Kodály philosophy
Supportive and welcoming school staff	Strong personal identity as a musician	Satisfaction from observable growth in teaching practice
Sense of belonging within the school campus	Alignment between relational values and school leadership	Difficulty sustaining energy due to physical exhaustion
Mentorship from music education colleagues	Enjoyment of working with many students daily	Limited opportunity for personal music performance
Professional network through Kodály training	Teaching role suited to talkative and engaging personality	Emotional cost of early-career survival mode
Ongoing relationships with fellow music educators	Fulfillment from relational aspects of teaching	Uncertainty about long-term career advancement
Daily relational interactions with specials team	Joy-centered nature of elementary music education	Perceived constraint from highly specialized training
Positive collegial rapport creating a home-like environment	Commitment to continuous learning and professional growth	Potential loss of joyful daily interactions with students

Strong collegial relationships within grade-level team	Preference for collaborative and interactive work environment	Potential loss of close coworker relationships
Friendship-based collaboration among coworkers	Alignment with whole-child educational philosophy	Concern about work–life balance with family changes
Emotional and professional support from teammates	Passion for working closely with children	Fear of reduced fulfillment in alternative careers
Shared problem-solving around student behavior	Teaching role matches energetic and relational personality	Uncertainty about transferable career options
Ongoing relationships with former students	Fulfillment from student academic and personal growth	Loss of daily interaction with students
Supportive relationships with instructional staff	Comfort teaching multiple subjects in self-contained setting	Giving up schedule flexibility and school calendar benefits
Familiarity and connection across a small school staff	Perceived purpose and meaning in teaching work	Mentoring and guiding less-experienced teammates
Enjoyment of fourth-grade developmental level		Supportive relationships with school administration

Strong collegial bonds within grade-level team	Preference for working with middle school students	Satisfaction with current school culture and climate
Faith-based professional support network	Alignment with servant leadership philosophy	Sense of professional growth after years of experience
Idea-sharing with teachers across schools and districts	Teaching role consistent with moral and faith values	Role alignment with desire to help students build confidence
Statewide professional connections through ATPE	Strong identification with language arts and reading instruction	Loss of daily interaction and affirmation from students
Use of teaching skills in church and community settings	Personal fulfillment from mentoring and leadership roles	Loss of close professional friendships
Recognition and affirmation from students	Comfort integrating special education expertise into general education	Giving up leadership and mentoring opportunities
Positive professional reputation within current district	Teaching approach centered on relationship-building	Separation from supportive faith-aligned work environment
Friendship-based relationships at current campus		Loss of meaningful community impact

Emotional toll of past unsupportive work environments	Continued connections with families across siblings	Teaching role aligned with patience and empathy
Limited alternative career paths given specialized training	Supportive relationships with school administration	Comfort identifying root causes of student behavior
Sacrificing alignment with family schedule and benefits	Shared sense of collective mission within the campus	Fulfillment from using natural strengths in teaching
Loss of sense of calling and long-term purpose	Preference for self- contained classroom structure	Professional growth through changing grade levels
Family-like bonds with teaching colleagues	Satisfaction from sustained daily interaction with students	Enjoyment of ongoing challenge and variety in work
Strong peer support through shared challenges	Alignment with district emphasis on relationships	Strong alignment with district core values and vision
Mutual encouragement among grade-level teammates	Commitment to character development alongside academics	Uncertainty about alternative career pathways
Long-term relationships with students' families		

Fear of losing a role  
where strengths are fully  
utilized

Emotional difficulty of  
leaving close student  
relationships

Loss of daily sense of  
purpose and impact

Giving up predictable  
schedule and family-  
friendly calendar

Risk of reduced  
fulfillment outside of  
teaching

## Appendix D: Teacher Secondary Codes

- Relational interdependence
- Collective coping through shared experiences
- Familiarization of the workplace
- Connections through routine interactions
- Community relationships
- Multi-level relationships
- Validation of professional worth
- Mentorship
- Career identity alignment
- Moral similarity with district values
- Relationships are valued over student performance
- Personal connections to the student population
- Professional self-efficacy
- Meaningful daily impact
- Personal compatibility
- Growth-oriented
- Flexibility as a teacher
- Relationship loss
- Identity loss
- Moral abandonment

- Work-life balance
- Irreplaceability of meaning
- Locked in due to education
- Accumulated emotional investment
- Career immobility
- Loss of relationship legacy
- Lack of exit burnout

## Appendix E: Administrator Initial Codes

Strong community involvement in school activities	Peer support through new-teacher cohorts	Alignment between teacher strengths and assigned roles
Community validation of teachers' work	Collaborative problem-solving among teachers	Matching personality traits within teaching teams
Partnerships with local businesses	Strong grade-level and campus teams	Cultural fit with campus mission and values
Faith-based and civic organization support	Principal accessibility and relational leadership	Teacher identification with school community
Community attendance at school events	Cross-grade and vertical collaboration	Shared language indicating collective identity ("we")
Financial and material support from community sponsors	Ongoing communication through PLCs	Acceptance of progress-over-perfection mindset
Structured mentor-mentee relationships	Informal relationship-building through check-ins	Teaching viewed as purpose-driven work
Informal buddy systems for new teachers	Teacher sense of belonging to campus	Emotional investment in student growth
Social integration of novice teachers	Shared ownership of school success	

Teaching aligned with relational orientation	Emotional difficulty detaching from students' outcomes	Community safety considerations
Confidence supported through front-loaded training	Risk of burnout without adequate boundaries	influencing retention
Role clarity through extended orientation	Perceived isolation when support is lacking	Ongoing relationships with local law enforcement
Professional growth through leadership pathways	Workload strain related to parent communication	Law enforcement presence normalized for students and staff
Perceived long-term career viability in education	Fear of leaving a supportive school culture	Partnerships with neighborhood organizations
Loss of sense of purpose and impact	Loss of stability and growth opportunities within education	Hosting community events on campus
Loss of meaningful relationships with students	Importance of exposing candidates to campus context during hiring	School commitment to long-term neighborhood presence
Loss of professional community and belonging	Transparency about neighborhood conditions	Community recognition of school as positive anchor
		Content-aligned mentor assignments

Immediate access to mentors for real-time support	Team-based problem solving during instructional transitions	Adaptation to curricular rigor and internalization demands
Participation in campus committees beyond content roles	Structured opportunities for staff collaboration	Adjustment to self-contained instructional roles
Engagement with external educator networks	Alignment between teacher expectations and campus realities	Compatibility between teacher skill sets and content assignments
Peer validation through shared challenges	Acceptance of working in high-needs Title I context	Flexibility in role placement when feasible
Cross-campus professional connections	Teaching framed as doing what is best for children	Support for instructional planning and pacing
Regular one-on-one administrative check-ins	Emphasis on growth over perfection	Structured schedules supporting planning and balance
Open-door leadership approach	Teaching as a learning process for adults	Alignment with collaborative problem-solving culture
Trust-based communication between teachers and administration	Safe environment for professional mistakes	Openness to feedback as indicator of fit

Willingness to meet students where they are	Frustration with perceived lack of parent engagement	Community relationships viewed as integral to teacher retention
Recognition of student growth as professional motivation	Risk of burnout from sustained workload	Intentional campus–community collaboration for novice teachers
Alignment with relational approach to instruction	Fear of inadequacy when expectations differ from reality	Structured novice teacher program (Marigold program)
Emotional strain of working with high-need students	Loss of opportunity to influence students’ lives	Monthly cohort meetings for new teachers
Overwhelm from instructional and planning demands	Emotional cost of abandoning commitment to community	Assignment of mentors as relational anchors
Difficulty differentiating for diverse learning needs	Perceived difficulty of replacing relational fulfillment elsewhere	Mentor relationships based on personal compatibility
Stress related to student behavioral and special needs	Tension between professional demands and personal life	Safe spaces for novice teachers to communicate needs
	Increased complexity of teaching in evolving policy environment	

Principal stepping back to allow authentic peer dialogue	Strong emotional and identity connection to teaching	Ongoing instructional and emotional support structures
Campus leaders serving as relational supports	Alignment between teacher purpose and campus mission	Emphasis on preparation for professional rigor
Consistent solicitation of teacher feedback	Intentional matching of mentors based on strengths	Alignment with collaborative campus culture
PLC structures fostering collaboration	Use of surveys to understand teacher collaboration styles	Value placed on growth, accountability, and support
Committee participation ensuring teacher voice	Instructional coaching supporting role	Professional goal setting as a retention strategy
Open-door leadership approach	alignment	Loss of professional identity if leaving teaching
Regular visibility of administrators in classrooms	Clear communication of campus expectations	Emotional difficulty detaching from a calling
Trust-based communication between staff and leadership	Front-loaded onboarding systems to reduce overwhelm	Heightened emotional investment among novice teachers
Teaching framed as a calling rather than a job		Risk of burnout due to pressure to perform

Disconnection as a primary reason for leaving

Practice shock from unmet expectations of the role

Loss of belonging within a supportive school culture

## Appendix F: Administrator Secondary Codes

- Community affirmation
- Systems provide connections
- Relational leadership
- Protection against isolation
- Collective ownership of school success
- Multilayered support systems
- Trust-based communication
- Community is an extension of the school
- Teaching is a core identity
- Moral and purpose alignment
- Expectations acceptance
- Safety for trying new things
- Relationships over student growth
- Adaptive self-efficacy
- Structured onboarding
- Team compatibility
- Growth oriented professional trajectory
- Identity loss
- Relationship loss
- Moral abandonment

- Accumulated emotional investmentLack of exit burnout
- Career immobility
- Reality shock
- Disconnection
- Work-life balance
- Irreplaceability of meaning