

ABSTRACT

A Multiple Descriptive Case Study Exploring Special Education Teachers' Motivational Factors Which Influence Retention in Washington, DC

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The causes of teacher attrition are varied and complex. In urban environments, these challenges are more pronounced. In particular, special education teachers in urban environments seem to leave the field disproportionately compared to their general education counterparts. Some estimates state that as many as 40% of new special education teachers chose to leave their roles in the first three years of teaching, compared to an estimated total public-school general education attrition rate of 25.5% (Billingsley, 2004). The impact of this attrition is \$2.2 billion per year nationwide in costs related to recruitment, training, and turnover (Barnes et al., 2007). Special education teachers cite factors such as salary, lack of support, poor collegial relationships, increasing caseloads, lack of resources, and lack of administrative support as critical components that drive attrition in the field. The absence of adequate special education staff leads to consequences for students with disabilities, including the reduction of services, improper classification of disabilities to matched available staff, and a perpetuating achievement gap between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers.

This multiple descriptive case study explored the relationship between workplace conditions and special education teacher retention in Washington, DC. A theoretical framework drew connections between the lived experience and the academic research base. Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory (1959) is used to frame this case study. Purposively sampled participants engaged in a two-phase data collection process including completion of a questionnaire and then select participants engaged in semi-structured interviews.

This qualitative case study addresses the gap in research related to special education teacher retention in urban school environments. Results from this study demonstrated that these special education teachers are overwhelmingly motivated by relationships with students and being recognized by school administration. However, teachers cited concerns with administrative support, increased demands on workload, and organizational policies. The researcher provided recommendations based on the study's findings for practitioners and policymakers.

Keywords: retention, attrition, special education, urban schools, administrators, teachers, workplace conditions, motivational factors

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A Multiple Descriptive Case Study Exploring Special Education Teachers' Motivational
Factors Which Influence Retention in Washington, DC

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	vii
LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	ix
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	x
DEDICATION	xii
CHAPTER ONE	1
Introduction to the Problem of Practice	1
Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Purpose of the Study	7
Theoretical Framework.....	8
Research Design and Methods.....	9
Definition of Key Terms	9
Conclusion	12
CHAPTER TWO	13
Literature Review	13
Introduction.....	13
Nationwide Teacher Shortages and Supply and Demand.....	15
Costs Associated with Attrition	17
Teacher Turnover Related to Teacher and Student Characteristics	20
Special Education Teacher Burnout.....	24
Administrators' Influence	29
The Experience of Beginning Teachers	34
Conclusion	36
CHAPTER THREE	38
Methodology	38
Introduction.....	38
Researcher Perspective	39
Theoretical Framework.....	42
Research Design and Rationale	44

Site Selection and Participant Sampling	46
Data Collection Procedures.....	50
Data Analysis Procedures	52
Ethical Considerations	56
Limitations and Delimitations.....	57
Conclusions.....	58
CHAPTER FOUR.....	60
Results and Implications	60
Introduction.....	60
Description of Setting and Context.....	61
Description of the Participants.....	62
Individual Case Profiles.....	63
Framework Coding of Phase One Data	69
Findings from Phase Two.....	70
Cross Case Analysis.....	89
Implications.....	93
Summary and Conclusion.....	97
CHAPTER FIVE	100
Distribution of Findings.....	100
Executive Summary	100
Findings Distribution Proposal	105
Conclusion	107
APPENDICES	109
APPENDIX A.....	110
Special Education Teacher Retention Questionnaire.....	110
APPENDIX B.....	115
Informed Consent Form for Research	115
APPENDIX C.....	118
Interview Protocol.....	118
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	120

LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 3.1.</i> Framework analysis steps	53
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LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 <i>Demographic Profile of Participant Sample</i>	49
Table 4.1 <i>Demographic Profile of Participant Sample</i>	63
Table 4.2 <i>Phase 1 Questionnaire Themes</i>	70
Table 4.3 <i>Major Categories and Concepts of Teacher Motivational Factors</i>	71

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DC: District of Columbia

DCPS: District of Columbia Public Schools

ELA: English Language Arts

ESL: English as a Second Language

EL: English Learner

LEA: Local Education Agency

OSSE: Office of the State Superintendent of Education

PARCC: Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career

SBOE: State Board of Education

SPED: Special Education

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I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Philippians 4:13

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to the Problem of Practice

Introduction

Almost 90,000 students attend a public school in Washington, DC.

Approximately one in every five students is a student with a disability and holds an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). An IEP makes one eligible for special education services, and IEPs typically outline some form of specialized instruction provided by a special education teacher. Like many other areas across the country, Washington, DC struggles with finding highly qualified teachers for all classrooms. The District of Columbia has a teacher retention problem; teachers leave the field of teaching at disproportionate rates compared to other major cities, including New York, Chicago, and Milwaukee, and higher than the national average (Levy, 2018). Human resources and talent managers still struggle to fill a variety of teaching vacancies, chiefly in areas such as special education, math, science, and English as a Second Language (ESL). This staff turnover problem negatively affects the students in the DC schools because the rates of departure vary significantly from school to school, keeping attrition rates substantially higher in schools serving low-income or at-risk students.

The impact of inequitable access to qualified teachers is significant for students with disabilities. A score of proficient on the Partnership for Assessment Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) English Language Arts (ELA) assessment indicates college and career readiness for students in Washington, DC. By that standard, only eight of every twenty students achieve college readiness. However, only two of every twenty

students with disabilities are college and career ready on the same assessment (OSSE, 2019). Studies consistently show that teacher expertise is one of the essential factors in determining student achievement (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1997). Therefore, additional investigation on retaining qualified special education teachers to support one of the most sensitive demographic student groups is necessary. This study aims to focus on factors that drive special education teacher retention in urban schools.

Statement of the Problem

Ingersoll (2003) describes teacher turnover as the *revolving door*. Teachers comprise four percent of U.S. workers, a significant portion of the workforce. "For example, [there are] more than twice as many teachers as registered nurses and five times as many teachers as either lawyers or professors" (Ingersoll, 2003, p. 148). However, teachers experience some of the highest rates of attrition in all professional fields. Compared to nurses and lawyers, teachers are known to leave the profession at inflated rates. Year to year, nearly one-third of the teaching force is in some form of career transition. Attrition rates are higher in urban areas (Sutcher et al., 2016).

The factors that predict retention require further research. Teacher background and characteristics can be one predictor of turnover. Boyd et al. (2011) noted that teachers in times of transition, such as the beginning and end of their careers, experience higher turnover. Additionally, researchers noted that less experienced teachers were also more likely to leave the profession. Further, the preparation route often predicts turnover rates as teachers from alternative preparation routes like Teach for America and The Teaching Fellows also show higher attrition rates than their traditional preparation route

peers (Boyd et al., 2011a; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). However, the research presents less consistent trends related to retention concerning gender, race, or ethnicity.

Demonstrable evidence suggests that teacher transfer patterns connect to student demographics. Schools with large populations of low-achieving, non-White students from low-income households tend to experience increased teacher turnover rates (Boyd et al., 2011). Furthermore, teachers in hard-to-fill fields, such as special education, show higher attrition trends than their general education counterparts. Due to the vast reasons for attrition and the costs associated, it is essential to address why teachers leave the profession at rates higher than in other professional fields.

However, not all turnover is bad. Some employee turnover is expected and useful. Well-functioning organizations benefit from limited turnover by eliminating lower-performing talent and bringing in potentially higher-performing talent that may breed innovation. However, researchers have held that high turnover results from organizational performance problems (Ingersoll, 2003). Furthermore, high teacher turnover has a significant relationship with school performance. The revolving door that Ingersoll speaks of most often impacts high-poverty schools as compared to affluent schools. Also, urban schools experience higher turnover than suburban and rural schools, which causes patterns of instructional, financial, and organizational troubles that significantly impact school communities and directly affect student learning (Boyd et al., 2011b; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

Teacher turnover affects all teachers, especially teachers of students with disabilities. Scholars raised concerns over higher attrition rates in special education than general education dating back to the 1990s. At that time, there was no significant

difference between the attrition rates of general education teachers and special education teachers, as both were approximately six percent. However, special education teachers' attrition rate was more significant than general education teachers when including transfer attrition. An increase in special education student enrollment results in a need for special education teachers signaling an intense need to rectify the challenge of teacher attrition (Miller et al., 1999).

Across the country, there is a shortage of qualified special education teachers. Cross and Billingsley (1994) argue that “the lack of qualified special education teachers compromises the quality of services that students with disabilities receive” (p. 411). Some of these consequences include the number of underprepared teachers hired to fill vacant teaching positions and the potential of a reduction of services for students with disabilities. Personnel and specialized instruction programs are often inappropriately matched to students with disabilities (Cross & Billingsley, 1994). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2012), in low-income schools, hard-to-staff fields include special education roles (Cancio et al., 2014). Therefore, responses to low teacher supply are critical to addressing this need.

Little research and data with specific estimates of the teacher shortages in low-income and high-poverty schools similar to national shortage estimates exist. Therefore, one infers that the highly qualified special education teachers are in high demand and, as a result, have more options with regards to where they want to teach. Secondly, those same teachers are lured and recruited to work in more affluent schools that may provide them with better support and overall better working conditions (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Teachers who hold basic credentials and novice teachers tend to teach low-income

students disproportionately. Students in high-poverty schools have a nearly five percentage point likelihood to have a teacher who took an alternative route into teaching and about a six-percentage point higher probability to have a teacher who does not have an educational background in the subject of the primary assignment (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Most uncertified teachers are new to the field and represent about 30% of beginning teachers. These teachers often lack certification for their primary teaching assignments (Billingsley, 2004). This lack of experience has a considerable cost and impact on students with disabilities, as these students need the most support in critical learning experiences.

America's teacher dropout problem drains critical resources. It sabotages the ability to close the gap between White students and students of color and students from higher-income and lower-income households. Costs generated by teachers leaving the field could have an actual cost above \$7 billion (NCTAF, 2003). In 1994, the U.S. Department of Education warned that Baby Boom retirements were imminent. In the subsequent decade, school districts hired 2.25 million teachers, but in the same decade, 2.7 million teachers left the field, including 2.1 million teachers leaving pre-retirement (NCTAF, 2003). This shortage of teachers has as much to do with lack of supply, but equally as much to do with the demand created by significant rates of attrition and increased numbers of students requiring specialized instruction provided by a special education teacher.

Data collected from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), as part of its periodic national-level Teacher Follow-Up Surveys (TFS), provides extensive data from large sample sizes with high response rates. The TFS data for the 1994–1995 school

year reported that “twice as many teachers left special education teaching (15.3%) as left general education teaching (7%)” (Boe et al., 2008, p. 9). These trends lead researchers to question what factors within the special education teachers’ experiences cause more significant attrition than their general education peers.

There is an even higher attrition rate among new teachers (Billingsley, 2004; Shernoff et al., 2011; Weiss, 1999). The special education attrition rate among new teachers within the first three years is 40%, which compares to the total public-school attrition rate of 25.5%. Therefore, special education has a higher turnover rate. Additionally, 37% of those hired for special education classrooms enter not holding full special education licensure (Billingsley, 2004). New special education teachers note a lack of school administrators’ support, especially in schools that serve high-poverty populations as a concern and possible reason for leaving a school. Often in these schools, teachers are hired after the start of the school year; teachers do not engage in mentoring and lack instructional guidance or support (Kaufmann & Ring, 2011).

In a 1998 study of 1,000 special educators conducted by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), teachers reported poor working conditions as a cause for leaving the field. Other reasons cited included lack of support, lack of preparation, overwhelming student needs, and increasing job responsibilities, diverse caseloads, salary, and benefits (Kaufmann & Ring, 2011). These challenges only exacerbate the decreased quantity of teachers from traditional preparation routes and the attrition and migration of teachers from teaching.

For teachers of students with disabilities in urban environments, their needs may be greater than their peers in more affluent settings. These needs include lack of

resources, including technology and assistive devices, more significant student behavioral and emotional challenges caused by adverse childhood experiences, and limited related service providers with large caseloads. Therefore, it is vital to fully understand the challenges of being a special education teacher in an urban environment and what factors lead to increased retention of these teachers.

Purpose of the Study

This descriptive case study investigated special education teachers' experiences in Washington, DC, to determine the workplace and personal motivation and hygiene factors most critical to special education teachers' retention. To gain this understanding, six special education teachers engaged in a multiple descriptive case study to determine their perceptions of workplace conditions and examine the motivational factors that lead to job tenure and stability. The study concludes with concrete recommendations for both practitioners and policymakers regarding how to retain qualified teachers in the special education field.

This research study explored these research questions: What are the special education teachers' motivational factors which lead to prolonged job tenure? How do workplace conditions influence the retention of special education teachers in Washington, DC? This study bridged the research gap on the factors that influence special education teacher retention in an urban environment. Specifically, the study examined and described both the intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors related to teachers' perceptions of the workplace. This study's findings inform teacher preparation, professional learning for in-service teachers, talent management practices, and policy decisions.

Theoretical Framework

The researcher used a theoretical framework to connect the new research to the existing research. To provide “structure and support for the rationale of the study, the problem statement, the purpose, the significant, and the research questions”(Grant & Osanloo, 2014, p. 12), the researcher selected a theoretical framework that served as a lynchpin to the new research. To guide this study, the researcher used Herzberg’s motivation-hygiene theory (1959). Herzberg’s two factor theory states that different aspects of the job cause satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Herzberg’s theory defines motivation as an innate force that drives an individual to achieve personal and organizational goals. Hygiene factors mainly include the working environment of an organization, such as workplace conditions, organization policies, and interpersonal matters (Khanna, 2017).

Critical to Herzberg’s theory is the concept of job satisfaction. According to Herzberg, job satisfaction is driven by both “intrinsic” factors, also known as motivators, and “extrinsic factors” also known as hygiene factors. Intrinsic factors relate to what one does, and extrinsic factors relate to the work environment. For teachers, motivating factors would include working with students, opportunities for growth, and recognition. On the other hand, salary, role ambiguity, compensation, and working conditions are extrinsic factors. Herzberg argues that extrinsic factors do not contribute to job satisfaction but do contribute to job dissatisfaction. However, the presence of motivators leads to job satisfaction but does not necessarily lead to job dissatisfaction. Understanding the underlying factors regarding teacher attrition will allow policy change and future research.

Research Design and Methods

Utilizing multiple descriptive case study methodology, the researcher conducted the study in Washington, DC. Yin (2014) states that researchers choose case study designs to answer “how” and “why” questions. The study aimed to understand the current K–12 public school special education teachers’ experiences in this city.

In a two-phase data collection process, the researcher provided a questionnaire (see Appendix A) to a range of current special education practitioners and followed up with select participants who engaged in semi-structured interviews. The researcher collected data from artifact reviews, discussions, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. Data analysis included pattern matching, coding, and framework analysis.

Definition of Key Terms

Alternative certification program: a non-institution of higher education (IHE) program in which college graduates work towards certification while engaging in formal teacher education training (Ingersoll, 2003).

Attrition: teachers leaving employment regardless of performance level attained (Boe et al., 2008).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): an education law signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015. It reauthorized the Education and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and aimed to address the commitment to equal opportunity for all students (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015).

High-minority school: a school where 95% or more of the students are racial or ethnic minorities (OSSE Equitable Access Plan, 2021).

High-needs school: K–12 schools identified within the top 25% of elementary and secondary schools statewide identified through large numbers of unfilled teaching positions or are located in an area that 30% of students come from low-income households. Teachers in these schools tend to be work out-of-field, have high turnover, or have large numbers of teachers who are not certified or licensed (Wronowski, 2018).

Hygiene (maintenance) variables: relates to environmental or organizational factors, notwithstanding one’s perception of the job, such as salary, supervision, administrative policies, and workplace conditions (Herzberg et al., 1959).

Ineffective teacher: based on a local education agency’s (LEA’s) evaluation system, any teacher rated below “effective” (OSSE Equitable Access Technical Guide, 2021).

Low-income schools: “a school where 50% or more of students qualify for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), are homeless, or wards of the state through the Child and Family Services Agency CFSA” (OSSE Equitable Access Technical Guide, p. 2, 2021).

Low-performing school: using the state accountability framework, any school identified in the bottom ten percent of school performance (OSSE Equitable Access Technical Guide, 2021).

Novice teacher: a teacher in their first year of teaching, or second-year teacher rated “ineffective” in their first year of teaching (OSSE Equitable Access Technical Guide, 2021).

Migration: a teacher who moves from one school to another school (Boe et al., 2008).

Minority student: any student of a minority race or ethnicity (e.g., African American, Latinx, Native American, Asian, Pacific Islander, or more than one race; see discussion in OSSE Equitable Access Plan, 2021).

Motivator variables: relates to internalized or intrinsic factors such as praise or recognition (Herzberg et al., 1959).

School administrators: Staff members whose activities are responsible for directing the operations of a particular school; includes principals, assistant principals. These staff members supervise other staff members and coordinate school instructional activities (OSSE Teacher Data Collection Technical Guide, 2021).

Specialized instruction: carefully designed instruction used to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities through content, methodology, or delivery of instruction.

Students with disabilities: students with diagnosed mental or physical disabilities that impact primary life functions, including school engagement. Students receive specialized instruction and related services (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004).

Teacher: any person with a central teaching assignment in any grade(s) K–12, employed by a public school or public charter schools, not including itinerant teachers or long-term substitutes (Boe et al., 2008).

Teacher turnover: refers to significant shifts in a teacher’s primary role from one school year to the next (Boe et al., 2008).

Transfer: a teacher whose primary teaching assignment shifts from year to year (e.g., different grade level assignment[s] or other content area assignment[s]; Boe et al., 2008).

Turnover: Personnel leaving the district, switching to a non-teaching position, or exiting from the school (Boe et al., 2008).

Urban schools: a school in which the majority of students belong to a historically marginalized racial or ethnic group and who come from low-income backgrounds. This term relates more to the conditions of the environment and less associated with the geographic location (Morettini, 2016).

Conclusion

Addressing the retention of special education teachers in urban schools is critically important to the stability of the public-school system and the achievement of this vulnerable student population. The literature review in Chapter Two examines the factors related to a teacher's decision to remain in the profession including potential reasons, satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and other factors related to one's experience. Policymakers and school leaders need to be aware of and address the factors related to aspects within their control. Since students with disabilities currently demonstrate less than desirable academic outcomes, addressing teachers' retention can all improve outcomes for these students.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

At the start of the school year, teachers who are not fully qualified to teach or substitute teachers lead more than 100,000 classrooms across the nation (Sutcher et al., 2016). These understaffed or unstaffed classrooms are the result of ongoing teacher shortages. The shortages stem from teacher turnover that is a substantial challenge across the nation (Sutcher et al., 2016). Teachers deemed less than effective, more often than not, replace outgoing teachers. According to the research, effective teachers influence students' short and long-term life outcomes (Adnot et al., 2017). When considering some of the most vulnerable students, students with disabilities, there is a need for high-quality teachers to address the diagnosed academic and social-emotional needs of these students.

This study presents three arguments using the ensuing review of literature as support. First, the lack of teachers being prepared for the field and the pre-retirement attrition of teachers due to dissatisfaction leads to the shortage of qualified teachers to meet school needs known as supply and demand. Second, the supply and demand issues, coupled with the attrition issues, are more pronounced in urban environments and with specific student populations. Teacher preparation programs must do more to fully ensure that teachers are well prepared for urban schools' teaching roles. Once teachers are in classrooms, school districts and administrators must actively promote retention practices, which will lead to more teachers remaining in the teaching field, particularly in urban schools. Third, the study contends that special educators need specific support while in

the classroom to ensure appropriate professional development and ensure that they remain in their roles supporting the most vulnerable students.

The ensuing argument unfolds in six parts. First, the researcher presents an overview of the nationwide teacher shortage and the teacher supply and demand challenge. Gaining an understanding of national trends allows one to contextualize the experiences of one city. Second, the researcher presents the costs associated with attrition. These costs are both financial and non-financial costs and undermine student achievement and consume valuable staff time. Third, the researcher investigates teachers' and students' characteristics to determine how they relate to attrition trends. Fourth, beginning teacher experiences were studied. To maintain a well-qualified corps of teachers and address the teacher shortage, the researcher sought to understand the beginning teacher experience. The fifth section focuses on an administrators' role in the teachers' experiences and how administrators can support teachers to reduce teacher turnover. Finally, the researcher explores special education teacher motivation related to burnout, as this is important to shed light on the experiences of teachers who work with the most vulnerable students.

This problem of practice builds upon research in special education teacher retention and addresses the related workplace factors that contribute to teacher turnover, offering recommendations to policymakers and school leaders. This dissertation in practice fills the gap in a priori research by specifically addressing special education teacher attrition in urban schools.

Nationwide Teacher Shortages and Supply and Demand

In the United States, teacher demand is rapidly growing. This demand is a product of shifting student enrollment, fewer teachers trained in preparation programs, increased teacher-student ratios, and mostly because of teacher attrition. There was a spike in teacher demand shortly after the Great Recession. In 2014, around 260,000 teachers gained employment, and projections from 2017–2018 showed a higher increase to 300,000 teachers per year after that (Sutcher et al., 2016). However, demand alone would not be a problem for the education field. Using a supply and demand framework, Sutcher et al. (2016) define the teacher shortage as “an inadequate quantity of qualified individuals willing to offer their services under prevailing wages and conditions” (p. 10). Supply and demand indicate that due to the imbalance between the number of teachers needed and the number of teachers qualified to offer their service, there is a teacher shortage. States scramble to find enough teachers to fill their staffing needs. According to the 2014–2015 American Association for Employment in Education (AAEE), most districts reported finding enough candidates for open positions as a “big challenge” at 56% and not finding candidates with the right credentials at 53% (Sutcher et al., 2016).

However, the education research field has not reached a consensus regarding the supply and demand issue. Boe et al. (2008) tried to determine if the teacher shortages were due to excessive attrition or inadequate supply. The authors concluded that teacher attrition is not excessive compared to other vocations. Boe et al. (2018) stated that “the attrition of public and private teachers (combined), during their first three years, was among the lowest of several occupations studied. Thus, teaching seems to be a reasonably appealing occupation in comparison with others” (Boe et al., 2008, p. 25). Therefore, these authors do not believe that policy changes can reduce the attrition of qualified

public-school teachers. Few other researchers share the same opinion as that of Boe et al. Most researchers believe that the teaching field has disproportionate attrition considering the demand for teachers.

The supply and demand concerns impact not just general education positions but also special education positions. Non-certified teachers fill more than 30,000 of the approximately 300,000 special education positions across the nation, and still another 6,000 jobs remain unfilled because of lack of personnel (Thornton, 2007). Currently, teacher preparation programs do not produce nearly enough special education teachers to fill the needs of the K–12 system. This gap results from demand increasing over the last twenty years as the students with disabilities' population increases (Thornton, 2007; Miller et al., 1999). In 2007, teacher preparation programs prepared about 22,000 special education teachers; however, that was only half the number of special education teachers needed to fill vacant positions. As a result, positions were vacant or filled by underqualified staff.

The lack of qualified special education teachers is partially attributed to a lack of qualified special education higher education faculty. The shortage of faculty contributes to the need for teachers because the faculty train the teachers. Robb et al. (2012) conclude that the lack of special education faculty is mostly the result of faculty retirements, which accounts for 21% of the turnover rate. As a result, many of the programs rely on adjunct faculty's support to maintain programmatic offerings (Robb et al., 2012). However, full-time faculty must preserve teacher preparation programs' integrity as these individuals provide instructional continuity and are often informed about current research-based practices.

Moreover, the nationwide teacher shortage also disproportionately affects certain groups of students more than others. Students who come from low-income households or attend high-minority schools tend to experience the most significant impact of teacher shortages. Underprepared, inexperienced, or out-of-field teachers are more likely to teach students from low-income, high-minority schools. High-poverty schools often experience the most significant difficulty when hiring and experience high turnover more consistently. These schools frequently have inequitable funding and are left with inadequate resources, resulting in lower salaries than neighboring more affluent jurisdictions (Sutcher et al., 2016). On average, “schools in the top quartile of minority student enrollment had four times as many uncertified teachers as schools in the bottom quartile of minority student enrollment”(Sutcher et al., 2016, p. 14). High turnover undermines student achievement for all students in the school. Increased investments in training and improving teachers’ working conditions to address teacher turnover are needed.

Costs Associated with Attrition

In addition to the supply and demand issue, another concern with attrition is the cost. One projection estimated 25% of the departing teacher’s salary plus benefits to be the cost of replacing a teacher. Alternative projections only take into account the departing teacher’s salary as the replacement cost. A third model suggested that the cost to replace departing teachers across the nation was \$2.2 billion per year, and the cost balloons to \$4.9 billion per year when adding to the cost of teachers transferring schools (Watlinton et al., 2010). All of these costs are estimates, and the ability to calculate the actual cost varies significantly from district to district.

More specifically, researchers have considered three cost categories related to turnover: separation costs, replacement costs, and training costs. The Teacher Turnover Cost Model (TTCM) attempts to provide a comprehensive model of teacher turnover, which more accurately captures the actual costs of turnover. Separation costs should include the exit interview, exit survey, or other information gathering opportunities from leavers. Hiring costs should consist of advertising, recruiting, interviewing, checking references, making offers, conducting background checks, drug testing, instituting bonuses, and organizing the administrative tasks related to them. Training costs should include orientation, mentoring at the school or district level, and preservice training, including materials and administrative expenses (Synar & Maiden, 2012).

Synar and Maiden (2012) validated their model in a mid-sized southern city from 1999–2008. Utilizing the terminated teacher database provided by the sample district and interviews with district staff, separation costs, hiring costs, training costs, and performance productivity were calculated by the researchers. This analysis resulted in an average per-leaver cost of \$14,508.86 based on the yearly per-leaver costs. The analysis showed a lower rate of teacher turnover than the national average for the years studied; however, costs fluctuated between \$3.4 million and \$4.3 million annually. These researchers concluded some similarities with other studies: (a) half of the novice teachers (with less than five years' experience) left their placement; (b) the higher percentage of minority students within a school may contribute to the loss of teachers; and (c) the teacher turnover was consistent in districts noted to have an induction and mentoring program (Synar & Maiden, 2012).

There are other studies conducted in various districts that had similar findings. In 2006, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) conducted a pilot study of teacher attrition cost in five school districts. The five school districts comprised urban, suburban, and rural school districts. Barnes et al. (2007) outlined the study's findings: districts bear the cost of turnover, and at-risk schools are disproportionately affected. Focused efforts on teacher retention could decrease turnover costs. This calls for data systems that provide more accurate accounts of the costs of attrition.

The NCTAF study demonstrates that at-risk schools are negatively affected by pervasive teacher turnover. Often inexperienced teachers are the ones who turn over quickly and are teaching at-risk students (Barnes et al., 2007). As a result, schools that serve more at-risk students spend more on replacing teachers who turnover. Ronfeldt et al. (2013) state, "turnover has a broader, harmful influence on student achievement since it can reach beyond just those who students of teachers who left or those that replaced them" (p. 32). However, more research is needed to determine the specific impact of high attrition rates on student academic achievement.

To calculate turnover costs, one must consider the net difference in salary and the new difference in effectiveness between the departing teacher and the newly hired teacher. Studying teacher retention from the perspective of years of experience and level of effectiveness is important. Often teachers who depart are deemed less effective than their peers (Boyd et al., 2011a; Papay et al., 2017; Watlington et al., 2010). However, teacher turnover prompts the hiring of inexperienced teachers, which then also impacts student achievement. These impacts are "especially in schools with higher proportions of

low-performing and African American students” (Papay et al., 2017, p. 436). Research purports the significance of effective teachers. Estimates suggest that a student moving from an average teacher’s class to a teacher rated in the 85th percentile would increase that student’s achievement in the same way as reducing class size by 33% (Jacob, 2007). In sum, teacher turnover significantly impacts the teaching force, the student experience, and student achievement.

Teacher Turnover Related to Teacher and Student Characteristics

In addition to financial costs, teacher turnover has other impacts. Research demonstrates that there are teacher characteristics and student characteristics trends within teacher turnover. Poor students of color compared to more affluent and non-minority students tend to be instructed by less qualified teachers (Opfer, 2011). Because of these concerns, researchers have begun to investigate attrition related to teacher and student characteristics.

Teacher stability rates are directly connected to the demographic composition of students served in the school. Schools that serve low-income African American students predominately tend to have lower retention rates than schools serving students of other races and ethnicities. In Chicago Public Schools, Allensworth et al. (2009) found that teachers of all backgrounds were less likely to stay in schools with large populations of African American students (Allensworth et al., 2009). Guin (2014) similarly found teacher attrition rates connected to the percentage of minority students within a school. Metanalysis confirms these findings such that schools with lower student achievement scores experience higher attrition than schools with high or above-average achievement scores (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Guin, 2004). Studies also suggest that schools with

majority African American or Latinx populations have attrition rates up to three times greater than those with majority White populations (Borman & Dowling, 2008).

Variables such as age, sex, level and type of preparation, and certification status are known to influence a teacher's decision to remain in the field—also, age and academic status influence one's decision to leave the classroom. Younger teachers (i.e., those under the age of 35) are more likely to leave the classroom earlier than their older counterparts (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). Also, teachers who score high on national teachers' exams are at higher risk for attrition (Miller et al., 1999). Finally, mid-career new teachers are more than three times as likely as first-career teachers to move from one school to another, demonstrating instability as a group (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). However, the relationship between gender and attrition was inconsistent across general education literature.

The link between race and teacher retention has been inconsistent in studies. Non-White teachers are more likely to express intent to leave than their White counterparts (Billingsley, 2004; Cross & Billingsley, 1994). Billingsley (2004) provided context for these findings by arguing that non-White teachers are more likely to work in urban environments, where workplace conditions are more challenging, and those conditions may influence one's decision to depart. Teachers of color, mainly Black and Latinx teachers, may be more committed to serving high-poverty schools and students who share similar racial backgrounds than new White teachers. They may choose to teach in high-poverty urban schools (Ingersoll, 2001; Whipp & Geronime, 2017). However, demographic factors alone are insufficient to determine teacher attrition patterns. Miller et al. (1991) found “certification status, perceived stress, school climate, and age best

distinguish who will stay in the classroom, leave, and transfer to another school or district” (p. 201). Other personal factors contribute to one’s commitment to the classroom. Special educators who remain in the teaching field tend to hold higher concepts of their ability to guide their students to success than peers who leave. This increased teacher efficacy may encourage teachers to persevere despite the challenging teaching role (Miller et al., 1999).

Professional experience also affects turnover. Teachers with less experience have less investment in teaching as long-term careers, making their stability more tentative. Teachers with less experience also earn lower salaries than their experienced peers, making it easier to switch roles or leave teaching (Billingsley, 2004). Demanding classrooms with disadvantaged students receive new teachers with limited or developing skills. Without professional support and resources to help teachers cope with this reality, some of the most promising new teachers leave teaching (Weiss, 1999).

Two other researchers, Whipp and Geronime (2017), studied 72 teachers who all graduated from a midwestern university. These researchers attempted to determine which pre- and post-teacher preparation experiences are associated with a strong commitment to work in high-poverty urban schools. Urban experiences in and out of teacher preparation led to a strong commitment to urban teaching. Equally important are factors such as demographic and historical factors in predicting urban teacher retention. Candidates who have personally experienced attending high-poverty urban K–12 schools or who have lived in communities of lower socioeconomic status often opt to work in communities that have schools similar to those of one’s community. This study provides concrete suggestions for teacher preparation programs. The programs should recruit candidates

who have lived experiences in high-poverty urban environments and cater field experiences and student teaching to locations with high-poverty urban schools.

Boyd et al. (2005) shared similar findings from a study conducted including New York City public school teachers who started teaching in 1995–1996 through 2001–2002 academic years. The study included certified teachers with one to five years of experience. Commute times proved to be a critical factor related to attrition. Teachers living in New York City stayed in their teaching positions at a significantly higher rate than those traveling greater distances. Seven percent of first-year teachers living within two miles of the school where they taught transferred to other district schools, compared with 11% of those who live six or more miles away. Teachers not from New York City are more likely to transfer to positions outside of New York City throughout their careers in teaching (Boyd et al., 2005). These findings suggest that teachers residing in or from the communities where they teach are less likely to quit or transfer and prefer to work in communities similar to where they grew up.

Some research shows that teachers leave teaching or migrate to different schools seeking deeper relationships with the families they serve. Elfers et al. (2006) shared that 35% of teachers surveyed identified lack of support at home for students' learning (lack of homework help or positive attitudes toward school) to be a moderate reason to consider leaving their school. This figure balloons to 62% in schools with high-poverty. Within the same study, 53% of teachers cited the school's disciplinary issues as critical to potential teacher attrition (Elfers et al., 2006). Lack of parental support and disciplinary issues among students often prove too much for teachers to remain in the classroom.

Understanding individual teachers' characteristics may provide hiring officials with tangible traits to look for in the interviewing process.

Special Education Teacher Burnout

Individuals who work in human services fields tend to experience higher occupational stress as compared to their non-human services peers. Stress and teacher attrition is also concerning for teachers, especially for those who work in the special education field. Occupational stress is typically considered when the demands of the role are compromised due to external factors and particularly when individuals do not feel supported by their supervisors or co-workers. Compounded occupational stress leads to burnout. Burnout is the cumulative effect of attributional, behavioral, physiological, and psychological responses to stress that may influence a teacher's commitment to stay in the classroom and the teaching field (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017).

Burnout research had its origins in care-giving and service occupations in which a significant aspect of the job is a relationship between provider and recipient. Burnout is known to impact individuals as well as the cumulative relationships and transactions in the workplace. From this vantage point, the burnout phenomenon has several consistencies. First, providing service or care is demanding and may result in emotional exhaustion as a typical response to job overload. Second is depersonalization, in which people state feelings of cynicism related to burnout. Finally, detachment relates to shielding or protecting oneself from intense emotions associated with functioning effectively in the workplace (Maslach et al., 2001).

The term teacher burnout frequently describes dissatisfaction with teaching's responsibilities (Bressman et al., 2018; Maslach et al., 2001). Some of these challenging

factors include excessive paperwork requirements, increasing caseloads, low compensation, lack of administrative support, lack of a collegial environment, and problematic student behaviors (Billingsley, 2007; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). However, researchers have been unable to identify direct indices of teacher burnout.

Teachers' stress-related concerns are part of a developmental process. While student teaching, stress-related problems tend to focus on the students' characteristics and issues that focus on classroom ownership. Later in one's career, concerns change to a teacher's instructional performance and the students' long-term academic experience. The result is often emotional exhaustion caused by extensive periods of stress, culminating in reduced personal and professional accomplishment (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). As burnout relates to teaching, teachers often view the conditions of emotional exhaustion as a threat to one's personal sense of safety and security. Coupled with reduced professional commitment, the process of "burning out" leads to negatively impacted staff.

Other researchers have also highlighted the impact of teacher stress. Billingsley (1993) designed the schematic model, which categorized three factors to describe teacher attrition factors. First, external factors include the societal, economic, and institutional variables that teachers experience. Secondly, teacher qualifications, training, and working conditions are employment factors. Finally, personal factors include family needs, demographic variables, and individual interests (Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996). These factors in isolation may be overcome, but when experienced in multitudes, teachers leave the field at exponential rates.

In urban settings, stressors related to teaching are well documented in research. These concerns include school overcrowding, large class sizes, deteriorating school conditions, and large numbers of students with unaddressed academic and mental health needs (Shernoff et al., 2011). These stressors may ultimately lead to teachers leaving the field. Research shows correlations between teachers who experience job satisfaction having increased job retention, whereas teachers who experience job dissatisfaction are more likely to leave (Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2018). Unfortunately, teachers do not hold universal views of job satisfaction, so research studies' conclusions may be inconsistent. Hagaman and Casey (2018) conducted focus groups among three distinct groups of educators—preservice teachers, special education teachers in their first three years, and administrators from two states in the Midwest. All participant groups suggested that stress was a top contributor to teachers leaving the field. Secondary factors included a lack of cooperation, external rewards, and other teachers' support (Hagaman & Casey, 2018).

In other instances, one's career decisions have little to do with workplace conditions. Berry et al. (2011) surveyed special education teachers in rural school environments. In this study, teachers entered the field without adequate training, certification, or field experiences. "One-third of the special educators interviewed remarked that they provided services to students in areas they did not feel qualified or adequately prepared to teach" (Berry et al., 2011, p. 8). Iwanicki (1983) also suggested that role-related stress, namely, classroom discipline, challenges with appropriately developing instructional programs for students with disabilities, and inadequate time for professional development as causes of teacher stress and eventual burnout. Billingsley's

schematic model (1993) would consider these challenges employment factors that often lead to attrition.

Within the school community, social interactions are strong determinants of whether one experiences burnout. A school's social working environment includes opportunities to receive feedback and professional recognition and presents opportunities for colleagues to work together. Allensworth et al. (2009) concluded that a "positive, trusting, working relationship" (p. 25) was the most poignant organizational factor related to teachers' decisions to leave or stay. In schools that embodied shared commitment among faculty showed four to five percentage point increases in one-year stability rates (Allensworth et al., 2009).

The concerns raised in Berry et al. (2011) are consistent with the sentiments of many early career teachers. As many as 40% of special education teachers choose to leave the field within the first three years of teaching, resulting in special education classrooms being underserved (Kaufman & Ring, 2011). New special education teachers, when questioned about leaving, cited a lack of support. New teachers in schools that serve high-poverty populations face significant workplace challenges. Many new teachers are hired after the start of the school year and receive little support from administrators around instruction. These teachers are also not engaged in mentoring and induction programs (Kaufman & Ring, 2011). Teachers who receive supports and know how to access supports are less likely to switch careers prematurely.

Special education teachers have higher attrition rates than their general education peers (Billingsley, 2004). Singer (1992) reported that because special education teachers teach diverse groups of students, the potential to leave teaching depends highly on one's

teaching assignment. Special educators on the elementary level stay in their positions an average of 1.6 years longer than their secondary education peers. There are trends in attrition data that indicate that the attrition is impacted by teacher assignment (Singer, 1992). For example, teachers of students with learning disabilities, physical and multiple disabilities are considered the most stable. However, teachers of students with behavioral or emotional disabilities and speech problems tend to have shorter careers. The differences in career length and teachers' commitment provide an opportunity for additional research.

Special education teachers also cite concerns with their general education peers. Teachers surveyed by Adera and Bullock (2010) shared that general education teachers often demonstrate an unwillingness to work with students diagnosed with emotional or behavioral disabilities. General education teachers also report displeasure and provide occasional derogatory remarks towards students with emotional or behavioral disabilities. In addition to the complex and demanding day-to-day nature of special educators' work, these additional job stressors were likely to result in burnout of special educators.

Researchers contend that there are several reasons why special educators leave the classroom; role conflict and role ambiguity are two specific workplace conditions. Role conflict occurs when the expectations for a teacher's role differs between the teacher and the administrator. Role ambiguity occurs when an educator feels as if they did not receive adequate information about how to do the job they hold well (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). These findings are consistent with Leiter (1991), which stated that organization problems are more connected to burnout than difficulties with providing the services.

Acknowledging that teaching is difficult and employing appropriate supports may alleviate some of the teachers' stress and concerns.

Another concern raised by special educators is parental involvement or challenging parent involvement related to students with disabilities. Special education teachers identified cases in which the school and family held conflicting views of students' behavior, and therefore, parents and teachers were not working towards the same goal. Also, focus-group participants identified situations in which parents did not cooperate with the school or hold students accountable for their actions. Participants further stated that parents blamed teachers for the student's behavior. These situations leave teachers emotionally drained and over-stretched, eventually leading to teacher turnover (Adera & Bullock, 2010).

Administrators' Influence

Another critical aspect of teacher retention depends upon the relationship between the teacher and their administrator. Teachers in high-need schools want visible administrators (Petty et al., 2012). New teachers want principals to be instructional leaders who encourage teachers to participate in professional development. Also, teachers appreciate being observed by their principals. Another critical factor in job satisfaction was the support of principals on disciplinary decisions.

School leaders play a critical role in addressing the employment factors as indicated in Billingsley's (2003) schematic model. Teachers seek leaders who are supportive and delegate authority. Also, teachers seek administrators who will work collaboratively with teachers and engage them in problem-solving (Petty et al., 2012).

Similarly, other research findings suggest that the principal heavily influences novice teachers' decisions to remain at a school.

Principals are essential to the success of teachers. However, teachers often feel that principals must balance other factors and therefore extend those concerns to teachers. Wronowski (2008) conducted grounded theory research of successful teachers of high-needs schools. Participating teachers responded to the question, "What, if anything, would make you leave this school or the teaching profession?" (p. 561). Three themes emerged: "control by 'other' forces, lack of supportive and empathetic school administration, and burnout" (p. 561). In this study, teachers believed that school administrators piled on work with little regard for the implications. Several other teachers from the same study further described administrators who were striving to meet district and state goals using a tactic one participant described as "management through coercion" (Wronowski, 2018, p. 562). The participant said,

They manage by coercion. They want to write you up. There are constant threats. Your job is on the line. We don't value who you are or the job you've done for 18 years. You are easy to get rid of. (Wronowski, 2018, p. 563)

The burden of administrators trying to reach accountability goals often compels the administrator to put similar pressure on teachers and leaves teachers feeling discouraged and frustrated.

Weiss (1999) concluded that school leaders provide a crucial role in encouraging staff. Principals are responsible for setting the expectations for students and staff, enforcing student codes of conduct, and supporting teachers. The absence of these supports from school leaders leads teachers to waiver in their career choices. When teachers receive support from their supervisors, burnout and stress are reduced (Cross &

Billingsley, 1994). Johnson & Birkeland (2003) found from their study of 50 early career Massachusetts teachers that leavers from this sample characterize principals who are “arbitrary, abusive, and neglectful” (p. 594) as decisive factors to drive them from public education. When principals struggle to create collaborative and supportive school communities, teacher experience frustration and lack engagement.

In the 2012–2013 school year, Hughes et al. (2014) specifically looked at hard-to-staff schools and sought to determine if there was a relationship between principal inputs and the retention of teachers. Teachers who expressed intent to return held four areas of support in high regard as to why to stay in their current placement. These areas of support are environmental, instructional, technical, and emotional. Teachers surveyed listed emotional support, environmental support, and instructional support as the top three factors impacting one’s decision to remain in a current placement. Teachers listed technical support as the fourth factor for consideration (Hughes, 2012). Further, these data demonstrate that all aspects of support as critical to determining whether or not teachers will remain in the field.

Cross and Billingsley (2004) were interested in variables on commitment, job satisfaction, and employability. Principal support was in the top three most substantial effects, as indicated by teachers. Stress levels lower when principals provide teachers clear roles and responsibilities. These findings suggest that principal support significantly influences teachers’ perceptions of stress, job satisfaction, and commitment. Principals are critical to determining the organizational conditions in which teachers work. They may improve job satisfaction by working collaboratively and in a supportive manner to clarify roles and reduce stress.

Another study that draws a similar conclusion is Littrell et al. (1994). These researchers concluded that principal support is important to teachers' well-being. Teachers are more satisfied with their work when principals provide emotional support and informational support. Another finding from this study was teachers stating that administrators provide them support with building their professional practices as a form of emotional trust. More trusting relationships are formed when principals provide the type of support that teachers believe is important, and thus teachers demonstrate increased commitment to stay in the field (Littrell et al., 1994). Researchers Allensworth et al. (2009) stated that teacher retention rates are higher in schools where teachers note strong principal leadership, particularly in areas with coherence in instructional programming. Similarly, teachers who viewed the principal as positive were less likely to leave than those who did not (Ladd, 2011).

A study of New York City Public Schools teachers yielded consistent outcomes and confirmed the school leader's role in retention. In 2005, all NYC first-year teachers completed a survey. Four thousand teachers completed a survey with a 70% response rate. Forty percent of teachers surveyed noted dissatisfaction with the administration as an essential factor in leaving the field. Survey findings from Boyd et al. (2009) state:

Less than 10 percent found their principal exceptional in communicating respect or appreciation for teachers, encouraging teachers to change teaching methods if students were not doing well, working with teaching staff to solve school or departmental problems, encouraging staff to use student assessment results in planning curriculum and instruction, or working to develop broad agreement among teaching staff about the school's mission. Additionally, almost 20 percent of former teachers reported that their principals never worked with staff to meet curriculum standards, and 30 percent stated that their principals did not encourage professional collaboration among teachers. (p. 14)

The limits to Boyd et al.'s (2009) study are the potential inaccuracy of the respondent's answers and the respondent's interpretation of the question. For example, one statement reads, "The school administration's behavior toward the staff is supportive and encouraging" (p. 329). Teachers sometimes have different interpretations of what supportive and encouraging means. As such, subsequent studies might investigate what the administration controls that influences a teacher to stay or leave (Boyd et al., 2011b).

The role of school administrators is understandably complicated and nuanced. However, teachers rely on school administrators to provide support, which makes the work of teachers more manageable and helps teachers improve. Multiple studies have related administrative support to teacher retention. These studies demonstrate that teachers' perceptions of administrative support impact one's decision to remain in or depart from teaching. School administrators are also critical to building a sense of community, establishing systems and routines, setting a vision, and providing teachers with the necessary supports and resources to be successful. Improving school administrator knowledge and capacity to meet all teachers' needs will improve teachers' experiences and improve teacher retention.

Another important role of administrators is to foster collaboration. Due to the unique roles some special educators play in schools, often being the only teacher in a building working with students with challenging behaviors, these teachers tend to experience isolation. Administrators can demonstrate support by connecting special educators with instructional and behavioral resources and evidence-based best practices (Cancio et al., 2014).

Dissatisfaction with administrators was a significant theme in Billingsley's case study (2007) cited as a cause for special education teachers to leave (Billingsley, 2007). Hagaman and Casey (2018) found that participants lacked knowledge about special education. Several participants in the study noted that principals redirected teachers to central office staff to gain answers to questions about special education. Teachers felt that not receiving an immediate response from a school administrator impacted the time-sensitive concerns, which leads to a sense of frustration. Lawrenson and McKinnon (1982) presented similar findings in their study of 40 classroom teachers of students identified with emotional disturbances. Teachers perceived that administrators listened to their concerns yet failed to follow through or provide feedback on the requests.

Principals must proactively support special education teachers. They must be cognizant of those educators' responsibilities and unique needs and ensure that basic needs and provisions are met, such as appropriate instructional materials, adequate classroom space, reasonable caseloads, and time for co-planning with general education peers (Thornton et al., 2007). Addressing the realities of special education teachers' role will be necessary for principals to retain these teachers.

The Experience of Beginning Teachers

Early career educators are at risk for increased rates of turnover (Olivarez & Arnold, 2006). The first year of teaching experience, in particular, is critical in the process of teacher socialization, with school context having substantial influence. New teachers function in "survival mode" because they often lack professional confidence. As novice educators, the focus is more on more internal needs, specifically classroom management, and delivering instructional content (Bressman et al., 2018a). New

teachers' intentions and decisions to remain in the field are encompassed by views of their workplace conditions, including how they feel, dedication to one's career, and intentions to stay in the field. In Weiss's (1999) study, first-year teachers' views of their work environment influence commitment to the career field and planned retention. The most important finding was that first-year teachers valued school leadership and culture as well as teacher autonomy and discretion as motivators to staying in teaching from this study.

When surveyed using the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), first-year teachers reported that malicious student behavior discouraged them from doing their best, specifically calling teaching a "waste of time" (Weiss, 1999, p. 866). Additionally, some first-year teachers also deal with other negative student behavior such as tardiness and apathy towards school. In extreme cases, teachers themselves are the victims of physical and verbal abuse by students. Students' family dynamics, such as lack of parental involvement and parent engagement in illegal drugs and alcohol, also impact teachers. When behaviors are egregious, new teachers need administrator intervention or will be less likely to continue teaching as a long-term career (Weiss, 1999).

Further, in elementary schools, teachers are more likely to remain at schools where supportive and trusting relationships are built with parents. Teachers seek parents involved in school activities such as attending parent conferences, volunteering on school grounds, supporting school events, and engaging in fundraising events. Such parental involvement accounts for about four percentage points higher likelihood for teachers to remain in schools with levels of perceived identified trust (Allensworth et al., 2009).

Data supports the epidemic related to special education teacher attrition. Within the first three years of teaching, as many as 40% of new special educators chose to abandon their careers. This figure compares to 25.5% of all public-school teachers (Kaufman & Ring, 2011). Additionally, transferring positions accounted for 13% compared to 7% of general education teachers (Whitaker, 2000). Often the cause of these transitions is a lack of support, especially in schools that serve high-poverty populations.

Billingsley (2004) conducted one of the most extensive studies of novice special educators, including approximately 1,100 teachers. On the survey, teachers noted problems including access to materials, difficulty managing diverse responsibilities, excessive paperwork, not feeling included in the school, and not having principals understand the dynamic nature of special education. Participants noted the most helpful support they received coming from informal networks of colleagues, rather than through formalized mentoring initiatives. Approximately half of the beginning teachers said they planned to stay in teaching.

Finding ways to meet beginning teachers' varied needs is vitally important, yet it is unclear how that should happen. The research has provided strategies such as mentoring and induction, increased opportunities for collaboration, and establishing school-wide systems for teacher development to address beginning teachers' needs. Managing the experiences of teachers new to the field is essential to address teacher churn.

Conclusion

Research related to special education in urban setting is limited. A gap still exists in knowledge around the experiences and factors related to special education teachers

remaining in the field. Lack of supply and increased demand, coupled with teachers' pre-retirement attrition, leaves schools seeking qualified teachers and negatively affects students. Also, retaining quality teachers to work with specific student populations in urban schools is a challenge. Finally, special educators need particular supports to meet their needs and compel them to remain in the field. The literature suggests that there may be tangible ways to address the staggering trends of teacher turnover. The challenge lies in identifying, testing, and formalizing interventions that address and resolve the underlying attrition. Specifically, this study aims to build upon previous research, by utilizing questionnaire data and includes qualitative feedback from public-school teachers from an urban school environment regarding their experiences and determine what levers most impact urban special education teachers' retention.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

In light of conclusions drawn from the literature review, this Problem of Practice focused on understanding the motivational factors and workplace conditions that influenced special education teacher retention. The purpose of this multiple descriptive case study was to provide contextual information to school and district leaders and policymakers regarding the motivational factors and workplace conditions that impact the retention of special education teachers in Washington, DC. The researcher explored the experiences of six current K–12 special education teachers. This study illuminated the realities of special education teachers’ professional experiences and the motivational factors contributing to retention through a multiple descriptive case study. Using a combination of qualitative data collected, the researcher explored the motivational factors and workplace conditions of special education teachers, the impact on job satisfaction, and how these factors influenced job retention. This study is critical because ongoing teacher attrition is crippling urban public schools, and solving this problem will have important implications for students’ quality of education.

The researcher designed this study to hear special education teachers’ descriptions of the motivational factors and workplace conditions contributing to their retention. The research questions that grounded this study were, what are the special education teachers’ motivational factors which lead to prolonged job tenure? The second research question is

how do workplace conditions influence the retention of special education teachers in Washington, DC?

Researcher Perspective

The researcher conducted this study because of her belief that the teacher is the most critical classroom factor in student achievement. Without understanding why teachers remain in the classroom, the problems of attrition will be impossible to address. The researcher's speculations led to developing the problem statement and research questions and influenced how information gathered addresses the solution (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher chose an appropriate framework for the research process by addressing the ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological assumptions. Creswell and Poth (2018) state that ontological issues are related to the "nature and reality and its characteristics" (p. 20). The researcher conducted this study with the intent of describing the multiple realities of participants on the subject matter. With an epistemological assumption, the researcher aimed to build relationships with participants to learn firsthand about their experiences. Since all researchers bring their values with them, the axiological belief addressed the values and biases brought to the study. Finally, the methodology and analysis were inductive, and data were analyzed to develop "detailed knowledge of the topic being studied" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 21). These philosophical assumptions grounded the researcher in how she directed participants to develop meaning intentionally.

The researcher currently serves as the Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning at the state education agency in Washington, DC. Before this role, she served as the managing director of schools at a charter school management organization. Her

professional experience in K–12 school-based and education policy-based roles informed her understanding of the factors that lead to success and job tenure in the classroom. In almost 18 years in urban education, she watched as many teachers left the classroom due to career sustainability, stress, and burnout related to their roles. The researcher hoped this study would shed light on why some teachers remain special education teachers in urban schools despite challenging circumstances.

After spending five years as a public charter school principal and three years as a managing director of schools in which she had oversight of the academic programs of the charter school network and supervisory responsibilities of principals, the researcher observed the impact of teacher turnover on school communities. The turnover of merely one teacher, especially before the end of the school year, deeply impacted students, other teachers, and the school community. In many cases, administrators replaced teachers with long-term substitutes who were not qualified for the role or a novice teacher who joined the school community mid-year. These replacement teachers needed significant support acclimating to the school community and expectations for high-quality teaching and learning. The eventual impact of the initial turnover had considerable recruitment and training costs and, in almost all circumstances, had detrimental effects on student achievement outcomes.

When working in the state education agency, the researcher had oversight of educator quality and effectiveness across the city. In one workstream, a partnership with a non-profit research vendor ensued. Annually, the research vendor administered a workplace and instructional culture survey of about 5,000 select teachers. The research vendor that conducted the survey found that nationally, in places where teachers held a

strong perception of instructional culture, these schools retained higher rates of effective teachers, had fewer beginning-of-year vacancies, and had higher student achievement (OSSE, 2018). While serving as a school principal, the same research partner highlighted the researcher's school as having top quartile instructional culture scores within schools sampled. Learning from both practical and research-based experiences, the researcher sought to understand better teacher experiences and perceptions of what motivated them to remain in the teaching field.

With the state education agency, there was a strategic priority to improve the outcomes of students with disabilities (OSSE, 2019). The researcher saw this complex concern regarding special education as an opportunity to combine her interests in teacher quality and effectiveness with the strategic priority of improving special education student outcomes. As a result, she chose to focus her dissertation in practice on special education teachers' motivational factors and workplace conditions that influence retention. Despite this specific focus, the researcher understood that improving students' outcomes with disabilities was more complicated than just addressing and understanding teachers' experience alone.

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) define qualitative research as an "activity that locates the observer in the world...this means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3). In this study, the researcher served as the main instrument in data collection. Dryden-Peterson (2020) state that the researcher's positionality "shape[s] the ways we design research, build relationships and interact in field sites, and analyze data" (p. 127). The researcher favored the social construction of

reality and sought to understand the real-world constructs from individuals who lived and described the experience. In this instance, she received information from participants in the natural contexts in which they occur using descriptive case study procedures.

Theoretical Framework

This study applied Herzberg's Two-Factor Motivation Theory throughout its design to examine factors related to teacher retention. The researcher utilized Herzberg's distinction between internal factors (motivation) and external factors (hygiene) as a basis for examining teachers' experiences related to job satisfaction and retention. Motivators involve professional growth, whereas hygiene is related to avoiding unpleasantness (Herzberg, 1966). Motivators include responsibility, recognition, promotion, achievement. Hygiene category factors, including supervision, salary, work environment, policies, and relationships. Hygiene factors are extrinsic to the job and include organization policies, salary and compensation, supervision, and work relationships. Within this framework, Herzberg (1959) argues that motivators prompt job satisfaction, and hygiene factors prompt job dissatisfaction. However, satisfaction and job dissatisfaction are not exactly opposites; they are separate constructs. To improve job retention, employers need to increase job satisfaction while simultaneously decreasing job dissatisfaction to improve retention.

Herzberg's framework lends itself to a thorough analysis of the motivational factors that influence job retention. Herzberg maintained that both sets of factors, motivation and hygiene, account for job satisfaction. The first research question for this study investigated what motivational factors special education teachers attributed to

increased retention. By understanding the role and impact of motivators, employers can make suggestions for improving workplace culture.

Herzberg's theoretical framework supported the two-phase data collection process, beginning with eleven special education teachers completing a questionnaire about workplace conditions and motivational factors in the workplace. Using specific motivators and hygiene factors from Herzberg's theory, the researcher was able to glean the frequency in which teachers cited these factors in the workplace and whether these factors lead to job satisfaction or job dissatisfaction. In the second phase of data collection, the researcher engaged participants in semi-structured interviews that promoted engagement on topics related to the impact of motivators and hygiene factors in the workplace and the contribution to job satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

In data analysis, the researcher used a framework analysis to recognize important and emerging themes within the data set. Despite a starting point of the a priori themes, the researcher maintained an open mind and did not force data to fit into pre-established categories of analysis. The researcher placed themes from the data on charts with headings and subheadings drawn from the theoretical framework. To conclude this analysis process, the researcher interpreted the key characteristics of the data displayed in the charts and found associations and possible explanations of how participant responses related to motivational factors of workplace conditions that impact teacher retention.

The two-factor motivation theory framework is appropriate for studying retention because employee job satisfaction is connected to retention. While motivation factors do not affect job dissatisfaction, hygiene factors do not affect job satisfaction. Therefore, an increase in positive work outcomes does not necessarily equate to job satisfaction but

decreases job dissatisfaction. For example, teacher retention policies often focus on extrinsic hygiene factors such as financial incentives in recruiting and retention bonuses or loan forgiveness programs. Yet, these strategies only address the reduction of job dissatisfaction and not an increase in job satisfaction. However, alleviating job dissatisfaction in isolation will not improve teacher retention (Tran & Smith, 2020). Commonly, policymakers believe that if you increase salary, supervision, or improve company policies, that would increase employee job satisfaction. Herzberg argues that job satisfaction does not improve by solely improving hygiene factors; job satisfaction only improves by increasing the motivators (Smerek & Peterson, 2007).

Research Design and Rationale

The research design selected for this study was a multiple descriptive case study. Conducting qualitative research allows for the exploration of a complex problem or issue. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that one prominent feature of qualitative research is its focus on “naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings” (p. 10) as the premise for an understanding of “real life.” Yin (2011) suggests that a significant feature of qualitative research is “studying the meaning of people’s lives, under real-world conditions” (p. 8). The researcher chose this form of inquiry to study a specific group of teachers by hearing their voices from the field. This study aimed to take participants’ stories and compare them to an existing theoretical framework to determine motivational and workplace factors that influence retention.

Specifically, the researcher utilized descriptive case study methodology in which she sought to employed qualitative methods in a naturalistic setting to address a real-world situation experienced by a group of people bound by particular characteristics.

Participants helped define the real-world problem and the essential facts about it and described their perceptions of the problem, their proposed solutions, and the current status of the proposed problems and solutions. More specifically, the researcher viewed participants' stories through the lens of the theoretical framework (Gall et al., 1996).

This research study is considered a multiple case study as it intended to examine and measure the differences between more than one case (Yin, 2003). When describing case study methodology, Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated, "cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time" (p.13). Multiple case study design conditions were met because data yielded, "an in-depth understanding of situations and meaning for those involved" (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 11) across multiple participants. Therefore, the selection of multiple case study design was applicable and appropriate to learn more about the phenomenon of special education teacher retention in the selected jurisdiction.

The philosophical underpinnings of this case study were based on a constructivist paradigm. The researcher chose this paradigm to understand the truth related to one's perspective and gain answers to the research questions and understand the case(s). Through the constructivist paradigm, the researcher connected with participants to understand their actions (Baxter & Jack, 2018). Within this interpretative framework, researchers receive the complexity of views by relying on the participants' perception of the situation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

To understand this real-world problem of teacher retention, the researcher created questions that drove the data collection and analysis plan as part of this qualitative

research. Yin (2014) states that a case study is most appropriate to answer “how” and “why” questions. In this case study, there was a need to understand how and why teachers were motivated to work and remain special education teachers and the workplace conditions that support this motivation within an urban public-school system. Therefore, the researcher conducted a qualitative descriptive case study.

Research shows that schools in Washington, DC experience teacher turnover at higher rates than their counterparts in other urban cities (Levy, 2018). Using a case study design, the researcher highlighted common instances, those that “capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday situation” (Yin, 2011, p. 52) through descriptive stories from participants. In this study, the participant teachers represented the single unit within the phenomenon of teacher retention. The researcher engaged the participants at a single point in time, bounding and limiting the study by a specific time and place (Yin, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Yin (2014), case studies allow the researcher to explore a contemporary phenomenon in a real-world context. The researcher used these cases to explore teacher retention and gain a detailed understanding of this phenomenon from participants’ viewpoints resulting in a multiple descriptive case study.

Site Selection and Participant Sampling

The site of the research was in Washington, DC urban public and public charter schools. Washington DC public schools and public charter schools have a combined enrollment of over 94,000 students (OSSE, 2020). Morettini (2006) defines urban schools as schools where most students belong to a historically marginalized racial or ethnic group and come from low-income backgrounds. Using this definition, urban schools

relate more to the environment's conditions and less associated with the geographic location. Washington, DC is a typical urban school district serving predominantly more students of color than White students. Washington, DC schools serve 71% Black students, 17% Hispanic students, 2% Asian students, and 2% multiracial students (Ed Forward DC, 2020). While there is variation in teacher turnover data ranging from 25% turnover (Levy, 2018) to 30% turnover (OSSE, 2019), both figures demonstrate a high teacher turnover rate in Washington, DC, which is higher than the national average (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). The researcher selected this site due to personal and professional interest in the city and because the site is considered representative of other urban cities.

In this two-phase data collection, a questionnaire (see Appendix A) followed by semi-structured interviews, the researcher employed purposeful sampling. Data collection began with a questionnaire provided to teachers from purposefully sampled school districts in Washington, DC based on professional relationships between the district leadership and the researcher. Using social media advertisements in various online educators' communities, the researcher recruited 11 participants for the preliminary questionnaire. Educators were encouraged to spread the word regarding the survey to other educators who might provide useful insights. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the sampling strategy in which participants identify additional potential interest cases from who they know is considered snowball sampling. In both phases, the researcher sought participants who could inform the research problem. There were some considerations for the use of purposeful sampling in this case study. The first consideration was that the participant must have been currently serving as a K–12

special education teacher in a public or public charter school in Washington, DC. The second consideration was that the teacher must have at least one year of full-time teaching experience. For these reasons, participants were considered a representative sample.

The researcher recruited participants for the second phase of the study from public and public charter schools within the geographic boundaries of Washington, DC. Many of the participants for second phase of data collection were conveniently sampled from the 11 participants who engaged in phase one of data collection. Participants were conveniently sampled to ensure adequate representation of both the traditional public school and charter sectors, participants' years of experience, and gender diversity. Four participants were identified from phase one of data collection and two participants were identified from snowball sampling in which the researcher received direct outreach from the interested participant after initially hearing about the study from a different party.

The literature review in Chapter Two described the need for additional research to address gaps in the literature related to special education teachers' retention patterns in an urban environment. Specifically, Washington, DC, has a two-sector public education system comprised of one traditional public-school district, the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), and several smaller public charters schools. Participants for this study had half of the participants from DCPS and half from public charter schools. Participants in this study shared common characteristics as special education teachers who have served in these roles for more than one year. However, these individuals worked at various school sites and across different grade levels within K–12 schools.

Finally, teachers were representative of both males and females as well as diverse ethnic backgrounds. Table 3.1 provides an overview of the participants in the study.

Table 3.1

Demographic Profile of Participant Sample

Pseudonym	Years Experience	Gender	Grade Band	Classroom Type	Certification Type	Sector
Breonna	15 years	Female	Middle School	Inclusion	Alternative Certification	DCPS
Daunte	4 years	Male	High School	Self-contained	No preparation	Charter
Sandra	20 Years	Female	Elem. School	Inclusion/Resource	No preparation	DCPS
Vanessa	5 years	Female	Elem. School	Self-contained	Traditional Preparation	DCPS
Korryn	9 years	Female	Middle School	Inclusion	Alternative Preparation	Charter
India	10 years	Female	High School	Self-contained	Traditional	Charter

A qualitative research goal is to select the specific instances that will yield the most relevant data for the study topic. The selection should also have the broadest range of perspectives on the subject, known as maximum variation sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In qualitative studies, the researchers carefully select participants to ensure that they provide rich perspectives on their real-life experiences. Yin (2014) cautions researchers not to mislead readers into thinking that the sample is from some larger population of like-cases, meaning that such a sampling procedure is not statistically generalizable. The current study addressed the factors that contribute to teacher retention through individual teacher’s experiences.

Data Collection Procedures

Creswell and Poth (2018) describe data collection as a “series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering good information to answer emerging research questions” (p. 148). In the current study, the researcher collected data from a questionnaire provided to select K–12 special education teachers in Washington, DC, and from semi-structured interviews of a purposeful sample of the same teachers. In case study research, multiple sources of evidence allow the researcher to address broader historical and behavioral issues. Triangulation tests validity through the merging of information from different sources (Yin, 2014).

The researcher designed the questionnaire (See Appendix A) as the first form of data collection. Within the case study, participants who completed the questionnaire served as an embedded unit of a multiple case study. Eleven respondents completed the questionnaire to shed light on school-based experiences related to motivation and workplace conditions. The questionnaire then informed the conceptual model for the interview phase of data collection. Individuals were then purposefully selected based on the assumption that they held knowledge and experiences related to the topic of interest (Yin, 2014).

The second data source was one-on-one semi-structured interviews (See Appendix C) conducted via recorded web-based video conferencing. The researcher then transcribed the recorded interviews. The questions for this interview were short, open-ended, and conversational, which “relie[d] on the participants to offer in-depth responses to questions about how they have constructed or understood their experiences” (Jackson et al., 2007, p. 23). These interviews helped the researcher corroborate findings from the questionnaires offered earlier. The researcher designed the semi-structured interview

protocol to capture the participant's sense of reality. Yin et al. (2011) state that individual interviews may provide significant amounts of information from an individual's perspective. Using a semi-structured interview protocol, the researcher created predetermined but flexible questions that allowed for follow-up questions to probe more deeply. This interview structure enabled participants to describe their experiences and perspectives freely. The shorter personal interviews allowed interviewees to present their sense of reality in an open-ended and conversational manner (Yin, 2014). These interviews allowed interviewees to be in comfortable environments to share their personal experiences with the researcher.

Before conducting research, the researcher followed Baylor University's non-human subjects' protection procedures by completing an IRB proposal and gained approval to begin research on October 20, 2020. The researcher strictly adhered to the protocols established for ethical research. The researcher conducted outreach to prospective individuals by leveraging personal relationships and using email and social media postings. When subjects indicated interest in participating in the study, informed consent forms were sent to potential participants (Appendix B) for participants to review and sign prior to participating. Non-respondents received follow-up emails up to three times. The researcher obtained an interview response rate of 80%, representing a cross-section of teachers from public and public charter schools and varying years of experience and preparation methods.

In qualitative research, the researcher aims to build confidence in the cases as accurate representations of the phenomenon. Creswell and Poth (2018) describe, "validation in qualitative research to be an attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings

as best described by the researchers, the participants, and the readers (or reviewers)” (p. 259). Therefore, validation is a process that is incumbent upon thick description and the researcher's closeness to the field. There are many types of validation in qualitative data, but no one accurate measure exists (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Consequently, researchers should use more than one validation strategy.

Yin (2014) suggests that triangulating data occurs when the study’s findings are supported by more than one piece of evidence “to determine consistency of a finding” (p. 241). The researcher collected multiple sources of data through a questionnaire and interviews that helped provide various viewpoints of the phenomenon. The researcher strengthened analysis by comparing trends across the sources. Over several months, the observer spent time in the field engaging with participants to further support the collection of thick description. By emphasizing the importance of data triangulation, data collected from these multiple sources determined the findings’ consistency to ensure accurate results.

Data Analysis Procedures

The researcher utilized various data collection methods to provide supporting evidence for the research questions. Once these data were collected, the researcher determined the best way to analyze the data. Qualitative data analysis involves synthesizing many forms of data gained in the research process to generate meaningful findings (Hancock & Algozzine (2006). The data analysis procedures consisted of reviewing questionnaire results to support purposive sampling and identifying additional themes to investigate in the semi-structured interviews. The researcher coded data using

Nvivo computer software. The software provided a preliminary analysis that allowed for a more in-depth analysis of any meaningful patterns that emerged.

The researcher's approach to data analysis was shaped by an a priori theoretical framework yielding analytic priorities. For each case study, the purpose was to examine teachers' experiences through motivational factors and workplace conditions that influenced teacher retention. In addition to the theoretical propositions, the researcher also utilized analytic techniques described by Yin (2014) and Miles and Huberman (1994). Figure 3.1 shows the steps of the framework analysis.



Figure 3.1. Framework analysis steps.

The process of data analysis in qualitative research reduced the data into themes and made sense of the data through a process of coding and condensing the codes in a process known as pattern matching. Huberman and Miles (1994) describe the data analysis process as a customized process with interrelated and simultaneous tasks. This analysis process allows researchers to create congruence between the design methods, the problem and purpose statements, the research questions, and the theoretical framework (personal communication, T. Talbert, 11/9/20). The data collection process is often visualized in the data analysis spiral. In data collection, the researcher takes voluminous data and moves through analytic cycles rather than a linear approach to create analytical outcomes.

After moving through the data analysis spiral, the researcher then turns to the analysis process specific to the research methodology. Each methodology has specific characteristics for analysis. Creswell and Poth (2018) describe case study analysis in a few steps beginning with managing and organizing the data, then jotting down emerging ideas in a process called memoing, describing and classifying codes, creating interpretations, and finally representing and visualizing the data. Within case study research, the researcher describes the case and its context through themes or patterns and develops generalizations of what was “learned” from the data.

For this case study, the researcher chose an both an inductive and deductive framework for data analysis. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest that researchers start with an inductive strategy as they seek pieces of information that leads to tentative categories. Through additional data collection, the researcher confirms the earlier identified categories. By the end of the analysis, the researcher can compare to the selected theoretical framework to create the final set of categories.

To support the review of information-rich transcripts, the researcher initially wrote memos, identifying what she noticed and observed in the data. Memoing allows the researcher to reflexively move between the research questions and these data to state some findings and draw conclusions (Finfgeld-Connett, 2014; Yin, 2011). When memoing thick rich descriptive data, authors “disregard predetermined questions so they can *see* what interviewees said” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 188). After reflection, the researcher formed initial categories. Memoing helps track the development of ideas throughout the process and promotes credibility to the data analysis because spontaneous occurrences lead to robust analysis. Finfgeld-Connett (2014) states, “the intended

outcome [of memoing] is synthesis of findings across studies and inferences for policy formation and practice” (p. 345). The evidence from these multiple forms of evidence demonstrated support for category formation.

The researcher utilized Tesch’s Eight Steps in the Coding Process (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) using predetermined codes and fitting data to two codes, motivation and hygiene factors, which drew directly from Herzberg’s Two Factor Theory. The method of analysis was chosen due to the highly homogenous data collected. Through coding, the researcher reviewed questionnaire feedback and interview transcripts to align emergent themes to the theoretical framework. The analysis resulted in no outlier themes.

In qualitative research, the researcher relies on testing trustworthiness through credibility, transferability, and confirmability. The researcher employed member checking to validate data analysis findings by taking back themes to participants to assess whether or not the researcher’s depictions were accurate. Creswell and Poth (2018) state, “validation in qualitative research to be an attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings as best described by the researchers, the participants, and the readers (or reviewers)” (p. 259). Therefore, validation is a process that is incumbent upon thick description and the researcher’s closeness to the field. Quality member checking techniques ensure that participants are engaged in interpreting these data to enhance these results’ trustworthiness.

The researcher explicitly selected data analysis procedures to support the case study methodology. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state that case study data analysis aims to understand the case thoroughly. By culling information gleaned from multiple data sources, the researcher in data analysis seeks to organize the data into more easily

accessible formats by reducing redundancies, editing information, and sorting information topically. The goal of multiple case study data analysis is to explore participants' lived experiences with a focus on understanding varied data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This case study utilized both deductive and inductive analytic approaches.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were essential to the successful completion of this study. The researcher was responsible for conducting the study with sensitivity. The National Research Council (2003) provides guidance for researchers to ensure participants' protection in five key ways. First, the researcher must gain informed consent by providing the study's nature and asking participants to volunteer. Second, the researcher must protect participants from harm and deception. Third, the research must protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants. Fourth, the researcher must take significant precautions to protect vulnerable populations such as the incarcerated or minors. Finally, the researcher should ensure equitable participants' selection to ensure that individuals are not intentionally excluded from research.

All participants engaged voluntarily in this research, and at any time within the research, participants could withdraw from the study without justification, harm, or retribution. Participants were able to withdraw from the study before, during, and after data collection, and the withdrawal would prompt the destruction of any secured and confidential information. Participants completed an informed consent agreement that noted research procedures, the scope of data collection, confidentiality, and process for withdrawal from the study. Participants were aware that the study would not cause any unnecessary harm or undue risk (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

All study participants' identities remained confidential, including any associated data collected within the research study. The informed consent forms provided specific information regarding confidentiality procedures. The researcher protected participants' identity by securing all information via electronic security systems in a location that only the researcher could access. Throughout the study, the collected data was destroyed by the researcher following the protocols outlined in the Baylor University IRB process. As the principal investigator, the researcher was the only one to know the participants' names and other identifying data. This study aimed to describe the perceptions and stories of special education teachers in Washington, DC. The participants received aggregate study results and access to the findings of the publication.

There were no known risks for participants in this study. The researcher serves as an assistant superintendent of teaching and learning at the state education agency in Washington, DC; however, she has no authority or evaluation capacity over any study participants. Potential benefits to engaging are sharing ideas on improving special education teacher retention with policymakers and school administrators.

Limitations and Delimitations

Due to the nature of the case study methodology, this research focused on a small sample of participants from within one urban city in the nation. Therefore, the researcher was limited in her ability to generalize claims about outcomes beyond this multiple case study. Additionally, participants were limited to only public-school teachers who shared their perspectives, experiences, thoughts, and reflection. The information provided may or may not be the same as non-public school teachers in the same area. Also, despite the researcher's significant efforts to build relationships and rapport with the participants, the

researcher understands that participants may not have been candid in their accounts for fear of job security, confidentiality breaches, or performance reviews. Finally, due to personal and professional experience in public education in the target city, the researcher may have biases regarding the expected findings.

The researcher implemented several delimitations for this study to help define the scope and purpose. Participants were limited to current special education teachers in Washington, DC. By having a sample including only current teachers, valuable insight might have been overlooked from individuals no longer employed as special education teachers. A second delimitation was that participants were limited in number, guided by recommendations for qualitative studies. The research instruments included a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Additionally, a delimitation was that participants must have at least one-year full-time teaching experience. This delimitation was necessary to ensure that participants did not conflate concerns of adjusting to the teaching profession as long-term or job satisfaction-related concerns.

Conclusions

As outlined, this qualitative case study employed a multiple descriptive case study design. The research focused on motivational factors and workplace conditions that influenced special education teachers' job satisfaction and retention. The researcher aimed to elucidate public-school teachers' experiences in an urban city in Washington, DC and hear descriptive accounts of the teacher experience. The case study utilized Herzberg's Two-Factor Motivation Theory (1959) as the theoretical framework. The specific problem addressed was low retention rates among special education teachers across public and public charter schools in this mid-Atlantic city. This study's data

derived from a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, which presented some limitations. Findings from this study may help policymakers and school administrators formulate strategies and solutions to improve job conditions and job satisfaction, leading to increased retention of special education teachers.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results and Implications

Introduction

In this study, the researcher used a multiple descriptive case study to better understand the factors that influence job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction for special education teachers working in public-school settings. To accomplish this goal, the researcher disseminated a questionnaire and conducted semi-structured interviews. Two research questions guided these analyses:

1. What are the special education teachers' motivational factors which lead to prolonged job tenure?
2. How do workplace conditions influence the retention of special education teachers in Washington, DC?

This chapter presents findings based on teachers' descriptions of motivation and hygiene factors influencing their job satisfaction and dissatisfaction while serving as K–12 public school special education teachers in Washington, DC. The motivation factor category produced six themes: achievement, recognition, responsibility, the work itself, advancement, and personal growth. The hygiene factors produced five themes: working conditions, co-worker relations, policies and roles, supervisor quality, and base wage and salary. This study concludes that all teachers experience both motivation and hygiene factors in their day-to-day work. However, the impact on job satisfaction or job dissatisfaction of these themes varies from participant to participant.

This chapter begins with a thick, rich description of the research context and a reintroduction of the selected case study participants starting with a brief biographical

sketch of the interviewees. Next, the chapter discusses the participants' realities outlined by case describing their motivation and hygiene factors. Next, the researcher conducted an embedded cross-case analysis to understand the commonality in cases and other opportunities for analysis. Finally, the research summarizes the findings gleaned from data analysis.

Description of Setting and Context

This research took place in public and public charter schools across Washington, DC. Over 90,000 students attend public schools, of which nearly one in five students is a student with a disability (OSSE, 2019). While educational outcomes for students in Washington, DC, have improved from 2007 to 2017, significant gaps for students with disabilities persist. Students with disabilities also tend to experience lower attendance rates than their peers, are disciplined twice as often, and are more likely to repeat the ninth grade (OSSE, 2019). These data are even more troubling when coupled with data regarding teacher attrition in the District of Columbia. An October 2019 report commissioned by the DC State Board of Education found that, on average, 25% of public-school teachers leave their schools annually compared to the national average of 19% in other urban cities (SBOE, 2019). Given these concerning data patterns, it is necessary to understand the factors that impact a special education teacher's decision to remain in DC schools to support and educate the vulnerable population of students with disabilities.

Teacher experience and stability are positively associated with student achievement gains (Rice, 2013). Sutchter et al. (2016) conclude that teacher replacement costs can be as much as \$20,000 per teacher. These costs are exorbitant in systems that

are often hard-pressed for resources such as curriculum, training, and related learning opportunities. These challenges are more problematic in certain regions, states, and districts than others and impact content areas such as special education more frequently. Students in schools with significant staff turnover face severe consequences such as increased use of substitute teachers, canceled classes, missed specialized instruction services, and inexperienced and undertrained teachers.

Description of the Participants

Participants for this study were all employed as K–12 public-school special education teachers in Washington, DC. Convenience sampling yielded 11 participants who completed a questionnaire about perceptions of workplace factors and motivation. Then six purposefully selected participants (see Table 4.1) engaged in virtual one-on-one semi-structured interviews with the researcher. The participant sample was composed of five women and one man. Teachers ranged in years of experience from four to 20 years representing early career, mid-career, and late-career stages. Only one participant held a bachelors' degree in education, and three participants had masters' degrees in education. Two participants held master's degrees, but not in the field of education. Four teachers engaged in teacher preparation programs. Additionally, 50% of participants worked in charter schools, and 50% worked for the District of Columbia Public Schools. The demographic composition of the students in the schools these teachers served was predominantly Black and brown students who represented greater than 78% in schools with student populations ranging from 211 students to 523 students. Table 4.1 below outlines the study's participants.

All participants agreed in writing and verbally to have the virtual interview recorded, and no participants objected to that request. Participants discussed their motivations for becoming a teacher and their teaching experiences to date. Analysis of data occurred using both Nvivo and manual coding methods. The researcher-based interview questions (see Appendix C) on the descriptive framework (Yin, 2013) to understand the occurrences under investigation. Two central topics—motivator and hygiene factors formed the framework.

Table 4.1

Demographic Profile of Participant Sample

Pseudonym	Years Experience	Gender	Grade Band	Classroom Type	Certification Type	Sector
Breonna	15 years	Female	Middle School	Inclusion	Alternative Certification	DCPS
Daunte	4 years	Male	High School	Self-contained	No preparation	Charter
Sandra	20 Years	Female	Elem. School	Inclusion/Resource	No preparation	DCPS
Vanessa	5 years	Female	Elem. School	Self-contained	Traditional Preparation	DCPS
Korryn	9 years	Female	Middle School	Inclusion	Alternative Preparation	Charter
India	10 years	Female	High School	Self-contained	Traditional	Charter

Individual Case Profiles

This section provides an overview and biographical description of each participant. A summary of the participants’ work experiences and path to education provide context for who was engaged in the study. This case studied relied on current K–12 special education teachers working in public or public charter schools in Washington, DC. Teachers engaged required at least one year of teaching experience.

Case #1: Breonna

Breonna has been teaching for 15 years. She spent much of her teaching career at the elementary school level and transitioned to a turnaround middle school within the same district three years ago. Breonna was a clinical exercise science major in college and then decided to pursue a career in teaching. She moved from central Virginia to Washington, DC, to join the DC Urban Fellows Program. Breonna said people always encouraged her to pursue education, but she did not think she had the patience or temperament for the role. It was not until she saw how students and her colleagues responded to her that she recognized that she was successful.

Breonna's early career was in a predominantly White, affluent elementary school in Washington, DC. Three years ago, she decided to switch to a primarily Black, low-income school with many more students deemed at-risk. Breonna's desire to be in an environment that fostered her personal and professional development prompted her transition. Breonna shared that she has many more responsibilities, including serving as the Local Education Agency (LEA) representative and special education chairperson, planning and facilitating professional development for her peers through the district's Learning Together to Achieve More (LEAP) program, and serving as the school's family engagement lead. Her experiences in these ever-expanding roles have provided her with the opportunity to build systems and structures that her colleagues rely on to be successful inside and outside of the classroom.

Case #2: Daunte

In his fourth year of teaching, Daunte was the most novice participant. Daunte grew up in New York City and served as a social worker and case manager for 12 years

before teaching. When he moved to the Washington, DC area, he decided to teach at a non-public special education school that supports students with behavioral and mental health challenges. Daunte credits his training and background as a social worker as providing the necessary skills to help his entry to teach. Daunte said that he has always liked working with children and has done so his entire adult life. He believes his greatest motivation is seeing his students excited and proud of their accomplishments.

Daunte's school is a 9th through 12th-grade school whose mission is to support students who have previously been unsuccessful in school settings. The school serves an almost 100% Black and African American student population with one of the city's highest at-risk student populations. Additionally, the percentage of students with disabilities at this school is twice the city average. Despite this population and the mission of the school, Daunte does not consider this an alternative school. He said, "I don't see it as an alternative school because it runs and functions as a regular high school. We still have a lot of students who go to college or trade school, so I don't view it as an alternative school."

Case #3: Sandra

Sandra was the participant with the most teaching experience—over 20 years as a classroom teacher and administrator. Sandra was a psychology major and education minor in college and desired to be a school psychologist. After completing her masters' degree in psychology in education, she completed a practicum in a hospital setting. She was placed at a long-term hospital for students with behavioral difficulties. She spent much time in the classroom at the hospital and found herself gravitating towards that

setting rather than the clinical psychology setting. She enjoyed interacting with the students and particularly fell in love with students with autism.

Sandra has served in various in-school and out-of-school settings and held roles including manager, therapist, coach, and consultant throughout her career. After the birth of her son, she decided to return to the classroom where she currently serves as an inclusion and resource teacher for third through fifth-grade students. Sandra has been tasked with leading data meetings with the ELA coach and supporting the reteaching plan development. Under previous school leadership, Sandra recalled having increasing leadership responsibilities. She said,

I came in and took over RTI [Response to Intervention] and kid talk, revamped the whole intervention model and was part of the academic leadership team...I love data and assessment, and [leadership] knew that I would push her and the rest of the team to look at the data and interpret the data.

Sandra seemed to experience joy connecting to an interest and skill set that fell outside her specific role as a special education teacher. In this instance, Sandra's skills that may fall outside of her role are being utilized to support others and to allow her opportunities to grow and build her own leadership capacity. Opportunities such as these provide teachers with ripe experiences to grow within the role of teacher without having to exit the teaching for non-classroom-based roles.

Case #4: Vanessa

Vanessa is in her fifth year of teaching after spending two years teaching in Ghana prior. She completed a traditional teacher preparation program in a 4+1 program at a university in rural Virginia. She spent her entire public-school career in DCPS, initially as a general education teacher for first and second grade, and her (then) principal asked her to teach in the independence and learning support (ILS) program supporting students

in 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade with significant intellectual and cognitive disabilities. Vanessa knew she wanted to be a teacher from when she was a child and was her second-grade teacher significantly influenced her.

Vanessa enjoys her job, most specifically her work directly with students. Having taught only at this school, she has created solid relationships with parents and has relationships with teachers in special education and general education programs. She credits these relationships with her ability to collaborate with peers and gain valuable insights from other educators to meet her students' needs. She stated, "I am extremely lucky because I collaborate with the kinder teacher for phonics stuff and other resources... I get things from my friends, and that helps my kids." Vanessa's relationship with her co-workers from the time she was a general education teacher supports her and her students in the present.

Case #5: India

India has taught for ten years across two different school sites, both in Washington, DC, and a surrounding suburb. She started her career as a substitute teacher and then entered a graduate program in education to pursue her teacher certification. India dreamed of going to medical school and becoming a doctor but realized that none of the doctors she interacted with had families, and she knew she wanted to have a family. After watching a CNN special on education for Black males in America, she became interested in education. She decided to leave medical school and become a substitute teacher. She said that she was immediately "hooked" on teaching while serving as a substitute teacher.

Last year, India was asked by her school leaders to start a self-contained program for high school students with significant cognitive impairments. She feels that the program is going well, but she wishes for a more robust articulation of post-secondary programming for her students. She asked, “What’s next?” regarding what happens to students when they complete the high school program and cite a lack of coordination among city agencies to ensure that students have post-secondary plans in place to allow them to thrive.

Case #6: Korryn

Korryn has taught in urban public schools for nine years and previously taught for two years abroad in rural Micronesia. Korryn entered public education through a national alternative certification program that allowed her to earn her master’s degree while training to become a teacher. Korryn credits her alternative certification program with preparing her well to meet deadlines and engage in rigorous feedback cycles. She recalls engagement in daily feedback cycles, which fostered her practice and continuous improvement. Korryn’s graduate program prepared her well to seek research instead of only relying on her ideas. However, Korryn feels that her graduate program, in particular, did not model good teaching practices and instead relied on lectures to convey information to the preservice teachers.

Korryn currently serves as middle school math and science inclusion teacher at a charter school. Most of her students have learning disabilities or other health impairments, and some are dually identified as English learners and students with disabilities. She values the ability to support math, which she loves, and because she

notices that many of her students struggle with math anxiety and feelings of inadequacy in math.

Framework Coding of Phase One Data

The researcher used pre-determined codes from Herzberg's Two Factor Motivation Theory (1959) to generate themes from the 11 completed questionnaires in Phase One of the study. The researcher used a deductive approach using pre-determined codes to these data. These codes were initially used as organization tools which helped the researcher apply the theoretical framework. Initially, this was done by counting the frequency of noted participant responses for each item. Then, the researcher sorted the most frequent responses into categories which aligned with Herzberg's Two Factor Motivation Theory (1959). After this initial analysis, the researcher determined where more evidence could support each theme and areas in which more information was needed and considered how that information could be gleaned from the semi-structured interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The themes from Phase I, the initial questionnaire, include personal growth/advancement, recognition, co-worker relationships, base wage and salary, and achievement as being deeply satisfying and therefore having the greatest likelihood of impacting one's motivation and morale. Participants described company policies and supervisor quality as being the most profoundly concerning and therefore having the greatest chance of affecting personal motivation and dissatisfaction.

The themes from Phase One informed the interview protocol to ensure closer alignment to the selected theoretical framework, Herzberg's Two Factor Motivation Theory. Conclusions from the phase one data collection suggest that special education

teachers in Washington, DC, are grappling with factors related to workplace conditions as described in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Phase One Questionnaire Themes

Response Categories	Participant Responses Frequency
Most Satisfying	School Leader Relationships and Support (5) Personal Growth/Advancement (3) Recognition (2) Co-worker relationships (2) Base Wage and Salary (2) Achievement (2) Company/Organization Policies (3)
Most Concerning	Supervisor Quality (3)

To further discern the motivational factors related to the special education teaching experience in Washington, DC, the researcher conducted six semi-structured interviews with conveniently sampled participants to determine if other teachers reinforced these themes in the one-on-one interviews. The researcher created the interview protocol using these themes as a basis for questioning and the theoretical framework. Participant responses were then coded according to the two themes in the theoretical framework, and the researcher conducted an embedded cross-case analysis.

Findings from Phase Two

The researcher conducted 60-minute semi-structured interviews in February and March 2021 with six Washington, DC special education teachers. All participants answered approximately seven questions with follow-up questions utilized when a further inquiry was required (see interview protocol, Appendix C). Data from the phase two interviews yielded initial codes, motivator factors and hygiene factors. The second phase

of increasing complex analysis established patterns within these data and narrowed them down to the eleven sub-themes of Herzberg's Two Factor Motivational Theory. The researcher created a reference table containing examples from participants that explain each of the major categories. Table 4.3 illustrates the major themes and examples.

Table 4.3

Major Categories and Concepts of Teacher Motivational Factors

Major Categories	Associated Concepts
Achievement	Seeing students grow, the “lightbulb” moment for students, improvement in student reading levels
Recognition	Being selected to attend a conference, being sought out by peers, being asked to support or lead an initiative, professional respect
The Work Itself	“I love the kids”, always finding ways to mentor or support students, making a difference
Responsibility	Ideas accepted by leadership and autonomy to execute on one’s own
Advancement	Joining the school leadership team, getting support from the administrator with graduate school assignments related to administration and supervision
Growth	Seeing personal improvement in one’s practice, increasing workplace responsibilities
Company policies	Evaluation systems, grading policies, discipline policy
Supervision	Observation and supervision practices, school vision setting, school culture setting
Co-worker relationships	Co-teaching, sharing of expertise, peer observations, trust among colleagues
Working conditions	COVID-19 policies, schedules, physical space, professional development opportunities
Compensation and Pay	Salary, salary scale, bonus structure, budget cuts

Case #1: Breonna

Breonna is a mid-career teacher with 15 years of teaching experience, who finds that recognition and advancement and the work itself are the factors that provide the most job satisfaction. Three years ago, Breonna decided to leave her position at a high-

performing elementary school to take a role at a turnaround middle school. Breonna stated, “I wanted to be in an environment that fostered my development. In my career in an elementary school. I didn’t feel like there was room for growth.” She was excited by the opportunity to support the leadership team in this turnaround school by taking a SPED math role, which has expanded to her now being both the school’s LEA representative and having inclusion teaching responsibilities. For Breonna, this transition with increasing obligations under her leadership has proven to be a solid motivating factor that has led to job satisfaction.

However, Breonna noted that not all staff are interested in working in a turnaround school, as evidenced by recent attrition. For the past two years, more than 15 teachers have voluntarily left the school. Breonna shared that the school leadership is trying to create a more stable climate and culture. Previously, teachers expressed feeling underappreciated, and they did not experience a lot of success. As a result, teachers created mindsets that they could not do anything right and experienced defeat at work. Breonna described, “teachers just showed up vacantly as the biggest priority for them was their safety...and not student success...this led to [a culture in which] everyone was fending for themselves.” Breonna said that due to school leaders and newer teachers on board, the safety and security in the school are improving, thus slowly improving the school climate. When teachers experience this time of fear and insecurity in the workplace, it leads to job dissatisfaction because the workplace environment is too challenging for them.

Breonna is a member of the academic leadership team. Breonna's principal has allowed her to wear many hats in the school, including planning and leading professional

development, serving as the family engagement chair, and the special education chairperson. Breonna has supported both math and reading intervention for students. By allowing Breonna these opportunities, the school leadership has shown that she is trusted and valued. They are grooming Breonna for increasing school leadership responsibilities as Breonna hopes to become a school leader in the next few years. This recognition, as well as opportunities for advancement, serve as strong motivators for Breonna.

The work itself is also a significant motivator for Breonna. Breonna was always encouraged to be a teacher but shirked that notion until she changed career paths from clinical exercise science after college to education through an alternative certification program. Now, Breonna finds excitement and motivation directly from her students when “the lightbulb goes off.” She recently recalled a text from a student that indicated that the student “finally got it,” which energized Breonna and reassured her of her career path. Since Breonna's work now includes working with adults and students, she also has similar lightbulb moments with adults as she supports them through the school’s LEAP professional development framework.

However, given the vast needs of the school, she works in, the workplace conditions often have a considerable negative effect on teachers. Breonna notes that the students she serves have substantial social-emotional needs. According to Breonna, “they’ve experience[d] high levels of trauma—either first hand or secondarily.” Students’ experiences impact how they show up for school and dictate what students find value in, as the school may not always be the highest priority. Breonna says that teachers must know and understand Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs to meet student needs. The students at Breonna's school demonstrate a range of behaviors such as quick triggers when

entering a classroom or taking time to adjust to the structures at school, and students often test the limits set by adults in the school community. Students can be defiant and usually require much attention from adults because they often struggle to make and maintain friendships with peers. Breonna says that teachers often misunderstand the students' behavior. She gave an example, "They [students] show up to school as if they are adults and say they don't have to do this...why do I have to do this?" For teachers, this appears to be disrespectful, but for many of Breonna's students, they are accustomed to being responsible for themselves, so they "feel empowered to show up as adults." When teachers have difficulty understanding students' motivations and the origins of their behavior, building teacher-to-student relationships becomes challenging and often appears to be the power of wills in the classroom. When teachers experience strained relationships with students, this leads to job dissatisfaction.

The challenge of student engagement and relationship building extends to the virtual learning environment due to the COVID-19 health pandemic. When asked what aspects of teaching cause high-stress levels for you, Breonna responded that the biggest issue is virtual learning...[and] technology, point blank period. The platforms that should be operating in a way are not operating the way they are intended. It is really challenging...In the moment when you want to coach a kid in the moment, there's a lot you have to do to set that up. Share your screen, open the Whiteboard, and that is something really difficult for a lot of kids to sit through and grasp...without opportunities for support.

While the issues with access to technology and virtual learning will not exist forever as schools resume complete in-person learning in the Fall of 2021, the essence of

teachers' frustration was well captured in Breonna's interview. The ability of Breonna's administrators to identify Breonna's strengths and areas of interest has led to increased job satisfaction for Breonna. At the same time, workplace conditions related to virtual learning continue to be challenging and cause dissatisfaction for her.

Case #2: Daunte

In his fourth year of teaching, he was the most novice teacher interviewed. Daunte started his professional career as a case manager for social services in New York. After relocating to the Washington, DC area, Daunte began working at a non-public high school for students with disabilities who have behavioral and mental health challenges. Daunte is motivated by the work itself and credits his satisfaction in the workplace due mainly to his relationships with his co-workers and his students. Conversely, Daunte says the most significant source of stress for him comes from the demands of his large caseload and unrealistic expectations for student growth. According to Herzberg (1959), workload is a workplace condition that often leads to job dissatisfaction.

Daunte is a self-contained special education teacher at a charter high school for students who have not experienced success in traditional school settings. Students remain with him for all classes except for art, music, and gym. However, his classes vary as some students with disabilities attend classes with general education students, and some general education students attend his class when they require increased intervention and support. When asked, "how many students are on your caseload?" Daunte chuckled and responded, "Oh my goodness! I probably have at least 1,000." After more profound reflection, Daunte seemed to count in his head and confirm, "no, really, I have about 20–

23 [students].” Daunte expressed that challenges with such large class sizes and caseload (workplace factors) require him to do a lot of differentiating to meet his student needs.

Daunte expressed frustration with some policies related to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of the interview, Daunte’s school had resumed in-person operations for some students. His schedule required him come into the school building two days a week to teach students in-person and online through virtual instruction. Daunte felt that his administration could have asked teachers which students should engage in in-person or virtual learning. Daunte also wanted greater clarity regarding COVID-19 health precautions. He said, “so far, our school was shut down four times because people tested positive, but we never find out who the individuals are, and the school waited to notify us until two or three days later.” Daunte felt that this delayed, and vague communication potentially put him at risk of spreading COVID to his family members if he had been in close contact. Daunte suggested, “teachers should be engaged with policies like that...it shouldn’t just be your supervisor or the higher-ups making those decisions...teacher feedback could go a long way.” Daunte hoped that as health guidance related to COVID-19 becomes more apparent, his school leaders will solicit teacher input and suggestions for increased communication and transparency. Daunte believed that the school’s policies and communication for COVID-19 cases were lacking, and therefore this was a factor related to his job dissatisfaction.

Despite a desire for an increased role for teachers in decision-making, Daunte spoke highly of his school administrators. Daunte believes firmly that a principal’s behavior influences teacher retention. He said,

Well, my principal is dope! So even if I had a thought of leaving and he asked me to stay, I am probably gonna stay... He’s a great principal and a great man. He’s

really about his staff and how we can serve these kids...pretty much anything we ask for, he tries to get, and if he can't get it, he tries to explain it as best as he can.

Daunte continued to describe the specific traits that his principal embodies, which makes his leadership strong and has led to solid teacher retention. He said, "he works with the staff, works with students, and never asks anything to do anything he wouldn't do. He doesn't talk down to staff, and he often does things outside of his job description."

Daunte connects his principal's ability to build relationships with students and teachers and his ability to go above and beyond the call of duty as admirable traits that allow staff to follow him. This solid, positive relationship with his principal leads to great job satisfaction for Daunte.

Daunte also credits his co-workers with being extremely vital to his job satisfaction. He described the Victory Academy (pseudonym) staff as a family unit. One specific example of supporting each other that Daunte referenced is the school's process of designating accountability partners. Daunte was paired with a more veteran teacher who often comes in to check in on him, and if Daunte is struggling with anything in his teaching practice, he always has someone for support. Additionally, at Victory Academy, there is an expectation of peer observations with reflection. The process of matching accountability partners is adjusted each quarter to observe different teaching models to improve teacher practice. This form of embedded teacher support and model for development allows teachers to form and build relationships with each other. These solid structures for teacher development and relationship building also promote job satisfaction.

In addition to solid leaders and collaborative co-workers, Daunte notes that he is most motivated by his students. Daunte believes that regardless of a student's ability, they should be prepared for the future and have limitless options. He said,

...At the end of the day...once they [students] get out into the real world, no one will care or understand their [disability]...We need to give them the tools to be successful so they can get a job or finish higher education and so they have the tools to push through. They'll be running the world...

Daunte's embodiment of a growth mindset and limitless options for students is his primary motivation source in the workplace.

Case #3: Sandra

The most veteran educator interviewed, Sandra spoke confidently about her role and her impact as an educator. Sandra has been a teacher, therapist, manager, instructional coach, and consultant. After a job in which Sandra says she was "climbing the career ladder," she chose to return to teaching after the birth of her son. She found the school setting to be best for her growing family and her need for flexibility. Sandra decided to choose between advancing her career and choosing her motivating factor, the work itself, which has led to her job satisfaction.

Sandra's vast work experiences allow her to be a credible and respected member of her school team. Sandra recounted numerous examples of how under previous leadership, she supported school initiatives. According to Herzberg et al. (1959), she was recognized for her skill set and provided opportunities for her growth. When asked whether she feels she is part of a professional learning community at her school, Sandra replied,

With the previous principal, I was very much involved. She would pull me into different meetings. She knew I liked and had a knack for data, and I participated in data meetings with the ELA coach and helped come up with reteaching plans.

For Sandra, this acknowledgment of her skills and engagement in work outside of her job responsibilities as a form of recognition, which motivated her.

Sandra also credited her previous principal as having a significant influence on teacher retention at the school. She described her previous principal as a relationship builder who encouraged teachers to support one another. Conversely, Sandra seems unsure of her new principal, who began this year. She described feeling disconnected but could not identify if that was purely because the school was operating remotely. She said, “usually, I am very much a part of the learning community, now I don't know.” The uncertainty for educators during the COVID-19 pandemic is often exacerbated when school leaders have little guidance and coordination. For teachers like Sandra, the lack of relationships among teachers is a hygiene factor that leads to dissatisfaction.

In addition to pressure from uncertainty, Sandra feels a tremendous obligation to meet her responsibilities and meet the needs of all students. The hygiene factor of workload causes stress for Sandra and is a dissatisfier. When asked about the role of a special education teacher, Sandra responded,

It's a lot of work! I think they [school leaders and policy makers] think about us at the bottom. We cover a class, but they don't think about how that impacts my schedule and my caseload...I wish they knew how difficult, important, and intense the job is and the workload. It's not just about teaching...you have to write IEPs, progress reports, eligibilities.

Sandra feels that policymakers and school leaders do not understand these competing priorities related to workload. The result of this lack of understanding, according to Sandra, is teachers constantly having to adjust to meet the needs of students and sometimes not being able to meet the students' IEP hours, which has legal ramifications.

Sandra highlights the conflict between organizational policies and work conditions, which are both considered hygiene factors.

Throughout her time in education, Sandra has seen the impact of teacher attrition. When asked about the impact of this attrition, Sandra said, “For me, it depends on who the teachers were, how many teachers, and the experience of the teachers because that influences the [school] culture.” She described that when more veteran teachers leave, they are often replaced by newer, more inexperienced teachers who need additional support. The impact on the school culture is that the administration spends more time with the inexperienced teacher, and other need to support the new staff member, which detracts from their students. Sandra explained that “rallying around the new teacher takes resources away from others.” Sadly, Sandra foresees increased attrition at her school due to new school leadership. She is unsure how that will impact her school community and comfort. The leadership turnover and limited opportunity to build relationships with the new principal have increased Sandra's dissatisfaction.

Case #4: Vanessa

Vanessa was the only teacher who completed a traditional teaching program as an undergraduate student. After briefly teaching abroad in Ghana, Vanessa transitioned to her current school and has spent her entire urban school’s career at the same school. Initially, Vanessa was a general education teacher, but her principal asked her to shift to the Independence and Learning Support (ILS) program as a self-contained teacher of third through fifth-grade students with intellectual disabilities.

Vanessa often spoke about her experiences as a general education teacher that supported her preparation to be a special education teacher. However, she has found the

virtual school setting to be challenging. Vanessa finds a disconnect in addressing student goals when they are unable to be in person. For example, one of her students has a toileting goal, which cannot be tracked and supported while learning from home. Some other students have significant communication disorders, which are hard to address in the virtual setting. Vanessa grapples with meeting the vast needs of her students, which is related to workplace conditions, a hygiene factor. She provided an example, “I would love to know more about how to teach a student with limited verbal communication. I got a communication device [for a student], but I have to learn about it and then teach it to her first...I don’t feel as prepared for students with severe communication disorders.”

Vanessa also mentioned a student with anxiety who has yet to figure out how to adequately support the classroom. Vanessa attributes her lack of skills to being a teacher of a self-contained classroom. She said, “self-contained classrooms are forgotten about a little bit. Finding support in the school is tricky. I went to the social worker for help, and she said she didn't know what to do.” Despite reaching out to more skilled professionals in her school, Vanessa never received the strategies needed to meet her students’ needs.

Vanessa expressed almost being at her breaking point last year when she could not get school administrators to support her with a student with significant behavioral concerns. The lack of support from her supervisors, identified as a hygiene factor, resulted in job dissatisfaction. Vanessa stated that the student’s program was shifted from a behavior support classroom to her classroom for students with significant cognitive impairments. According to Vanessa, the student was diagnosed with ADHD, but her challenges were more substantial. In one instance, the student absconded and was roaming the building, putting himself in danger. She followed the protocol for a student

in crisis, but she said no administrators supported her. At one point, the student walked by administrators while absconding, and no one intervened. Vanessa described frustration with the student's program shifting and not providing enough ongoing behavioral support to be effective. Combined with the fact that the administrators did little to support her with these students, Vanessa said she experienced high stress levels in helping this student.

Another stressful topic that Vanessa spoke about frequently is the teacher evaluation system in DCPS, called IMPACT. Evaluation systems are considered part of organizational policies, which are hygiene factors in Herzberg's framework. Vanessa believes that IMPACT would drive her to leave teaching in DC Public Schools due to the anxiety that it causes her. She said, "I'm confident in my teaching, but it [IMPACT] causes me great stress... It's not healthy." Despite being rated effective or higher since working in DCPS and receiving a salary bonus for her performance, Vanessa expressed that IMPACT makes her feel inappropriately judged and regards the level of preparation to be successful under IMPACT to be unsustainable. She concluded, "I'm single and I don't have kids...I don't know how long I can stay in DC with IMPACT the way it is..." Vanessa remarked that she is an effective teacher because she has the time and bandwidth to work hard and devote significant hours outside of work. However, as she plans to have a family one day, she is not sure that she will continue to dedicate the time necessary to succeed.

Vanessa did provide insights into the positive supports that she has experienced while at her school. Vanessa's former supervisor invested in Vanessa's growth as a teacher. Vanessa said,

Two years ago, my assistant principal was the most wonderful woman. She was my LEAP coach. Every two weeks she would observe my class. She'd stay for 20 minutes and then we'd debrief for 10. She would give me suggestions, and the next time she would come in she would see it, and we'd keep tweaking things. If the process was like that instead of punitive...it would be a better way.

Vanessa connected this positive coaching and development experience to what she hopes would be the outcome of the IMPACT evaluation process. Vanessa believes that IMPACT is fueled by politics as a discrete number of teachers consistently score highly effective each year and are therefore eligible for bonuses. She also feels that principals struggle with justifying teachers' ratings. Vanessa hopes DCPS will re-think the IMPACT evaluation system. If that is not possible, she desires a less high-stakes format that would support teacher development rather than bonuses or the firing of teachers. Without significant changes to this evaluation system, Vanessa believes that continual job dissatisfaction will ensue.

On the other hand, Vanessa credits her co-workers as valuable partners in her work. She discussed receiving support and resources from her general education colleagues and highlighted the importance of paraprofessionals in the general education classroom. Vanessa advocated for making sure that paraprofessionals receive adequate training and earn a livable wage. She said, "paraprofessionals' salaries are criminal in my opinion." Vanessa mentioned the vast roles that paraprofessionals play, from supporting toileting to helping keep students safe. She believes that the relationship between teachers and paraprofessionals is "a marriage," and she hopes that paraprofessionals get the credit and salary they deserve for their very demanding roles. Vanessa cares deeply about her paraprofessional colleagues and wants the best for them. Her regard and relationships with these colleagues are considered motivators for Vanessa.

Case #5: India

India, a high school educator, shared multiple layers of how adult relationships influence job satisfaction to dissatisfaction. When asked what causes stress for her, she immediately responded, “dealing with the adults.” India believes that the students are the constant in schools, but adults can dramatically shift the culture positively or negatively. As a teacher, India said she has experienced leaders who believe they must be mean to influence control in their schools. She said, “I remember seeing a social media post saying you don't have to be a mean girl to be a boss. I’ve met a lot of women [leaders] who couldn’t be kind...and it impacted the school a lot.” India stated that she is unsure if these leaders’ actions were intentional or unintentional but identified that school administrators, in particular, need better personal leadership skills to lead schools, particularly challenging schools with high-needs populations. India believes that some of the supervisors’ challenges that lead to job dissatisfaction are caused by a lack of relationships and leadership skills.

India also spoke at length about the mindsets of general education teachers. She described situations in which more veteran teachers often feel they are not responsible for providing accommodations and modifications for students and are inflexible to learning new ways of meeting needs. She said, “if you have a peer who has been teaching for 20 years, that can be stressful...especially when they are unwilling to learn how to teach [students with disabilities]; they are doing something wrong but don't want to be told that.” India presented the conflict between general educators and special educators as us versus them in which many general education teachers believe that meeting the needs of students with disabilities is the role only of the special education teacher rather than a collaborative role in which each teacher equally supports the needs of these students.

When co-workers do not believe that all students can achieve, that promotes poor relationships among teachers and leads to low job dissatisfaction.

India also finds that training and development opportunities for special education teachers are limited, which leads to job dissatisfaction. She said, “there’s not a lot of preparation...I sought out a lot of professional development and had to...prepare myself.” She believes that she was underprepared to teach this group of students (high schoolers on a certificate of completion track), so she has learned a lot through experiences rather than formal training opportunities. India has also relied heavily on her colleagues to support her knowledge building. She said, “I have two amazing school psychologists. One just finished her ABA [applied behavior analysis], and we work closely together, and she is a godsend...The other brings so much experience to our program.” India’s commentary demonstrates the impact of both staff mindset and collegiality and the impact that both can make in supporting or negatively promoting one's job satisfaction.

India also spoke at length about the challenges she has experienced creating a new special education program at her campus. While she feels that her school is resource-rich and has provided any materials resources she asked for, she yearns for additional teachers to support her classroom. India teaches all subjects to 10 multi-grade high school students who are on a track for a certificate of completion rather than a high school diploma. She has a teaching assistant and two dedicated aides to support her, but India believes that another full-time teacher is needed to support the students’ needs. One instance where India feels additional support is required is on life skills development and independent living. India firmly believes that her students can be successful post-graduation.

However, coordinating internships and the experiences students need to understand the post-secondary options requires significant coordination within and outside the school. India thinks a full-time teacher to support these efforts would be a valuable resource for her and her students.

India is also concerned with the academic expectations for students in her program. To complete the program, they must have four years of reading, math, and science. India feels that for students with cognitive impairments, this expectation is too great. The students need additional time to focus on building independent or semi-independent living skills. India is concerned with the state graduation policy that puts academic development above meeting students' specific needs. This statewide policy, a hygiene factor, cause India job dissatisfaction.

While India's school leaders can do little to address state policies, she feels that administrators play a significant role in the engagement and satisfaction of teachers. India highlighted that she was previously recognized for her work as a science teacher (before becoming a special education teacher); however, recognition and growth opportunities are more limited now. Recently, India was asked to lead professional development for her peers, but she has good relationships with many of her peers. India believes that there should be systems in place to recognize teachers in their buildings. When asked why she thinks opportunities are limited, India stated that she does not think her principal cares for her and thus limits the options available. The perceived tenuous relationship between India and her principal leads to job dissatisfaction.

Case #6: Korryn

Korryn is one of four teachers in the study who engaged in an alternative certification program to become a teacher. Korryn credits her training program with her ability to meet deadlines and engage in rigorous feedback cycles with daily observations and practice sessions. After teaching for nine years, Korryn finally feels comfortable in her role and thinks she has found a good match at her school personally and professionally. In her current circumstance, the motivators outweigh the hygiene factors.

As a middle school inclusion teacher, Korryn supports seventh and eighth-grade math, which she enjoys because she loves math and appreciates the opportunity to help students overcome math anxiety. She also realizes her role as a teacher at a critical point in development for young people as many experience typical “middle school drama.” As a teacher, Korryn feels responsible for supporting students with their emotional responses and emotional regulation as a big part of her work.

Korryn also recognizes that her work is multi-faceted as many of her students are dually identified as English learners (EL) and students with disabilities. She feels that these classifications make meeting the needs of her students challenging. Korryn feels confident in meeting math IEP goals but feels less equipped to meet literacy goals. In some instances, she receives support from the EL teacher, but that is often insufficient to address student needs. The magnitude of this work creates an internal conflict for Korryn as she still

feels like there is a gaping hole at this moment. As their case manager, it seems like a big thing is not getting met, and in terms of balance between inclusion and pull out...I don't feel like I handle this well.

Despite having a caseload of only ten students, Korryn admits to struggling with the workload and demands of meeting students with diverse needs across two grade levels. This workload concern is considered a hygiene factor and may lead to job dissatisfaction.

However, Korryn identified positive co-worker relationships as a motivation factor to support her students. She said, “my co-teacher and resident teacher and I do a lot of processing how things are going. I read about this... let’s talk about this.” These informal and formal opportunities allow these teachers to effectively co-plan and engage in cycles of continuous improvement, which impact their development and the development of students. Korryn feels so strongly about her relationships with her co-teachers that she said if her co-teacher left the school, she, too, would consider leaving the school. She said, “it’s tough to always start over and thinking with a new co-teacher.” She noted that the turnover of teachers leads to difficulties with staff rapport and makes it challenging to meet the needs of students.

In addition to collaborative working relationships, Korryn also wants co-workers who are similarly invested in the school's core values and modeling them daily. In particular, she highlighted the need for educators who believe in students’ potential and supporting students regardless of a student’s ability. Korryn stated that she previously heard adults in the building speaking ill of students, leading to a lack of trust among adults. She asked, “are we all in this together?... Adults need to shape that [the culture], and if it’s off-balance, I would leave.” For Korryn, the need for like-minded adults is critical to her sense of belonging and satisfaction.

Korryn credits stability in teaching to supervisors who invest in staff by providing rich, timely feedback after observations. Korryn said in response to her description of

relevant observation and feedback cycles, “for me, it’s what a supervisor gives attention to that shows what they value.” Therefore, if supervisors prioritize teacher development rather than other more mundane compliance tasks, it shows investment in their development and a supportive relationship. When supervisors support teachers’ growth and development, that leads to job satisfaction.

The within-case analysis explored each single case as a stand-alone entity and helped the researcher understand the phenomenon under study. Through the participants’ stories, the researcher was able to further define the real-world problem under investigation and essential facts about individual teachers’ experiences. In order to understand this phenomenon across the multiple cases, the researcher then completed a cross-case analysis.

Cross Case Analysis

In addition to finding themes within each participant’s interview, the researcher noted recurrent themes across the participants’ responses utilizing a cross-case analysis to examine themes, similarities and differences across all cases. In all interviews, the most recurrent theme was that of relationships. All six participants identified that relationships among co-workers and administrators have impacted their perspectives of the workplace. Not surprisingly, when teachers remembered positive relationships built on trust, they seemed to experience greater satisfaction. Korryn shared, “my relationship with my co-workers is really important to my success.” Daunte described his co-workers as “the village that supports students...we all come together to make sure they come to school and transition out.” Sandra remarked on the positive culture of her school under her former principal. She said, “We met a lot as a team...we would look at the data and

interpret the data, and it helped a lot.” Positive relationships were described as transparent, open, and welcoming.

Conversely, when relationships were negative, and there was a lack of trust, teachers seemed to experience greater dissatisfaction. Korryn expressed having to take on additional responsibilities this year. She said, “This year, I have an extra responsibility. Whoa, that’s not fun. In other ways, there are other people who I want them to step up and be a good team player.” When staff does not feel that their peers are collaborative or share work responsibilities, that creates tension and will likely lead to negative relationships, which cause dissatisfaction.

All teachers noted that workload and unfair expectations of special education teachers as stifling their success. Overwhelmingly, teachers emphasized the tension between compliance and paperwork and teaching responsibilities as a significant stress factor. Participants described spending numerous hours beyond the workday completing tasks related to compliance and getting little in return. Sandra said, “I wish they [school leaders] knew how difficult and important and intense the job and the workload is. It’s not just about teaching. The caseload and the legalities around the paperwork....” Vanessa expressed similar frustration related to workload. She said, “It’s really like having two jobs—paperwork is one job, and teaching is the second.” The tension between teaching responsibilities and other responsibilities is compounded for special education teachers when they do not have administrators knowledgeable about special education. Therefore, all the responsibilities lie on the teachers alone. Teachers desire a more uniform to assign workloads way to ensure that they are given the time and resources necessary to meet these responsibilities.

Research supports these findings related to overwhelming workloads. Hughes (2012) stated that excessive workloads are a contributing factor to teacher attrition. He concluded that teachers who had little concern with salary and workload were almost twice as likely to remain in teaching compared to those concerned with those factors. The concern of excessive workload demands seem particularly pressing for special education teachers. Various studies have concluded that special education teachers feel they are the victims of unreasonable demands placed on them, which contribute to their desire to leave the field of special education (Bettini et al., 2017; Lawrenson & McKinnon, 1982; Nance & Calabrese, 2009; Stephens & Fish, 2010). To address teacher retention, administrators will need to adopt better practices assigning tasks and responsibilities to special education teachers.

Consistently, all teachers identified their motivation to be intrinsic and for the benefit of their students. Each participant provided examples of being satisfied by students having “lightbulb moments” when something that was challenging for a student finally clicked or specifically choosing to support students with disabilities or students in urban schools because they are keenly aware of the outcomes for such students absent high-quality educational programming. Despite the population that Daunte’s school serves, he highlighted, “we get a lot of students to go to college or a trade school...we stay close to our graduates and help them out.” Teachers described the historical inequities for Black and brown students and the desire to shift outcomes for these students. Sandra shared that she had one reasonably reserved student who recently transitioned back to the classroom from virtual learning. She said, “she doesn't talk to other teachers but me. It took me a while to build that relationship with her... it’s huge.”

Most teachers desire to do more for these students because the students deserve better. Crystal became excited talking about a recent text message received from a student. She said, “It’s the moment when someone gets it...when they are like that makes so much sense, or I wish I knew now what I knew back then...I get it now... It’s easy now. Yes! Yes!” Breonna’s excitement embodied the true motivation for her longevity as a teacher—seeing students persevere and be successful. The findings of Perrachione et al. (2008) were consistent as they concluded that the top reasons for teacher satisfaction were intrinsic factors, notably working with students, personal efficacy, and job satisfaction.

Making a difference in the lives of students was essential to teachers in this study. Charlton and Kristonis (2009) suggest that personal satisfaction results from being a part of a student's growth and progress, affecting retention. Teachers need to see that they are making a difference in students’ lives as this supports their job satisfaction. Cochran-Smith (2006) shares the sentiments of Sonia Nieto, esteemed Professor Emerita from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Nieto finds that good teachers will stay teaching with the most marginalized students despite the most challenging circumstances if they lead with heart. Cochran-Smith (2006) states,

...a central theme in her book is that part of why good urban teachers stay is that they love, believe in, and respect the students they work with and that they can dream of or imagine possibilities from them other than the dire circumstances in which many of them live. (p. 11)

When teachers can focus on their students, they can find great job satisfaction even when challenged by extrinsic factors.

All teachers presented as genuinely interested in improving their practice, but few described consistent structures within the schools that allow them to receive actionable

feedback for improvement and development. Some teachers described observation and feedback cycles, some described opportunities to work with peers in professional learning cycles, and a few mentioned systematic professional development designed specifically for special education teachers. In most cases, these teachers described having professional learning experiences that are not fully developed or targeted to meet their specific needs. Vanessa said, “There was nothing formal last year [related to professional learning]. They forgot to put me in LEAP [the district's professional learning system]. Now LEAP doesn't pertain to my class at all.” Three teachers described administrators asking them to provide professional development for their peers, leading to optimism about recognizing their work and skillsets. India said,

I've been recognized for my work as a teacher [more] outside of my network than inside... Within the network, the SPED team will ask me to do PD on a particular topic or ask for my support on something because I have good relationships and am detailed oriented.

Overall, teachers experienced inconsistent opportunities for professional learning.

Without solid systems to grow knowledge and maintain skills, special education teachers are at a significant developmental disadvantage compared to their general education peers.

Implications

The experiences of special education teachers from their authentic voices provide school leaders and policymakers with significant opportunities for improvement in the field. This section outlines the implications for data-informed solutions, policy proposals, and organizational changes, highlighting the findings from Chapter Four. Through a qualitative study, the sample size is inherently limited yet significant. These six

participants underscored a sample of special education teachers in Washington, DC from both sectors—public and public charter schools and spanning K–12 education.

This research reveals big takeaways related to the intrinsic and extrinsic reasons special education teachers remain in their roles. Some reasons that cause teacher satisfaction are motivated by the relationships with students, the feeling of satisfaction when students achieve and being recognized for their work, and thus being able to take on increasing responsibilities. Causes of teacher dissatisfaction are lack of administrative support, overwhelming workload, and organizational policies inconsistent with one's own belief or values systems. By addressing job dissatisfaction factors, teachers would be more likely to remain in their roles and lead to increased job longevity.

There are four proposed solutions based on these findings. First, there should be specific and planned mentoring and induction programs for new and beginning teachers. Secondly, school leaders should have training and ongoing professional learning for on personal leadership. Thirdly, special education teachers require routine ongoing professional learning within a professional learning community of their own. Finally, school leaders must increase attention to the workload and expectations of special education compared to that of general education teachers.

Mentoring and induction programs provide significant opportunities for new and beginning teachers (Bressman et al., 2018b; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Wynn et al., 2007). The goal of these programs is to support beginning teachers' performance and retention. The format of these programs varies but often includes orientation, collaborative planning, opportunities to meet with school leaders, and targeted mentoring from a more veteran teacher. The goal is to provide new and

beginning teachers with a supportive peer within a structured program that includes frequent meetings and release time from typical teaching loads to engage in mentoring activities.

For mentoring to be effective, it must be a mandated program and be a program that emphasizes the relationships of mentoring and the foundational aspects of best practices in teaching, such as observations and feedback. Whitaker (2000) suggests that effective mentoring programs for special education teachers must provide frequent forms of contact such as checking in weekly and providing support to meet their needs. Additionally, mentors need guidance on how to best support new and beginning teachers. Some key areas are emotional support, school or district-specific information, strategies related to special education, and resources. Within this case study, no participants were engaged in formal or informal mentoring programs offered by their school or district.

Each participant spoke at length about the impact of school leadership on teachers' decisions to remain in their roles and at their schools. Todd Whitaker (2003) confirms that influential leaders must treat others with understanding and respect. Daunte said, "the principal is absolutely critical to teacher retention!" Teachers need to feel supported at their schools, and they need a sense of belonging as part of a positive culture reinforced by relationships and trust among staff, students, and parents. Whitaker (2003) suggests that teachers are better able to meet the needs of students if the teachers' needs are met first. Thus, "great principals focus on students—by focusing on teachers" (p. 35). Further Petty et al. (2012) stressed the importance of supportive administrators. These authors recommended that administrators must set the tone for school culture by

recognizing teachers and celebrating successes. These acknowledgments lead to increased morale and community-building.

Five out of six participants expressed limited opportunities for professional learning specific to the needs of special educators. In most cases, participants described having professional learning opportunities shared with general educators or having no defined professional learning and then choosing an opportunity to attend. India shared,

I am part of a PLC [professional learning community], however, it is not specific for special education. Because I'm the only teacher who teaches what I teach, I am part of the science PLC which is great for my love of science but doesn't impact my teaching at all.

These unintentional training opportunities lead to unaligned development for special educators and neglect the intricacies of their specific roles. Special educators need specialized professional learning that addresses their unique professional duties. Leko and Brownwell (2009) suggest that professional learning for special educators should rely on experts, infuse technology, dedicate appropriate time and attention to content standards and special education curriculum, and foster collaboration between general education teachers and special education teachers. Breonna, now taking on some administrative responsibilities, shared her thoughts on professional development for special education teachers. She said,

We are building a whole instructional model about PLCs. That is very intentional this year. More than any other school year, we are trying to create that within our school. Teachers meet weekly as a content with general education and special education together... We are facilitating discussion among the teachers about their practice. Just allowing space for teachers to learn from one each other, successful instructional strategies that work, and reflecting on using that data.

The goal of this type of professional learning is to build the capacity of special education teachers while bridging the gap with general education teachers. The absence of such

professional learning opportunities allows special education teachers to be viewed as “others” in their schools and leads to their isolation in school buildings. Improvement in professional learning opportunities for special educators may lead to these teachers’ increased perception of workplace culture.

In addition to limited opportunities for aligned and coherent professional learning, special education teachers extensively discuss negative perceptions of workload. Teachers in this study described increased paperwork, record keeping, and legal compliance, scheduling meetings, communication with parents, and planning for the needs of students with vast and varied needs. A proposed solution to these challenges is to consider an appropriate caseload for special education teachers and create scheduling flexibilities so special education teachers have dedicated time in the workday to address these responsibilities. Special education teachers may report increased workload manageability, stronger effectiveness, and increased retention by providing increased support to meet these demands.

Summary and Conclusion

Teacher turnover continues to plague urban school communities. In particular, teacher turnover tends to disproportionately impact students within specific demographics, including students in high-need and urban schools. At the same time, fewer teachers are prepared for careers in teaching through traditional and alternative preparation programs. Therefore, teacher attrition must be addressed to ensure that there are enough qualified staff to meet the needs of the public-school students and reduce costs related to recruitment and training caused by attrition. A literature review demonstrated significant studies with large sample sizes of general education teachers

studied; however, few qualitative studies exist with a focused group of teachers, such as special education teachers. This study addresses the gap in the literature by utilizing qualitative study methods to investigate the motivational factors that influence special education retention in an urban city.

The researcher conducted a multiple descriptive case study of six special education teachers in Washington, DC, utilizing a two-phase data collection process. The first phase included using a questionnaire provided to conveniently sampled teachers, and the second phase included semi-structured interviews conducted with purposefully sampled participants. Key findings from this research indicate that special education teachers are primarily motivated by making a difference in the lives of their students. Additionally, teachers desire collaborative and supportive relationships with their colleagues, professional development and growth opportunities, and strong school leaders who foster positive school climates. However, teachers experience job dissatisfaction when school leaders do not create school cultures that allow for collegial interactions when the policies are unaligned to personal philosophy and when teachers have insurmountable workloads.

These findings provide relatively low-cost opportunities for improvement as most relate to enhancing existing systems. The results demonstrate that teachers will withstand less favorable conditions if there are other ways to experience job satisfaction in the workplace. There are great opportunities to address these findings through improved preservice training and improved in-service opportunities for teachers and leaders. These findings are aligned with Herzberg's Two Factor Motivation Theory and support the idea that working conditions are composed of hygiene and motivator factors. According to

Herzberg's theory, hygiene and motivating factors must be addressed simultaneously; thus, school leaders and policymakers must be conscious of the impact of these factors on individual teachers.

CHAPTER FIVE

Distribution of Findings

Executive Summary

Every year, teachers have to make the decision about whether or not they will return to their place of employment in the following school year. For many teachers, various considerations factor into their decision-making including workload, administrative support, school culture, morale of staff, student behavior, and organizational policies. Teacher shortages across the nation exacerbate the challenges presented when teachers choose not to return to teaching prior to retirement. Urban schools are disproportionately impacted by teacher attrition (Papay et al., 2017).

The impact of teacher retention is significant for students and school communities. Tangible costs to school systems rooted in recruitment, replacement, and training costs are estimated to be \$7 billion (NCTAF, 2003). Also, in schools with high turnover there are other intangible costs including decreased staff morale and strain on working relationships. This turnover has a deeper impact to staff culture including the erosion of relational trust among students, teachers, parents, and administrators. High teacher turnover rates continue to disrupt the functioning of schools that serve poor and minority students (Guin, 2004).

Washington, DC, like many other urban cities, faces challenges related to teacher retention. On average, 25% of public-school teachers in Washington, DC leave their schools compared to the national average of 19% noted in other urban cities. Within the group of teachers who have departed Washington, DC schools there are certain

subgroups of teachers who disproportionately leave the profession including teachers with less than five years' experience, alternatively certified teachers, and teachers who work in schools in which the majority of students were deemed at-risk or low-income (SBOE, 2020).

The retention of special education teachers, in particular, seems to be critical to the stability of the education system. In Washington, DC, nearly 20% of students are identified as a student with a disability. While educational outcomes have improved in Washington, DC, significant gaps remain for students with disabilities with only two out of every 20 students with disabilities scoring proficient on the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) English Language Arts exam.

Additionally, students with disabilities have lower attendance rates, are twice as likely to be disciplined than their peers, and more than one out of four students with disabilities repeats the ninth grade. To address these deep gaps and concerning data, students with disabilities require a highly skilled and dedicated workforce. Cross and Billingsley (1994) contended that “lack of qualified special education teachers compromises the quality of services that students with disabilities receive” (p. 411). With fewer teachers being prepared through teacher preparation programs and large numbers of teachers exiting the field pre-retirement, there is a need to address the issue of supply and demand and teacher retention.

This study was needed to understand the experiences of special education teachers and the conditions that prompt these teachers to remain at their schools in their roles. The literature related to special education teacher attrition is outdated with most major studies on this topic conducted in the 1990s and early 2000s. These studies involved the use of

large data sets with questionnaires and surveys, but few utilized qualitative methods. Previous recommendations for future research encouraged studies that address teachers' perspectives to better understand contributing factors to job satisfactions and dissatisfaction (Billingsley, 2004). Consequently, this study utilized qualitative methods to specifically describe the motivation and hygiene factors related to special education teacher retention in Washington, DC.

Overview of Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

A descriptive case study was chosen to allow participants to tell their stories including the interesting and important events that illustrate the case(s). In this descriptive case study, the researcher investigated the workplace conditions that increased job satisfaction by focusing on the stories of six public school special education teachers. The goals of this study were to share the experiences of teachers and highlight the conditions that contributed to their retention through the lens of Herzberg's Two Factor Motivation Theory.

Herzberg's Two Factor Motivation Theory details how certain factors affect people's attitude about work and equated motivators to job satisfaction and hygiene factors with job dissatisfaction. According to Gawal (1997), motivators are "elements that enriched a person's job" whereas hygiene factors "consistently produced only short-term changes in job attitudes and performance" (p.1). Satisfiers relate to job tasks and what one does while dissatisfiers relate to the context or situation in which one does their job. In this study, each participant was treated as a single case, and an embedded unit cross case analysis was conducted to offer analysis and evaluation of a few proposed solutions.

Participants for this study were selected through purposive sampling by the researcher leveraging personal relationships and through outreach on social media. The researcher sent all interested parties a brief survey used to assess participant background. Selected teachers needed to have at least one-year full time teaching experience and must be currently employed as a K–12 public or public charter school special education teacher in Washington, DC. Selected participants completed a questionnaire identifying the significance of job-related factors on participant’s workplace satisfaction or dissatisfaction and were then asked if they were interested in participating in phase two data collection, which included semi-structured one-on-one interviews. Using purposive and snowball sampling methods, the researcher identified six participants to engage in semi-structured one-on-one interviews to glean additional information on special education teachers’ experiences in urban schools. Data were coded and analyzed against Herzberg’s Two Factor Motivation Theory, the theoretical framework.

Summary of Key Findings

Results from this study were very aligned with the literature and congruent with the theoretical framework. Participants in Phase One of data collection identified school leader relationships and support, personal growth and advancement, recognition, co-worker relationships, base wage and salary and achievement as the most satisfying aspects of their work. Conversely, teachers identified organization policies and supervisor quality as the most dissatisfying aspects of their jobs. These findings suggest that motivating factors are primarily intrinsic job elements, whereas hygiene factors are primarily extrinsic job elements. Hygiene factors can lead to job dissatisfaction if not well managed. However, the opposite of satisfaction is not dissatisfaction. With adequate

maintenance of hygiene factors employee dissatisfaction could be prevented, but these factors will not increase satisfaction or motivation. When individuals choose whether to continue employment, they weigh their motivators and hygiene factors.

The literature related to teacher attrition provides some common reasons why teachers leave their roles or the profession entirely. These reasons include low salaries, student discipline challenges, lack of support from administrators, and lack of engagement in decision-making (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Harrell et al., 2019; Ingersoll, 2001). Participants from Phase Two identified the work itself as the biggest factor related to job satisfaction as well as receiving recognition and having opportunities for advancement. Specifically, participants noted relationships with students and the notion that they can make a difference in students' lives and receive recognition for their efforts as factors that impact their job satisfaction. Participants cited working conditions, namely workload, as the most dissatisfying factors followed by supervisor quality, and company policies. Notably, teachers identified concerns with limited administrative support and administrators not understanding or having knowledge of special education, limited input in decision making, and school or district policies that teachers found ineffective or unaligned. The results are consistent with Johnson, Kraft, and Papay's (2012) declaration that:

...although a wide range of working conditions matter to teachers, the specific elements of the work environment that matter the most to teachers are not narrowly conceived working conditions... Instead, it is the social conditions—the school's culture, the principal's leadership, and relationships among colleagues—that predominate in prediction teachers' job satisfaction and career plans. (p. 2)

This author reminds readers that there are specific aspects of working conditions that lead to teacher dissatisfaction and plan to seek alternative employment.

In many cases, the reasons that compel a teacher to stay may be the same reasons that compel a different teacher to leave. This aligns with Herzberg's theory, which concludes extrinsic factors are less likely to contribute to employee's motivation and job satisfaction. However, intrinsic factors do contribute to an employee's level of satisfaction. Herzberg further argues that intrinsic and extrinsic factors are independent from one another. Therefore, decreasing job dissatisfaction does not necessarily increase job satisfaction. As a result, organizations must address operations to satisfy both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors of its employees.

Findings Distribution Proposal

Many of the responses to address teacher retention are identified at the school level. However, it is important to ensure that, in addition to school strategies to address retention, there are also policy solutions as well. Recently, the State Board of Education in DC has been keenly interested in learning more about teacher retention in the District of Columbia. The State Board has commissioned two reports in the past two years investigating teacher retention. Like many studies on teacher retention, these reports involve the use of large data sets. The researcher hopes to bolster the existing data with descriptive data from authentic teacher voices.

Target Audience

The researcher proposes testifying at a public hearing before the State Board of Education. The DC State Board of Education has the primary responsibility to advise the State Superintendent of Education on educational matters, including state standards, state policies, and state regulations. Additionally, the State Board of Education has the unique

role in DC education to advocate to the City Council for increased funding to be specifically purposed to address teacher retention.

Proposed Distribution Method

This professional presentation for stakeholders will summarize and synthesize the researcher's dissertation in practice. The presentation begins with an explanation of the problem nationally and historically, a review of the literature, and then the researcher will zoom in to include major themes from the study. The major themes include teacher perspectives on workload, relationships and support from school administrators, the social-emotional effect of COVID-19 on teachers, and professional learning needs for educators.

The DC State Board of Education has monthly public meetings with topics and a call for speakers monthly. At the time of publication of this dissertation, the exact date for the next public hearing was not available. The stakeholders are members of the DC State Board of Education and their constituents. This professional presentation will be presented virtually (until conditions permit in-person meetings) to members of the State Board of Education for no more than 30 minutes with about 20 minutes dedicated to the researcher presenting literature on the topic and findings from the qualitative case study. The remaining 10 minutes are designated for questions and answers between the researcher and the SBOE. The goals of the presentation are to build awareness of the motivational factors of why special education teachers stay in their roles and the workplace conditions that warrant additional intervention to increase retention of these teachers.

Distribution of Materials

Prior to the presentation, the researcher will provide the SBOE leadership with the PowerPoint and written testimony for review and distribution to members of the SBOE. The SBOE will have ample time to review these slides and prepare questions prior to the presentation. The PowerPoint will serve as a backdrop for the testimony and includes visuals to support the content delivered.

Conclusion

Stakeholders in Washington, DC yearn for qualitative and quantitative feedback related to the teacher experience with the goal of addressing teacher retention challenges. The descriptive stories from participants provides school and district leaders and policymakers with the information needed to adjust formal and informal policies related to teacher retention. With increased emphasis on the factors that truly matter to teachers, increased job satisfaction will occur, leading to increased teacher retention. Meeting the needs of critical educators such as special education teachers requires increased input in the form of research and action on the part of decision-makers in positions of authority.

The purpose of this multiple descriptive case study was to explore the motivational factors that impact teacher retention of special education teachers in Washington, DC. Despite limitation of the size of the sample, the findings from this study illuminate the factors of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction among this group of teachers. This study suggests that efforts to improve teacher retention should focus on decreasing aspects of job dissatisfaction that are often factors outside of a teacher's individual realm of control and are extrinsic in nature. School administrators and policymakers must make

concerted efforts to address special education teacher satisfaction, which will promote teacher quality and ultimately lead to improvement in student achievement.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Special Education Teacher Retention Questionnaire

Thank you for your interest in participating in my research study. This study aims to gather the thoughts and opinions related to teacher retention of current DC K–12 special education teachers. This questionnaire has three parts and should take about 25-30 minutes to complete. Part one collects demographic data, and part two seeks your perceptions on factors that contribute to job satisfaction or job dissatisfaction. Part three allows participants to suggest which factors were most likely to lead to your retention or possible exit from the profession within the next five years.

Data collected will be used as part of a dissertation and your participation will be anonymous. There are no risks different from everyday life associated with completing this questionnaire. Possible benefits of participation include shedding light on the teacher experience such that improvements at the school and state levels can improve teacher retention in the District of Columbia. Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You do not have to participate, and you can stop at any time.

Part 1: Demographic Data (pull down menus will be provided)

- Gender (male, female, other)
- Sector (DCPS, public charter school)
- Number of years teaching in urban schools
- Ethnicity (Black/African American, Latinx, White, Multiracial, Asian, Other _____)

Part 2: Using the Likert scale, please rate the following items on their importance to you as it relates to remaining in your current role at your current school.

	High Importance	Importance	Neutral	Low importance	No importance
The workload					
The balance between work and personal life					
Proportion of time spent on administration					

Friendliness of other staff					
Society's view of teachers					
Non-contact time is well allocated					
Student behavior issues					
Class sizes that ensure that all teachers can teach effectively					
Salary					
Recognition of my efforts					
School leaders provide effective support for teachers					
The classroom presents an atmosphere conducive to learning					
Working with others to achieve shared goals					
There is a climate of achievement within the school					
Support on discipline issues					
Support from students' parents					

The school values contribution made by staff					
Relationship with my direct supervisor					
The school works hard to make learning more effective					
Autonomy over my own teaching					
Availability of resources for learning and teaching					
Sharing work with one another					
Prospects of career advancement					
Impact of performance evaluation					
Classrooms that stimulate pupil learning					
The working environment is in a good physical condition					
Having a belief that one take on challenges within the school					

School decision making is participatory					
Intellectual challenge					
The school allows me to show initiative					
School policies support teaching and learning					
The level of support offered to assist with additional responsibilities resulting from other initiatives					
Opportunity to influence school policies					
Colleagues' view of teaching					
Facility within the school to realize a variety of teaching strategies					
Facility within the school to realize effective curriculum planning					
Facility within the school to realize a variety of assessment techniques					

Risk to pupils of bullying and other fear-arousing factors					
Professional development is offered which is relevant to my own needs					
There is a negotiated approach to the deployment of resources					

Part 3: Open-ended response

Drawing upon the above factors, identify five factors that you consider to be the most deeply satisfying and the five factors that you consider to be most deeply dissatisfying in respect to your own professional experience and therefore have the most likelihood of impacting your personal motivation and morale.

Most satisfying _____

Most dissatisfying _____

Optional

The second phase of data collection related to this dissertation are 90-minute one-on-one interviews between special education teachers and the researcher. Are you interested in participating in a one-on-one interview? If so, please leave your name and email address for future correspondence.

*Please note that your name and contact information will be kept anonymous.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire!

This questionnaire was adapted from the “Valuing and Supporting Teachers Survey” (Rhodes, Nevill, & Allan, 2004). Permission granted by SAGE Publishing.

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form for Research

PROTOCOL TITLE: A Multiple Descriptive Case Study Exploring Special Education Teachers' Motivational Factors Which Influence Retention in Washington, DC

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Shavonne Gibson

SUPPORTED BY: Baylor University

Purpose of the research: The purpose of this study is to understand special education teacher retention in the Washington, DC public and public charter schools. Teacher retention in Washington, DC will be examined through the motivational and workplace factors that influence retention. I am asking that you take part in this study because your experiences and opinions are valuable to understanding teachers' perspectives and may represent the perspectives of many other teachers throughout the District.

Study activities: If you choose to be in the study, you will take part in a ~90-minute semi-structured interview in which the interviewer will not strictly follow a formalized list of questions. Instead, the interviewer will ask more open-ended questions, allowing for a discussion with the interviewee rather than a straightforward question and answer format.

Risks and Benefits: To the best of my knowledge, there are no risks to you for taking part in this study. You may be uncomfortable with some of the questions and topics we will ask about. You do not have to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

You may or may not benefit from taking part in this study. Possible benefits include the discovery of a way to decrease teacher turnover in DC public and public charter schools through the implementation of changes that are meaningful to you and the teachers like you within the District. Findings may also be useful to policymakers so they may adjust their approach based on feedback gleaned from participants in this study.

Others may benefit in the future from the information that is learned in this study. The potential benefit to society is creating strategies to decrease teacher turnover that can help lower the high national public school teacher turnover rate. This benefit could have a positive impact on student achievement.

Confidentiality: A risk of taking part in this study is the possibility of a loss of confidentiality. Loss of confidentiality includes having your personal information shared with someone who is not the researcher and was not supposed to see or know about your information. The researcher plans to protect your confidentiality. The interview

discussion will be recorded on a Zoom software and transcribed into a Google Document. Both the recording and the transcribed document will be housed on the on the researcher's personal computer, only accessible to Shavonne Gibson, the researcher. The recording will be deleted from the researcher's personal computer at the completion of the research phase.

You will be assigned a unique code/pseudonym that will be used instead of your name. This code will be listed next to your responses in the Google Document. Your name will never appear on the written Google Document.

We will keep the records of this study confidential by storing all information on the researcher's Google Drive which is only accessible using a password. I will make every effort to keep your records confidential. However, there are times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of your records.

Authorized staff of Baylor University may review the study records for purposes such as quality control or safety.

Compensation: You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

Questions or concerns about this research study:

You can call with any concerns or questions about the research. Contact information is listed below for your reference.

- Principal Investigator: Shavonne Gibson, [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]
- Baylor Faculty Advisor: Dr. Sandra Talbert, [REDACTED]

If you want to speak with someone not directly involved in this research study, you may contact the Baylor University IRB through the Office of the Vice Provost for Research at [REDACTED]. You can talk to them about:

- Your rights as a research subject
- Your concerns about the research
- A complaint about the research

Taking part in this study is your choice. You are free not to take part or to stop at any time for any reason. No matter what you decide, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are entitled. If you decide to withdraw from this study, the information that you have already provided will be kept confidential. Information already collected about you cannot be deleted.

By continuing with the research and completing the study activities, you are providing consent.

Printed Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol

Introduction to the study and welcome the participants

I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study. The purpose of this study is to gather the thoughts and opinions of teachers decide to stay in their schools despite some of the challenges that cause their colleagues to leave the school or the professional altogether. Data revealing why you have decided to stay in your position instead of transferring to another school or leaving the profession altogether will be collected and analyzed. The data collected will be used in a dissertation and your participation will be anonymous. The interview session should take about an hour to an hour and a half. Do you have any questions before I turn on the recording device. [Wait time of ~20 seconds] The interview will start now.

How old are you?

What is your ethnicity?

How many years have you taught?

How were you prepared to be a teacher (traditional prep, alternative prep, no prep)

How many of those years were spent in urban public schools?

Please describe the educational setting in which you currently teach? Inclusion, resource, self-contained, other--describe

1. Were you motivated intrinsically or extrinsically to become a teacher?
2. Do you think that you are motivated most by the work or reward that come from the work (like pay, security, etc.)
3. What facets of the teaching profession do you find most rewarding?
4. What are aspects of teaching that causes high levels of stress for you?
5. What is the main reason you remain at this school in this role?
6. Do you feel like you are a part of a professional learning community at your school?
7. In what ways do you think that a principal's behavior influences teacher attrition?
8. How effective do you feel your principal is in reducing duties that interfere with your teaching responsibilities?
9. What would cause you to leave your current teaching position?

10. What are some factors you think have contributed to your decision to remain teaching at your school?
11. How would you describe the working conditions at the job?
Follow-up questions:
What impact does your working conditions at your school have on your decision to continue teaching at your school? OR What are some working conditions that could attribute to your decision to leave or stay in the teaching profession? Explain.
12. Research has shown that teacher education has a big impact on teacher retention. Describe how your credentialing program prepared you for teaching in the inner city.
 - What did your program do well?
 - What are some ways your credentialing program could have better prepared you (others) for teaching, specifically in high needs schools?
 - What suggestions do you give for teacher credentialing programs in improving their programs for teachers in the future?
13. What impact does student characteristics and attitudes have on your job satisfaction in an urban setting?
14. To what extent do you ever think about leaving this job? (If the interviewee indicate they do, then say: tell me more about this.
15. To what extent do you like or dislike policies of your school or district? Tell me more about the specific policies and your feelings toward these policies. (pay, work hours, professional development, attendance, curriculum selection, hiring, advancement)
16. To what extent do you say workplace conditions affect the way you feel about your job (grading policy, meeting structure, collaboration efforts, the discipline referral policy)
17. In what ways, if any, have you been involved in decisions that directly affect your school environment?
18. If you leave teaching, what would be the reason(s) or factor(s)?

That concludes our interview. Do you have any questions?

Turn off recording device.

I would like to thank you for your participation in this study. I will be reaching out to you in a couple of months to share descriptive data from your interview to ensure that I captured your sentiments accurately and appropriately in a process called member checking.

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