ABSTRACT

Exploring the Principal Perspective on Teacher Attrition in Urban Education:
A Single Case Study

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Teachers at all educational levels and disciplines are leaving the profession at a rapid rate across the United States with numbers increasing since the COVID-19 pandemic. Retention tools and strategies are critical to the success of a school and school district. The purpose of this single case study was to explore urban high school principals’ perceptions of why teachers leave the teaching profession and to identify the methods used by principals to retain teachers.

I conducted this single case study to answer two research questions rooted in Frederick Herzberg’s Two Factor Theory. The research questions were first, according to urban high school principals, for what reasons do urban high school teachers leave the teaching profession? Second, what policies, procedures, or strategies do urban high school principals use to retain teachers? I collected data using semi-structured interviews with four principals, conducted a focus group discussion, and collected related artifacts. I analyzed the data using the data analysis spiral (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
Analyzing the lived experiences of principals navigating teacher attrition allowed me to identify commonalities among their experiences, their perceived reasons for teachers leaving the profession, and the methods they used to retain teachers. As a result, I uncovered five findings. First, the principal participants in this study perceived compensation, performance pay, and workload balance as critical to teacher decisions related to remaining or leaving the profession in different ways. Second, the principal participants in this study identified leader support and relationships as reasons why teachers stay in the profession. Third, the principal participants in this study identified classroom management and negative student behaviors lead to teacher dissatisfaction. Fourth, the principal participants in this study recognized growth opportunities within the charter network as a reason teachers stay in the field. Fifth and finally, the principal participants in this study identified relationships as the leading retention strategy they used. This research benefits principals, district administrators, and teachers as it highlights principals’ perceptions related to teacher dissatisfaction and their perception of the necessity of building meaningful relationships with teachers to reduce attrition.

Keywords: teacher attrition, teacher retention, satisfaction, dissatisfaction
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DEDICATION

To the ones that made this possible,
Mom, Charles, Mikayla, CJ, Sister, Jeran, my Lab family
And my heroes in heaven, my Dad and my Grams.

THANK YOU!
CHAPTER ONE

Background and Needs Assessment

Introduction

Teacher attrition is an issue that has impacted many school districts throughout the United States (Garcia et al., 2022). Ingersoll et al. (2019) highlighted the difficulty in staffing ethnic minority teachers as the nation struggles with a teacher shortage. Research highlights a myriad of contributing factors that lead to teacher attrition including stress, overwhelming teacher loads, and curriculum changes (Harfitt, 2015). Literature focuses on factors that allow teachers to persist or exit the profession. School leadership contributes both positively and negatively to the experience of teachers (DeMatthews et al., 2022). In the fight against burnout and teacher attrition, school leaders must take responsibility for their contribution to the mitigating factors that lead to attrition (Harfitt, 2015).

Urban educators manage the needs of the students, the school, and the local community and connect to students in urban community through cultural synchronicity (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Jackson and Knight-Manuel (2019) postulated that educators of color tackle the societal constructs of their students that impede their schooling experiences. When schools create a sense of community, students’ well-being increases (Prati & Cicognani, 2021). The impact of teachers leaving a school or school district drastically affects student achievement (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). It is difficult to build camaraderie among students and staff if the rate of teachers leaving the school is elevated (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).
The opportunity gap for students in urban schools continues to widen as the process of hiring qualified teachers grows more difficult (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Fewer students enroll in pre-service teacher programs thus reducing the pool of qualified teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Some districts resort to hiring long-term substitutes who seldom have an academic background in education (Kini & Podolsky, 2016). To combat attrition, school administrators must understand its causes. Current research views teacher attrition and job dissatisfaction from the perspective of teachers (Garcia et al., 2022, Bottiani et al., 2019). Analyzing teacher attrition through the lens of the principal adds a new perspective for exploration. As such, the purpose of this single case study was to explore urban high school principals’ perceptions of why teachers leave the teaching profession and to identify the methods used by principals to retain teachers.

Statement of the Problem

Teacher attrition is an issue that impacts all facets of education including student achievement, staff morale, and recruitment (Boyd et al., 2008; Chambers Mack et al., 2019; Harris et al., 2019). The number of teachers that leave teaching has rapidly increased due to stress from the profession (Ansley et al., 2016; Ingersoll, 2011; Tait, 2008). Nationally, 44% of new teachers leave the profession within five years (Ingersoll et al., 2018). According to Carver-Thomas and Darling Hammond (2017), “turnover rates are 50% higher in Title I schools, which serve more low-income students” (p. 14). The researchers additionally indicated, “Turnover rates are 70% higher for teachers in schools serving the largest concentrations of students of color” (p. 14). Teachers in lower-income neighborhoods often endure challenges that contribute to dissatisfaction. One factor
contributing to teacher dissatisfaction is the increased teacher-student ratios in classrooms (Sutcher et al., 2016). Additionally, teacher job dissatisfaction (Gardner, 2010) and a lack of administrative support contribute to the decision to leave the profession (Cancio et al., 2013).

Teacher satisfaction is a strong indicator in a teacher’s desire to remain in the profession, yet less students are pursuing teaching in post-secondary education (Sutcher et al., 2016; Van der Westhuizen et al. 2012). The number of students enrolling in teacher education programs decreased by 35% from 2009 to 2014 (Sutcher et al., 2016). As the number of students entering education decreases, so does the pool of eligible teachers to draw from. Once in the profession, many teachers leave due to job dissatisfaction. The number of teachers that express dissatisfaction increased after the COVID-19 pandemic. Gillani et al. (2022) conducted a cross-sectional survey among teachers that taught during pandemic in 2020–2021. Of the 1,807 educators surveyed, “43.4% of teachers reported they were thinking about leaving the profession or retiring more so than recalled prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (February 2020)” (p. 5). As teachers leave the profession, the number of underqualified and inexperienced teachers is exorbitant in urban schools (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). If teachers in high-poverty districts lack certification, have minimal or no experience, and lack educational teaching background, the type of education the students in those schools receive suffers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

Teacher attrition directly impacts student achievement and significantly impacts school districts financially (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Research has shown a negative correlation between student achievement and teacher attrition (Garcia
& Weiss, 2019). Madigan and Kim (2021) asserted teachers burnout affects student achievement. Teachers suffering from occupational burnout have low assessment scores and cumulative grades. When teachers feel burnout, they struggle to meet planning demands which impacts the quality of instruction which directly influences student achievement (Madigan & Kim, 2021). The cost of replacing teachers is extensive, but the effects of a teacher leaving render schools and districts incapable of building a solid reputation for recruiting teachers. Hiring qualified educators has become a daunting task. As a result, unqualified teachers are hired and student achievement declines with inconsistency in instructional delivery (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Lindqvist et al. (2014) found that “trained and skilled teachers are a fundamental requirement in such reasoning and increasing efforts to provide students with teachers has become a challenging worldwide quest” (p. 94). Teacher attrition or teacher departure from the profession impacts the educational experience of students.

The effects of teacher attrition have hindered academic growth, school culture, and climate in a charter school network in the northeastern United States. Within the charter network, which was the site for this study, building and maintaining staff morale while developing genuine relationships among staff and with students has presented challenges. Principals have developed recruitment techniques and strategies, yet retention practices are not widely discussed in the charter school network. For school principals to retain teachers, it is critical to research their perceptions of teacher attrition and their efforts to identify and address factors that lead to teacher retention. As such, I conducted this study to explore urban high school principals’ perceptions of why teachers leave the teaching profession and to identify the methods used by principals to retain teachers.
Teaching is a rewarding profession for educators. Though the benefits of teaching are evident, teacher recruitment and retention are challenging. Urban education presents challenges that extend beyond the classroom that make recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers difficult. Researchers have previously explored both attrition and retention factors from the perspective of educators (Ingersoll, 2001; Sahlberg & Oldroyd, 2010; Skaalvik, 2007; Rothmann et al., 2017).

In the following literature review, I argue that the perspective of school leaders must be included when refining teacher retention strategies. The impact of teacher attrition on school leaders, school culture, and student achievement is significant (Dutta & Sahney, 2016). I begin the literature review by presenting factors that plague teachers and increase their desire to leave the profession (DeShields et al., 2005; Robinson et al., 2019). Next, I share literature related to pre-service programs and teacher mentorship. Pre-service programs and teacher mentoring programs provide insight into the sustainability of educators (Callahan, 2016; Goldhaber & Cowan, 2014; Latham & Vogt, 2007). Identifying patterns within these programs provides clarity and an alternative perspective to school districts and school leaders when addressing teacher attrition. Last, I highlight the role of the administrator. The impact or perception of the school administrator drastically impacts teacher satisfaction (Handford & Leithwood, 2012).

Although many researchers frequently examine teacher attrition and retention, further understanding school administrators’ perceptions related to teacher retention is essential.
Factors Leading to Teacher Attrition

Factors that draw teachers to education and contribute to job satisfaction are seldom identified as reasons for leaving the profession (Garcia et al., 2022). Teacher satisfaction is the pleasure teachers take in their role as an educator. Locke (1976) asserted that teacher satisfaction is the conceptualized affection and reaction to teachers’ role as an educator. More recently, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) explained that teachers often equate their job satisfaction or dissatisfaction to external measures. Factors contributing to teacher attrition are salary, workload, and teacher autonomy (Bottiani et al., 2019, Walker, 2016; Williams et al., 2021). Additional factors that affect teacher satisfaction are feelings of belonging, emotional exhaustion, and value consonance (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). Harris et al. (2019) surveyed principals, K–12 teachers, and parents to identify commonalities in the reasons for teacher resignations. Principals’ perception of reasons for teacher attrition included working conditions, professional development, autonomy, and compensation (Harris et al., 2019). In the following sections, I share research focused on teacher attrition and salary, workload and working conditions, teacher autonomy, sense of belonging, and stress.

Salary: Teaching is rewarding, but teachers often make less money than college graduates working in non-teaching sectors (Han, 2021). As the cost of living increases each year, the salaries of teachers often do not increase, leading many to pursue opportunities outside of the profession. Compensation varies for educators throughout the country causing many teachers to leave the profession. Teachers that have gone on strike often site the disparity in salaries with their counterparts in other parts of the country (Pearce, 2018). In 2018, teachers in Oklahoma demanded higher salaries citing that many
teachers had to work multiple jobs, donate plasma, and use food pantries to provide for their families (Pearce, 2018). Educators in southern states are generally paid significantly lower than their counterparts in northern states. Williams et al. (2021) found that rural communities in Georgia with predominantly Black populations saw a significantly higher rate of lower salaries being paid teachers. Williams et al. (2021) indicated that “Black rural schools have the lowest average salaries, and teachers are more likely to leave their district” (p. 17). As teachers persist in the career and learn of the disparities in salaries according to location or student demographic, the appeal to remain in the profession lessens.

The drastic disparities in salary have led to concerns regarding educational quality as the pool of quality teachers has diminished causing districts and principals to become creative in their hiring process (Creno, 2014; Wendler, 2015). Many districts increase salaries according to a pay scale that includes years of service and the highest educational level achieved (Grissom & Strunk, 2012). Grissom and Strunk (2012) argued that districts benefited from implementing structured salary scales. Utilizing a structured salary scale would reward teachers for the growth made through experience. Teachers with four to five years of experience would initially receive higher increases, but over time, the increase would reduce.

Many school districts have begun to implement performance pay according to teacher performance or evaluation systems and see potential in these programs (Eren, 2019). Eren (2019) explained that in Louisiana, teachers are being held accountable using the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP), sharing that “teachers in TAP schools are eligible for additional compensation based on their performance in the classroom
(teaching practices) as well as their students’ performance (teaching outcomes)” (p. 872). Though performance pay is found in many school districts, TAP stands out as a program that focuses on both teaching practices and student outcomes when determining teacher performance pay. Many states and districts use these ratings to determine teacher salaries (Doan et al., 2019).

Policymakers have highlighted merit pay or pay based on student test score gains as an effective way to increase teacher salary (Grissom & Strunk, 2012). According to merit pay standards, teachers may not receive performance pay if they are underperforming. Despite efforts teachers make to improve in deficient areas of the craft, evaluating teachers with a singular measure is less appealing than imploring a multiple-measure evaluation system (Borko, 2004; Doan et al., 2019). Advocates of performance pay believe pay increases should be given to teachers who have high student test data and evaluations (Grissom & Strunk, 2012). Teachers that do not meet the criteria for performance pay are more likely to be disgruntled in their position, and principals risk losing qualified teachers. Utilizing a uniform salary guide allows for equal compensation among teachers and is more appealing for teachers (Tran & Buckman, 2020).

Workload and working conditions. The work of an educator does not end when they leave the school building. Teachers may spend many hours preparing lesson plans, grading student work, and preparing to deliver lessons. Managing student misbehavior can add to an increased feeling of fatigue and burnout. Bottiani et al. (2019) conducted a study to analyze factors that lead to teacher burnout in urban education. The researchers identified reasons related to burnout as institutional demands, classroom demands, and
personal demands. Bottiani et al. (2019) found classroom demands leading to teacher burnout were directly related to student behaviors.

The burdens and mandates of the position cause burnout and fatigue among teachers. Burnout has been a factor identified by teachers as a leading cause for attrition (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Madigan and Kim (2021) conducted a meta-analysis to determine the relationship between teacher burnout and job satisfaction, concluding that teacher burnout has a higher impact on teachers’ decision to remain the profession. Job satisfaction was an important factor for teacher retention and significantly impacted a teacher’s intention to remain in the field. Exploring factors that impede teacher satisfaction allows educational stakeholders to apply strategies to reduce teacher job dissatisfaction and increase teacher retention. Completing required tasks such as preparing lessons, correcting tests, and administrative tasks contribute to teacher burnout as these tasks take time from teachers’ personal time (Philipp & Kunter, 2013).

Work-life balance refers to the ability to balance the demands of the profession and the family (Al-Alawi et al., 2021). Maintaining a healthy work-life balance presents challenges for many novice teachers as they are seldom given strategies or taught skills to aid in balancing the demands of the profession (Mulyani et al., 2021). Abdulaziz et al. (2022) conducted a study analyzing the impact of work-life balance on teacher satisfaction in India. A random sample of 278 teachers indicated that work-life balance negatively impacted teacher satisfaction and overall job commitment. When teachers are burdened with the demands of the profession without reprieve, the commitment to the work can decline.
Working conditions often deter teachers from remaining in the profession. Poor working conditions cause frustration among teachers (Atashpanjeh et al., 2020). Physical work conditions will contribute to teacher dissatisfaction. Some teachers find themselves sharing classrooms and desks with colleagues. Sharing space in this manner deprives teachers of privacy and adds stress and strife to teachers (Clay, 2020). Teachers are genuinely happier to have their own classroom, but principals often require teachers to share classrooms due to space restrictions in a school building (Clay, 2020). Ford et al. (2018) surmised that working conditions directly impact teachers’ desire to remain in the profession. Ford et al. (2018) analyzed the impact of organizational conditions within schools on teacher turnover rates. and determined that principals are necessary for addressing the psychological needs of their staff and addressing unsatisfactory work conditions, which may require one-on-one meetings or collaborating with teachers. The perception of school leadership and the creation of school culture adds to teachers feeling of poor working conditions if those perceptions are negative (Torres, 2016). Torres (2016) used mid-year survey data collected in 2010–2011 by a Charter Management Organization (CMO) anonymously administered to 25 of their charter schools to examined factor that contributed to teacher turnover. The survey results suggested that teacher burnout directly aligned with the level of support teachers received from school leadership. Torres (2016) surmised that a regular “monitoring of how teachers feel about support from their principal” (p. 905). The perception, connection, and involvement of a school principal contribute to overall emotional effect of their teachers (Lambersky, 2016). Student and community problems can further increase teacher dissatisfaction and make working conditions unpleasant (Moore, 2012). Moore
(2012) asserted that supportive administration reduces teachers’ disdain or frustration with their working conditions.

*Teacher autonomy.* Autonomy refers to one’s ability to self-govern and follow rules or principles that promote self-governance (Wermke & Hostfalt, 2014). Autonomy is often related to freedom, but the acquisition of autonomy does not equate to freedom. When teachers gain autonomy, they learn how to manage their pedagogical responsibilities with the organizational constraints (Wermke & Hostfalt, 2014). Teacher autonomy is the level of professionalism teachers are treated with, which correlates with job satisfaction (Walker, 2016). The No Child Left Behind era contributed to a reduction in teacher autonomy, as many high-stake testing and standardized test dominated education (Walker, 2016). When teachers lack the opportunity to work autonomously, they can become frustrated. In Harris et al.’s (2019) study of principals, K–12 teachers, and parents, one commonality in reasons for teacher resignations was a lack of teacher autonomy with teachers rating this factor higher than principals.

*Sense of belonging.* The teaching profession fosters a sense of belonging. This element of belonging is motivative in nature for most humans. Teachers instinctively work together and learn from each other when they feel connected to their colleagues (Heineke et al., 2014). Ortan et al. (2021) surveyed 658 K–12 teachers to explore the relationship of self-efficacy, relationships, workload, and working conditions in accordance with the well-being of teachers. They found that self-efficacy was a factor that leads to teacher job satisfaction. Self-efficacy focuses on a teacher’s ability to produce results. Teachers increase their self-efficacy through professional development
and by increasing self-efficacy teachers feel successful. When teachers feel successful, they are less likely to leave the profession (Ortan et al., 2021).

Relatability with colleagues is another key element in teacher satisfaction (Yin et al., 2017). Klassen et al. (2012) administered a questionnaire to 409 Canadian teachers to measure the participants’ perception of autonomy support, satisfaction of relatedness with colleagues and students, and emotional exhaustion. A key finding of this study revealed parallels between teacher-student relationships and teacher motivation. When meaningful connections are established, teachers find meaning in the work which increases job satisfaction. Similarly, when teachers find meaningful connections to the work and contribute to the advancement of policies, the level of satisfaction increases. Garcia-Torres (2019) analyzed the relationship between professional collaboration, distributed leadership, and teacher job satisfaction. Garcia-Torres (2019) collected administrative data from a statewide survey administered through a partnership between the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) and the Tennessee Education Research Alliance (TERA). The findings represented 9,889 teachers surveyed in Tennessee and revealed that teachers value professional collaboration and self-efficacy exhibited more signs of job satisfaction. Additionally, when teachers have autonomy and more opportunities to lead within the school, they are more invested, the level of belonging increases, and the work environment is positive. When teachers lack a sense of belonging, they may be less likely to remain in the profession (Atashpanjeh et al., 2020).

Stress. The work of an urban educator is often filled with stress (Camacho et al., 2018; Stoeber & Rennert, 2008). Stress for many teachers is attributed to colleagues, students, and families. Stoeber and Rennert (2008) explained that teachers are
professionals under the highest level of stress. Stoeber and Rennert (2008) sampled 118 secondary school teachers and measured perfectionism, stress, coping styles, and burnout. They concluded that many stressors teachers endure are connected to the need to be a perfectionist. It is difficult to be perfect when teachers are managing occupational stressors. Occupational stressors stem from student misbehavior, increased workload, and lack of work-life balance (Torenbeek & Peters, 2017). Torenbeek and Peters (2017) conducted a study to explain why teacher attrition rates are high and to examine why teachers with 20 or more years of experience decrease in effectiveness. Study findings indicated that veteran teachers experience higher levels of burnout and lower levels of motivation. With more tasks and responsibilities being asked of teachers and increased student issues, veteran teachers struggle to cope with the increased demands of the profession.

Teachers in urban settings experience emotional stress on a larger magnitude, which requires intentional efforts to equip educators with skills to support the social and emotional demands of the job (Camacho et al., 2018). Camacho et al. (2018) explored the feelings of 160 urban teachers and found the most common feelings among the teachers were anger, anxiety, sadness, emotional exhaustion, incompetence, and confusion. These feelings aligned with the most prevalent thoughts of inability to resolve situations, factors outside of the classroom, personal locus of control, and wanting a break. Camacho et al. (2018) asserted, “while all teachers experience stressors, teachers in urban schools, as opposed to their suburban counterparts, may more acutely experience such challenges, given that students in urban environments are more likely to experience social-emotional difficulties” (p. 1). If teachers in urban education are to succeed, they must learn how to
manage both emotional and social stressors. Harmsen et al. (2018) explained that the Job Demands Resource Model (JD-R) is a useful framework to assess teacher stress, stating, “The model depicts the relationship between work characteristics, well-being and organizational outcomes comprehensively” (p. 627). Harmsen et al. (2018) examined the relationship between 143 beginning teachers’ perceived stressors. Teachers completed a questionnaire and teaching behavior was observed using the International Comparative Analysis of Learning and Teaching (ICALT) observation instrument. Harmsen et al. (2018) identified four factors that can reduce teacher stress: workload reduction, supporting effective teacher behavior in the classroom, supporting school enculturation, or receiving school rules and procedures, and supporting professional development. Ideally, when teacher stress levels are reduced, the level of job satisfaction will increase. Teachers with lower job satisfaction exhibit a higher intention to leave the profession (Arnup & Bowles, 2016).

Education is a vocation of service in which educators enter the profession with a value system and ethics that drive them to the work (Rothmann et al., 2017). Rothmann et al. (2017) noted the necessity for educators to maintain a sense of autonomy. Lavy and Bocker (2018) conducted two studies to explore the path to teacher happiness and satisfaction. The studies addressed the hypotheses, “Teachers’ sense of meaning at work will positively affect teacher-student relationships” and “Teachers’ perceptions of their relationships with students will positively affect teachers’ job satisfaction” (p. 1489). Study 1 consisted of 312 teachers that completed a self-report regarding their sense of meaning at work. Study 2 consisted of 120 teachers that completed a “daily measurement of their sense of meaning at work, relationships with students and job satisfaction” (p.
The findings revealed that when teachers find a sense of meaning in the work and establish relationships among themselves, their perceived satisfaction within their career increases. Relationships deepen the meaning of the work for teachers, as teachers are able to develop self-identification (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014). By finding meaning in the work and building relationships with students and colleagues, teachers are more likely to remain in the profession. If teachers do not feel valued or lack self-efficacy, they are less inclined to remain in the profession.

The Effects of Pre-Service Programs, Induction Programs, and Mentorship on Teacher Retention

Teacher preparation programs prepare future educators for the work of teaching. Ingersoll et al. (2018) acknowledged the necessity for qualified teachers in education. The quality of pre-service programs has been questioned, but Ingersoll et al. (2018) found that those that participated in a pre-service program were less inclined to leave the profession. Ongoing support and teacher preparation strengthen self-efficacy in teachers (Adams & Woods, 2015). Ideally, pre-service programs before employment and mentorship programs after employment improve the overall experience of the teacher thus increasing the probability of remaining in the profession.

Pre-service programs. Pre-service programs prepare and equip future teachers with the skills and knowledge needed to excel in the profession. A benefit of pre-service programs is the training opportunities for student teachers before entering the profession (Reeves, 2017). Reeves (2017) conducted a study with 142 pre-service teachers who completed full time student teaching in Illinois and Massachusetts to analyze the effectiveness of those teachers in terms of increasing student achievement. The results
showed that teachers who participate in pre-service programs are equipped to read and analyze data which will “ultimately enhance the quality of teacher classroom practice related to data use, and in doing so, K-12 student achievement” (Reeves, 2017, p. 27). Student achievement is at the heart of the work of a teacher. Reeves (2017) asserted that through proper training in reading and disaggregating data, teachers are more effective in the classroom, which improves student achievement. Teacher educators who supervise or monitor teachers in pre-service programs heavily influence teachers through modeling professional dialogue and pedagogical practices (Clarke et al., 2013; Graham, 2005).

With proper preparation through participation in pre-service programs, educators persist in the profession.

Addressing prevalent issues in education, such as student absenteeism as one example, also begins in pre-service programs. Gottfried et al. (2020) examined the impact of pre-service teacher programs in preparing teachers for student absenteeism, collecting data from 2017–2018 graduates of universities in California. The results indicated the surveyed graduates felt more supported and equipped to address student absenteeism when it was presented in their pre-service program. Providing pre-service teachers with the knowledge of chronic absenteeism equipped them to respond effectively.

*Induction programs.* While pre-service programs establish the expectation of a pre-service teacher regarding the profession, expectations regarding the profession are established in induction programs. Teacher perceptions are confirmed or rejected in pre-service programs (Ebersole, 2019), yet induction programs provide novice teachers with the tools to excel in the profession. Consuegra et al. (2014) explained that “student teachers can become highly qualified teachers by learning what they need to learn about
teaching on the job” (p. 80). Participation in pre-service and induction programs builds the confidence of teachers (Grierson et al., 2011). As principals recruit new teachers, acquiring teachers that attended pre-service programs and mandating participation in an induction program once hired will increase the likelihood of reducing attrition rates (Callahan, 2016). Mentorship does not only need to be relegated to teachers, as principals can also serve as mentors. Principals are essential in creating an environment that welcomes and promotes collaboration through mentorship (Callahan, 2016).

Engaging in both pre-service programs and induction programs has benefits, but when teachers engage in induction programs aimed at teaching and providing novice teachers with tools and strategies for teaching, they can excel as teachers. Numerous scholars have investigated the effectiveness of induction programs in reducing teacher attrition. Ingersoll and Strong (2011) examined induction programs through a longitudinal survey. The findings indicated that induction programs were considered a direct response to lower teacher attrition. Hammerness and Matsko (2013) conducted a case study regarding the effectiveness of induction programs in Chicago Public Schools. The research revealed that induction programs focus on pedagogical content rather than providing situational context. This study centered on the importance of providing context about the school and environment in an urban teacher preparation program. Hammerness and Matsko (2013) determined that in providing context regarding the school and the community, teachers were knowledgeable about “economic, geographic, and cultural features of their district and school” (p. 574). Providing teachers with context while in the induction program presented support to teachers which contributed to their success with students and teaching. African American teachers are 80% more likely to receive
extensive induction support than White teachers, and African American teachers are more inclined to attend induction programs due to the challenges that many face teaching in urban education (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017). Engaging in induction programs builds the confidence of educators and increases their belief in themselves to handle the burdens of the profession.

*Mentorship programs.* The acquisition of teachers to fill classrooms has resulted in teacher recruitment through alternative programs. In 2015–2016, 18% or 676,000 teachers that entered the profession, did so through an alternative program (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2015). As teachers with limited experiences enter the field, they are often paired with teacher mentors. Cicchinelli and Pammer-Schindler (2022) found that mentor support can influence productive problem-solving strategies and critical thinking strategies. Mentors can address many attrition factors identified by principals and provide an outlet and a second opinion to teachers that feel ostracized.

Teacher mentorship programs have success because they create meaningful relationships among colleagues that garner mutual respect and a desire to learn one from another (Hellsten et al., 2009). Teacher mentorship allows teachers to engage with lesson planning, practice delivering instruction, and reflect on their practice with guidance from their mentor (Mathur et al., 2013). Non-traditional teachers that enter the profession through alternative certification programs may receive mentorship from a veteran teacher as a certification component. Heineke et al. (2014) found that teachers that persist in the profession attribute their success to having mentors and supportive principals. As teachers continue to leave the profession, alternatively certified teachers fill many classrooms. Mentorship programs help teachers gain confidence, build collaboration,
personal growth, and self-reflection (Grierson et al., 2011). Grierson et al. (2011) conducted a study with 166 teacher candidates that participated in a peer mentorship program. The participants ranged from year-one to year-three candidates and were given mentorship partners. Participants used a five-point Likert scale to rate how often they engaged with their mentor at the end of the program. Additionally, participants used a Likert scale to convey how well the mentorship program was for novice teachers and mentors. The results revealed that mentorship was effective in creating collaborative opportunities for participants. Teachers long to feel a sense of belonging and collaboration with peers (Garcia-Torres, 2019). Fostering and developing these feelings can encourage teachers to remain in the profession.

Mentorship programs assist in fostering a sense of belonging. Sunde and Ulvik (2014) conducted a study analyzing mentorship from the administrator’s perspective. The study was conducted in Norway with nine school leaders. The findings revealed that school leaders perceive beginning teacher needs as practical and professional and mentors are qualified by the level of experience. School leaders are essential in securing mentors and cultivating teamwork amongst staff members. Further, Sunde and Ulvik (2014) concluded that school principals are essential to the success of new teachers by creating professional communities that embrace teacher ideas and visions. Teacher retention is not the sole responsibility of the administrator, but principals play a vital role in ensuring teachers feel needed and wanted. Participation in induction and pre-service programs prepares educators to do the work of teaching. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) asserted through research that teachers that participate in induction programs and mentorship are less likely to resign. Assigning mentors to teachers that are on the same
grade level or teach the same subject is optimal for the success of the mentee (Johnson & Kardos, 2010). Hellsten et al. (2009) explained that regardless of the type of mentor, veteran teacher, or supervisor, mentees learn even when they intentionally did not engage with the mentor. Those that do not participate in these programs have a propensity to leave the profession more frequently than program participants.

The Role of the Administrator

As the discussion of teacher attrition heightens, school leadership is cited as a factor that reduces teacher attrition. Kim (2019) asserted that the quality of school leadership significantly impacts how successful a school is. Research shows there is a connection between trust fostered by principals and teacher retention (Kuykendall & Slater, 2020). School principals serve as the leaders, motivators, and purveyors of school culture and school climate. The relationships built by school principals is important to the overall success and execution of the school vision. Additionally, school principals are tasked with building relationships with all stakeholders. Prado and Spillane (2019) explained that school stakeholders included all building staff members, teachers, and students. In the following sections, I share research focused on the administrator’s role in creating a culture of feedback, professional development, leader development, and school safety.

Culture of feedback. Creating an environment where feedback is welcomed and accepted by principals builds staff confidence and trust. Multisource feedback entails providing feedback to both teachers and principals (Goldring et al., 2015). Goldring et al. (2015) explained that teacher feedback provides principals with an alternative perspective on their performance. Further, school leaders need critical feedback from teachers for
continued growth and development in the school community. The cycle of feedback from leader to teacher and teacher to leader is essential in creating trust among staff members and leadership. The relationship built by school principals is important to the overall success and execution of the school vision (Kim, 2019). Feedback given or received is most effective when there is a relationship between each party. Teachers provide feedback to principals that they trust and feel connection with. It is imperative that teachers trust school leadership (Handford & Leithwood, 2012). In a study conducted with 24 randomly selected teachers from the mid-eastern, mid-western, and south-western United States, researchers found teachers trust leaders that exemplify leadership traits. Such traits are competency, consistency, reliability, openness, respect, and integrity (Handford & Leithwood, 2012). Trust in leadership strengthens the relationships within the school and helps reduce friction (Handford & Leithwood, 2012; Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

*Professional development.* Principals are responsible for teacher development of teachers. Professional development centers on learning, support, and collaboration to increase the probability of a teacher remaining in the profession (Ado, 2013). It is through these continued professional educational opportunities that school principals can build teacher confidence. Carlisle and Berebitsky (2011) examined the effectiveness of professional development with first grade teachers. The researchers compared the impact of having professional development with and without a literacy coach. Teachers that had professional development with a literacy coach showed an increase in student performance in literacy as the professional development centered on instruction delivery. Presenting professional development in an environment where skills can be developed
beyond one meeting helps to increase student achievement (Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2011). Administration, school-based leadership, or an outside agency can provide professional development, but following up after the professional development with workshops or teacher check-ins helps the teacher improve (Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2011).

The quality and type of professional development teachers experience are determined by needs identified by school leadership. Virtual professional development allows teachers to attend more courses that speak to their specific needs at their own pace. The benefits of virtual professional development are flexibility due to asynchronous options, opportunities to build and practice with other professionals, and an increase in teacher engagement (Stieben et al., 2017). Principals must be strategic in the professional development that is provided and select courses focused on the needs of the staff. Unfortunately, many teachers do not experience fruitful and meaningful professional development that will prepare them for curricular challenges, pedagogical improvements, or student needs (Wee et al., 2007). As principals address teacher attrition, providing professional developments that speak to factors that lead to attrition can provide teachers with strategies to balance the demands of the profession.

Leader development. The development of other leaders is essential to the role of a principal or school leader. Research has shown that distributive leadership allows principals to focus on developing a priori knowledge that will assist in the matriculation of rising leaders (Huggins et al., 2016). When issues arise in schools, principals may be at the forefront responding to student, family, and staff complaints. Huggins et al. (2016) conducted an exploratory qualitative study where two high school principals analyzed the capacities and leadership skills of leaders in their schools. Each principal viewed
leadership development as an individualistic endeavor strategically designed by the principal to address the leaders’ needs (Huggins et al., 2016). Principals must develop the leadership skills of other leaders. Principals do not have the capacity to address everything, thus the development of a competent supportive team to assist in leading the school is needed (Ni et al., 2018). Principals are charged with building this capacity within others (Dimmock, 2012). As such, staff members primarily interact with the assistant or vice principal (Yu-Kwong & Walker, 2010). Balancing the demands of the staff and families requires assistance, generally from assistant or vice principals. These experiences provide training for assistant principals who may evolve as leaders (Walker et al., 2003). Ni et al. (2018) found that principals created environments that influenced the development of future leaders.

*School safety.* Safety in urban schools is a priority of school leadership. The physical makeup and demographic makeup of the school impact its functionality (Lameoreaux et al., 2020). Lameoreaux et al. (2020) highlighted the necessity to create physically safe schools that do not negatively impact school function or climate. As school shootings and violence increase in urban settings, many districts are increasing security measures (Coon & Travis, 2012). Though increased security contributes to an immediate sense of security, the lasting effects negatively affect school climate (Lameoreaux et al., 2020). Principals must be cognizant that the physical space or environment contributes to the overall perception of safety for teachers.

Emotional or psychological safety is of equal importance as physical safety. The COVID-19 pandemic created an environment where principals had to manage the unknown. Weiner et al. (2021) stated that principals “were thrust into the role of helping
faculty, staff, students, and families learn how to effectively ‘do school’ in a highly uncertain and ever-changing environment” (p. 1). For a school to be emotionally or psychologically safe, employees must feel that they will not be ridiculed, embarrassed, or rejected for sharing thoughts or opinions. The administrator is responsible for setting the vision of the school, which includes a response to crises. Principals must have a clear and effective response to crises, yet many do not (Weiner et al., 2021). If teachers do not feel physically safe, they will be less inclined to remain in that school. Similarly, if the school culture is not receptive to teacher input, teachers may begin to feel as if they have no voice. Providing space for teachers to provide feedback speaks to their psychological safety as teachers must feel safe to provide feedback. In creating an atmosphere where constructive feedback is shared, principals can address the psychological safety of teachers because they know they will not be penalized or isolated for expressing an unfavorable opinion. Kelley and Dikkers (2016) found that multi-rater feedback or feedback from multiple sources is critical for individual improvement in leadership. In this study, the term multi-rater feedback referred to the collection of data from employees regarding leadership effectiveness. Seeking this level of feedback for leadership increases the level of teacher autonomy. Research shows that teacher autonomy or professional independence is necessary for teacher satisfaction (Worth & Van den Brande, 2020). It is through creating an environment of psychological safety that school principals can encourage teachers to provide honest and unbiased feedback.

Synthesis of Literature

Student academic growth and achievement are attributable to quality teachers and instructional delivery. Teachers are the central figure in student learning as their
interactions with students fosters learning (Levya et al., 2015). Understanding the significance of a teacher to the educational process of a student, the rate of teachers that leave the profession drastically decreases the likelihood that all students will receive a quality education from a qualified instructor. Attrition cost in the state of Texas is among the highest in the country costing the state $235 million (Callahan, 2016). School systems across the country are incurring a debt that is avoidable, yet many districts do not understand the reasons behind teacher attrition. There is no singular reason that can be attributed to teacher attrition, but rather a combination of factors leads to teacher attrition (Erichsen & Reynolds, 2020; Gillani et al., 2022). Teacher burnout due to poor working conditions, an increased workload, and perceived low salaries have been attributable factors for teacher attrition (Cieslinski & Szum, 2014). Additionally, a lack of belonging, emotional exhaustion, and value consonance or feeling that the organization’s goals and values at the school do not align with the teachers’ personal values are factors that lead to attrition (Rothmann et al., 2017). Principals are greatly affected by teacher attrition, as school culture and finances are immediately impacted, and the reasons teachers leave according to principals varies. The cost of replacing teachers is crippling for districts (Callahan, 2016). While analyzing district finances, teacher salary is often cited as a mitigating factor for attrition (Sulis et al., 2022). Principals must be cognizant of the workload that teachers manage. Poor working conditions create stress among teachers (Clay, 2020). As principals hire new teachers and strive to retain those hired, they must acknowledge and address the factors that lead to teacher attrition.

Pre-service programs, induction programs, and teacher mentorship can support teacher retention. Preparing teachers for the work through pre-service programs gives
teachers an insight into the profession before they begin the work (Reeves, 2017). Pre-service programs provide an opportunity for modeling by veteran teachers and novice teachers to ask questions in preparation for live teaching (Clarke et al., 2013). Similarly, mentorship programs allow novice teachers to improve pedagogically through modeling, lesson preparation, and practice with an experienced teacher (Mathuer et al., 2013). Teachers desire to build relationships with their colleagues and mentorship naturally creates relationships between mentors and mentees (Hellsten et al., 2009).

The role of the administrator encompasses creating a culture of inclusivity and learning for both staff and students. Principals identify professional development opportunities for staff members that meet the area of deficiency or need. Professional development provides educators with an opportunity to improve their craft. The benefits of virtual professional development are flexibility due to asynchronous options, opportunities to build and practice with other professionals, and an increase in teacher engagement (Stieben et al., 2017). As principals strategize to reduce attrition, creating an environment where feedback is welcomed and professional development opportunities are offered, teachers will feel connected to the leader and school (Thomas et al., 2018).

The perspective of the administrator is necessary when considering teacher attrition because principals are front-line defenders when fighting to retain teachers. If the administrator’s perspective does not align with the reasons teachers give for leaving the profession, the issue cannot be adequately addressed. As such, I designed this study to explore urban high school principals’ perceptions of why teachers leave the teaching profession and to identify the methods used by principals to retain teachers.
Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework I chose to serve as the foundation of this study was Herzberg’s (1959) Two Factor Theory. Frederick Herzberg was an American psychologist most known for his ideas in management and motivational theory. In 1959, Herzberg theorized that particular factors contribute to people’s feelings about work.

Herzberg’s Motivation-Hygiene Theory, or Herzberg’s (1959) Two Factor Theory, hypothesized that factors constitute job satisfaction (motivator factors) and job dissatisfaction (hygiene factors).

Herzberg (1959) developed the Two Factor Theory after conducting research with employees regarding their job satisfaction and identified two types of factors: motivator factors and hygiene factors. Motivator factors were the factors that promote job satisfaction, while factors identified as poor hygiene factors aligned to job dissatisfaction. According to Herzberg’s (1959) Two Factor Theory, hygiene factors promote dissatisfaction or a lack of dissatisfaction. Motivator factors similarly only promote satisfaction or a lack of satisfaction.

In a study analyzing the impact of motivator and hygiene factors on academicians, Singh and Bhattacharjee (2020) identified workplace demographics and work environment as factors leading to job dissatisfaction. An additional example of a hygiene factor or dissatisfier is relationships with supervisors and peers. Improving hygiene factors decreases the level of dissatisfaction for employees (Bhatt et al., 2022). To retain employees, it is imperative that employee satisfaction is prioritized and maximized (Bhatt et al., 2022). Motivator factors can lead to teacher retention. Alshemri et al. (2017) indicated that motivator factors increase job satisfaction and poor hygiene factors increase job dissatisfaction.
Some researchers have acknowledged that Herzberg’s (1959) Two Factor Theory is dated and holds less merit in comparison to other theories (Bhatt et al., 2022). Bhatt et al. (2022) investigated the relevancy of Herzberg’s theory with job satisfaction of millennials. According to Bhatt et al. (2022), millennials find job satisfaction through motivator factors only, which is contradictory to Herzberg’s (1959) Two Factor Theory. There is a distinct difference between the two factors (Alshemri et al., 2017). Herzberg’s (1959) Two Factor Theory views job satisfaction as factors leading to satisfaction or a lack of satisfaction and factors leading to dissatisfaction or a lack of dissatisfaction. Although some may consider the theory to be dated, it is through the examination of the reasons teachers leave the profession as perceived by principals that teacher attrition can be understood, and teachers’ needs can be met.

**Conclusion: Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this single case study was to explore urban high school principals’ perceptions of why teachers leave the teaching profession and to identify the methods used by principals to retain teachers. This study highlights the experiences of four high school principals in a charter network in the northeastern United States. Although researchers identified factors that contribute to teacher attrition (den Brok et al., 2017; Garcia et al., 2022; Sass et al., 2012), a more layered approach focused on principals’ perceptions of why teachers resign could benefit principals and teachers. As such, the following research questions guided this study:

1. According to urban high school principals, for what reasons do urban high school teachers leave the teaching profession?

2. What policies, procedures, or strategies do urban high school principals use to retain teachers?
This study brings awareness to the issue of teacher attrition in urban education and the lack of policies to retain teachers. The findings of this study will inform school principals and district leaders of the necessity to develop policies and procedures to retain teachers. Teachers are instrumental in the academic and social growth of students, so when teachers are absent from the classroom, the academic and social growth of students may be stunted. To retain teachers in urban education, an understanding of factors leading to teacher resignations is needed, accompanied with strategies to use when conversing with teachers that have expressed a desire to leave. High teacher retention rates benefit the entire school community and creates consistency among the staff and students needed to build meaningful relationships. It is imperative that teachers are retained in all schools, but the impact is even greater in urban areas.

In Chapter One, I presented the statement of the problem and provided a detailed review and synthesis of the literature. Herzberg’s (1959) Two Factor Theory served as the theoretical framework for the study. Chapter Two includes the researcher perspective and positionality and research design. Additionally, Chapter Two includes the data collection procedures, protocols, and steps for data analysis.
CHAPTER TWO
Methodology

Introduction: Research Questions

The impact of teacher attrition in urban education affects school culture and student achievement (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Replacing qualified teachers presents a challenge to principals and school districts. Urban schools present challenges for teachers that are not found in suburban or rural schools (Williams et al., 2021). When societal issues infiltrate the school system, principals often serve as community leaders and liaisons (Green, 2018). Principals in urban education must have knowledge of hygiene factors, which are factors that contribute to job dissatisfaction, to prevent teachers from leaving the profession once a desire to leave is expressed. They must also consider the policies, procedures, or strategies they can use to help retain teachers.

The purpose of this single case study was to explore urban high school principals’ perceptions of why teachers leave the teaching profession and to identify the methods used by principals to retain teachers. I used Herzberg’s Two Factor Theory as the theoretical framework for this study. The two research questions that guided this study were:

1. According to urban high school principals, for what reasons do urban high school teachers leave the teaching profession?

2. What policies, procedures, or strategies do urban high school principals use to retain teachers?
Researcher Perspective and Positionality

As an educator for more than a decade, I have had a tremendous experience in my chosen career path. Understanding that my experience was favorable, I recognize that the same does not hold for all educators in the field. My experience as an educator has only been in urban communities. The power of an educator in an urban community is endless. Many children and families struggle with abandonment and look to the educational system, specifically teachers and schools to bring a sense of consistency. When a teacher leaves in the middle of the year or after a year, there can be an emptiness felt among staff and students. Having watched teachers leave consistently year after year, seldom reaching five years, I began to seek an understanding of why teachers chose to leave. The increasing problem of teacher attrition is plaguing inner-city schools and urban education.

As a newly appointed high school principal, I desire to examine teacher attrition from the perspective of school principals. I also would like to identify the policies or protocols utilized by principals to prevent or deter teachers from leaving the profession. When teachers decide to sign a contract with a school district, they must be aware of the pivotal role in the lives and communities of those they will educate. Principals are tasked with impressing this importance to teachers to ensure that when they commit to the profession, they commit to the children, their families, and the community. As a new administrator, this study will assist in my continued effort to retain teachers.

Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested that philosophical assumptions that makeup researcher beliefs that guide inquiries are considered worldviews. The worldview that this study is rooted in is social constructivism. Social constructivism looks to understand the world that one both lives and works. Meaning is derived through lived experiences of others (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Theorist Lev Vygotsky (1962) believed that people learn
best from social interaction. Vygotsky’s theory of social constructivism theorized that through social interactions, one develops consciousness and skills through modeled instruction and discussion. Utilizing a social constructivist approach, school principals and assistant principals can equip teachers with tools through social interactions such as professional development and mentorship to address attrition factors while encouraging and empowering teachers to remain in the profession.

Theoretical Framework Application

The theoretical framework that I selected for this study was Herzberg's (1959) Two Factor Theory. Herzberg’s (1959) Two Factor Theory asserted that job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction are attributable to specific factors. Factors that contribute to job satisfaction are called motivator factors, while factors that contribute to job dissatisfaction are considered hygiene factors. Addressing teacher attrition in urban education requires an examination of the motivator and hygiene factors as perceived by school principals. Analyzing these factors may assist principals in creating systems or policies to reduce the number of teachers leaving urban education.

Herzberg’s (1959) Two Factor Theory’s factors that lead to job satisfaction and dissatisfaction guided the development of this study’s research questions. Teachers that leave the profession leave due to job dissatisfaction. Principals in urban schools may perceive teacher dissatisfaction differently but recognition of such factors is necessary to combat teacher attrition through the development of retention policies, procedures, and strategies. Teachers attribute a lack of connection with colleagues, excessive workload, and poor work-life balance as reasons for leaving the profession (Torres, 2016). Hygiene factors such as salary contribute to the dissatisfaction of teachers. Without a clear
understanding of why teachers show dissatisfaction in the profession, identifying a resolve for the problem may elude school districts and school leadership. Teacher attrition requires principals to replace teachers that vacate their positions. The first research question in this study is related to principals’ identification of the reasons why teachers are dissatisfied and leave the profession. Herzberg’s theory asserts that motivator factors lead to job satisfaction, thus the second research question in this study is related to how principals use policies, procedures, and strategies to retain teachers.

The theoretical framework I selected informed the data collection for this study. Data collected included factors that contribute to job satisfaction and dissatisfaction based on the perspectives of principals. I used semi-structured interviews and a focus group discussion to determine principals’ perspectives related to teacher attrition and also retention policies, procedures and strategies. Principals are at the forefront of the fight against teacher attrition, so the perspective of the principal is unique. Additional research, such as this study, is needed to understand principals’ perspectives on teacher attrition. Herzberg’s (1959) Two Factor Theory aided in the formulation of interview and focus group discussion questions I posed to principals, which highlighted factors leading to teacher retention and attrition. Motivator and hygiene factors guided me when I crafted the interview questions and focus group discussion questions. I also used artifacts provided by participants to support their perspectives.

The data I analyzed included factors principals expressed in the interviews and focus group discussion as leading to teacher attrition or retention. I categorized the factors they shared as motivator or hygiene according to Herzberg’s (1959) Two Factor Theory. I analyzed the reasons principal participants thought teachers leave the
profession and the reasons principal participants thought teachers stay in the profession, and I analyzed whether these reasons were motivator or hygiene factors according to Herzberg’s (1959) Two Factor Theory.

**Research Design and Rationale**

I selected a single case study for this research study. The perspective of four high school principals from three schools within a charter network in the northeastern United States provided insight on the topic of teacher attrition while analyzing retention policies within the network. The qualitative research design seeks to explain the behavior and thought process of others through pre-existing or newly developed ideas (Yin, 2016). Qualitative research is rooted in sociology and humanities (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, I acknowledge the perspectives of teacher attrition according to urban principals. Understanding each perspective illuminated how principals address teacher resignations. I chose a qualitative approach for this study because understanding the perspectives of each principal participant and their personal stories and experiences revealed their perceptions of teacher attrition.

Within qualitative research, there are multiple approaches available for researchers to select that most accurately and appropriately align with their study. The case study approach provides understanding for complex ideas and extends thinking while adding to pre-existing research. Case studies allow researchers to analyze “a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 14). I sought to understand urban high school principals’ perceptions of why teachers leave the teaching profession and to identify the methods used by principals to retain teachers. A case study best suited this study because the research questions
required the researcher to gain data from multiple sources and perspectives to fully understand the issue. The participants were bounded by their experience as high school principals, similar years as assistant principals, and total years of experience within the same charter network.

In this study, I used a single case study approach which allowed me to conduct an in-depth analysis of the perspective of four high school principals from three high schools regarding teacher attrition and retention. Each high school operates under and within the design of a larger charter network. A single case study answers evaluative how and why questions (Yin, 2018). With the use of the research questions, I sought to understand urban high school principals’ perceptions of why teachers leave the teaching profession and to identify the methods used by principals to retain teachers. A single case study was used to analyze the lived experiences of principals within the same charter network with access to the same retention materials. I sought to identify commonalities found in retention techniques used by the principal participants.

Though research outlines reasons why teachers leave from the perspective of the teacher, the perspective of teacher attrition from the lens of school administration is underdeveloped. When teachers leave the profession, the school community is impacted, and the principal is forced to find a replacement teacher. The impact that teacher attrition has on principals is an understudied field. The lived experiences of four principals from three schools provided a new perspective that is necessary when discussing teacher attrition and teacher retention. Figure 1 provides an overview of the research design for this study.
Research Questions:
1) According to urban high school principals, for what reasons do urban high school teachers leave the teaching profession?
2) What policies, procedures, or strategies do urban high school principals use to retain teachers?

Design Method: Single Case Study

Data Collection: Semi-structured interview, Focus Group Discussion, Artifact Collection

Data Analysis: Codes, categories, and themes identified

Findings: Reported in table format specifying categories and themes.

Figure 1. Research design.

Site Selection and Participant Sampling

This study focused on four principals from three college preparatory high schools within a charter network in the northeastern United States. This study occurred in an urban city in the northeastern United States. According to the U.S. Census (2019), the population of the city exceeds 200,000. The largest racial group is African American at approximately 50%. Further, more than one in four individuals of the population live in poverty. The highest level of education for 75% of residents is high school with only 15% of residents reporting a bachelor’s degree as the highest level of education (US Census, 2019). I provide more information about the site of the study and the study participants in the following sections.


Site

I selected a conglomerative charter network located in the northeastern United States as the site for this study because as a current employee, each school and principal were easily accessible. Conducting this study in a charter network provided insight into the organization that was not otherwise readily available and provided a deeper understanding of the network’s inner workings. As an employee, I have watched teachers leave the profession over time, and I have seen the strain placed on principals to fill available positions even though teacher salaries in the charter network studied are higher than the salaries of the traditional public school district. It may be important to note that the charter network studied did not experience high attrition rates during the virtual year of instruction beginning March 2020 and ending June 2021.

Three college preparatory high schools represented the charter network that was the site of this study. Table 1 includes an overview of information about each school. School One (pseudonym) was established in 2007 and employs more than 137 staff members and has 800 students in grades 9–12. At the time of the study, School One had as a teacher retention rate of 73%. School Two has been in existence since 2019 and had 360 students in grades 9–11 with more than 50 employees. School Two (pseudonym) had a teacher retention rate of 65%. Established in 2020, School Three (pseudonym) had a teacher retention rate of 90% with 240 students in grades 9–10 and more than 30 staff members. The school leadership at each high school has changed over time. I provide information about four principals from these three schools in the following section.
Table 1

School Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Demographic</th>
<th>School One</th>
<th>School Two</th>
<th>School Three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year Established</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Levels</td>
<td>9–12</td>
<td>9–11</td>
<td>9–10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Population</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Staff</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention Rate</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants

Participants in this study included four principals from the three sites (see Table 2). The four principals in this study have served in many roles. They each were teachers for five or more years, and they were school leaders for a minimum of two years. I selected the study participants using purposive sampling. Barrett et al. (2015) explained that purposive sampling depends on the researcher’s connection to the field of study and relationship with the intended participants. My connection to the study was that I was a principal in one of the schools in the charter network at the time of the study. Teacher attrition directly impacted my school. Understanding factors that lead to both teacher satisfaction and dissatisfaction equips me as the principal with knowledge to effectively address the needs of the teachers. Further, “Purposive sampling means that after taking into consideration the purpose of the research, we seek for a pre-determined target group” (Apostolopoulos & Liargovas 2016, p. 25). I selected the participants based on their experiences as school administrators, the diversity of the experiences that each participant would bring to the study, and their consent to participate in the study.
Table 2

School Leadership Demographics and Site Locations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years in Education</th>
<th>Years as a Principal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abby</td>
<td>School One</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>School Two</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cady</td>
<td>School Three</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don</td>
<td>School One</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection Procedures and Protocols

The collection of multiple data sources strengthens case studies (Yin, 2018). Unlike quantitative or mixed methods designs, qualitative research is built on the experiences of participants. Case studies are “in-depth study of a phenomenon in its real-world context” (Yin, 2018, p. 127). Discussing the phenomenon of teacher attrition from the lived experiences of high school principals in this study provided an in depth and realistic perspective of the problem. Collecting data from multiple sources allowed for an in-depth analysis. The data sources I used in this study included semi-structured interviews, a focus group discussion, and artifact collection. I conducted the data collection over two months (see Table 3).

It is also important to note that I conducted a pilot interview with a principal from outside of the charter network in this study. The pilot interviewee answered the interview questions so that I could consider if I needed to make any changes to the interview questions prior to conducting the study. I made no alterations to the questions after conducting the pilot interview.
Table 3

*Data Collection Timeline*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 2022</td>
<td>Individual Semi-Structured Interviews</td>
<td>Discuss reasons teachers resign according to principals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2022</td>
<td>Artifact Collection</td>
<td>All principals email artifacts regarding retention policies or procedures when teacher expresses desire to leave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2022</td>
<td>Focus Group Discussion</td>
<td>Identify ways the charter network can address reduce attrition rates according to principals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data Collection Protocols*

Before data collection began, I sent each participant an email detailing the purpose of the study and requesting their consent to participate (see Appendices C and D). I informed participants that their participation would be voluntary with no compensation. I used three data sources: semi-structured interviews, a focus group discussion, and artifact collection. I describe these data sources in the following sections.

*Semi-structured interview.* I interviewed each principal participant in this study. The semi-structured interview allowed me to identify reasons why they believe teachers leave the profession and reasons why they believe teachers stay in the profession according to each principal in the study. An interview protocol that incorporated elements of the study’s theoretical framework, specifically hygiene and motivator factors, guided the interview with participants (see Appendix A). Table 4 illustrates the alignment between Herzberg’s (1959) Two Factor Theory and the interview questions. The questions I asked helped participants identify factors that they believe lead to teacher
attrition. The average time of each interview was 45 to 60 minutes. Qualitative interviews are intentionally open-ended in nature to allow participants to speak freely regarding the topic (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The structure of the semi-structured interview fostered additional questions that participants answered.

Table 4

*Theoretical Framework and Interview Alignment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Herzberg’s (1959) Two Factor Theory Component</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hygiene Factors</td>
<td>6, 7, 8–10, 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivator Factors</td>
<td>5, 8–12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Focus group discussion.* Three of the four participants met on Zoom for one hour to discuss their experiences with both teacher attrition and teacher retention in a focus group discussion. During the focus group discussion, I asked the principal participants to discuss the reasons why teachers leave the profession, which I identified during the semi-structured interviews. Reducing attrition rates requires intentional acknowledgement and planning by school leaders. As part of the focus group discussion, the participants in this study strategized how to address teacher attrition by identifying the reasons why teachers leave the profession and discussing them with one another.

Five questions guided the focus group discussion (see Appendix B). These questions, which I crafted, aligned with the theoretical framework. Table 5 illustrates the alignment between Herzberg’s (1959) Two Factor Theory and the focus group discussion questions. The questions also centered on the policies, procedures, or strategies principals used to retain teachers. They each expounded on the reasons they provided during the semi-structured interview regarding why they believed teachers left and named three
things that impact their decision to fight for a teacher to stay. Discussion centered on the organization’s stance on promoting teacher retention. Participants continued the discussion by providing additional information on teacher attrition they may have neglected to include in the interview.

| Table 5 |
|---|---|
| **Theoretical Framework and Focus Group Discussion Alignment** |  |
| Herzberg’s (1959) Two Factor Theory Component | Focus Group Discussion Questions |
| Hygiene Factors | 2, 4, 5 |
| Motivator Factors | 1, 3, 4, 5 |

*Artifact collection.* I asked the principals to email any artifacts related to teacher attrition or retention, including district- or school-wide teacher retention policies, and to provide their permission to use the artifacts in the study. I also requested the retention rates for each school for the past three years but received regional retention rates from 2014–2022. One participant also provided a list of reasons teachers gave for leaving during teacher exit interviews.

*Data Analysis Procedures*

I conducted the data analysis for this study in three phases, focusing on principals’ perceptions of teacher job satisfaction and teacher job dissatisfaction. Qualitative data analysis happens “hand-in-hand with other parts of developing the qualitative study” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 192). Objectively, the researcher must validate the data analysis process in multiple ways to ensure they collect and interpret the data in an ethical manner. I analyzed the data using the data analysis spiral (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
In this section I illustrate the data analysis phases and describe how I interpreted the data.

The first phase of data analysis began with participants from each site receiving and signing consent forms. Then, I scheduled and conducted the semi-structured interviews. Next, I gave the participants a copy of the transcript from their interview. Participants reviewed the transcript to report any inaccuracies that contradicted their statements or thoughts. I used this transcript verification as a form of member checking to assist in determining validity (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

After the completion of all interviews, I conducted the focus group discussion with the participants. After reviewing the focus group discussion transcripts, I identified codes and coded the interviews and focus group discussion transcripts. This step involved putting text into categories and labeling those categories utilizing verbiage used by participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The final phase of the data analysis process was a within-case analysis. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that the triangulation of data or the gathering of data from multiple sources used to identify common themes or codes increases the study’s validity, authenticity, and trustworthiness. After I identified the codes and categories, I identified themes related to the research question, the theoretical framework, and other emerging themes. I organized the data in response to the research questions using tables to show the commonalities and differences across the four embedded units of analysis in this study. Table 6 includes the alignment between the research questions and the data analysis.
Table 6

Data Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. According to urban high school principals, for what reasons do urban high school teachers leave the teaching profession? | • Interview Questions 6–8  
• Focus Group Discussion Question 2 |
| 2. What policies, procedures, or strategies do urban high school principals use to retain teachers? | • Interview Questions 9–10  
• Focus Group Discussion Questions 1, 3, 4  
• Artifact Collection |

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

For this study, I used the TACT framework to ensure trustworthiness and dependability in the research. TACT is an acronym for trustworthiness, auditability, credibility, and transferability (Daniel, 2018). The first component of the TACT framework is trustworthiness. Trustworthiness in qualitative research relates to the researcher’s ability to remain integral during every step of the process and outcome of a study (Daniel, 2018). When establishing trustworthiness, the researcher must acknowledge the potential researcher biases and experiences while ensuring that the data collected and presented accurately reflects the words and ideas of the participants. As such, I had to consider my potential researcher bias as a current employee of the charter network. I used the same interview questions for each participant to minimize any possible researcher bias. Participants may have hesitated to share information with me in fear of being identified, but to address this, I let participants know that I would use pseudonyms rather than using participants’ names and that they could withdraw from the study at any time.
The second component of the TACT framework is auditability. As a researcher, I had to consider my biases and experiences as I collected, analyzed, and reported the data to address auditability. Daniel (2019) explained auditability as the systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of collected data. Auditability requires the researcher to explain how they engaged with the data throughout the collection, evaluation, and interpretation process (Daniel, 2019). I collected the data in this study and stored all documents in a password protected internet-based system.

The third component of the TACT framework is credibility. Credibility is established by the researcher by showing congruence and relevancy through collecting data from multiple sources (Daniel, 2018). I collected the data in this study through semi-structured interviews, a focus group discussion, and artifacts. When researchers collect and analyze data from multiple sources, this process is called triangulation. I triangulated the data in this study by bringing these sources together in data analysis. Triangulation increased the credibility of the study (Daniel, 2018). During the triangulation process, I examined each data source to uncover commonalities or themes among each embedded unit of analysis. Collecting data from multiple sources and analyzing the data to find similarities or triangulating the data added to the credibility of the study. As I identified themes through fusing multiple sources, the process added validity to the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Using the active process of reflexivity, I used my understanding and experience with the research topic to interpret the data. Reflexivity involved acknowledging my own positionality and biases and the impact that my opinions have on the data collection stages and analysis (Dodgson, 2019). Practicing reflexivity provided me an opportunity
to pinpoint when my personal views may have unintentionally influenced the study. Instead of shifting the focus of the study onto myself as the researcher, I needed to evaluate how my own positionality could have affected the study’s outcomes. As a principal that works with resigning teachers, it was imperative that my experiences did not influence my analysis of the data.

The fourth component of the TACT framework is transferability. The transferability of a study refers to the ability of a study’s findings to be applied to another setting. A researcher must present rich, thick descriptions of the experiences of participants and an extensive explanation of all components of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As such, I provided rich, thick descriptions related to each embedded unit of analysis. The transparency of the study also assisted in establishing the credibility of the study.

**Ethical Considerations**

Conducting the research in the district where I work presented ethical concerns that I addressed. I took six steps to mitigate any potential concerns. First, I submitted this research to the Office of Research Compliance for review and received a non-human subject’s research determination. Second, I sent all potential participants an initial email communication informing them of the purpose of the study emailed. I conducted all communication through my university email account to differentiate and separate my work affiliation and establish the scholarly nature of the study. The email also included a statement of confidentiality. Third, participants signed a consent form before participating with the understanding that they could leave the study at any time and that there was no monetary compensation for participating in the study. Fourth, I used
pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of each participant. I used Abby, Barbara, Cady, and Don as pseudonyms for the participants. Fifth, I stored all files on a password-protected device to secure the data collected. Sixth and finally, as an employee that has worked at the site of this study, I was aware that participants may be reluctant or hesitate to share openly and honestly. As all participants were school leaders, my role as a supervisor could have been a conflict of interest. To address this potential conflict and to address concerns of familiarity with school sites, I encouraged all participants not to provide names or grade levels of any teachers discussed during the semi-structured interviews and the focus group discussion.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations of this study consisted of both limited access to data and sample size. First, one participant was not able to participate in the focus group discussion, limiting participant perspectives to those that have only served as principals for two years or less. Having the viewpoint of a participant with more than two years in the role of a principal provides unique and in-depth perspective. Second, the data or artifacts collected were limited to the charter school network. With a commonality in artifacts, there may have been limited viewpoints among all school sites regarding teacher retention policies. Third, a sample size of four was a limitation, as participants’ views and experiences may be deemed limited as they have all served as principals of only one school in the charter network. The study design did not require more participants and the information collected by the participants was germane to the organization and schools in the study.

A delimitation of this current study is the sites of the study represented only one charter network in an urban area. The premise of this study is that urban education has
higher attrition rates than other districts. The study does not include attrition rates from
districts or schools that are not in an urban setting. Though the focus of the study was
urban districts, providing attrition rates from suburban or rural districts provides
opportunities for additional comparisons. All participants have served as principals only
in urban school districts which limits their experiences and perspective to that of only
urban districts. The participants also represent principals only in the northeastern United
States which may impact the reception of the study’s findings amongst principals in other
regions of the United States. The study findings may not be applicable to principals that
are outside of the northeastern United States. Further, the theoretical framework,
Herzberg’s Two Factor Theory, was developed in 1959 and may not address all present-
day considerations and issues.

Conclusion

In Chapter Two, I illuminated the research design of the current study, the
research questions, participant sampling, site selection, data collection, and data analysis.
With this study, I sought to explore urban high school principals’ perceptions of why
teachers leave the teaching profession and to identify the methods used by principals to
retain teachers. In Chapter Three, I provide the study findings, discussion, and
implications for future research.
CHAPTER THREE

Results and Implications

Introduction

When teachers leave the profession, student achievement is impacted (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Principals are responsible for ensuring students are showing academic progress. In Chapter Two, I conveyed the importance of the research design and understanding why teachers leave the profession as seen through the lens of principals. I used semi-structured interviews, a focus group discussion, and artifact analysis to answer the research questions for the study:

1. According to urban high school principals, for what reasons do urban high school teachers leave the teaching profession?

2. What policies, procedures, or strategies do urban high school principals use to retain teachers?

This study is rooted in Herzberg’s (1959) Two Factor Theory. I used Herzberg’s notion of motivator and hygiene factors to craft each research question. First, I focused on principals’ perceptions of why teachers leave the teaching profession. Second, I focused on the policies, procedures, and strategies principals use to retain teachers.

The five findings of this study highlighted the reasons principals in the study believe teachers leave the profession and the strategies they used to try to retain them. First, the principal participants in this study perceived compensation, performance pay, and workload balance as critical to teacher decisions related to remaining or leaving the profession in different ways. Second, the principal participants in this study identified leader support and relationships as reasons why teachers stay in the profession. Third, the
principal participants in this study identified classroom management and negative student behaviors lead to teacher dissatisfaction. Fourth, the principal participants in this study recognized growth opportunities within the charter network as a reason teachers stay in the field. Fifth and finally, the principal participants in this study identified relationships as the leading retention strategy they used.

In Chapter Three, I include the findings of the study, beginning with a description of each embedded unit of analysis. I begin each embedded unit of analysis with a description of the participant and then organized the data related to the research questions within each embedded unit of analysis. Second, I include the within-case analysis. Third, I include a discussion of the study findings organized by the research questions and by the theoretical framework. Fourth, I include implications and recommendations based on the findings of the study. Fifth and finally, I conclude the chapter with a summary.

Case Description

The study findings denoted the perspectives of four high school principals and their experiences with teachers leaving the profession. In this study, I also closely examined the strategies each principal implored to retain teachers that expressed an interest in leaving. I collected data over two months, through semi-structured interviews, a focus group discussion, and the collection of artifacts. Each participant participated in a one-on-one semi-structured Zoom interview in July 2022. The participants were current or former high school principals within the same charter network who had served in the role for a minimum of two years. I facilitated the focus group discussion in August 2022 via Zoom, but one participant was unable to participate due to internet connectivity issues. Three of the four participants provided the same artifact, a teacher rubric, from the
organization. Although the fourth participant did not provide an artifact, they referenced the same artifact identified by the other participants. One participant provided an additional artifact describing reasons teachers give for leaving the profession and eight years of network attrition data.

*Abby’s Embedded Unit of Analysis*

Abby (pseudonym) is a Black female who has been in education for 15 years. She has served in her current school, School One, for seven years. At the time of the study, Abby had just completed her first year as a high school principal of School One. Previously, she served in many capacities during her career including as a mathematics teacher, department chair, and assistant principal. As a student that grew up in an urban community, Abby desired to give back to communities that cultivated her as a student. When she began her educational career, she set a goal of becoming a principal. During the eight years she worked in traditional public school, she served as a mathematics teacher and department chair. It was not until she began working in the charter network that her goal of working in administration became a reality. In her first two years in the charter network, Abby served as a mathematics department chair while also teaching. She then moved into the role of an assistant principal for three years before becoming the principal of School One.

*Abby’s perception of why teachers leave.* The first research question in this study was: According to urban high school principals, for what reasons do urban high school teachers leave the teaching profession? To answer this research question for Abby, I used her responses from the interview and the artifact she provided. The artifact Abby provided was a teaching rubric used to calculate performance pay. Additionally, she
provided regional retention rates for the past seven years and a document sharing the reasons teachers give for leaving during exit interviews.

According to Abby, the top reasons teachers leave the profession were low pay, lack of support, loneliness in their school, and a lack of growth opportunities. Abby stated in the interview,

Teachers leave the work for a multitude of reasons. The biggest reason I have seen is low pay and a lack of support from leadership. Now my experience in charter has been slightly different because there are opportunities to make more money than in traditional public school or district schools but there is sense of loneliness that many teachers feel. This is why we created the staff happy committee because we wanted to be intentional about addressing staff loneliness. We are also as you know, intentional about [teacher] coaching. Every teacher is assigned to a leader in the building that is responsible for their growth.

Abby provided an artifact detailing reasons teachers gave for leaving the charter network, which supported her rationale of teachers leaving the profession due to salary and lack of career advancement. Out of the 13 reasons listed on this document, salary was the second highest reason teachers that leave the charter network. Career advancement was the fifth reason.

When asked why she specifically focused on teacher loneliness, Abby explained that when teachers feel disconnected from coworkers and leaders, the work becomes even more difficult. She described it in this way in the interview, “I mean this work is hard enough, but it is even harder when you feel by yourself. I do not want anyone to feel like they are by themselves.” As we continued in the interview, Abby asked if she could add one more reason for teachers leaving. The last reason she identified was a lack of growth in the profession. Acknowledging that Abby previously worked in both traditional public schools and charter schools, I asked if there was a difference in career progression in public and charter. She stated it is “more difficult to get a [vice principal] role in district
school versus a charter school. I say it that way because both are really public, but the certification requirements are massively different.” All teachers do not pursue career advancement, but Abby indicated that for those that desire it, professional growth can be a retention tool.

*Abby’s strategies for teacher retention.* The second research question in this study was: What policies, procedures, or strategies do urban high school principals use to retain teachers? To answer this research question for Abby, I used her responses from the interview, the focus group discussion, and the artifact she provided.

Abby acknowledged in the interview that the organization she works for does not have an extensive teacher retention policy. The charter network does compensate teachers through performance pay and slightly higher salaries than district schools. Abby provided a teaching rubric as an artifact. She explained the importance of the artifact as it was used to determine calculate the amount a teacher receives from performance pay. Abby reiterated this point in the focus group discussion and explained,

Yes, there is concern for teacher retention but there is no codify system used for retention currently. The [rubric] does promote retention because teachers can increase their salaries up to $8,000 but that is based on performance and in the time that we have used the [rubric], how many teachers have really scored well enough to earn the $8,000? So, retention strategies are a case by case, school by school thing. Principals at each school use and do whatever they need to do to retain teachers because it is definitely not a good look to have your staff leave in a mass exodus.

Abby discussed both in the interview and during the focus group discussion her experience as a first-year principal who lost 30% of her staff due to attrition, highlighting the importance of teachers believing in the principal.
When I asked during the interview how she handled the large turnover rate, Abby responded,

Truthfully, it was not easy. I had to look retrospectively and accept that people had a vision and an idea of what my school was going to be because we started the year with a different principal so the vision and person they believed in left. I came in to keep the dream alive, but it was not my dream. Once I accepted that those that left, left the former principal I was able to move on and begin building the school that I had always envisioned.

Abby continued by saying principals do not want teachers to leave the profession, but if a teacher is not productive, principals will let them leave. When I asked her to elaborate, Abby responded,

Ideally, we would keep them all, but some just are not a good fit. They are not a good fit for staff, for students, or the culture. Those people we let them go and be great. For others, those that are an asset, you have conversations with them. You find out what the root of their decision is and if it is in your locus of control to fix, you fix it because they bring value to your school.

Sharing the principal’s role in addressing teacher concerns, Abby indicated that she works to address what she can when a teacher decides to leave the profession.

Abby explained that the strategies she has used to retain teachers included modifying their workload and shift. For example, if a conflict arises with childcare drop off or pick up, she will modify the teacher’s start and end time. She proceeded to share a story about a teacher that landed their dream job at a software company and could not maintain the full teaching load and work for the company. The teacher did not want to leave but could not pass up such an opportunity. Abby was able to modify the teacher’s workload, which allowed the teacher to work at the school and the other company for the last five months of school. The teacher did not renew their contract the following year but was hired as a consultant that continues to work with students after school.
**Abby’s summary.** In her time as an assistant principal and principal, Abby experienced four reasons for teachers quitting. Related to the first research question, the reasons Abby believed teachers left the profession were low salaries, lack of support, loneliness in schools, and a lack of professional growth. Abby elaborated on the varied reasons for teacher departure and stated both during the interview and reiterated during the focus group discussion that principals fight to retain teachers.

Related to the second research question, she has fought for teachers that are a good fit for students and staff and offer something unique for students. Abby acknowledged that strategies are used when convincing teachers to remain after expressing a desire to leave. The strategies she used, such as a modified teaching schedule and load, were in accordance with the need of the teacher. Though principals are allowed to use their own strategies for retaining teachers, the charter network uses performance pay as the primary retention strategy. Abby shared that if the teacher is an asset to the staff and students, principals will employ such strategies to retain the teacher.

**Barbara’s Embedded Unit of Analysis**

Barbara (pseudonym) is a White female that has served in urban education for 10 years. Barbara attended public school throughout her schooling and admittedly received rigorous instruction that she assumed all students received. Barbara began her career in Florida as a Teach for America (TFA) core member. It was this experience that cemented Barbara’s love and passion for urban education as she witnessed firsthand the disparities in the quality of education students in urban settings received in comparison to those in suburban settings based on her own experience. She decided that becoming a principal provided her the greatest opportunity to improve academic outcomes in urban education.
Barbara served as School Two’s principal for one year but resigned from the position in June 2022.

*Barbara’s perception of why teachers leave.* The first research question in this study was: According to urban high school principals, for what reasons do urban high school teachers leave the teaching profession? To answer this research question for Barbara, I used her responses from the interview, the focus group discussion, and the artifact she provided. The artifact Barbara provided was a teaching rubric used to calculate performance pay. Additionally, she provided regional retention rates for the past seven years and a document sharing the reasons teachers give for leaving during exit interviews.

According to Barbara, teachers leave the profession due to classroom management difficulties, limited experience, compassion burnout, and insufficient pay in accordance with the teacher workload. In the interview, Barbara elaborated further,

I think they both go hand in hand. I think it is pay in accordance to the workload. Like, if people were making six figures, they might not care working at 80-hour week, but for what they are making and the amount of work, I do not think those two things are comparable.

Barbara believed the amount of work teachers are expected to do does not align to the salary they receive. She indicated that if teachers were paid according to workload, teachers may be more inclined to stay. She spoke of other career fields being more appealing because they pay more than the educational with less workload. Barbara continued to expound on the reasons teacher leave urban education specifically stating,

I think it is just compassion burnout, like especially in urban ed because you are seeing some rough things day in and day out. And if you are not like able to sort or figure out how to calibrate that, it can really wear you down.
Barbara shared that one area that teachers must navigate is classroom management. If teachers struggle with classroom management, according to Barbara, their level of fatigue and burnout increases. She stated in the interview, “I think that is like the number one thing that really wears people down. Because I mean, classroom management can be a doozy. It is a base; it is like a make or break.” According to Barbara, trying experiences with classroom management, balancing the workload, and continuously showing compassion in situations that are new or unfamiliar can negatively impact teachers.

Barbara also referenced years of experience for teachers when determining who stays and who leaves. She stated, “if you make it past year one, you may or may not last a couple more years but if you make it past year five, teachers tend to stay or become an administrator.” According to Barbara, a teacher’s years of service also contribute to the teacher’s desire to stay in the field. She indicated that the fewer years of service a teacher has, the less likely a teacher is to remain in the profession. Further, she shared the connection between compensation, workload, and classroom management can impact teacher morale. In Barbara’s opinion, teachers with less than five years of experience are more likely to leave the profession when these challenges are prevalent.

*Barbara’s strategies for teacher retention.* The second research question in this study was: What policies, procedures, or strategies do urban high school principals use to retain teachers? To answer this question, I used Barbara’s responses from the interview, the focus group discussion, and the artifact she provided.

Barbara believed the charter network in this study used more strategies for retaining teachers than policies. Like Abby, Barbara acknowledged in the interview and the focus group discussion that the charter network uses performance pay as a teacher
retention incentive. Barbara provided a performance rubric as an artifact to illustrate that the performance pay provided by this charter network exceeded the annual increase a teacher would receive in a traditional public school from surrounding school districts. As Barbara discussed performance pay in the focus group discussion, she shared additional strategies the network used, explaining,

So performance management is technically a teacher retention technique, right? To try to incentivize their pay because we do pay more competitively based on performance. And then there is just a lot of like trainings that go into teacher retention. I remember one year, we read The Carrot Principle, and everyone was in charge of like making staff appreciation plans and making sure that like you know teachers are given a lot of gratitude.

During the focus group discussion, Barbara reiterated the usage of performance pay through teachers being rated on a teacher rubric and provided a copy as a retention tool artifact. Barbara spoke about key events that the network held yearly to show gratitude. Such events included a regional summit with all schools where giveaways are distributed to all staff members and the yearly holiday party where staff members could bring as many guests as they would like free of charge. Additionally, there is a regional awards ceremony focused on highlighting and celebrating teammates with all schools. The winners of any award receive a trophy and monetary compensation. Barbara reiterated these sentiments in the focus group discussion and added that as an organization, there are competitive benefits packages that attract people to work there. The biggest retention strategy Barbara believed the organization had was “to actually promote people to leadership.” Barbara believed the problem with this philosophy is people are retained, not teachers.

Although Barbara had resigned from her leadership position, she had extensive experience with developing and implementing retention strategies. One strategy that she
used was showing teachers that expressed a desire to leave where they had success. She asserted that teachers that desire to leave do not feel successful. During the interview, Barbara stated,

    I have to show them how not only how they are successful, but I have to show them in their love language, right? Like I cannot be like data is through the roof if they do not care about data. I have to speak to what they care about so that they can see their success.

Understanding how a teacher likes to have gratitude expressed, or what Barbara called their love language, requires the principal to build a relationship with the teacher. Barbara said that when you have a relationship with your teachers, you will listen to them while seeking to understand what is driving their decision to leave. Once leaders listen to the reasons, it is acceptable for leaders to let teachers know that they support their decision to leave, but before leaving, the leader works with the teacher to address the reasons the teacher indicates they are leaving in order to retain the teacher. If a resolution such as a schedule change, teaching reassignment, or increased stipend can be agreed upon, teachers become aware of the choices they have. Barbara stated,

    I think it really surprises them because they come in and they are like assuming you are going to beg them to stay and when you offer alternatives, it takes a little bit of pressure off them. They are like, oh, wait a minute, I do have choices!

Barbara shared that listening to her teachers and addressing their needs through modifications has been the most successful teacher retention strategy for her.

    Barbara’s summary. As a principal for one year, Barbara has experienced teachers leaving the profession for many reasons. Related to the first research question, the primary reasons Barbara provided for teachers leaving the profession included teacher workload, lower salaries in comparison to workload, years of experience, and classroom
management. According to Barbara, teacher compensation is not comparable to the weekly workload of a teacher. The number of hours a teacher works is not reflected in their salary. Particularly in urban education, classroom management lends to teacher burnout and fatigue. Teachers that struggle with classroom management may express a desire to leave the profession. Barbara believed if a teacher could last at least five years in the profession, they were more inclined to stay. She shared that teachers that struggle the most with classroom management tended to be those with less than five years of experience.

Related to the second research question, Barbara asserted that the charter network being studied does not have retention policies, but they do have retention strategies. Strategies used are either presented by the network or created by individual principals. The network has used awards ceremonies, parties, regional summits, and monetary compensation through the teacher rubric as retention tools. A key strategy used by Barbara as a principal was building relationships with teachers and listening to their needs. Barbara believed that teachers must feel heard and once the leaders hear the concerns of the teacher, it is imperative for leaders to address the needs.

*Cady’s Embedded Unit of Analysis*

Cady (pseudonym) is a White female that has served in urban education for 13 years. Beginning her career in Pennsylvania as a TFA core member teaching 12th grade Physics, where she had her first experience with urban education and charter networks. As a core member, Cady served as a coach and trainer for new teachers while teaching herself. Cady comes from a family of teachers and teaching was a desire she always had. Cady was selected to participate in a leadership program which prepared leaders to be
principals. It was her experiences as a TFA core member and the education she gleaned from the leadership program that allowed Cady to overcome what she termed imposter syndrome and pursue leadership. Cady served as a high school principal at School Three for two years but resigned from the principal role in June 2022.

*Cady’s perception of why teachers leave.* The first research question in this study was: According to urban high school principals, for what reasons do urban high school teachers leave the teaching profession? Cady’s responses were derived from the interview and focus group discussion only, as she did not provide any artifacts.

According to Cady, teachers leave the profession due to a lack of commitment as TFA members, an increase in negative student behaviors after the pandemic, excessive workload, and student behaviors as they relate to classroom management. As a TFA core member, Cady has had experience with teachers placed in her schools by assignment rather than by choice. She believes, that in addition to TFA core members, teachers that are alternatively certified leave the profession in higher numbers. According to Cady, teachers that come into the profession through alternative certifications like TFA often leave once they fulfill their required time. Cady stated in the interview, “when asked why the teacher was leaving the response, I heard from folks was like, I was questioning whether or not I wanted to teach anymore because it was like really hard.” She continued, “these folks did not just leave my school, they left the profession totally.” When asked what made the profession difficult, her answer related to addressing student behaviors. Cady identified the COVID-19 pandemic as a reason teachers left the profession, and the impact of student behaviors post-pandemic on teachers. In the interview, Cady stated, “Student behaviors have definitely been an issue, but, like, the behaviors are far more
significant and severe than I have ever experienced and seen.” According to Cady, the student behaviors of students were the main reason teachers leave.

Germane to the organization being studied, teacher workload due to classroom coverage was the second reason Cady gave for teachers leaving. The organization does not believe in substitutes; thus, teachers cover classes for other teachers when they are absent. Cady explained,

People just feel overwhelmed and overworked due to coverage. People were spent because they were used to using their preps to actually get something done, and to be honest, with the number of people out they did not have the opportunity and was just covering. And I think that really drained people.

As a result of excessive coverage due to a fluctuation in attendance related to COVID-19, teachers were unable to maintain their workload, and time back for coverage was not given to staff members. As a result, Cady shared those teachers became very disgruntled.

Cady’s strategies for teacher retention. The second research question in this study was: What policies, procedures, or strategies do urban high school principals use to retain teachers? I used Cady’s responses from the interview and the focus group discussion to answer the question.

During the interview and focus group discussion, Cady identified the same teacher rubric Abby and Barbara shared as a retention tool used by the organization. Cady described how teachers were celebrated by the organization at award ceremonies and parties. In the focus group discussion, Cady reflected on these experiences stating, “I really think the [award ceremony] and parties in Atlantic City did bring people together. I do not know how much people care about the swag but special lunches and events, and the holiday bonus are all things that mattered.” Cady continued and discussed how the
organization did little things to show teachers that they cared about them. Something as simple as modifying the teacher dress code was an informal strategy used to retain teachers. Cady shared, “I do think that like we try to think about ways to say we care. We care about our coworkers, and we try to build strong relationships.” Like Abby and Barbara, Cady believed that the charter network uses retention strategies and principals are encouraged to utilize their own strategies to retain teachers. The charter network celebrated teachers and showed their appreciation for their work, but there were no retention policies utilized by the network.

Cady provided examples of strategies she personally used to retain teachers during the interview. Similar to Barbara, Cady had a criterion by which she used to determine if she would fight for particular teachers. Cady looked for honesty and transparency in teachers to make her decision. During the interview Cady asserted,

I will fight the hardest for the people that have been like transparent and honest about those things they have issues with from day one and have like shared their worries with me in a solutions-oriented way. And I know they are going to work with me and if I fight for them, then they are going to one, stay longer and two, remain loyal to our leadership team because we have like therefore helped them in those situations.

Cady would fight for those that she built a relationship with through transparency and honesty. She shared that she believed the relationship between teachers and leaders is critical to retaining teachers.

Cady’s summary. Related to the first research question, Cady believed teachers left the profession because of the workload derived from excessive classroom coverage coupled with student behaviors and classroom management. For teachers that are alternatively certified, she did not believe those teachers joined the profession for the
right reasons, so the probability of them leaving was higher than traditionally certified teachers. Cady experienced a large turnover rate of teachers that were alternatively certified. Teachers assigned to teach in urban neighborhoods through TFA are less likely to remain in the profession beyond the contracted years of service. Cady shared that she believed student behaviors and workload also contribute to teachers’ desire to leave the profession. The behaviors students have exhibited post-pandemic have been more extreme and volatile. Student behaviors affect classroom management which eventually leads to teacher disenchantment with the profession. As schools have navigated through the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of teachers that have been sick negatively impacted Cady’s charter network, as they do not have substitutes. As a result, teachers covered multiple classes, leaving little to no time to complete their work.

Related to the second research question, Cady recognized the retention strategies within the charter network fall into two categories. The categories are regional strategies and principal specific strategies. Regional strategies are those used throughout the organization and include awards ceremonies and parties. The primary strategy Cady used as a principal was building relationships with teachers. It was through relationship-building that teachers could be transparent and honest with her as a principal. There was a level of loyalty built between the teacher and principal, as Cady worked with the teachers to meet their needs.

*Don’s Embedded Unit of Analysis*

Don (pseudonym) is a Black male who has been in education for 15 years with nine of those years as a principal. As the oldest of six siblings, Don’s accomplishments became a badge of honor for his family. Neither his mother nor father graduated from
high school, yet they understood that education was the key to financial and academic freedom. Though Don lived in an urban neighborhood, he earned academic scholarships which allowed him to attend very prestigious private schools. Don began teaching in Washington, DC, as a special education teacher. When asked why he chose to work in urban education, he stated that he was from an urban neighborhood and that he could only dream of teaching in urban education. He has served in many capacities during her career including mathematics teacher, department chair, assistant principal, principal, curriculum writer, and chief academic officer. Don acquired his first principal position within his third year of education. He served as a high school principal for four total years in two charter schools. Three of those years were within the charter network at School One in this study. At the time of the study, Don had not worked for the charter network for two years.

Don’s perception of why teachers leave. The first research question in this study was: According to urban high school principals, for what reasons do urban high school teachers leave the teaching profession? To answer this research question for Don, I used his responses from the interview and the artifact he provided. Don did not participate in the focus group discussion.

According to Don, teachers leave the profession for uncompetitive compensation, a lack of career progression, better career opportunities and negative student behaviors. Don acknowledged that teachers come into urban education for different reasons and from different backgrounds. The most common reason teachers leave the profession according to Don is compensation. He stated in the interview,
It is the most underpaid profession of like life other than working in poverty at Starbucks. And not even because Starbucks pays a cute little $19 an hour. But for the level of stress no one wants to be getting paid pennies.

In addition to low wages, Don attributed teachers leaving the profession to a lack of career progression in traditional public schools. He noted a difference between charter networks and traditional public schools. Don explained,

This is mostly in traditional public schools, but with the bureaucratic tape, it’s so hard to progress in traditional public schools. You know, charter school, it is different. You do well, you know, stand out, and we promote you, but in traditional public schools, people slave in the classroom for 50 years and can’t get an assistant principalship. So leadership capacity and leadership pipeline is lacking.

Don also asserted that teachers leave if they are provided a better opportunity making more money with less stress. He stated,

I’m sorry, there are just better opportunities. It’s giving more opportunities, like there are just more opportunities. There’s nothing left to be said about that, you know, it’s like I’m now about to be a deputy chief academic officer. I’m now about to be a curriculum writer. It’s the direct service people get tired of.

Compensation can be an effective tool for teacher retention, or it can be a deterrent and with multiple career opportunities for educators, accepting inadequate pay is something that many teachers elect not to do over time.

Don also discussed the impact of negative student behavior that teachers must address. He explained that teachers do not come to work to be disrespected by children, and over time, if not equipped with tools to address the student behaviors, teachers can elect to work in a different profession. Don reflected on his time in the classroom. He stated,

Kids can really be rude. Like, I’m sorry, I don’t have four degrees to get cursed out by a 14-year-old. In my mind, I am saying I am not dealing with this. Unfortunately, the experience of many in urban education is that of disrespect from students.
Don further indicated that teachers deserve respect but that in the United States, teaching is one of the most underrated and unappreciated careers.

*Don’s strategies for teacher retention.* The second research question in this study was: What policies, procedures, or strategies do urban high school principals use to retain teachers? To answer this research question for Don, I used his responses from the interview, as he did not participate in the focus group discussion. I also used his references to the teacher rubric with regard to the artifact collection.

Unlike the other participants, Don did not believe the charter network in this study had any retention strategies beyond the teacher rubric. Don acknowledged performance pay as a great way to inspire teachers, but he also spoke about the difficulty in attaining the highest score which equated to the largest compensation. He believed retention practices were the responsibility of the principal. Don asserted that teachers are retained and desire to stay in the profession when they are coached by a leader that is not afraid to show or model what they want from the teacher. According to Don, it is the relationship the leader builds with teachers that gives the teacher support when the requirements of the profession become overwhelming. Don said,

> As a leader, you are giving them tools, you are giving them practice time, and you are giving them the professional learning opportunities and development that they need in order to now incorporate this thing that they can feel confident in because their leader experienced it first.

In discussing retention strategies, Don spoke of the leader as being the lynch pin in retention. “The job of the leader is to coach, hold the bar of academic excellence, to inspire, to equip, and to push.” If a leader encompasses these traits, teachers will buy into the vision of the leader and the leader.
Don’s summary. Related to the first research question, Don identified multiple reasons that result in teachers leaving the profession. Like other participants, Don’s primary reasons for teachers leaving were, compensation, workload, professional growth, and student behaviors. Teaching is one of the most underpaid and undervalued careers. Teacher salaries do not compare to the amount of work required by teachers. Though there are more opportunities for professional growth in charter networks, opportunities for career progression in other academic settings are few. Student behaviors also contribute to teachers leaving the profession. The behavior of students can be overwhelming and difficult to handle. As a result, many teachers will pursue a profession where they are respected and less stressed. Don also named a lack of respect for the profession as a reason teachers leave. According to Don, teachers in other countries are revered, but in the United States, the perception and worth of a teacher differs.

Related to the second research question, teacher retention in the charter network was heavily dependent on the efforts of principals according to Don. Principals build relationships with teachers and teach them how to improve as a teacher through modeling and coaching. The charter network uses a teacher rubric to validate increasing teachers’ salaries. Salaries are increased according to the rubric score teachers earn over one school year. Though performance pay is utilized, Don believed the best indicator for retaining teachers is the principal.

Within-Case Analysis

The within-case analysis included reading through the data, which included semi-structured interview transcripts, focus group discussion transcripts, and retention tool artifacts. The purpose of analyzing the data was to identify patterns and themes. I used
inductive coding to identify codes, which I used to develop the themes. I coded the data sources to identify themes related to the research questions, which I developed using Herzberg’s (1959) Two Factor Theory. The first research question focused on principals’ perceptions of why teachers leave the profession. The second research question focused on the strategies principals use to retain teachers. I describe the themes I uncovered when coding the data in the following sections, which are organized by the research questions.

Themes Related to the First Research Question

The first research question in this study allowed me to explore what urban principals believe are the reasons for teachers leaving the profession, which I share in this section. I list the responses gathered from the semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion, and artifact collection in Table 7. I note the reasons with an “X” to represent participant responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Abby</th>
<th>Barbara</th>
<th>Cady</th>
<th>Don</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workload and Compensation Outside the Charter Network</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Management and Student Behavior</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Experience</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternate Certification</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 Pandemic</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Advancement Opportunities Outside the Charter Network</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The principals in this study identified seven reasons that they believe lead to teacher attrition, and in this section, I focus on the first two reasons. First, the principals in this study believed that teachers believe workload and compensation are not well-matched.
Second, they believe that teachers leave due to difficulties with classroom management and student behaviors. I provide detail about the principal perceptions in the following sections.

**Workload and compensation outside the charter network.** The principals in this study shared that they perceive that teachers leave because they believe that the teacher workload and teacher salary are not comparable. Teachers work a minimum of seven or eight hours a day and often hold office hours, oversee clubs, and coach athletics. The time spent at school does not include writing lesson plans or grading student work. The totality of teacher workload must be considered when evaluating how teachers are compensated. Barbara explained in the interview,

>I think it is pay in accordance to the workload. Like, if people were making six figures, they might not care working at 80-hour week, but for what they are making and the amount of work, I do not think those two things are comparable.

Barbara described how workload and inadequate compensation are conjoined in describing why teachers become dissatisfied and disenchanted with doing the work.

Cady also stated in the interview that there must be a systemic change. She further stated that the charter network in this study once paid more than surrounding districts, but these districts are now catching up. Cady explained,

>I think unless there is real systemic change, like [another district] did with their salaries we will keep losing people. They start new teachers at $60K, and we start at $59K. That $1,000 makes a difference. But for us like there is no difference. It used to be like, oh we pay you more, be we don’t pay you more now. Now everyone is catching up. They all get paid the same. We just make you work more.

The difference between the charter network and surrounding school districts according to Cady is the charter network now pays the same as others but makes teachers work more.
Similarly, in Don’s interview, he discussed the reason teachers leave stating that the first reason is pay. Don believed that teachers are not properly compensated in the United States because the profession is not respected in the same way as it is in other countries. According to Don, this slight is realized in the salaries that teachers receive for the work they do.

*Classroom management and student behavior.* The principals in this study shared that they perceive that teachers leave because of student behaviors and classroom management. The behaviors of students impede and affect classroom management. While providing factors that lead to teachers leaving the profession during the interview, Barbara reflected on the importance of teachers having classroom management as it can be a deciding factor for teachers to satisfaction. Barbara stated,

> I think classroom management is the main thing that like makes or breaks somebody’s experience, if they can, like come in and enjoy their class and have fun with them versus like, feeling like they’re fighting them every day.

Barbara acknowledged classroom management as “the number one thing that really wears people down.” When teachers are tasked with managing egregious student behaviors, it can be extremely difficult. Support for teachers should come from leadership such as coaches or assistant principals. Training must be provided as most teachers do not know how to handle the behaviors of their students because the behaviors students are exhibiting have never been seen before. Barbara continued in the interview by discussing the necessity for quality training from leaders regarding classroom management. She stated, “if their coaches can get them confident in classroom management, then they feel more confident.” Confidence is necessary for any employee regardless of the work they are doing.
According to the principals in this study, it is the students’ behaviors that make classroom management extremely difficult. Student misbehaviors have increased tremendously since the COVID-19 pandemic. Having served students virtually either in full or hybrid for more than a year, students and teachers became accustomed to virtual learning, forgetting the many challenges that arise during live instruction. Cady reflected on her experiences returning to in-person instruction post-pandemic. She recalled,

This year was real. I think everyone experienced it in a different way, and that’s something I think that, like, people came back from the pandemic not remembering what it was to, like, have a rough pass period, which everyone does, and how to deal with student misbehaviors and the emotions that go with it, like, how emotionally draining that is. People were very used to the flexibility that they gained being at home.

The principals also discussed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to classroom management and student behaviors. Student behaviors have increased as the social and emotional stability provided by schools was stripped away while the school doors could not be opened. As a result, students have since entered schools and been verbally abusive and, in some cases, physically abusive. Don recounted an experience where a student verbally lashed out at him because he said the student needed a pass to go to the bathroom. Don acknowledged that at times adults can be brash with students and speak harshly, but a common request should not be met with such vehement anger and rage. He stated, “I’m sorry, I don’t have four degrees to get cursed out by a 14-year-old.” Teachers have educational backgrounds and skill sets that can be utilized in other professions. The principals in this study believe negative behaviors are rising and that teachers must be equipped with strategies for dealing with those less than desired behaviors. Abby also provided a chart listing reasons teachers gave for leaving the profession, including school culture and classroom management. The principals shared
that student behaviors, though difficult, must be addressed and teachers need strategies to be successful in addressing them.

*Themes Related to the Second Research Question*

The second research question centered on the policies, procedures, or strategies principals used to retain teachers. The participants acknowledged that the charter network did not have retention policies, but they shared the strategies they use to retain teachers. In this section, I share the reasons principals believe teachers stay in the profession. Then, I share the strategies principals use to retain teachers. I list the responses gathered from the semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion, and artifact collection in Table 8. I note the reasons with an “X” to represent participant responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Abby</th>
<th>Barbara</th>
<th>Cady</th>
<th>Don</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compensation/Performance Pay Inside the Charter Network</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader Support/Relationship</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advancement Opportunities Inside the Charter Network</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First, the participants in this study shared that they believed that compensation and performance pay was the leading reason for teachers remaining in the profession. Second, the principal participants in this study identified leader support and relationships as reasons teachers remain in the profession. Third, they shared that growth opportunities in charter networks positively influence a teacher’s decision to remain. I provide detail about the principal perceptions in the following sections.
Compensation and performance pay inside the charter network. Each participant identified compensation and performance pay as reasons teachers remain in the profession. Abby recounted in her interview her experience working in traditional public and charter schools. Though she made professional connections in traditional public schools, she earned more money in the charter network, which led her to stay in the network. It is through her experience receiving higher compensation at the charter network that Abby believed compensation and performance pay leads to teacher persistence and satisfaction. Barbara referenced the impact of performance pay as a retention tool for teachers. She believed when teachers have an opportunity to increase their salaries, they are more inclined to remain in the profession. Barbara acknowledged in the focus group discussion that competitive salaries offered by the charter network studied, served as an incentive for teachers to remain in the network. Similarly, during the focus group discussion, Cady identified performance pay as an opportunity for teachers and a retention tool for the charter network. She stated, “The [teacher rubric] and performance based paying salaries are a big retention strategy, I think, teacher struggles to make as much in education as they would elsewhere, and performance pay gives them a chance.” Like other participants, Don acknowledged the importance of performance pay as an incentivize and retention strategy used by the charter network in this study. However, Don believed that the salaries teachers earn are not adequate, particularly given the related stress teachers face. The work of an educator is demanding, and as Don expressed, teachers should be paid for the work they do. I present an analysis of principals’ perceptions of compensation and performance pay as both a reason teachers stay, and reason teachers leave in a later section in this chapter.
**Leader support and relationship.** The principal participants in this study identified leader support and relationships to reduce teacher attrition in their schools. The principals in this study were more inclined to fight for an accommodate teachers they believe bring value to the school and are asset to students. Abby, as one example, explained in her interview that leaders are flexible and understanding when teachers are willing to work to bring the leader’s vision and mission to life. Abby further explained that these are the teachers that principals fight to retain when they express a desire to leave the profession.

When leaders show understanding and empathy toward teachers and the demand of the profession, it increases the level of connection felt by the teacher to the leader. Abby recalled during the focus group discussion that as a leader, it is imperative that leaders create an environment that allows teachers to feel like a part of a community that cares. Cady built upon Abby’s thought stating, “when teachers engage in a community that cares in a school, that makes teachers feel like they belong despite the long hours, despite having to take work home, it is easier to go through together than alone.”

Principals are responsible for creating the culture in a school. Leaders know firsthand of the demands placed on teachers and creating a culture of community allows teachers to feel that they are not alone in meeting the demands of the work. The principal is an integral part of the culture of the school.

Barbara discussed the importance of leadership relationships in teacher retention. During her time as a school leader, the relationship between teachers and leaders was significant in teachers feeling seen, heard, and known. Barbara believed that the relationship between teachers and school-based leadership planned a significant role in
teachers’ overall satisfaction with the school and the profession. Great leaders, according to Barbara, will act as buffers when changes arise from central office or within the school. Teachers want to feel successful, and Barbara asserted that teachers want to leave when they do not feel successful. Barbara explained,

In general, when teachers want to go or leave, it’s because they’re feeling unsuccessful. And so I have to show them how not only how they’re actually successful… It is also listening to them and hearing like what are the three things that are making them want to leave and what are the three things that can make you stay.

The success of teachers looks different for each teacher. Principal participants in this study shared they build relationships with teachers by listening to them and determining what success looks like for each teacher. They work to ensure that all feel successful. The measure of success is in accordance with what is important to the teacher, and they believe this contributes to a teacher’s decision to stay in the field.

Advancement opportunities inside the charter network. The participants in this study have served as teachers or administrators in traditional public-school settings in addition to charter networks. Three of the four participants acknowledged growth opportunities in charter networks as a factor leading to job satisfaction. Abby discussed her personal leadership trajectory in her interview. She stated, “I had no aspiration to be a leader, but I began climbing the leadership ladder my second year with the organization and I did not know it.” She explained that she started as a department chair for mathematics and quickly was encouraged to apply for a position as an assistant principal. Abby also explained that she was admitted into a leadership cohort that prepared her for the principalship. She participated in a yearlong leadership training program paid for by the charter network which served the sole intention of preparing her to be a principal.
Barbara recalled, her experience as a traditional public-school teacher and the lack of leadership opportunities. During the focus group discussion, Barbara also recognized growth opportunities within the charter network as retention tool. She explained that growth or leadership opportunities were often presented to highly effective teachers. The downside of this practice was that the best teachers leave the classroom. Don conveyed the same sentiments as Barbara regarding advancement in charter networks. Don stated in his interview that it is hard to progress in traditional public schools. He explained that leadership capacity and leadership pipeline are positive attribute of charter networks.

The opportunities for career advancement differs in traditional public and charter networks. According to this study’s participants, though growth opportunities are available in traditional public schools, they do not occur as quickly as those in charter networks. Traditional public schools provide opportunities for career advancement over time while in the charter network, teachers can advance in their career with three years of employment. As teachers struggle to find a reason to continue in the work, knowing there are advancement opportunities has caused many teachers to remain in the charter network. Career advancements in charter networks are found in all grade bands, elementary, middle, and high school. Providing growth opportunities in the charter network is a retention tool as perceived by the principals in this study.

Each participant in this study also provided examples of a strategy they each used when trying to retain teachers. I list the responses gathered from the semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion, and artifact collection in Table 9. I note the retention strategies with an “X” to represent participant responses.
Table 9

*Retention Strategies Used by Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retention Strategy</th>
<th>Abby</th>
<th>Barbara</th>
<th>Cady</th>
<th>Don</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School-Based or Personalized Strategies</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Between Teacher and Leader</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Pay</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Awards Ceremonies and Parties</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants in this study shared that they used two primary strategies to retain teachers. First, principals used school-based or personalized strategies to meet the needs of teachers to retain them. Second, the principals identified the relationship between teachers and principals as a significant strategy they used to retain teachers. I provide more detail about these strategies in the following sections.

_School-based or personalized strategies to retain teachers._ Principals in the charter network studied have autonomy in selecting retention strategies. Abby recalled in the focus group discussion, her experiences with teacher retention. She stated, “I think it is very much school based and school leader determined.” Abby explained how she made concession for a computer science teacher that was given a position with a technology company and requested to leave mid-year. Though it was unconventional, Abby described the schedule she created for the teacher which allowed him to work part-time as a computer science teacher three times a week while maintaining his full-time position. The teacher was an asset to the school and Abby did not want to lose him. She created an opportunity that allowed the teacher to pursue his passion and uphold his commitment to the students and the school.
Barbara believed the autonomy given to principals to retain teachers was a strength of the organization. She shared in her interview the importance of getting to know her teachers and when they show signs of fatigue or express a desire to resign, she highlights their successes. Barbara stated that teachers leave when the feel unsuccessful, so she works to show them how they are successful by using their love language. Communication between teachers and principals is essential when convincing someone to remain stay. When the needs of both the teacher and the school are expressed, a resolution can be found that benefits all parties.

During the focus group discussion, Cady recalled a similar situation with a teacher that required creativity and flexibility to retain the teacher. She recalled having a teacher that struggled to get to work on time due to babysitting issues. The teacher submitted a letter of resignation and was going to take a lower paying job to accommodate the babysitter. She stated, “the problem was uncovered, and I encouraged her to stay, because she did not want to leave.” Cady was able to alter the teacher’s arrival time and departure time. Having autonomy in retention decisions proved to be beneficial to each principal.

*Relationship between teacher and leader to retain teachers.* Teacher and leader relationships are pivotal in retaining teachers. When principals use personalized strategies, the strategies are in accordance with the relationship the principal has with the teacher. The relationship begins with honesty and openness from both parties. Barbara discusses the importance of honesty and transparency during her interview. Barbara stated,
I am so transparent with people, like I never want to sell a utopia because when they realize that it is not what you sold them, they want to quit. Honesty as the leader goes a long way and people will trust you.

Barbara shared an anecdote in the focus group discussion about a teacher that contemplated resigning due to marital issues. A lack of work life balance was causing issues in the marriage for the novice teacher. When Barbara got to the root of the issue, she helped the teacher create systems to complete work in school to reduce the amount of work done at home and provided suggestion to better communicate with the spouse. After helping the teacher process the issues and find a solution, Barbara recalls the teacher saying, “I do not want to leave this leader, like she is here giving me marriage advice when I am about to through it all away. I can’t screw her over.” The relationship that Barbara built with the teacher superseded the work, but she cared about the teacher person which led to loyalty from the teacher. Cady identified relationships as the leading factor in teacher retention during her interview. She said,

I used to say people stayed for development because there was a time when we were able to focus on that really robustly but now, I believe the relationships kept people and the development made them stay because they improved.

The relationship created by teachers and principals is important to the development of positive school culture. Positive school culture includes teacher retention.

Don shared in his interview the importance of principals being a coach for their teachers. He stated,

The administrator is the coach, like, your coach is arguably the biggest champion of the people they are coaching! They are also the biggest critics, but you don’t get better without a coach. And so the administrator as a coach ensures people around you experience the multiplier effect.

Don explained that leaders build the capacity of others around them to do their jobs well. They then take those skills and transfer to everyone else. The leaders live in a space of
radical candor, but everything is done in love. Don believed a leader must know and understand their people. He said, “you need to know exactly how to land and meet them where they are in order to push them to space where they need to grow.” It is through relationship that a leader can identify the potential in people and push them to their highest level of growth. Having intentionality placed on one’s career trajectory by a leader reduces the chances of one leaving.

*Additional Themes Related to Both Research Questions*

When analyzing participants’ responses, I uncovered two themes that related to both research questions. The participants acknowledged compensation and performance pay and the lack of advancement opportunities as reasons that both contribute to a teacher’s decision to leave or stay in the profession. In this section, I share more about these reasons principal participants acknowledged as factors that can lead to teachers leaving or staying in the profession.

*Compensation and performance pay.* Teacher salary was identified as both a reasons to stay or leave the profession according to the principals in this study. The charter network in this study uses performance pay as a retention tool because teachers can earn a maximum of $7,000 and a minimum of $1,000 yearly. Each participant identified performance pay as a retention tool of the charter network. The charter network in this study uses a teacher rubric, to determine the effectiveness of its teachers. The higher a teacher scores on the rubric, the larger the monetary increase. The rubric, which was provided as an artifact by Abby, showed scores ranging from one to five. A score of one equated to $1000, a score of two was $2,000, a score of three was $3,000, and scores of four and five earned an increase of $7,000. Cady acknowledged in the focus group
discussion that the rubric is a big retention strategy for the charter network and teachers may struggle to make the same salary elsewhere. Barbara supported this claim in the interview, stating “performance management is technically a teacher retention technique. We try to incentivize their pay because we pay more competitively based on performance.” Though the charter network implored additional retention techniques such as awards ceremonies and parties, the most effective technique was performance pay.

Performance pay is a retention tool used by the charter network in this study, but the competitive salary offered by the network is no longer meeting the financial needs of its employees. Abby provided a chart that illustrated the reasons teachers gave for leaving the charter network and salary was the second highest selected reason. Don recounts his experience as a principal and surmised that the primary reason for teachers leaving was salary as he identified teaching as the most underpaid profession.

Cady looked at the decline in salary competitiveness as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic. She stated, “I promise you it feels messy, because it does, because everyone’s tired. Adults are tired.” According to Cady, as teachers reentered classrooms after the pandemic, the pressures and demands of the work and the behaviors of the students led to massive amounts of teachers resigning. Even with highly competitive salaries, they have not been competitive enough to retain teachers. Don echoed these sentiments and added that teacher salaries do not compare to the salaries of professions outside the field which he categorized as “better opportunities.”

Lack of advancement opportunities. The opportunity for teachers to move up within an organization was identified as both a reasons to stay or leave according to the principals in this study. The lack of professional growth within traditional public schools
promotes dissatisfaction. Teachers work to receive tenure for job security, but the probability of advancing in leadership with less than 10 years of experience is uncommon. Don recounted his experience working in traditional public schools. With scarce opportunities for promotion, many pursue their career ambitions elsewhere. Don shared that when teachers struggle to find a leadership position, they will leave. Educators should have opportunities to elevate in the profession if they desire promotion. The impact they have in the classroom can be expanded if their reach extended beyond the classroom to other teachers. In traditional public schools, career progression is rare, yet in the charter network being study, it is used as a retention tool. The best teachers are promoted to leadership creating vacancies in classrooms that are difficult to fill. Barbara discussed during the focus discussion what she felt was the biggest retention strategy. She stated, “Honestly, our biggest retention strategy is to promote people to leadership, and then that, therefore is the way we retain people. But we don’t retain teachers because we move them into leadership positions.” Though leadership is more accessible, replacing those promoted becomes problematic.

Theoretical Framework Analysis

In this section, I provide a theoretical framework by analyzing the motivator and hygiene factors according to principals’ perceptions. Herzberg’s (1959) Two Factor Theory focuses on factors that lead to job satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Hygiene factors are factors that can lead to dissatisfaction or a lack of dissatisfaction. Motivator factors lead to satisfaction or a lack of satisfaction. The principal participant identified factors they believed contributed to a teacher’s decision to stay or leave the profession. In
accordance with Herzberg’s (1959) Two Factor Theory, Table 10 illustrates which factors aligned to motivator and hygiene factors.

Table 10

*Principal Participant Perceptions Alignment to Herzberg’s (1959) Two Factor Theory*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Urban High School Principals’ Perceptions of Reasons Teachers Leave or Stay in the Profession</th>
<th>Herzberg’s Motivator Factors</th>
<th>Herzberg’s Hygiene Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reasons Principal Participants Think Teachers Leave</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Workload and compensation outside the charter network</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Classroom management and student behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of advancement opportunities outside the charter network</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons Principal Participants Think Teachers Stay</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Compensation/performance pay inside the charter network</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Leader support/relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Advancement opportunities inside the charter network</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the factors the principal participants identified as reasons teachers leave the profession, a lack of advancement outside the charter network was identified as a motivator factor. Similarly, advancement opportunities inside the charter network was identified as a motivator factor according to the principals’ perceptions of why teachers stay in the profession. Though the participants identified compensation as a reason why teachers may leave or a reason why teachers may stay in the profession, Herzberg (1959) stated that salary and compensation will always be a hygiene factor. Money will not lead to job satisfaction, but it can lead to a lack of dissatisfaction. Additionally, principal participants identified leader support/relationships as reasons teachers stay in the profession and as leading retention tools. According to Herzberg (1959), leader support
and relationships is a hygiene factor meaning it can give a lack of dissatisfaction, but it does not indicate that the teacher is satisfied with their job.

Discussion

The purpose of this single case study was to explore urban high school principals’ perceptions of why teachers leave the teaching profession and to identify the methods used by principals to retain teachers. Researchers previously explored teacher attrition from the educator perspective and the impact of teachers leaving the profession (Ingersoll, 2001; Sahlberg & Oldroyd, 2010; Skaalvik, 2007; Rothmann et al. 2017), whereas I present five findings from the principal perspective in this study. In the following discussion, I illustrate how the study’s findings support and deviate from the literature.

Compensation, Performance Pay, and Workload Balance

The principal participants in this study perceived compensation, performance pay, and workload balance as critical to teacher decisions related to remaining or leaving the profession in different ways. Compensation is a factor many teachers identify as a reason for career dissatisfaction (Harris et al., 2019). Teachers have gone on strike to demand higher salaries in states such as West Virginia and Oklahoma (Pearce, 2018). As teachers in Black communities compared their salaries in Georgia with teachers in rural Georgia, disparities in teacher salaries teachers were uncovered. Teachers in urban communities in Georgia have left the profession because of the insufficient and inadequate salaries (Williams et al., 2021). Each participant in this study identified salary as a factor for teacher dissatisfaction. The participants of this study have particularly interesting viewpoints regarding compensation as they were all previously teachers. Though they
persisted in the field, they know first-hand the disparities in pay in comparison to the
demands of the job. One artifact from this study showed that salary is the second highest
reason given for leaving the charter network. Participants acknowledged that the charter
network pays well, but the salary is not proportionate to the amount of work teachers are
expected to complete.

The workload of teachers does not equate to the salary of those in non-teaching
sectors (Han, 2021). Though teacher salaries were identified as factors for dissatisfaction,
performance pay was acknowledged as a reason why teacher stay in the profession,
particular in the charter network in the study. Performance pay is determined by
performance ratings (Doan et al., 2019). In this study, participants provided a copy of a
rubric used to rate teachers. The amount of increase is calculated in accordance with the
score teachers earn on the rubric. The higher the score on the rubric, the larger the
increase will be. The principals in this study perceived compensation and performance
pay to be both a source of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The difference identified
by participant was employment with traditional public school and charter network with
charter networks paying higher salaries. The perception of the principals regarding
compensation and workload being factors of job dissatisfaction leading to teacher
attrition aligned with previous literature (Pearce, 2018; Williams et al., 2021). As
teachers across the United States fight to receive fair salaries, teachers in states like West
Virginia, Oklahoma, and Georgia have protested and petitioned their local governments
to increase and improve the working conditions and teaching salaries (Pearce, 2018;
Williams et al., 2021).
Leader Support and Relationships

The principal participants in this study identified leader support and relationships as reasons why teachers stay in the profession. These relationships were used to retain teachers who expressed a desire to leave. The perception of principal participants regarding leader support and relationship and its importance to teacher satisfaction aligned to previous literature. Studies indicate teachers that remain in the profession find satisfaction in the work they do when they build a positive relationship with leaders (Handford & Leithwood, 2012; Kuykendall & Slater, 2020). Teacher satisfaction hinges on the relationship they have with colleagues and school leadership (Ladd, 2011; Rothemann et al., 2017). The relationship a principal has with staff is key to the overall success of the school (Kim, 2019). Participants in this study described the importance of leaders building relationships with staff members as they are the visionary and are responsible for creating an environment in which all staff members thrive.

A key element in teacher retention is trust in leadership (Kuykendall & Slater, 2020). When teachers desire to leave the profession, it is the relationship and trust developed between teacher and leader that allows one to sustain (Hanford & Leithwood, 2012). The principal participants in this study explained the relationship they built with teachers significantly impacted how they approached teacher retention. Relationships deepen the meaning of the work for teachers, as teachers are able to develop self-identification (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014). It is of equal importance to teachers and leaders that a positive relationship is established between them. Leaders lean on that relationship when signs of fatigue arise in teachers.
Classroom Management and Student Behavior

The principal participants in this study identified classroom management and negative student behaviors as reasons why teachers leave the profession. Three of the four principal participants in this study acknowledged classroom management as a factor of teacher attrition. These findings align with those found in literature as contributing factors in teacher job dissatisfaction. Teachers in urban settings require skills to support the emotional demands of the job (Camacho et al., 2018). The emotional demands of the job center around the misbehavior of students, which impacts classroom management and may lead to teacher dissatisfaction. Bottiani et al. (2019) found classroom demands leading to teacher burnout in urban education were directly related to student behaviors.

Research categorized student misbehaviors, workload, and a lack of work-life balance as occupational stressors (Torenbeek & Peters, 2017). Teachers cannot ignore student misbehaviors, yet when addressed, they add stress to the teacher. If not addressed, student misbehaviors can continue. It is imperative that teachers are trained to manage both the classroom and student behaviors. It is through training that teachers are equipped to lead their classrooms. When teachers shift into the posture of a leader in the classroom, stress will decrease. Though Torenbeek and Peters (2017) acknowledged student misbehavior as an occupational stressor, they did not indicate that teachers are leaving the profession as a result. They did indicate, however, that student misbehavior leads to job dissatisfaction. As the level of stress decreases, teachers are more satisfied yet when that stress is not reduced, teachers express higher intentions to leave the profession (Arnup & Bowles, 2016).
**Professional Growth Opportunities**

The principal participants in this study recognized growth opportunities within the charter network as a reason teachers stay in the field. Participants in this study identified a lack of growth opportunities in traditional public education. While their charter network provided growth opportunities, the traditional public school requires teachers to work for years before promoting them. Participants in this study acknowledged that the charter network in this study uses promotion as a retention tool. However, when teachers are promoted to leadership, it leaves a vacancy in the classroom. This perspective of professional growth opportunities did not align to present research. Further research is needed to ascertain if teachers believe professional growth opportunities contribute to perceived job satisfaction. The role of administrator includes cultivating future leaders (Dimmock, 2012). Career progression assists in creating environments that are conducive for teacher retention. Professional development is an effective tool to prepare teachers for career progression. Leaders can use professional development as a collaborative mechanism for teacher development, increasing the probability of teachers remaining in the profession (Ado, 2013). As teachers grow, they can serve in leadership roles such as teacher mentors. Teacher mentorship allows mentors to work in a leadership capacity while supporting lesson planning, instructional delivery, and positive relationship building amongst colleagues (Hellsten et al., 2009; Mathur et al., 2013).

**Retention Strategies**

The principal participants in this study identified relationships as the leading retention strategy they used. The perception of participants in this study supported the importance of relationship building has been expressed in literature. For example,
Erichsen and Reynolds (2020) echoed the sentiments of other researchers in stating that teachers leave the profession when there are not quality relationships built with leadership. Leaders are encouraged to build positive relationships with educators by creating strategies that promote teacher satisfaction (Frahm & Cinca, 2021). In establishing healthy relationships between leaders and teachers, leaders are responsible for monitoring how teachers feel and creating an environment to increases the teacher’s well-being (Ford et al., 2018; Torre, 2016). The relationship leaders create with teachers must be genuine. There is a level of loyalty that develops among the teacher and leader when genuine relationships are developed. The perception, connection, and involvement of a school principal contributes to the emotional effect of their teachers (Lambersky, 2016). Retention strategies used by the principal participants in this study were unique to each principal and tailored for specific situations. The primary strategy used by the principals hinged on relationships. These relationships were viewed as contributing factors in teacher’s decisions to continue teaching in their schools after expressing a desire to leave. The importance of building significant relationships with teachers aligned with the research of Erichsen and Reynolds (2020), who acknowledged that quality relationships are needed between leaders and teachers.

Implications and Recommendations

This study revealed how the perspectives of four urban high school principals and their lived experiences as school-based leaders shaped how they addressed teacher retention and attrition. The findings of this study have implications for other principals and teachers. I describe these implications and related recommendations in the following sections.
Principals

Principals would benefit from this research as leaders of schools. Teacher attrition directly impacts the productivity of schools. The themes identified in this case study were presented in accordance with the Herzberg’s Two Factor Theory (1959) and principals’ perceptions of teacher reasons that lead to their retention or attrition. The perceptions of the principal participants in this study aligned with research regarding factors leading to teacher attrition. Research showed that increased workload and low salaries contributed to teacher dissatisfaction (Cieslinski & Szum, 2014; Walker 2016). Principals would benefit from intentionally crafting additional strategies to reduce teacher attrition. Future in-depth research can be conducted on the topic of the tools and strategies principals use to retain teachers. Identifying additional strategies in addition to building relationships will encourage principals to be proactive in creating positive work environments for teachers.

Further, I recommend that principals work with other district leadership to increase teacher salaries in accordance with their workload. District administrators in conjunction with state legislatures determine the salaries of teachers. An area identified by this study’s findings was the importance of providing teachers with salaries that are comparable to the workload and equitable regardless of school district (Williams et al., 2021). If teachers are to be retained, adequate salaries that align to amount of time expended by teachers needs to be considered when determining teacher wages. Research shows one way to meet the financial needs of teachers is to utilize performance pay to increase teacher salary (Doan et al., 2019). Future research on increasing teacher salaries or providing incentives where a monetary increase is possible would equip school-based leaders with tools for retaining teachers.
Lastly, research on the impact of these relationships on principals’ intent to return would provide additional insight that I did not explore. If teachers are connecting with their principals, when a principal leaves, a question to be considered is the impact of a leader’s departure on teachers.

Teacher

The findings of this study benefit current and perspective teachers. Principal participants identified workload and compensation along with classroom management and student behavior as factors leading to teacher dissatisfaction. Teachers benefit from productive relationships with principals. It is imperative that both teachers and leaders acknowledge the factors that lead to teacher dissatisfaction and work together to identify reasons that lead to job satisfaction. Though these factors contribute to dissatisfaction, one of the most effective factors that leads to teacher satisfaction as perceived by the principal participants in this study is the relationship teachers build with colleagues and school leadership. Though principals perceives relationships as being significant in teacher job satisfaction, teachers must communicate with leadership if the perception of the principal does not align to the reality of teachers. Research aligns to the principal participant perspectives in that teachers long for a sense of belonging with colleagues but desire to have a positive relationship with their principal (Heineke et al., 2014). Each participant explained how significant relationships with teachers are in the work of a leader. When teachers establish a positive relationship with a leader, they are less likely to leave. The relationship between a teacher and their principal contributes to a teacher’s overall satisfaction but if relationships are not significant in a teacher’s job satisfaction, it is imperative that the teacher share that with leadership.
Summary and Conclusion

This single case study allowed me to uncover the perspectives of four principals in urban education to ascertain why they believed teachers left the profession. The data analysis using thick and rich descriptions allowed each participant’s voice to be heard in the study. Herzberg’s (1959) Two Factor Theory was the theoretical framework I used in this research. It provided a lens to analyze the experiences of the participants by looking at factors that lead to job satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Data analysis in this study included interview transcript reviews, focus group discussion transcript review, and artifact analysis. I uncovered five findings. First, the principal participants in this study perceived compensation, performance pay, and workload balance as critical to teacher decisions related to remaining or leaving the profession in different ways. Second, the principal participants in this study identified leader support and relationships as reasons why teachers stay in the profession. Third, the principal participants in this study identified classroom management and negative student behaviors lead to teacher dissatisfaction. Fourth, the principal participants in this study recognized growth opportunities within the charter network as a reason teachers stay in the field. Fifth and finally, the principal participants in this study identified relationships as the leading retention strategy they used.

The study findings highlight the impact of workload and compensation on teachers finding satisfaction in this field. Continued research is needed on salary comparisons with other professions. The first key finding underscored the necessity for providing teachers with salaries that are equitable with the demands of teaching. Addressing teacher salary in comparison to other occupational fields would be an acknowledgment of the discrepancies in salary. Teachers want to feel heard and known
and adjusting salaries or working to adjust salaries lets teachers know that their concerns have been heard.

Teacher attrition affects urban high schools across the United States (DeMatthews et al., 2022). Teachers desire to feel connected with colleagues and leadership (Garcia-Torres, 2019). In this study, the participants’ voices provided the perspective of principals’ perceptions related to teacher attrition and their strategies to retain teachers. Leaders must understand that teachers have more options to leave the profession than ever before. To retain teachers, leaders must be aware of the reasons they leave the profession. Without qualified teachers, the future of education is in jeopardy.
CHAPTER FOUR
Executive Summary and Distribution of Findings

Executive Summary

Teacher attrition negatively impacts schools, students, and principals. The Merriam-Webster dictionary (2022) defined attrition as, “a reduction in numbers usually as a result of resignation, retirement, or death.” In the context of this study, attrition is viewed as the reduction of teachers through resignation. Teacher attrition impacts school culture and student achievement (Papay et al., 2017). Teachers leave the profession at higher rate in charter schools than traditional public schools. The turnover rate is nearly 54% for charter schools in dense communities (Pivovarova & Powers, 2022). Principals are tasked with both hiring and retaining teachers to ensure that schools are equipped with the personnel.

Factors such as workload, student behavior, and compensation contribute to teacher dissatisfaction (Han, 2021; Torenbeek & Peters, 2017). As teachers leave the profession, the cost of replacing teachers is significantly higher than retaining teachers (Callahan, 2016). The impact of teacher attrition is great in urban schools (Papay et al., 2017). Hanson and Yoon (2018) suggested that more than 20% of teachers do not return to schools that are low-performing or located in impoverished communities.

The purpose of this single case study was to explore urban high school principals’ perceptions of why teachers leave the teaching profession and to identify the methods used by principals to retain teachers. This study highlighted the experiences of four high school principals in a charter network in the northeastern United States. Although
researchers have previously identified factors that contribute to teacher attrition (den Brok et al., 2017; Garcia et al., 2022; Sass et al., 2012), a more layered approach focused on the perception of why teachers resign from teaching the analyzed through the lens of administration may be useful in understanding principals’ responses to teacher attrition. As such, I designed this study and crafted the following research questions, which guided this study:

1. According to urban high school principals, for what reasons do urban high school teachers leave the teaching profession?

2. What policies, procedures, or strategies do urban high school principals use to retain teachers?

Overview of Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The theoretical framework that I selected for this study was Herzberg’s (1959) Two Factor Theory, which indicated that job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction are attributable to specific factors. Addressing teacher attrition in urban education requires an examination of the factors that lead to teachers staying and factors attributed to teachers leaving as expressed by teachers as well as principals’ perceptions of these factors. Analyzing these factors may assist principals in creating systems or policies to reduce the number of teachers leaving urban education.

To learn more about urban high school principals’ perceptions of why teachers leave the teaching profession and to identify the methods used by principals to retain teachers, I designed and conducted a single case study. The perspective of four high school principals from three schools within a charter network in the northeastern United States provided insight on their perspectives of teacher attrition and retention policies, procedures, and strategies they used. The participants of the study participated in semi-
structured interviews, a focus group discussion, and provided artifacts. The interviews and the focus group discussions were held via Zoom. Though all participants engaged in individualized semi-structured interviews, only three participants participated in the focus group discussion, and three participants provided artifacts.

I conducted the data analysis for this study in three phases. I analyzed the data according to principals’ perceptions of why teachers stay (job satisfaction) and principals’ perceptions of why teachers leave (job dissatisfaction). I coded participant responses and categorized the codes as principals’ perceptions of why teachers stay or principals’ perceptions of why teachers leave the profession. Then I conducted a within case analysis to identify patterns and uncover the study themes.

**Summary of Key Findings**

I identified five key findings in this study. First, the principal participants in this study perceived compensation, performance pay, and workload balance as critical to teacher decisions related to remaining or leaving the profession in different ways. Second, the principal participants in this study identified leader support and relationships as reasons why teachers stay in the profession. Third, the principal participants in this study identified classroom management and negative student behaviors lead to teacher dissatisfaction. Fourth, the principal participants in this study recognized growth opportunities within the charter network as a reason teachers stay in the field. Fifth and finally, the principal participants in this study identified relationships as the leading retention strategy they used.
Implications and Recommendations

Research studies supported the findings of this study, as principals perceived compensation and leader support as factors that contribute to teacher job satisfaction. Salary in urban setting and charter networks are higher than other educational settings. Districts or charter networks that provide competitive salaries must maintain that competitive status. Yearly evaluations of salaries should be completed to ensure that teacher compensation increases at an appropriate rate.

Teacher salaries vary by state and educational setting thus, it is the recommendation of this study that teacher salaries be reevaluated and adjusted to coincide with the increased demands of the profession. Creating a general salary guide in accordance with state and district regulations creates equity amongst all teachers and eliminates the differences in salary found across state and vocational lines. Relationships are also in an important factor in teacher satisfaction. Leaders are instrumental in building lasting relationships with teachers and literature supporting this concept would be beneficial to leaders to consider when supporting teachers.

As principals continue to combat teacher attrition, the principal perspective on why teachers leave should be evaluated. This study found the principal perspective aligns with current research. The relationship between leaders and teachers was identified as a significant in teacher retention. Principals need to exhibit an intentionality in developing relationships with teachers. Additionally, providing professional growth opportunities for teachers deepens a teacher’s satisfaction with the work. It is through relationship and communication that teacher retention will increase.

There is also a need for teachers to communicate with school leaders more expressing when they feel overwhelmed or disenchanted with the work. Compensation
and workload play a significant role in teacher dissatisfaction. Classroom management and student misbehaviors contribute to teacher dissatisfaction. Professional development opportunities focused on classroom management and addressing student misbehavior is a necessity for teachers both veteran and novice. Additionally, professional opportunities are available for teachers to learn how to prioritize their time to decrease the stresses of increased workload. Teachers need continually training to reduce the level of dissatisfaction with the work.

A future recommendation for research is the impact of leader attrition on school culture. Though the study focused on teacher attrition, leader attrition has increased. The burden of the profession impacts principals just as it does teachers. Principals need to have an outlet where they can share their experiences, insecurities, failures, and successes.

Findings Distribution Proposal

The findings of this study support school districts in their endeavor to retain teachers. The target audiences for this work are teachers and principals. The distribution of findings is most effectively communicated through professional development sessions or webinars. Intentionally addressing attrition through leader development equips leaders with the tools needed to increase teacher retention.

Target Audience

The target audiences of this study are teachers and principals. Teacher attrition directly affects the identified target audience. Research has shown that teacher attrition impacts school budgets, school culture, and student achievement. The findings of this study will benefit teachers and principals because it highlights the importance of building
positive relationships which leads to job satisfaction. The culture and climate of a school is set by the principal but carried out by teachers. Understanding how to create a climate of retention benefits teachers and principals in creating stability in a school.

*Proposed Distribution Method and Venue*

Educational leaders are accustomed to participating in professional development session and webinars. Communicating the findings of this study in a professional development or webinar allows leaders and teachers to review data, hear or read experiences of actual leaders and begin brainstorming strategies they can use in their schools or districts. It is through collaborative efforts that leaders can effectively prepare to reduce the attrition rate in their particular school and district. The goal of this study was to explore urban high school principals’ perceptions of why teachers leave the teaching profession and to identify the methods used by principals to retain teachers. A setting of professional development or webinar permits leaders to join forces in their efforts of reducing teacher attrition.

*Conclusion*

The impact of teacher attrition affects many components of education. Students feel the impact, and it is evident in student achievement (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Establishing a consistent school climate and culture is difficult for school leaders when teachers leave. Participants of this study and current research, identified the prioritization of teacher support and relationships by school leader as factors of job satisfaction. Factors leading to job dissatisfaction were identified as compensation and workload balance, classroom management, and student behavior. As principals and district administrators address the issue of teacher attrition, it is imperative they acknowledge the principals’
perception regarding teacher attrition and consider the strategies they implement to retain teachers.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

1. When and where did you begin teaching?

2. What made you want to be a principal?

3. Why do you choose to teach in an urban school district?

4. How long have you been an administrator?

5. Describe your role as an administrator.

6. What experiences have you had experience with teachers quitting during the school year?

7. What reasons do you believe teachers give for leaving the profession?

8. What reasons do you believe teachers give for remaining in the profession?

9. Are there policies or protocols used in your organization to promote teacher retention?

10. What are the best strategies to uses when teachers express a desire to leave?

11. What things do you or have you done to convince teachers to remain in the profession?

12. Were these efforts successful?

13. Is there anything else you would like to share about teacher attrition?
APPENDIX B

Focus Group Discussion Protocol

1. What policies, procedures, or strategies do you use when teachers express a desire to quit?

2. Previously, you each identified reasons that you believe teachers leave the profession. Can you expound on these pre-identified reasons individually?

3. What three things impact whether you fight to retain a teacher?

4. Does your organization proactively promote teacher retention? Why or why not?

5. Is there anything else you would like to share about teacher attrition?
APPENDIX C

Recruitment Letter

Email Invitation to participate in the research project titled:

“Exploring the Principal Perspective on Teacher Attrition in Urban Education: A Single Case Study”

Dear Fellow Administrators,

I am conducting interviews as part of a research study to increase our understanding of perceived reasons for teacher attrition and identifying policies or procedures designed to retain teachers within our organization. As a current or previous member of school leadership, you are in an ideal position to give me valuable first-hand information from your own perspective. Your participation in this study would include an interview, focus group with other principals, and providing documentation regarding current teacher retention policies for each school and/or the organization.

The interview takes 60 minutes. I am trying to capture your thoughts and perspectives on addressing teacher attrition as an administrator in an urban school. Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential. Each interview will be assigned a number code to ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the analysis and findings.

There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to our research and findings could lead to greater understanding of teacher attrition and its effects on school leadership.

If you are willing to participate, please suggest a day and time that suits you, and I’ll do my best to be available. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Thanks!

Danielle Burroughs
Doctoral Candidate
Baylor University
APPENDIX D

Consent Form for Research

Baylor University
School of Education

PROTOCOL TITLE: Exploring the Principal Perspective on Teacher Attrition in Urban Education: A Single Case Study

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Danielle Burroughs

SUPPORTED BY: Dr. Ryann Shelton
Faculty Advisor
Baylor University

Purpose of the research: The purpose of this study is to analyze the motivating factors leading to teacher attrition according to school principals and to identify the methods used by principals to retain teachers. This study seeks to address research questions about teacher attrition from the perspective of urban school principals:

1. According to urban high school principals, for what reasons do urban high school teachers leave the teaching profession?

2. What policies, procedures, or strategies do urban high school principals use to retain teachers?

Study activities: The study will consist of semi-formal interviews with each participant and one focus group and artifact collection conveying the retention procedures or policies for each school from each participant.

Risks and Benefits: Possible Risks or discomforts from this research include principals’ comfortability with sharing personal information regarding attrition within their schools. The possible benefits of this study include creating policies that will assist in addressing the concerns and needs of teachers that express a desire to leave the profession.

Confidentiality: All information will be stored in a secure password protected computer. Participant names will not be used nor will the name of the school or city. Authorized staff of Baylor University may review the study records for purposes such as quality control or safety.
Compensation: None

Questions or concerns about this research study: You can call the researcher(s) with any concerns or questions about the research.

PI: Danielle Burroughs
Email Address: Danielle_Burroughs1@baylor.edu
Phone Number: [redacted information]
Contact Hours: 4:00–8:00 pm (EST)

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Ryann Shelton
Email Address: ryann_shelton@baylor.edu
Phone Number: [redacted information]

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), you may contact the Baylor University IRB through the Office of the Vice Provost for Research at 254-710-3708 or irb@baylor.edu.

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 your consent.

SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT:

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. We will give you a copy of this document for your records. We will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about, and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

__________________________________________________________________________
Signature of Subject

__________________________________________________________________________
Date
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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