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How School Leaders Can Increase Teacher Satisfaction in a Rural Fringe High School in South Carolina

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HOW SCHOOL LEADERS CAN INCREASE TEACHER SATISFACTION IN A

RURAL FRINGE HIGH SCHOOL IN SOUTH CAROLINA

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ABSTRACT

Unfilled teaching positions are rising in South Carolina, increasing year over year. To combat this problem of practice, I conducted an improvement science study to understand factors that impact teacher satisfaction levels aimed to raise teacher retention rates. The study aimed to allow teachers to identify areas that school administrators can target to positively affect teacher satisfaction levels. I created a change idea based on this teacher feedback to impact their retention decisions. As an educator, I have identified three major themes in this area. First, influence over their profession impacts teachers' decision to return to their position each year. Secondly, opportunities for professional growth have the potential to impact teacher retention decisions and overall satisfaction. Lastly, teachers who feel their administrators provide adequate support have more positive feelings towards their school and profession. In terms of implications, school administrators who take the initiative to listen to teachers can positively impact their retention rates.

DEDICATION

I thank my wife for her unwavering strength and love throughout the process. She has never stopped believing in me and encouraging me to challenge myself professionally and personally. Her work ethic and fearlessness inspire me every day. I thank my parents for giving me opportunities at every step of my educational career. Their message of education being an essential step in one's life will stay with me forever. I thank my mother and father-in-law for being a constant source of positivity. Their support encouraged me when times were difficult. I dedicate this to each of you; I love you all.

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OVERVIEW OF THE PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Teacher Retention on the National Level

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) reported that nearly 300,000 teachers leave the profession yearly—two-thirds before retirement age (Weingarten et al., 2022, p. 1). The US Bureau of Labor Statistics reported this information and went even further, stating that 270,000 teachers are expected to leave the profession yearly until at least 2026 (Torpey, 2018). This information points to insufficient teachers waiting to fill those vacant positions. This has led to a shortage of teachers to replace them. The term teacher retention is closely related to teacher turnover. Harris and Adams (2007) described teacher turnover as educators leaving the profession. Ingersoll (2001) defined turnover as those who depart the organization, including migration to other organizations and those leaving the occupation altogether. Dauksas and White (2010) detailed teacher retention challenges as a problem with the number of teachers per year who move from one teaching job to another or leave the teaching profession altogether. Teacher retention and turnover are closely intertwined because schools with low retention rates are plagued by high rates of teachers turning over year after year.

Teacher turnover leads to student learning loss in an environment with different educators instructing them each year. Ronfeldt et al. (2013) stated, "On average, students are harmed by the changing composition in teacher effectiveness that results from teacher turnover, primarily in lower-performing schools" (p. 29). In other words, the more teachers leave schools, the more vulnerable students become impacted. What starts as one

problem, retaining teachers leads to more significant issues, such as underachieving student populations.

Regarding the impact of teacher turnover on student achievement, Ronfeldt et al. (2013) concluded, "Most existing research on the relationship between teacher turnover and student achievement is correlational, revealing negative correlations" (p. 6). When effective teachers leave the profession, student achievement may decline. When schools have problems retaining teachers, the students suffer. A 2021 study by Yorko included 14 current and former teachers in a school district comprising 127 teachers. Through observations, interviews, and semi-structured questionnaires, his study found that the teacher turnover epidemic may lead to decreased student achievement. Yorko (2021) stated, "High teacher turnover rate at the elementary, middle, and high school may have a negative impact on student achievement" (p. 7). In other words, school leaders who do not retain effective teachers can harm student growth.

Teacher Retention on the State Level

Teacher retention is a significant educational inequality in South Carolina. A study by The Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, & Advancement (CERRA, 2022) detailed that one in seven teachers did not return to their position after the 2021-2022 school year. Simply stated, teachers are leaving the profession at an alarming rate. CERRA (2022) data reported 1,474 vacant teaching positions at the start of the 2022 school year compared to 1,063 in 2021. The retention rates from two years ago tell the story of retention becoming a growing concern in the educational field. CERRA (2021) described how approximately 6,900 South Carolina teachers from the 2020-2021 school

year did not return to a teaching or service position in the same district the following year. These numbers are staggering, considering the number of incoming students continues to rise. Educational leaders could benefit from successful retention strategies as teacher retention plagues the state's schools.

<center>**Why Teachers Stay**</center>

When looking at teacher retention rates, multiple factors contribute to whether the rates are low or high. When broken down further, these themes can be divided into different groups. Although the groups are various, the big ideas can help explain why teachers stay. This section will serve as an introduction that discusses support, climate and culture, and organizational decisions. Support refers to the multiple ways teachers receive instructional support in their practice. Climate and culture refer to the profession's relational side and the building's atmosphere. Organizational decisions relate to the opportunities for autonomy and learning teachers have available.

Support

The broad idea of support can impact a teacher's decision to stay in the profession in many ways. Ingersoll and Strong (2011) found that beginning teachers reported a lack of adequate school administration support as a primary factor behind their decision to depart from education. This is important because if school leaders want to see professional growth from their new teachers, the new teachers must feel the administrators have their best interests at heart.

Also, community support can go a long way in retaining teachers year after year. Kersaint et al. (2007) reported that teachers need support from the administration,

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students, the community and parents. Support from outside the building can reinvigorate and motivate a teacher to return the following year. Another aspect leading to the return of teachers to their classrooms year after year is the strong and deep connection teachers have with their community. The 2021 study by Seelig and McCabe took place with 50 educational stakeholders from a rural school district. The authors stated, "Across all three districts, teachers also pointed to their dual role as respected community members as personally significant and a reason to remain to teach in their districts (Seelig & McCabe, 2021, p. 10). In close-knit communities, especially rural towns, teachers from this study stated they had a personal connection to the community and its inhabitants. Even though the job may sometimes frustrate them, their relationship with the town caused them to return year after year.

A multi-year study from a Florida public school district offers more insights into why teachers leave the profession (Kersaint et al., 2007). Kersaint et al. (2007) studied 2,858 former teachers from two large Florida public school districts. Of the reasons the leavers listed for quitting the career, the ones within school leaders' control were related to administrative support. Teachers in this study identified administrative support as school leadership having an effective discipline plan and implementing professional support measures. Kersaint et al. (2007) stated that more teachers will be inclined to return if schools form well-developed programs that enhance teachers' classroom management skills with well-developed school policies. The more supported and heard teachers feel in the classroom, the more likely they will stay in the profession. When school leaders positively engage teachers, it can significantly impact their satisfaction.

Climate and Culture

Climate and culture refer to the strength of relationships between multiple stakeholders. These relationships range from teacher to teacher, teacher to administrator, and teacher to student. Climate and culture also refer to the building's overall atmosphere. These factors can significantly impact teacher retention decisions. Miraj et al. (2018) suggested higher teacher morale is directly associated with a school culture that supports teamwork and teacher involvement in decision-making. These factors also lead to a more substantial commitment to teaching and a purpose for teachers to stay in the profession. A positive school culture directly impacts teacher satisfaction levels and their desire to remain in the profession.

Many people go into education hoping to impact tomorrow's future leaders. In a study of three rural Wisconsin school districts, Seelig and McCabe (2021) conducted interviews and focus groups with 44 teachers and six administrators. Seelig and McCabe (2021) detailed how teachers structured their instruction to the experiences of students, with an emphasis on addressing student needs or interests. Teacher's commitment to students can overshadow some of the more challenging aspects of the job. It is the teacher's focus on the students that is one of the reasons they return year after year. This focus and commitment to students help foster a positive culture and climate throughout an entire building. Aulia and Heirani (2022) found that school leaders may do more to retain teachers and improve student learning outcomes by encouraging community and collaboration among educators. In other words, when school and district leaders focus on

creating a healthy and happy school culture, they are directly working to address the teacher's satisfaction levels, and the low retention rates of teachers.

Organizational Decisions

Organizational decisions refer to the autonomy of teachers in their classrooms and the opportunities for professional learning given to the staff. Shuls and Flores (2020) described how top retaining districts generate trust, openness, and academic freedom in their schools. They illustrate how important it is for administrators to allow teacher autonomy to shine in the classroom. The organizational decision to create opportunities for teacher autonomy in the school may positively affect their satisfaction, leading to higher retention. Creating opportunities for professional learning among teachers is necessary for teacher retention.

Opportunities to learn and grow in their profession impact teachers' satisfaction and willingness to remain. Research shows the norms of collaboration that emerge in a professional culture are deliberately developed, often through formal structures, such as well-designed mentoring and induction programs (Simon & Johnson, 2015, p. 20). Learning opportunities are significant for early career educators because they can lead to deeper collaboration among staff.

<center>**Why Teachers Leave**</center>

Several factors can contribute to teacher turnover and lower satisfaction. I chose the six factors below because they relate to the factors (i.e., support, climate and culture, and organizational decisions) that cause teachers to stay, as described in the section above. When teachers' experiences are negative, it may lead to their dissatisfaction and

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departure. In other words, the factors that cause teachers to stay, if implemented incorrectly or haphazardly, may also cause teachers to leave. I discuss these factors further below.

Support with Emotional Demands

Teachers often talk about the emotional aspect of caring for students, working with parents, and being responsible for a child's learning. Leech et al. (2022) surveyed 655 teachers in public schools in a western state. These included teachers from both rural and non-rural schools. Respondents who were asked why they left teaching reported, "The emotional demands and workload are not sustainable" (Leech et al., 2022, p. 4). Like many jobs, there are everyday stressors, but researchers can see that when turnover is consistently high across the profession, the emotional state of the teachers must be considered. Assuring teachers they are cared for and supported is insufficient; school leaders must actively work to support teachers' emotional well-being. If school leaders do not emphasize the well-being of teachers, they may struggle with dissatisfaction and low retention rates.

Support with Student Discipline

The problem of teacher turnover is more nuanced than simply a lack of commitment and dissatisfaction among teachers. Other issues, such as student discipline and school safety, may cause teachers to leave the profession. Boyd et al. (2011) found that student behavior and schools' responses to student behavior are persistent and prevalent issues for teachers. The better systems are in place, and the more attentive the administration is to student discipline needs from teachers, the happier the educators will

be in their profession. If teachers do not feel supported in student discipline, they may become dissatisfied and eventually leave.

Culture and Climate Shown Through School Safety

School safety refers to conditions that affect students' and teachers' physical and psychological well-being (Boyd et al., 2011, p. 308). In other words, a teacher's well-being is paramount to feeling safe and secure in their profession. Boyd et al. (2011) concluded that a teacher's psychological well-being refers to their general perceptions of their students, staff, and community. In other words, schools that provide a positive working environment struggle less in retaining teachers than schools that have challenges in maintaining a safe school environment. School leaders who tend to these areas will tap into what positively impacts teachers' satisfaction levels and thus encourage them to stay in the profession.

Culture and Climate Leading to a Lack of Respect

Increased workloads and less support can lead to teachers feeling underappreciated and undervalued. Leech et al. (2022) attributed high teacher turnover to a lack of respect toward teachers among various stakeholders, leading to teachers' deprofessionalization. Feeling unacknowledged by their community and peers can often lead to low self-worth and frustration among teachers, prompting them to seek employment elsewhere. In Leech et al.'s (2022) study, participants also discussed advice they would give future teachers. According to Leech et al. (2022), "both rural and non-rural respondents also proposed considering other career options and the implications of a teaching career before committing to the profession" (p. 5). When veteran teachers try to

discourage young teachers from entering the field, researchers must investigate, diagnose, and attempt to solve the problem. School leaders may not be able to ensure every person respects teachers, but they can do their best to show and give respect to teachers in their schools.

Organizational Decisions Leading to a Loss of Commitment

Teachers may change careers for many reasons, one being commitment to the work. Rosenholtz and Simpson (1990) studied 1,213 teachers from 78 elementary schools throughout Tennessee. Their findings showed that teachers' commitment to their profession changes modestly across their teaching career, falling after five years and then partially returning by the end of their career (Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990, p. 252). It is essential to understand why these teachers were less committed to their jobs after the first few years. Rosenholtz and Simpson (1990) wrote,

> It may be that a mid-career "crisis of independence" could prove to be a critical stage at which organizational arrangements could either help talented novices make the transition to effective and committed veterans or cause them to reduce their commitment and perhaps leave the field. (p. 253)

When school leaders make decisions to help teachers grow in their practice and commitment, they have better chances of positively impacting their satisfaction and retention rates.

Organizational Decisions Leading to Professional Dissatisfaction

Job dissatisfaction is when an employee, or in this case, a teacher, does not feel content in their job. Mertler (2002) studied 702 middle and high school teachers roughly

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20 years ago. He found that of the 107 teachers with 1-5 years of experience, 80% were satisfied with their job. This proportion fell to 65% satisfaction among the 77 teachers with 6-10 years of experience. This study suggested a trend of lowering teacher satisfaction rates over time (Mertler, 2002). This is why finding solutions that schools can implement to keep teachers satisfied over an extended period is paramount.

The Local Context

The school district in this study, Crosstown School District (all names and locations are pseudonyms), is no exception in the ongoing struggle to retain teachers. When reviewing retention data throughout the Crosstown School District, roughly 42% of new hires from 2016 through 2022 have left. This is an interesting statistic that can be examined more closely. I want to study factors that raise teacher satisfaction because many newly hired teachers are leaving my work district. If I can better understand how administrators impact teacher satisfaction levels, I can target the strategies that lead to the retention of more teachers in the district.

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Site Selection

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Rationale for the Site

I researched at Crosstown High School's Ninth Grade School (NGS), with approximately 750 students and 50 full-time classroom teachers. The Ninth Grade School was a compelling site because this school served as an essential transition for middle school students as they entered high school. The Ninth Grade School in Crosstown was the first time students from seven different elementary schools and two middle schools came together. The goal was to create a smaller, more structured environment that eased

this transition. Moving towards the teacher aspect, teachers at this location played a pivotal role in facilitating the change for students who transferred from middle to high school. The school was a fully functioning stand-alone school, only serving ninth-grade students. To begin the 2023-2024 school year, one teacher was new to education, having just completed their teacher preparation program, one was in the process of completing their alternative certification, and two were in their first three years of teaching. I focused on this group, induction teachers within the early part of their career, because these are the critical years in ensuring teachers stay in education. Positively impacting their satisfaction levels at this stage can help form their career, leading to positive retention decisions. The first three years of a teacher's career are critical in impacting their decision to return for years after. Working with a small group allowed me to start small, make necessary changes, and share the results with the district leaders.

This campus was the ideal site to research this specific problem of practice because it was a rural fringe district growing exponentially. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) defined rural fringe as "census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an Urbanized Area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an Urban Cluster" (p. 1). This was unique because when considering a rural fringe district, one may not think of maximum growth and student population numbers increasing. However, Crosstown is growing exponentially. Since 2020, the town of Crosstown has grown in population by 11%, and by 2026, Crosstown Schools will be over capacity in all seven elementary schools. This was

informative to this specific district because Crosstown's rural school district grew yearly, with well over 9,200 students at the start of the 2023-2024 school year.

The benefit of studying a growing rural district is that it helped other districts with retention challenges. If the intervention in this study raised satisfaction and retention, other rural districts could follow these steps to support their retention efforts. Other rural districts could learn from this study because Crosstown was again a rural fringe district, and the more the population grew, the more suburban it became. These changes happened in many neighborhoods and districts, so understanding these trends early could impact students and teachers. Addressing these changes could lead to positive outcomes.

On day one of ninth grade, the students are still in a transition phase, and currently, teachers' impact on students is foundational to their success during the rest of high school. If I can uncover what satisfies teachers and implement strategies that increase teacher satisfaction, the effect on the district will be invaluable, starting with Kindergarten through graduation. My immediate goal is to implement these strategies at one campus with the long-term goal of district-wide implementation.

Positionality

With district permission, I accessed student academic and behavioral data specific to my position. This was important because I reflected this data and discussed it with the teachers in my study. I reviewed how students were doing academically and behaviorally. This data led to instructional conversations with the teachers in my research. In the past, I was an administrator in a school district with 1,200 students and roughly 3,500 people living in the town. Conducting research in this agricultural and farming community was

my first experience with a school district in this type of community. These same experiences highlighted the struggles, resources, proximity to opportunities, strengths, close-knit community, and people's spirit for the town. As a researcher, I used these experiences to guide my study and encourage me when I needed motivation or was unclear about the next steps.

It is important to note how this positionality may have biased my study. Having worked in a district on the fringes of an urban town in a rural part of the state, I kept previous thoughts and experiences from impacting the validity of this study. I have seen retention challenges in schools located near rural communities and have seen the recruitment efforts led by these districts. If I had allowed these experiences to cloud my efforts, it would have been detrimental to the study. It also served as motivation. Working in this type of district, I saw how the community rallied behind one another and supported education. This was the same type of atmosphere in the district of Crosstown. The support of parents and the community did wonders for the spirit of teachers, and channeling that energy provided some insight into the satisfaction of educators.

Contextual Overview of the Site

The Crosstown School District was a rural fringe, roughly 30 miles from a central metropolitan area. One high school in the district is divided across two campuses. One ninth-grade school served approximately 750 students and 50 teachers, and the main campus served 2,000 students in tenth through twelfth grade. The student-to-teacher ratio in the high school was roughly 25:1. To understand this study, I learned about the demographics of Crosstown. According to a census study (US Census Bureau, 2022) in

Crosstown, approximately 82.5% of residents had a high school diploma or a post-secondary degree. This meant roughly 6,702 Crosstown residents out of 7,405 have earned a diploma. Almost 18% of the population was impoverished (US Census Bureau, 2022). Three of the seven elementary schools in Crosstown received Title 1 funds, and those three schools served roughly 32% of the elementary-aged students.

My Role as a Scholarly Practitioner

As an educator and scholarly practitioner, I had critical insights from teachers. Perry (2020) defined a scholarly practitioner as "someone who blends practical wisdom with professional skills and knowledge to name, frame, and solve problems of practice. They use practical research and applied theories as tools for change because they understand the importance of equity and social justice" (p. 11). Every year, the district office sends an insight survey to district employees regarding their feelings about working in Crosstown; I requested this information from the public information officer to uncover the areas where teacher satisfaction is low. I shared the findings and interventions with the district. Conducting this study at the NGS served the district because the strategies identified in this study can be expanded to other campuses.

Creswell and Poth (2018) detailed the ethical issues in qualitative research by contacting the participants, informing them of the general purpose of the study, and selecting a site that will not raise power issues with the researcher. Choosing a place where the participants can trust the researcher has their best interests is at the heart of the study. I remained ethical and moral with this knowledge and only explored topics shared by teachers. This meant I did not pressure or pry the teachers to give information that

benefited the study but truly analyzed their survey results and interview answers to increase their satisfaction. At the NGS, more information was needed about teacher satisfaction levels.

The Problem of Practice

From the 2015-2016 school year through the 2023-2024 school year, there were a total of 183 teachers hired by the district. Since the 2015-2016 school year of those 183 newly hired teachers, only 97 teachers remain in Crosstown School District. This translates to a total of 86 newly hired teachers having left the district since the start of the 2015-2016 school year. Of the 86 teachers who left the district, 19 of them chose to leave for another South Carolina school district.

From the start of the 2019-2020 school year through the 2023-2024 school year, there were a total of 121 teachers hired by the district. Since the 2019-2020 school year of those 121 teachers, only 95 remain. The district has not reported the number of teachers remaining from the latest cohort (2023-2024). In the last five school years, a total of 26 teachers have left the district. Of those 26, eight left for another South Carolina school district.

During the last nine years (2015-2024) roughly 22% of teachers left Crosstown for another South Carolina school district, and specifically during the second five year period (2019-2024) almost 31% of teachers left for another South Carolina school district. The most surprising piece of data is that only 75% of teachers hired to start the 2021-2022 school year still remain. This points to a departure of 25% of the newly hired teachers in just over two school years. The district hired 27 new teachers to start the

2022-2023 school year; two have already left. One of those chose to teach in another

South Carolina district. See Figure 1.1 below for more detailed information about

retention rates in the Crosstown School District.

Figure 1.1

Teacher Retention Data in the Crosstown School District by Cohort by School

Year

|	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Induction Cohort	17	11	12	22	20	28	28	27	18
Year 2	17	9	8	18 .	19	25	23	25	
Year 3	16	8	7	17 .	15	21	21		
Year 4	15	8	6	13 .	12	19			
Year 5	14	6	3	8	12				
After 5 years	13	5	2	10	12				
5 Year Retention Rate	*76.4*	*45.4*	*16.7*	*45.4*	*60.0*	*70.0*	*75.0*	*93.0*	
Year 6	13	5	2	8					
Year 7	12	3	1						
Year 8	11	2							
Year 9	9								
Reasons	5 left education 2 Health 2 another SC district 2 Family	2 left education 2 family 2 another SC district 1 SC private school 1 no certificate	7 left education 2 another SC district 1 family 1 no certificate	6 left education 4 another SC district 1 another state 1 no certificate 2 to uncertified role	1 left education 4 another SC district 1 family 21 out of state	4 left education 1 another state 1 no certificate 1 breach 1 unknown 1 family	3 left education 3 another SC district 1 not rehired 2 family	1 left education 1 another SC district	

This suggested a retention problem because the district focused energy and

finances on keeping teachers in the district. When 18 out of 72 (25%) teachers over the

last eight completed school years chose to leave for other schools, this brought up a

question as to why they were leaving. The data currently missing is what led to teachers

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leaving this district for another school. Was it a promotion, a closer commute, better pay, or some type of dissatisfaction?

The fishbone diagram below details the problem of practice in Crosstown School District, which needs to improve teacher retention. After an extensive literature review, I identified three key factors that often contribute to low teacher retention: (a) lack of teacher influence, (b) lack of administrative support, and (c) poor staff relationships. These three factors are based on the current research and national data, leading to the low retention rates of teachers. A few significant factors identified in existing literature contributing to teacher retention are detailed below in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2

Fishbone Diagram

Teacher Turnover: Understanding the root causes of teacher turnover and attrition
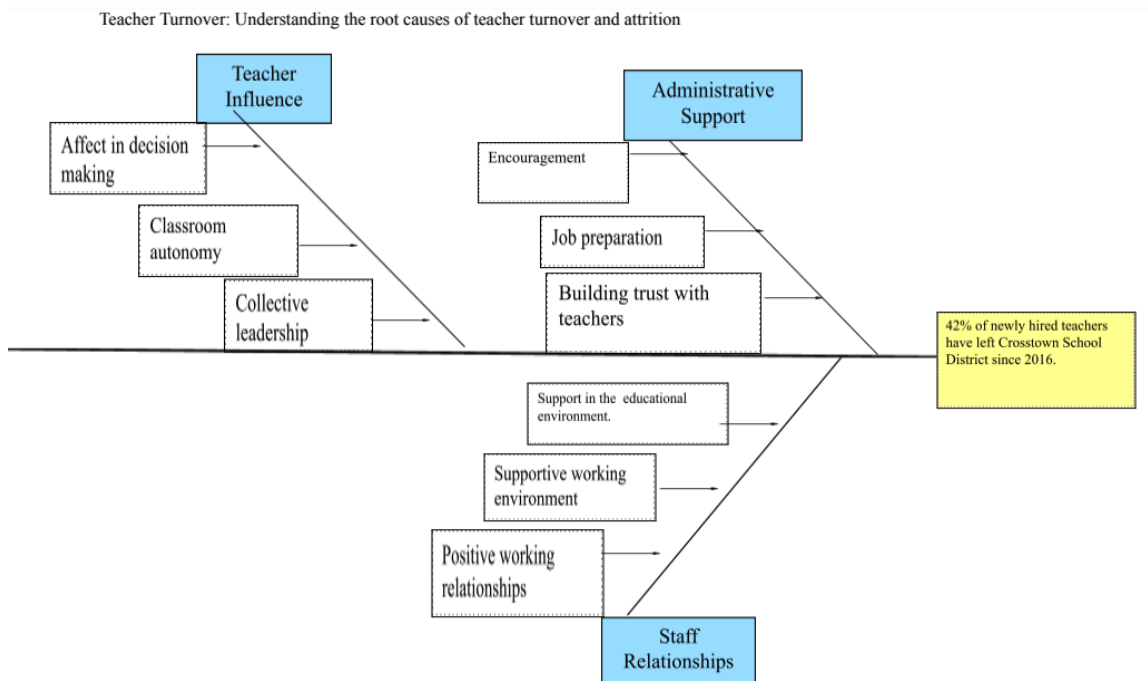
Zembylas and Papanastasiou (2005) defined teacher influence as a teacher's power to participate in decision-making about teaching and learning. Teachers' influence on a teacher's retention decision is enormous. Zembylas and Papanastasiou (2005) found a lack of professional autonomy among the reasons for low teacher satisfaction. When teachers do not have the power to make decisions in their field or their voices are silenced, they can become unhappy, which may lead to turnover. Empowering teachers to lead can have positive outcomes. Dauksas and White (2010) reported that when teachers feel empowered, their expertise is valued, and their contributions are honored, they are more inclined to remain in their schools. Cultivating teacher leaders will positively contribute to raising retention rates.

Administrative support has been researched heavily in the field of teacher satisfaction and teacher retention. Hammond and Thomas (2017) analyzed national survey data from a 2012 school and staffing survey and a 2013 teacher follow-up survey. The results reflected that the teachers surveyed reported a lack of administrative support as one of the most vital turnover indicators. When turnover is high, retention rates are low. School leaders can support teachers by listening to them and their needs. Dauksas and White (2010) wrote that when principals allow teachers to relate to and communicate with the principal, it supports retention. Strategies that allow for teacher to principal communication can impact retention decisions.

School leaders who focus on fostering relationships between staff, students, and the community ensure their team has access to healthy and positive relationships. Allensworth et al. (2009) reported that school leadership is essential when teachers

decide to leave school. However, their relationships with fellow teachers and parents, or the extent to which they feel their school serves its students well, are paramount in their satisfaction and retention decisions. Teachers' opportunities to foster and grow stakeholder relationships exponentially impact their retention decisions. When teachers can form relationships with their peers and those they work with, they trust their working environment more. Dauksas and White (2010) wrote that teachers appreciate it when they are provided with opportunities to form study and critical friend groups, conduct action research, and join professional learning communities. All these activities center around one area: building and cultivating positive working relationships, which impact satisfaction retention in the long run.

Not included in the fishbone diagram, but a well-documented reason contributing to teacher retention was shown through a 2016 study by Mertler. In this survey, 9,053 K-12 public school teachers, or 18% of the total teaching population in Arizona, participated in a survey (Mertler, 2016). The survey, created by Mertler, focused on three key areas: job satisfaction, motivation, and perceptions of retention. In the study, 91% of all survey completers stated interpersonal relationships with students were motivating or highly motivating factors in their jobs. Mertler (2016) presented data showing that 96.6% of all respondents reported "having students thank you for assisting in the understanding of a difficult concept is a major intrinsic motivator in their jobs" (p. 40). This critical information details how vital the relational aspect of a teacher's job is to the individuals who completed the statewide survey.

Rationale and Conclusion

These teachers served only ninth-grade students during a crucial transition from middle to high school. The school served as a Tier-1 intervention for all students who transitioned from middle to high school. Here, teachers pinpointed academic areas in which students needed support in the future, and counselors targeted behaviors requiring intervention and extra support. I invited first year teachers and teachers in their first five years to participate in this study to understand their satisfaction levels and determine what school leaders, could do to retain teachers year after year.

The Focus

When narrowing the focus of my study, I wanted to analyze if increased administrative support led to increased satisfaction. Specifically uncovering if and how the increased administrative supports impacted teacher satisfaction and retention Leithwood and McAdie (2007) reported principals contribute to teacher satisfaction by providing resources and minimizing student disorder in the school. This finding impacted the direction of my study, and how I believed I could best impact teacher satisfaction and retention at this school.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to the Research on Teacher Turnover and Retention

The impacts of teachers leaving the profession are vast and far-reaching. When districts have high teacher turnover, this leads to low teacher retention rates. Much research points towards various vital factors that impact retention and teacher satisfaction. Moreover, high teacher turnover is costly for a school district, in part due to the onboarding and training process for new hires.

Costs of Teacher Turnover

Through her study on factors influencing teacher retention, Troutt (2014) stated that funding for recruitment, advertising, administrative processing of new hires, training for new hires, and training for first-year teachers is apparent throughout the review of teacher turnover costs. Troutt (2014) discussed that the turnover of teachers costs the district office a significant amount of money, time, and effort. My current district is losing newly hired teachers and spending year after year on retraining new staff, negatively impacting the district's finances. Looking further at Crosstown School District, 42% of newly hired teachers have left since the 2015-2016 school year. It costs the district thousands to retrain new staff yearly. In addition, time and money must be spent providing professional development and mentoring to newly hired teachers. More effective uses of this money are possible if turnover is understood and reduced.

Teacher Turnover as an Equity Issue

Schools considered academically low performing often have higher turnover rates. Watlington et al. (2010) summed up the cost of low teacher retention rates by illustrating that schools with predominantly lower-performing, poor, and minoritized students have more difficulty hiring and retaining teachers. This inability to hire and retain quality teachers negatively impacts student performance. Students are left in persistently lower-performing schools if teachers choose to go every year.

A shortage of teachers due to low retention rates is of significant concern to educators everywhere. The greatest problem is the need for more high-quality teachers who have the potential to provide substantially higher-quality classroom education to American students (Watlington et al., 2010, p. 23). Again, this pointed to an equity issue; students need access to high-quality instruction to be positively affected by constant changes to their learning environment. The difference could be long-term substitutes teaching them, unqualified candidates instructing them, or new teachers with different expectations leading their learning year after year. Some research pointed to a drop in student performance due to teachers turning over each year. Hammond and Thomas (2019) inferred that high turnover rates may lead to hiring inexperienced teachers, negatively impacting student learning. Students in schools with high turnover and few experienced teachers were at a decided educational disadvantage.

Being in a suburban, rural fringe area, I addressed the rural aspect of my study. Rural students were considered vulnerable and impacted by teacher retention due to the lack of resources available. Ingersoll and Tran (2023) reported that 36% of rural

secondary schools had job openings for mathematics teachers, and about half indicated

serious difficulties filling these openings, representing about 16% of all rural public

secondary schools nationally (p. 15). From a place-based perspective, rural schools

needed help to fill teacher openings. I aimed to address these inequities unfairly

impacting rural schools by finding what professionally satisfied teachers to retain more of

them. Crosstown School District sat in a suburban area near the rural fringe area, and this

study directly impacted these schools and schools like it.

Factors Contributing to Teacher Retention

Before this section, I discussed reasons why teachers stay in the profession. The

overarching ideas discussed included general support, climate and culture, and

organizational decisions. In the section below, I continued with factors contributing to

retention. Here, I delineated those overarching themes into specific points. I explained

how support, culture, climate, and organizational decisions were essential when

considering retention.

Examining Support

According to the research, schools with supportive administration had better

chances of higher retention and lower turnover rates. Zembylas and Papanastasiou (2007)

wrote that teachers who worked in supportive environments are more likely to contribute

immensely to school reform efforts. The research shows that when teachers felt supported

by their school leaders, they supported the school and its change efforts. A supportive

administration went beyond simply offering conversation and assistance with materials.

Shuls and Flores (2020) understood that administrators who supported novice teachers by

developing and implementing strategies that met their needs were more successful in helping them cope with the issues that most beginning teachers had. Administrators who took the time to get to know their new teachers raised their satisfaction by tending to those unique struggles.

Administrators who supported teachers built community and trust among their teachers. Watson (2021) shared that administrative support refers to behaviors encouraging teacher collaboration, providing growth opportunities, and offering encouragement. Furthering the idea of administrative support aiding in the retention of teachers, The Learning Policy Institute (2017) reported that one of the key variables driving turnover is the kind of preparation teachers have had before entry and the type of administrative support they receive on the job. This research directly points to the fact that administrators who support teachers have a better chance of raising retention rates.

Using an improvement science approach, LaBerge (2021) identified through surveys and interviews of elementary school teachers that trust and support between teachers and administrators were two factors impacting retention. In other words, teachers who communicate with their administration have a higher chance of staying at their school. LaBerge (2021) quoted teachers as saying, "Being able to discuss matters with administration and trusting administrators is essential" (p. 49). This trust and accountability that principals build with their teachers can significantly impact teacher retention rates. Boyd et al. (2011) concluded that administrative support refers to how principals and other school leaders make teachers' work easier and help them improve

their teaching. School administration can support their teachers by ensuring they tend to and listen to teachers' needs.

Analyzing Climate and Culture

The climate and culture of a school come down to the relationships formed in and out of the building, as well as the atmosphere inside the building. Miraj et al. (2018) concluded that the teacher-principal relationship is critical to raising teacher morale. The principal's ability to enable others to act and motivate the heart is vital in uplifting the teacher's enthusiasm. Regarding relationships, schools that focus on maintaining relationships between key stakeholders may have more satisfied teachers with higher retention numbers. Ingersoll and Tran (2023) reported that teachers often stay in rural schools primarily due to the strength of the relationships. These relationships can include those with students, colleagues, administrators, and even community members. The data shows that teachers tend to remain in schools longer and are more satisfied when there is a focus on relationship-building in their schools. The more teachers can foster appropriate and professional relationships amongst other professionals, the more likely they will be satisfied. Staff relations can also refer to teachers' professional and social relationships with other teachers (Boyd et al., 2011, p. 307). Teachers who can collaborate and work with other educators are building relationships together, which influences their overall happiness levels.

The atmosphere and environment of a school are often described as the feeling a person gets when they walk into the building. This definition can be summarized in two

words: school culture. This was a factor many teachers discuss when talking about their feelings towards a school. Haerani (2022) wrote,

> Higher rates of teacher retention have been linked to creating a healthy school culture in which instructors feel valued and encouraged. Teachers' decisions to stay or leave a school are often heavily influenced by the climate there. Higher rates of teacher retention have been linked to creating a healthy school culture in which instructors feel valued and encouraged. (p. 39)

The culture and feel of a building went a long way in ensuring a teacher's high satisfaction levels and that they felt safe and supported. School leaders who focused on this area had more success with their retention rates.

Analyzing Organizational Decisions

Organizational decisions incorporate the more significant ideas of professional learning and autonomy. Seelig and McCabe (2021) discussed how administrators could creatively instill a culture of distributed leadership, so the entire teaching staff is involved in improving their practice. This focus on professional learning and growth will contribute to the overall betterment of the district. In other words, school leaders invest not only in their teachers by giving them opportunities to learn professionally but also in the success of their school and district.

Teachers who feel they have a chance to grow personally and professionally will likely stay in the profession longer. The National Education Association (NEA) has a clear vision for professional teachers. The NEA (2023) discussed how misguided teacher evaluation based on test scores can devastate teacher morale. When talking about the

professional growth of teachers, it must focus on the individual's development, not solely the results their students earn on a standardized test. Of course, educational leaders want to see growth in the classroom, but the teachers having the ability to train and strengthen their practice should be an outcome on the same level as test scores.

Focusing on teachers' professional and individual growth is critical to their satisfaction. School leaders investing in their teachers are trying to assist their professional growth. In a 2020 study on the top retaining schools in the Missouri public school system, Schulz and Flores found significant data when schools focused on the development of their employees. Shuls and Flores (2020) reported one of those districts had a substantial goal of helping new staff feel comfortable, supported, and valued by the district even before their first day on the job. This attention to detail and focus on assisting teachers to grow professionally contributed to their retention. Shuls and Flores (2020) found through an empathy interview with a district's Chief Human Resources Officer that the high retention rates in their schools were attributed to their focus on individual and professional growth. This individual believed this to be the number one reason why teachers stay in her district. According to the top retaining districts in Missouri, school districts that place teacher growth both in and outside the classroom have a more substantial chance of retaining those teachers year after year.

Zembylas and Papanastasiou (2007) wrote that teachers' job satisfaction and perceived levels of influence positively correlated with their decision-making and interest in decision issues (p. 438). Teachers who influenced decision-making in their schools were more likely to be satisfied with their jobs. Encouraging teachers to take charge of

their profession and identify areas where they needed support helped empower them. Teacher influence was a factor that impacted retention rates. Giving educators power over their profession can yield promising retention results. Boyd et al. (2011) reported that teacher influence refers to teachers' autonomy in their classrooms and their ability to affect school policies and practices. Administrators should include teachers in the leadership and decision-making process. Boyd et al. (2011) stated that teachers are more likely to stay in schools where they can contribute to schoolwide decision-making, such as scheduling, selection of materials, and selection of professional development experiences. School leaders who allow for teacher autonomy in their building and give teachers more influence have a better chance of retaining those teachers year after year. Knox and Anfara (2013) described teachers who influence the school environment and culture as feeling invested in the organization. They state that teachers need to feel they influence the school environment (Knox & Anfara, 2013, p. 60). It is imperative to understand how teacher's perceived levels of influence affect these rates. Teachers react positively when they control their school environment by having a choice in professional matters related to their workday. Teacher influence refers to teachers' autonomy in their classrooms and their ability to affect school policies and practices (Boyd et al., 2011, p. 306). In other words, it is influential for teachers when they have a say in what they teach and how they teach that material.

Based on this review, I focused on support, climate and, culture, and organizational decisions. These three themes are expansive. However, I used teacher-specific feedback on these critical areas through the improvement science approach to

personalize my study to the teacher's needs. Rather than going into a study with the areas of need already selected, I personalized this study by interviewing the teachers on those broad themes and focusing on their answers. This approach allowed me to create a targeted intervention around these themes but concentrate on specific areas the teachers decided were essential.

Significance of the Study

Understanding the unique challenges of retaining teachers in South Carolina will lead to more satisfied teachers. CERRA (2022) showed an increase of 411 teachers not returning from the 2021 to 2022 school year. Locally, 42% of the newly hired teachers from the 2015-2016 school year have left the district. The retention rate of teachers remaining since the 2015-2016 hiring cycle is roughly 58%. This means about 42% of the newly hired teachers have left the district. It is essential to understand what prompts teachers to stay. If the problem is not addressed later, the number of teachers staying in the classroom may remain the same.

Conclusion

The central idea in uplifting others and improving their morale is to offer support as administrators and listen to the teachers when they have ideas and needs. In summary, understanding where teachers want influence may raise teacher morale. According to the literature review, understanding the impact of solid leadership and implementing effective strategies is paramount to retention. Much research exists on the various techniques one can implement to impact retention. By examining teacher influence,

administrative support, and staff relationships, I sought to understand further how to lower teacher turnover and raise satisfaction.

Research and Improvement Team

A research team is critical in any study because they provide perspective the lead researcher may miss through the mass amounts of data collection, analysis, and writing. I used this specific team to audit my work and ensure I mitigate potential biases. It is crucial to conduct an honest study, and a research and improvement team provided the experience and mentorship I wanted in this process.

Importance of an Improvement Team

Including others in an improvement team is essential because I needed outside perspective and critical feedback at various study points. Certain biases may have permeated it if I had been the only member checking my study. Having essential friends double-check my work and offer their thoughts throughout my entire study was imperative. Costa and Kallick (1990) wrote, "A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. The friend advocates for that work's success (p. 50). For this reason, I created an improvement team of critical friends who are experienced, knowledgeable, and qualified.

Introducing the Team

Multiple factors were essential when deciding who to include on the research team. Firstly, I included individuals who grappled with retention and satisfaction as part of their jobs. Being able to speak to and work with colleagues who dealt with these

challenges as part of their daily work gave me keen insight into the roots and causes of this problem. Secondly, I included individuals at the school and district levels. School-level officials were close to the problem and spoke to the work they did every day to find solutions. Having district-level leaders allowed me to analyze the situation from a larger perspective where I thought about local, community, statewide, and national trends. I included my school principal in this team. He had over 25 years of educational experience and 18 in a leadership role. I involved the school principal in the research team because he had been on the front lines when hiring teachers year after year due to retention challenges. He helped the study by offering firsthand experience on the steps needed to support and satisfy teachers and keep them in the classroom.

I also included the Chief Human Resource Officer. He had worked in education for over 30 years, beginning as a classroom teacher. He assisted this study by offering a unique perspective, having conducted many career fairs and working with individuals across the state to improve hiring and onboarding practices.

Lastly, I included the district director of teacher effectiveness. I involved her because she led teacher recruitment and retention efforts for the last seven years. She administered the exit surveys when teachers left and kept track of why teachers felt unhappy if they went for non-family or retirement reasons. Her experience proved crucial in analyzing teacher satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

An Engaged and Empowered Team

With only three members, this team had over 70 years of educational experience. I gained insight from people who saw changes in education over the last three decades,

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which was priceless. I engaged them by explaining my problem of practice in detail. Since this was a problem with which each individual worked closely, I anticipated their engagement level to be high. Not only did I explain the situation in general, but I also shared the local data. This data was complex to hear without wanting to act. I empowered this team by showing them how we affected change within our district through research. I spoke to techniques and strategies and shared ideas for a plan that showed them that, with their help, achieving high retention rates was a possibility.

Research Question

One research question guides this study: In what ways does providing administrative support through a professional learning community for induction teachers impact their satisfaction and retention?

How the Question Relates to the Research

The research question directly related to teacher satisfaction, a factor in some districts leading to low retention rates. When teachers choose to move to another school for a non-family reason, educational leaders must investigate why that decision was made. Ingersoll (2001) stated that young teachers have very high departure rates, and high levels of employee turnover are both cause and effect of ineffectiveness and low performance in organizations (p. 502, 505). Ineffective management may lead to stress and frustration, causing teachers to become unsatisfied and seek employment elsewhere. Implementing effective management policies is significant to the practice of education because it is one factor that can move the needle with teacher satisfaction.

How the Questions Addresses the Problem

Understanding teacher dissatisfaction and low retention rates go hand in hand. Can an administrator implement changes or interventions in a school that increases teacher satisfaction? How can professional learning communities impact teacher satisfaction and retention rates? The problem of practice that guided my study were understanding if professional learning communities for induction teachers, with the curriculum selected by those teachers, has an impact on their satisfaction and retention.

What I Hoped to Learn About the Problem

Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) reported that in schools serving predominantly low-income and students of color, these learners are normalized to a "revolving door" of inexperienced teachers. This point makes retaining high-quality and impactful teachers important because some vulnerable students are negatively affected. Researching strategies that increase the satisfaction levels of teachers is vital to the future of education because teachers who are happier in their profession choose to stay in the classroom. Part of raising teacher satisfaction levels was understanding how to encourage teachers. Zembylas and Papanastasiou (2005) wrote about how teacher empowerment is defined and measured regarding teachers' power to participate in decision-making about teaching and learning conditions. This statement summed up my study's goal: giving teachers a voice and choice in their learning empowered them professionally and personally. I chose to listen to their specific pedagogical needs.

Causal Analysis of the Problem

Tools Used to Understand the Problem

District Data File

In the early stages of my data collection, I wanted to understand the retention rates of teachers in the district. It was essential to uncover these rates to understand if retention was in fact a problem. For this phase, I requested a district data file tracking the district turnover numbers from the 2015-2016 school year. With the help of this data sheet, I tracked the number of teachers leaving the district each year and the reasoning behind their exit. I analyzed this data by examining the number of teachers who left the district and their reasoning. Looking at teachers who chose to leave Crosstown for another local district became my point of focus. As stated previously, during the last nine years (2015-2024) about 22% of all teachers that left Crosstown School District, left for another South Carolina school district. Specifically, during the second five year period (2019-2024) 31% of all teachers who left, chose to work for another South Carolina school district.

My initial assumption was that most new teachers were unhappy, so they left. However, there were multiple reasons why some teachers left the district. I learned that some teachers moved to different states or let their teaching certificates expire. I also learned that from 2015-2020, 14 of the 58 teachers (25%) who left decided to work for another school. This prompted me to examine teacher satisfaction and teacher retention for the study. I plan to identify ways to increase teacher satisfaction and retention in the district.

Empathy Interviews

To prepare for this study, I conducted a few initial empathy interviews to understand the problem. I asked them about their experiences in the field, what made them happy, and what led to dissatisfaction. Conducting semi-structured empathy interviews was an eye-opening experience because it gave me insight into what new teachers crave regarding support and what may cause frustration. After the IRB approval process, I conducted post-proposal empathy interviews. This set of interviews assisted me in designing the intervention. I conducted post-intervention interviews to understand the impact. This gave me a sufficient understanding of the entire process and its effect. Based on what I know about the school and the historical research, I expected the post-intervention interviews to include teachers' need for support. I expected them to reference administrative support with students and parents. Based on the literature and past studies, I hoped the interviews would direct me toward further understanding the relationship between satisfaction and retention. I assumed dissatisfaction and pay would become a part of the conversation. Although salary was a part of the questioning, research has disconfirmed this theory because various types of support are the most prevalent answer when teachers discuss satisfaction. My research expanded my understanding in that I learned dissatisfaction and satisfaction could be related to more than salary. I wanted to understand better what supports can increase teacher satisfaction and retention over a sustained period.

Practice, Research, and Policy

My study improved educational outcomes for students because, as earlier stated, students who had access to high-quality teachers year after year performed better in the classroom. Simon and Johnson (2015) discussed how favorable working conditions predicted higher academic growth rates on standardized tests, even in schools serving similar low-income, high-minority student populations. I found working conditions that satisfied teachers, which led to the development of an intervention that led to higher retention rates.

My research added to the current research on the topic in two ways. First, I examined the impact of school administration on teacher satisfaction and retention. This was the key to my study: identifying if and how school leaders affected teacher satisfaction. Secondly, I developed an intervention that impacted teacher satisfaction and had implications for their retention decisions. I shared these findings with school leaders around the district to positively impact education in Crosstown School District. This study was unique because this rural fringe district's student population has grown yearly. The growth taking place in Crosstown, discussed previously, is taking this once small district, and turning it into a suburban destination for families. To keep Crosstown an education destination, high-quality teachers must return year after year.

This study informed policymakers at the local level because it was done in one of the district's schools. I shared these findings with district leaders to improve the retention rates of newly hired teachers. The study enhanced the teacher retention rate because I went directly to the source for my information: the teachers. Studying and working with

early career educators gave essential insight into what motivated and satisfied young educators, ensuring they returned each year. The findings led to better policies implemented locally. Boyd et al. (2011) reported that substantial evidence and literature points to school leaders matter for teachers and students. I hoped to find similar answers in my study, which helped lead to better policies. This helped inform district leaders what worked and did not work to keep teachers happy and returning each year.

<center>**Theory of Improvement**</center>

Explanation and Relevance of a Theory of Improvement

Theories of improvement aim to analyze systems to solve problems of practice. In the educational sense, one can look at various issues, collect data, and test hypotheses to solve said problems. The STEM Push Network (2023) defined a theory of improvement as a set of hypotheses about getting a meaningful collective impact on a shared problem. Combining the understanding of a system that creates the problem, the theory of improvement seeks to solve the problem using the most high-leverage solutions possible. The theory of improvement is a vital part of improvement science. In an improvement science study, researchers define a problem of practice by collecting data. Next, they aim to understand the system producing the problem. The subsequent two portions are the theory of improvement steps. The researchers identify changes to rectify the problem and then test those hypotheses. Without a theory of improvement, action research could not occur, and solutions would never be found. If solutions are not found, the last step of sharing the findings will never lead to meaningful change.

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Measuring Teacher Satisfaction

Taking an improvement science approach, I defined the problem of practice. For my study, it was the large number of early career teachers leaving the profession in my district and around the state. The system producing the problem was the various school districts needing help retaining teachers. To help solve this problem, I identified changes to rectify this challenge. For my study, I looked at raising teacher satisfaction levels. I tested this hypothesis, which I explained below, using interviews, surveys, and other methods to pinpoint areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction within the teachers. Lastly, I shared my knowledge with the educational community to educate others on how to lower teacher turnover.

Before understanding the meaning of satisfaction, I analyzed job and teacher satisfaction definitions and found their connection in my study. Knox and Anfara (2013) defined job satisfaction as the feelings people have about their jobs. This roughly translated to how people associated their jobs with feelings of happiness or unhappiness. Simon and Johnson (2015) discussed job satisfaction as the social conditions most important to teachers that act as predicators for their satisfaction and predicted retention. These conditions included school leadership quality, collegial relationship caliber, and specific aspects of school culture. These conditions influenced teachers' satisfaction and their anticipated career decisions (p. 15). This definition closely related to my study because I tried to understand what factors would positively impact their satisfaction most. A US Department of Education survey (2018) sought to find the definition of teacher satisfaction based on the teacher's response to a straightforward question, "I am generally

satisfied with being a teacher at this school" (p. 6). This definition cut right to the core: Am I happy at this school? Ozkan and Akgenc (2022) found their definition of teacher satisfaction as "The emotional reactions of teachers to their jobs or teaching roles" (p. 1). This definition dealt with the teacher's emotional side and feelings toward their profession.

Looking at all three definitions, there was a commonality that I used as my measure of teacher satisfaction. Each definition was connected to an individual's emotional reaction to their job or school. Multiple definitions were used as a model to measure satisfaction. Lukiyanto (2020) wrote that positive emotions are a person's feelings developed by mood or good conditions. These feelings can be happiness, love, liking something, joy, or satisfaction. In other words, if positive, someone's mood or surrounding conditions can lead to a happy or positive feeling about the situation. The Cambridge Dictionary defines satisfaction as "a pleasant feeling you get when you receive something you wanted, or when you have done something you wanted to do (p.1). Relating this to my study, teacher satisfaction is described as the pleasant feeling a teacher has when they receive support in an area where they want to achieve success. The satisfaction of teachers can be illustrated through positive emotional feeling related to the conditions experienced as a teacher, leading to their return year after year. Therefore, my definition of a satisfied teacher is one who felt support and returned the next year to work with students.

Theory of Improvement for my Study

Figure 1.3, the driver diagram, is below. The aim and goal of my study was to increase teacher retention at my specific school. With a focus on 75% of the teaching force returning the following year. The primary driver included impacting teacher satisfaction and building relationships between teachers. I worked to achieve this through the secondary drivers of increasing teacher autonomy and collaborating with participants to uncover their satisfaction and satisfaction. The secondary drivers of building relationships were creating a supportive environment and growing teacher collaboration opportunities. The change ideas that achieved these drivers were as follows: Survey teachers to track their satisfaction, interview teachers to analyze their satisfaction, and form support groups for teachers to collaborate. For a more detailed analysis, please see the sections below.

Figure 1.3

Driver Diagram
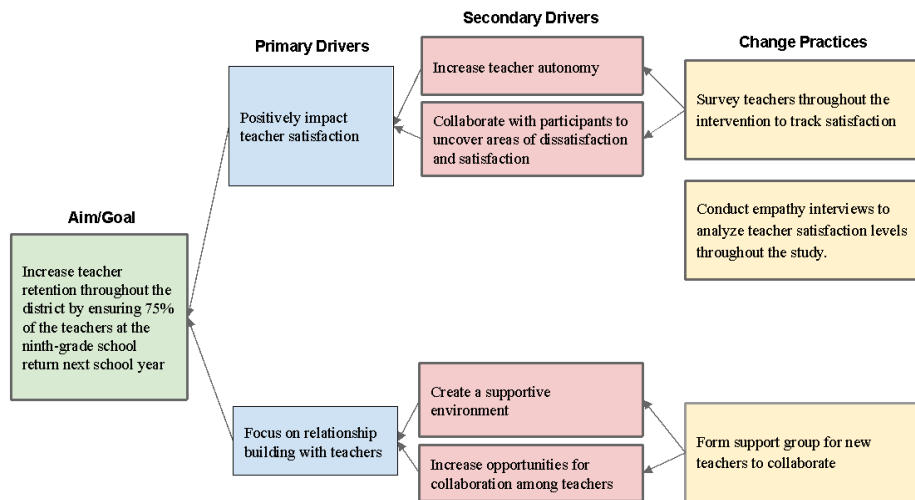
Primary Driver — Positively Impacting Teacher Satisfaction Through Support

      My study aimed to increase teacher satisfaction, leading to promising teacher retention rates. The first primary driver used to raise retention rates is to affect teacher satisfaction levels positively. Firstly, I can retain a higher rate of teachers by tending to and working to improve their satisfaction levels. Long (2016) reported that teacher preparation and support are critical. Teachers, especially those new to the profession, must feel supported and prepared if they want to succeed and feel like they are doing a good job. As a researcher, I worked with teachers in the local context to understand where they required support and how I made them feel most prepared. With this decision, I would raise satisfaction levels and retention rates.

Secondary Driver — Increasing Teacher Autonomy Through Organizational Decisions

Multiple steps were taken to achieve this primary driver. Positively impacting teacher satisfaction, the secondary driver of organizational decision-making that affects autonomy and teacher learning, was imperative. Organizational decisions that create opportunities for autonomy and learning can affect teacher satisfaction. Pearson and Hall (1993) suggested that teacher turnover may decrease if administrators are more sensitive to teacher needs, such as personal autonomy, job satisfaction, and professional identity. These two researchers, roughly 30 years ago, pinpointed significant factors in retaining teachers. Simply finding out what makes teachers happy and implementing those ideas can impact their retention decisions.

Primary Driver — Building Relationships Between Teachers Through Climate and Culture

Creating a positive climate and culture by building relationships among teachers was proven to help build community at the school level. In a 2009 article on the Chicago Public School System, researchers stated, "Teachers are more likely to stay in schools where they have positive, trusting, working relationships with each other" (Allensworth et al., 2009, p. 25). When teachers built trust among each other, they were more likely to stay and teach in that school. The relational aspect between colleagues was critical to creating a high-functioning and supportive environment.

Secondary Driver — Collaborative Opportunities Resulting in a Positive Climate and Culture

According to the research, giving teachers opportunities to talk and work together significantly increased their satisfaction level, which led to a noticeably healthy climate and culture. In an article published by the *NEA Today* discussing retaining teachers long term, Long (2016) wrote, "Create productive school environments, including supportive working conditions, administrative supports, and time for teachers' collaborative planning and professional development—all of which help attract and keep teachers in schools (p. 7). Collaboration was critical in making teachers feel part of a team, supported, and happier overall. School leaders who fostered a nurturing and supportive environment connected with their teachers more deeply. Crocco and Costigan (2007) detailed how problems in a school resulted in teachers leaving poorly performing schools. These exits were attributed to a restrictive school culture or leadership unsupported by their professional development efforts.

Leaders who led with support at the forefront of their minds helped create a positive culture. The literature stated that collaboration is crucial to teacher satisfaction and levels. Dauksas and White (2010) discussed how providing opportunities for collaboration, recognizing teachers' strengths, and honoring teachers' expertise nurtured teacher leaders and ensured they felt integral and valued. When school leaders allowed collaboration among their staff, their satisfaction rose, leading to a more positive school climate and culture.

Change Ideas — Providing Support by Interviewing Teachers for Areas of Need and Creating Interventions

I aimed to create structures that supported teachers in understanding how administrators can positively impact teacher satisfaction. The specific structures or interventions were not determined beforehand but only after working with teachers to learn what they wanted in their profession. The change idea in conducting semi-structured interviews with teachers was the first step in this process. This change practice led to the change idea of implementing what the teachers say in these interviews. As the professional researcher in this study, I implemented the idea of giving teachers targeted support with a group of selected participants in the building. I implemented the change once I uncovered the teachers' chosen needs. Throughout the study, I conducted check-in surveys to gauge their level of satisfaction and track the changes in their satisfaction levels.

I turned to the teachers to understand how administrators can impact teacher satisfaction. I investigated what they wanted, implemented whatever they chose, and studied how this intervention worked or did not work to affect satisfaction. Crocco (2007) detailed how autonomy is strongly related to a teacher's desire to do good work (p. 522). Crocco's (2007) study aligned with my thoughts; teachers who have autonomy want to do good work for their school. Crocco (2007) wrote that good teachers are essential to student outcomes (p. 522). Giving teachers support allowed them to share their voice in their profession; research showed this led to motivated teachers and success in the classroom.

Theory of Change

I aimed to increase teacher retention rates by understanding how administrators can impact teacher satisfaction. As previously discussed, the satisfaction levels of teachers were tied directly to their retention decisions. To conduct this study, I focused on positively impacting their satisfaction levels and creating systems to support them. These drivers were conducted by interviewing teachers, surveying teacher needs, creating a supportive environment, and increasing collaboration opportunities. See Figure 1.3 below for a detailed plan of action. Once the teachers identified structures they wanted to support them, I implemented and tracked their feelings toward retention and overall satisfaction.

I expected to uncover areas of need for early career educators. I expected to find ways to satisfy teachers through surveys and professional empathy interviews. I wanted to finally pinpoint what early career educators craved in terms of support and how to address their areas of dissatisfaction.

<div align="center">Proposed Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) Cycle</div>

I used a Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) cycle as the organizing frame for this study. Hinnant-Crawford (2020) described the PDSA cycle as developing a theory, testing that theory, and revisiting that theory based on those results (p. 153).

Plan

The objective of the planning phase was to collect qualitative data. I compiled this data to learn what brings joy to teachers in their profession and what frustrates them. This type of research allowed me to get to the core of the problem and analyze teachers'

answers to find solutions. Here is where I conducted the pre-intervention semi-structured interviews. I included the four induction/early career teachers as participants. I invited teachers in this career phase because they are early in their teaching journey. Research showed that teachers who feel underprepared and unsupported would leave the profession. The Learning Policy Institute (2016) wrote, "New teachers who do not receive mentoring and other supports leave at more than two times the rate of those who do" (p. 1). Young teachers are more vulnerable to leaving when not supported or given the necessary resources they need to succeed. The planning phase was vital in collecting data, sorting through the data, and planning the intervention based on the results.

After this initial phase, I interviewed each research and improvement team member. This interview did not include another new protocol; I shared the teacher's interview responses and got the team's feedback. I shared the data with them and got their thoughts about possible interventions and change ideas. Next, I met with the teachers to share my ideas for an intervention and get their feedback. I needed more than one conversation with each teacher. Having a focus group with teachers and a research and improvement team to get their help in designing the intervention proved beneficial for the study. Teacher 1 is a white female teacher who earned her teaching license through traditional routes, going to a four-year school. Teacher 2 is a Hispanic female teacher who earned her license teaching through alternative certification routes. Teacher 3 is a white female teacher who earned her certification by attending a four-year college. Lastly, teacher 4 is a white male who earned his teaching license through a four-year degree program. See Figure 1.4 below for participant information.

Figure 1.4

Participant Information

Participant #	Teaching Experience	Year Career Began
1	Has been teaching for less than one year	Started Fall 2023
2	Has been teaching for less than one year	Started Winter 2024
3	Has been teaching for less than two years	Started Fall 2022
4	Has been teaching for less than three years	Started Fall 2021

Do

Hinnant-Crawford (2020) stated that the do portion of the study includes a combination of implementation and documentation of what is happening (p. 168). This personalized approach ensured that teachers are the drivers of the change idea and that their needs are being addressed. Since the planning phase included collecting data and analyzing the results, I created the intervention or support method and implemented that from the gathered information in the do portion. The intervention was not selected before the interviews because they were based on teacher interview answers. The do portion of the cycle was critical because it was the primary implementation of the intervention teachers selected. I wanted this intervention to positively impact their satisfaction, leading to higher retention decisions and rates.

When I began this study to understand teacher satisfaction and retention, I did not select the intervention from national and state data. I included the participants in this process to get their feedback and advice on what they thought was necessary. I included localized data because it made the study more meaningful to the participants and me. I

developed the intervention through semi-structured interviews and survey responses from the participants. I asked them to detail their thoughts on various aspects of school and illustrate what makes them happy and satisfied professionally. The data I uncovered from this portion of the study was invaluable. Each participant mentioned the need for an involved administration that checks on them regularly and supports them with challenging student behaviors.

This led to the creation of targeted Professional Learning Community (PLC) sessions that focused on understanding student behaviors and learning strategies to de-escalate situations and build positive classroom environments. I incorporated a book titled *Hacking School Discipline* (Maynard and Weinstein, 2019) that focused on creating a classroom culture of empathy and responsibility. After studying the interview and survey responses, we studied the "hacks" in the book that detailed strategies to work with and support students rather than allowing lingering behaviors to impact the classroom negatively. I used the book to address the teachers' similar desire for support with challenging and disruptive student behaviors. Each PLC session focused on one to two school discipline hacks to positively impact the classroom. The first session focused on the "Let's Talk" and "Repair the Harm" discipline hacks. In this training, we discussed the importance of responding to student misbehaviors positively, creating a space for students and teachers to discuss the behavior, and allowing students to improve their actions and fix the situation if it impacts others negatively.

The second PLC session took place two weeks later. We reviewed the previous session in this workshop and whether the hack impacted their classroom. After the initial

discussion, I trained the participants on the hacks titled "Teaching Mindfulness" and "Creating a Growth Mindset." Here, we paid close attention to how teachers can empower students with positive thinking and instill belief in them by assisting them in shifting their mindset.

The third and final PLC session occurred two weeks after the second session. This session focused on one hack (i.e., cultivating empathy within our students), but it was a major one. I showed them a video where they could learn about different people's perspectives and situations. Then, we discussed strategies in the classroom that grew empathy in our students and limited disrespectful comments and behaviors within our classes.

Study

The next portion of the PDSA cycle, the study phase included conducting check-in surveys throughout the intervention and post-intervention interviews. Hinnant-Crawford (2020) described the study portion of the cycle as an opportunity to reflect on what happened during the do phase. This research portion allowed me to collect qualitative data by interviewing the four participating teachers on their thoughts, feelings, and overall attitudes toward the change idea. These interviews were crucial in genuinely understanding if giving teachers a voice impacts their satisfaction level positively. The check-in survey allowed me to target the four teachers' feelings about the intervention and its success level at various study points. I analyzed the data to track their satisfaction and progress to ensure their needs were being met and adjust the interventions if appropriate.

Act

The act phase came last. Hinnant-Crawford (2020) described the act phase as learning from the study and using this information to inform the following steps (p. 170). During this act phase, I shared the results of the study. I hoped the results showed increased satisfaction for teachers who stay in the district by increasing teacher autonomy and creating more collaborative opportunities. I wanted to inform the research community that allowing teachers to build relationships among colleagues and surveying them for their areas of need lead to satisfied teachers and a district leading the state in retention. I hoped to learn more about what satisfies teachers with the plan of sharing this information with educators around the state. See Figure 1.4 for the steps of the PDSA cycle.

Figure 1.5

Plan, Do, Study, Act Cycle
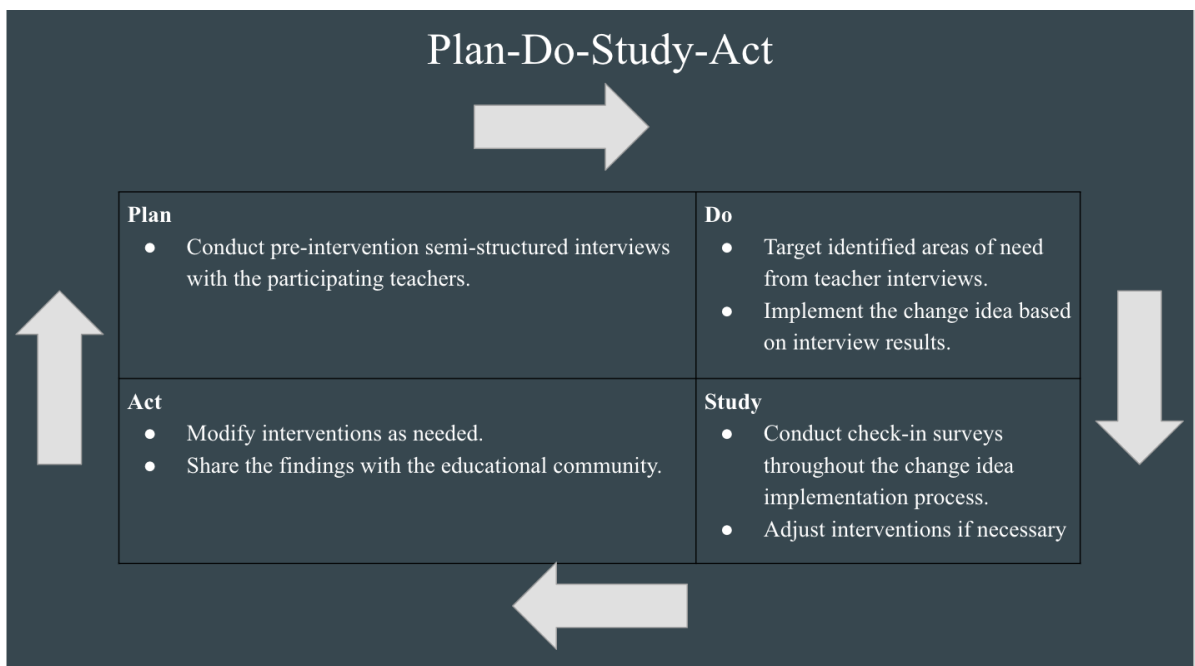
I carried out this intervention because the retention rates of newly hired teachers are problematic in the Crosstown School District. I developed and completed this intervention based on data I collected from satisfaction surveys, empathy interviews, and a person-centered approach searching for solutions rather than the easiest path. This intervention occurred over the second semester of the 2023-2024 school year. This was a 90-day school period. I used February to collect the data through interviews and surveys. This gave me three months to work with participants to develop an intervention or support and gave me time to complete post-intervention surveys and interviews by the end of the academic year. The implementation period ran from late March to early May.

I implemented a support or intervention that teachers identify as helpful. This study occurred at the Ninth Grade School in Crosstown School District. The research supported this planned approach because teacher autonomy, administrative support, and time for collaboration, as discussed previously, are tied directly to retention decisions. After IRB approval, I invited four educators in their first three years of teaching at my school to participate in this study. As stated above, teachers early in their careers are two times more likely to leave when feeling unsupported. I included Teacher #1 in the study because they were in their first year of teaching. Teacher #1 graduated from college in Spring 2023 and often asked for feedback on handling challenging student behaviors. Teacher #2 earned their teaching license through alternative pathways and only taught for a few months when this study began. Teacher #3 served in athletic roles and was extremely busy before and after school. This study gave them strategies to use without researching independently. Teacher #4 was the group veteran in their third year of

teaching. They specifically worked with students with deeper academic and behavioral needs, so this study was significant to their success. See Figure 1.5 for a timeline of my research.

Figure 1.6

Timeline

Month	Action Completed
February	1. Conduct semi-structured interviews.
	2. Conduct a pre-intervention survey with each participant.
	3. Gather and analyze interview data to plan for and identify the change idea.
March, April, and May	1. Implement change ideas identified by teachers.
	2. Conduct the mid-intervention check-in surveys.
	3. Conduct post-intervention interviews.
	4. Share the findings.

Practical Measurement System

Outcome Measures

The outcome measure answers the question, did the intervention work? Hinnant-Crawford (2020) wrote outcome measures indicate the success of the organization or the system. For this, I conducted pre- and post-study semi-structured interviews. These interviews helped me identify the problem areas and determine which intervention to implement. This is important because the data was directly from the participating

teachers, and it let me know if I was successful in the implementation. One other outcome measure was the pre- and post-intervention survey.

Along with the interviews, I conducted pre- and post-intervention surveys tracking the participant's thoughts and feelings on the success of the intervention. This survey was given at the beginning and end of the intervention, and it tracked the participants' feelings on support, climate and culture, and satisfaction. This was vital data because the same survey was conducted as my initial first step, and seeing the teacher's feelings over time was highly insightful.

Driver Measures

Driver measures are essential in any study; they let the researcher know if they are on the right track. Driver measures "let you know if you are moving in the right direction before you have data from the outcome measure" (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020, p.140). These measures ensured the study moved forward and did not hit any obstacles hindering the change idea's success. This measure uncovered barriers that the teachers experience through their detailed responses in their interview answers. The driver measure was check-in surveys with the participating teachers. This process allowed the teachers to rate the success of the intervention on their satisfaction. This helped me understand if the intervention was the driver that impacted their satisfaction levels positively or negatively or if it was something unrelated. The measure was essential because it measured if the intervention successfully demonstrated a change in teacher satisfaction through their answers and reflections.

Process Measures

The process measures were one of the more challenging measures for researchers to identify and implement. Process measures "are measures of fidelity" (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020, p.141). The process measure tracked whether the individuals implemented the intervention, and the impact of this implementation. I conducted in-person check-ins during the professional development series with teachers. The check-ins ensured the intervention was implemented with fidelity and answered any questions.

Balance Measures

Balance measures act as vital signs, ensuring health in the entire system. This measure "ensures that introducing a change in one part of the system does not disrupt or have unintended consequences on other parts of the system" (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020, p. 145). Due to its implementation, did my intervention negatively affect other teachers or students? As a balance measure, I tracked the retention of teachers not included in the study. I did not want the attention these teachers received to have unintended consequences and cause other teachers to leave because they were left out of the study.

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Tools

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Check-In Survey (SCCIS)

Teachers responded to the Self-Created Check-In Survey (SCCIS) every other week of the study. This survey revealed whether the study created positive change, stagnated, or hurt the teachers' overall satisfaction. I made this survey to track their satisfaction and the impact of the intervention on that satisfaction. See Figure 1.7 in the appendices for the SCCIS.

Pre- and Post-Intervention Survey

Teachers completed the pre- and post-intervention surveys at the beginning and end of the study. I created this survey based on my experiences in the school, historical research, and the themes that cause teachers to both stay and leave the profession. See Figure 1.8 in the appendices for the pre- and post-intervention survey.

Semi-Structured Empathy Interviews

I used a self-created empathy interview protocol for this study. I used local teachers to craft this interview protocol, which was personalized to the area. There were a total of 18 questions in this interview. The questions revolved around the following sections: support, climate and culture, and organizational decisions. Questions at the end of the interview asked if they wanted to add any additional information. See Figure 1.9 in the appendices section for the interview questions and introductory statement.

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Ethical Considerations and Limitations

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Ethical Issues and Challenges

I ensured morality and trustworthiness in my data collection by conducting fidelity and implementation checks and following up with teachers throughout the study. Asking teachers to evaluate their satisfaction levels could have caused a conflict of interest. To overcome this, I considered interviewing the teachers together to build community. Being interviewed in a group is less threatening and will build team chemistry if the teachers can come together to share their experiences. Maxwell (2005) described qualitative studies as having four major components; one of those methods is establishing relationships with those you study. Fortunately, I built relationships with

staff at the Ninth Grade School. After further review, I found out the teachers wanted to be interviewed alone and moved forward with that action.

Furthermore, I collected the check-in survey data anonymously. The teachers filled out each survey anonymously. I wanted the ability to closely monitor, study, and support a group of early career educators. This path allowed me that opportunity, the chance to truly study the core of the teacher satisfaction issue and understand the retention challenges facing them, as opposed to the generation of teachers. Working with smaller numbers was the best action, instead of surveying more than 50 individuals at once.

I ensured my analysis was valid by taking preventive measures. Creswell and Creswell (2018) detailed member checking as taking preliminary findings back to the participants and checking for accuracy. This process included follow-up conversations with the teachers and time to comment on the initial findings. I routinely communicated with the participants to check their feelings about the data, ask their perspectives on the findings, and further solicit information I used in the analysis portion.

Limitations

The small number of teachers in my study was a limitation. I worked with four early career educators, and this number caused some limitations in my research. To ameliorate this, I was able to create an intervention personal to each educator. This intervention reflected each teacher's voice. The relatively short duration of my study was another limitation to consider. This study took place over one half of a semester, roughly four months. When looking at long-term retention, this study was on the shorter side.

However, this length did allow me to adjust the study when necessary and conduct

multiple iterations with teacher feedback at each point.

CHAPTER 3

DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE

Introduction to Findings

The initial data collection process included pre-intervention surveys and individual interviews. The pre-intervention surveys showed favorable data concerning teacher satisfaction levels at their current school. However, the interviews provided somewhat different results. The most common answer among participants revolved around supportive administration as individuals who encourage and provide resources for teachers with student discipline and daily operations. The answers varied from one participant sharing that administrators can help by "Keeping students accountable" (Teacher 2) to another noting, "Supportive administration helps with the environment and disruptions" (Teacher 4). These initial findings led me to conclude that the study participants are relatively satisfied, but there is room for improvement. This improvement falls under supportive leadership, which helped with challenging student behaviors.

Patterns That Emerged During the Do and Study Phases

The central theme that emerged during the intervention period, the do phase, was that the teachers were all experiencing discipline challenges at various levels. One teacher, who began teaching in January 2024, stated, "Talking in the hallways directly after situations is what I do" (Teacher 2). Another said, "I welcome students back and start fresh with a clean slate" (Teacher 1). However, after further review, it became clear that although the participants used variations of the intervention, they did not have a specified process or a specific set of methods.

The central theme that emerged during the evaluation period, the study phase, was the idea that early career educators wanted "supportive administration." This word repeatedly appeared in interviews, conversations, and professional development sessions. Supportive administration can mean something entirely different for each person. In my case, I needed to uncover the meaning for the four participants to meet their needs. All four participants shared a version of the following answer, "It is important for the administration to support teachers by checking in and being present" (Teacher 2). A different participant stated, "They can also support teachers by helping them when students present disruptive behaviors" (Teacher 3). Evaluating the interview data illustrated that the participants wanted involved leaders who were consistently present and accessible.

Implementation Overview

The implementation plan centered around communication with the four participating teachers. It was vital from the beginning that teachers knew their feedback and viewpoints would be reflected not only in the study but also in the design of the change idea. The change idea was not something I created individually and forced upon them but something we developed collaboratively, worked through, and communicated about throughout each process step. The first step included interviewing teachers about their satisfaction levels and surveying them about their current perspective on their profession. This was vital in building the groundwork and finding a place to intervene with the teachers. After I collected this initial data, I worked with my dissertation committee to summarize and share my findings and discuss the intervention I planned to

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implement with the teachers. This was a vital step in gaining outside perspective from people not directly related to my study or place of work.

This work led to a series of professional development workshops to support teachers in their identified areas of need. In this case, the area that most impacts their satisfaction is having structures in place that help with challenging student behaviors. Reviewing the interviews and surveys uncovered a common theme; the participants shared that supportive administration consistently checks in and supports them in overcoming challenging student behaviors.

After deciding the change idea would be a series of professional development workshops in a PLC format, I went to the teachers for their feedback. This step was important because it let them know the plan, voice their concerns, or discuss any part of the study. It also gave me more data on whether they were excited or uncertain about the change idea.

Modifications

Before the study began, I notified a participant they would not be able to take part in the study. During the IRB approval process, I was informed that teachers under my observational supervision would not be allowed to participate in the study. I found a replacement who met all the criteria to participate in the study. The rationale behind this change was to protect participants I evaluated from an environment where they might have felt pressure to answer a certain way. Also, working with teachers who did not feel this pressure would allow for deeper and more meaningful conversations during the PLC sessions.

Driver Measures

It was evident early on that the driver measures provided meaningful and informative results. There were minor changes in responses across the three surveys, but all responses ranged from three (neither agree nor disagree) to five (strongly agree). This suggested the participants had relatively positive feelings towards their current school and job setting. Throughout the study, teachers completed check-in surveys; see Figure 1.7 below for the results. These surveys allowed teachers to anonymously share their feelings about the intervention anonymously and whether it impacted their classroom positively or negatively. The Likert-scale survey asked teachers to score their answers on a scale from one to five, one being strongly disagreed and five being strongly agreed. The numbers in the chart are averaged from all three check-in surveys for each participant, given every two weeks. When reviewing the data below, one can see that teachers' overall results trended more positively. Figure 1.7 below shows the results from the check-in surveys. An evident trend is that no teacher fell below a three (neutral) when discussing the intervention's impact on their job and satisfaction. In total, 41 out of 48 responses (85.4%) were at the four or five level (agree or strongly agree).

Figure 1.7

Check-In Survey Responses

Question from check-in surveys	Teacher #	Survey 1	Survey 2	Survey 3
The intervention helped me feel supported as an early career teacher	198	4	4	4
	444	4	4	5
	562	4	4	4
	653	5	5	5
The intervention impacted my job the past two weeks in a positive way	198	3	4	4
	444	5	4	4
	562	3	3	3
	653	5	5	5
The intervention has contributed a positive climate and culture in my classroom	198	4	4	4
	444	5	4	4
	562	4	3	3
	653	5	5	5
The intervention helped me grow in my profession over the past two weeks	198	3	4	3
	444	4	4	4
	562	4	4	3
	653	5	5	5

Outcome Measure Results - Pre-intervention

The outcome measures included a pre- and post-intervention semi-structured interview and a pre- and post-intervention survey with the participating teachers. At the beginning of the study, these interviews helped me identify the problem areas. Here, I asked the participants about what led to their satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The initial interviews revealed that the early career educators in this study wanted support with classroom discipline and challenging student behaviors. Support in this area would positively impact their satisfaction levels.

The surveys, given anonymously, allowed teachers to rate their feelings regarding support, climate and culture, and satisfaction. This data helped guide the direction of the intervention, along with the interviews conducted both before and after the completion of the intervention.

Outcome Measure Results - Post-intervention

The post-intervention intervention interviews provided vital insight into whether the intervention positively impacted the teacher's satisfaction level. Key findings from the interview included participants sharing they want administrators who check in regularly, support teachers in their progression and intervene with problematic student behaviors. The main finding was that solid leadership includes support with all facets of a teacher's job, ranging from curriculum and student behavior to professional development support.

The post-intervention interviews addressed the teachers' thoughts on whether providing administrative support impacts their satisfaction and retention. Each teacher spoke highly of the effectiveness of this change idea, providing specific examples of how the intervention improved their satisfaction levels. One participant stated, "Yes, this intervention changed my satisfaction. I now have higher satisfaction" (Teacher 1). A second participant stated, "The intervention process was smooth, and the check-ins were great" (Teacher 2). Both teachers above reported either a higher satisfaction level, or thinking the check-ins were helpful. The third teacher stated, "Overall, you heard our concerns and listened to us and gave us tools to use with classroom management. This improved my satisfaction because I can use these strategies moving forward" (Teacher

3). As shown here, listening to teachers, and working to support them and give them tools to support their advancement. The fourth teacher in the study stated, "The strategies would benefit the entire school. This would help the classroom environment and could lead to a better school culture" (Teacher 4). This commentary provided strong evidence that this teacher believed support similar to this would benefit teachers across the school.

The pre- and post-intervention satisfaction survey allowed teachers to answer a Likert-scale survey detailing their current level of satisfaction both before and after the intervention. This information, paired with the interviews, showed how listening to teachers, and implementing changes they want can lead to meaningful change. See Figures 1.8 A, B, C, and D below for the survey responses.

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Findings Interpreted

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Through the pre-intervention semi-structured interview, I gathered more detailed results. Each participant gave a variation of an answer referencing a desire for support with student behaviors and for the administration to be present and visible daily.

The critical pieces of information involve some commonalities. Firstly, all four participants answered at least one of the questions referencing administration supporting early career educators with challenging behaviors. Each teacher used the interview to discuss many aspects of their job, but all shared the need for assistance with student behaviors and attitudes. These findings aligned with my early expectations because I have worked with these teachers all year; throughout those experiences, I became keenly aware of their frustration points and identified times when they needed support with student behaviors.

The post-intervention interview protocol provided updates on the participant's thoughts. The results of the post-intervention interviews were promising, and the participants displayed positive feelings regarding the intervention and their satisfaction levels. This portion of the study allowed me to analyze the fidelity of implementation and determine the impact of the intervention on participants' satisfaction.

One participant stated, "Feeling heard and listened to is huge. This study did that very well. We were not talked down to, which is important" (Teacher 1). This quote illustrated the impact of listening to teachers. This teacher also said, "Yes, being supportive goes a long way too (Teacher 1) when asked whether this intervention would impact more teachers staying in education.

One of the teachers stated in the post-intervention interview, "Yes. I felt more supported" (Teacher 2) when asked if this intervention supported their growth. This quote goes straight to the core of my goal and research question. This participant believed that administrative supports in a PLC format can impact their retention. This same teacher shared, "Yes, this was a way for teachers to express themselves and be heard. It impacted the classroom environment" (Teacher 2). By allowing teachers to share their thoughts, feelings, and opinions, they felt supported, and this led to changes in their environment.

The third teacher in the study shared interesting perspectives that deviated from the norm. They reported, "Yes, I liked the topics. Having this approach and the tools you gave us helped" (Teacher 3) when asked if the intervention supported teachers. They stated they liked the intervention but did not use any strategies as in-depth as the others. They further said, "I liked sitting down with an administrator and receiving feedback.

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Getting and giving feedback was beneficial" (Teacher 3). Even though this participant did not use each strategy, they liked receiving targeted feedback from the administrator.

The fourth teacher I interviewed spoke how the intervention helped them. This teacher stated, "When you feel alone, teaching is the hardest; it puts pressure on you. This intervention impacted teacher satisfaction because I felt supported" (Teacher 4). Listening to teachers and ensuring they are not teaching "on an island" supported and impacted them. When I asked this teacher how this intervention impacted their satisfaction, they reported, "It was a good intervention. It helped with the school culture. It was great for newer teachers. It had a good impact and positively affected the school environment (Teacher 4). The quote showed the intervention positively impacted them, and changed the school environment.

Outcome Measures Interpreted

The four versions of Figure 1.8 (A, B, C, and D) measure participants' feelings before and after the intervention regarding support, climate and culture, organizational decisions, and satisfaction. I measured the level at which teachers feel supported in their jobs, whether the climate and culture in their day-to-day work tasks are positive, how they rate their influence on decision-making at the school, and overall satisfaction in their current position. This survey was meant to capture their experiences before the intervention and the impact of the change idea on those listed areas.

Primary Driver - Positively Impacts Teacher Satisfaction

Positively impacting teacher satisfaction was one of the primary drivers of my study. In the pre- and post-intervention survey, I asked three questions about satisfaction. These

questions were as follows: I am satisfied working at Crosstown High School's Ninth

Grade School (NGS), I am satisfied as a classroom teacher, and I intend to remain in the

profession for the foreseeable future. Please see Figure 1.8A below for the results. The

section below from the survey includes three questions that deal directly with

satisfaction. The scores for Teacher 198 went down when asked about their satisfaction at

the Crosstown High School's Ninth Grade School and down for Teacher 444 with the

question about their intent to remain in the profession for the foreseeable future. Every

other question resulted in the score remaining at a four or rising from a four to a five for

all participants.

Figure 1.8A

Coded Data from Pre - and Post-intervention Survey

Pre- and Post-intervention Survey Questions	Teacher #	Pre-intervention Response	Post-intervention Response
	198	4	3
I am satisfied working at the	444	5	5
Ninth Grade School (NGS)	562	5	5
	658	5	5
	198	4	5
I am satisfied as	444	4	4
a classroom teacher	562	4	5
	658	4	5
	198	4	5
I intend to remain in the	444	4	3
profession for the	562	4	5
foreseeable future	658	4	5

The change idea of surveying teachers on their professional needs and implementing

changes to meet those needs was a central part of impacting this primary driver.

Secondary Driver - Increase Teacher Autonomy and Participant Collaboration

The section below from the pre- and post-intervention survey included two questions about organizational decision-making. One participant's score went down from a five to a four on the first question, but every other participant either remained at a five or rose from a four to a five.

Figure 1.8B

Coded Data from Pre- and Post-intervention Survey

Pre- and Post-Intervention Survey Questions	Teacher #	Pre-intervention Response	Post-intervention Response
	198	5	4
I have influence in decision	444	5	5
making over how I teach	562	5	5
my class.	658	4	5
	198	5	4
I have access to opportunities	444	4	5
to grow as a teacher.	562	5	5
	658	5	5

Creating opportunities for participants to collaborate and increasing teacher autonomy were the secondary drivers. I attempted to use these secondary drivers to impact the primary driver by making a teacher-guided PLC. The teachers had complete autonomy over selecting the PLC topic, and I collaboratively provided resources and learning opportunities to affect their satisfaction and future retention decisions. When discussing collaboration with the participants, Teacher 1 stated, "Yes, it forced me to reflect. I am getting help with reflecting. Hearing other perspectives was helpful." Collaboration was critical in ensuring teachers had the opportunity to guide their learning and work with others to hear their viewpoints.

Primary Driver 2 - Focus on Relationship Building with Teachers

The questions below from the survey pertain to relationship building. Except for one teacher, every response remained at a four or rose from a four to a five. These survey questions asked the participants to rate the culture and climate in their classroom and building as healthy.

Figure 1.8C

Coded Data from Pre- and Post-intervention Survey

Pre- and Post-Intervention Survey Questions	Teacher #	Pre-intervention Response	Post-intervention Response
	198	5	4
The culture and climate	444	4	5
in my classroom is	562	4	5
healthy.	658	4	4
	198	5	4
The culture and climate	444	4	4
in my building is healthy.	562	4	5
	658	4	5

The second primary driver focused on teacher relationships. National and statewide data showed that teachers want a supportive environment where they enjoy working. I created opportunities for teamwork amongst the teachers and places where they found support. Regarding support, Teacher 4 stated, "It made for a better school environment. It could be listening or giving strategies based on classroom need." This approach ensured that teachers could listen to and help each other.

Secondary Driver 2 - Create A Supportive Environment and Increase Collaborative

Opportunities

In the questions relating to the support section, all responses either remained at a score of five or rose from a four to a five. This shows the intervention did not negatively impact the teachers' feelings on support.

Figure 1.8D

Coded Data From Pre - and Post-Intervention Survey

Pre- and Post-intervention Survey Questions	Teacher #	Pre-intervention Response	Post-intervention Response
	198	5	5
I feel supported as an	444	4	5
early career educator by	562	5	5
my school administrator.	658	5	5

Overall, these findings show the scores stayed the same at a four or a five or rose from a four to a five 26 out of 32 items, reaching 81%. This proves that the intervention ensured teacher satisfaction remained the same or was positively impacted. For 6 out of 32 items, the scores decreased, accounting for almost 19% of items. These findings show counterproductive results, but they are smaller than the gains.

Through the interviews and surveys, I found the participants wanted support with student discipline and encouragement through consistent check-ins. Simply interviewing the participants showed them they had support, and someone was willing to listen. One of their most significant needs was someone checking in with them. Doing this informally in the hallways and formally through the implementation of PLCs allowed me to further my understanding of their needs. Being an early career educator at Crosstown High School

allowed them to be in their cohort and support one another through collaborative PLCs. When speaking specifically about receiving interventions to help with negative student behaviors, Teacher 3 reported, "I liked the strategies. It helped students reason through situations." The teachers wanted assistance with handling and overcoming negative behaviors, and this intervention allowed their voices to be heard.

The Theory of Improvement - The Successes and Challenges

The PLC sessions were the most meaningful portion of my study. The participants shared struggles, successes, and challenging situations in these sessions. As a group, we dove into the "hacks" presented in each section of the book and discussed this idea's positives and potential negatives. Rather than simply accepting the hacks as is, the PLC sessions created a space where teachers shared their thoughts with other participants. The portion that limited my theory of improvement the most was only having access to four early career educators in my school. I completed this study with a total of four participants. Although I engaged in serious work with the participants; ideally, future improvement cycles would include more participants.

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Process Measures

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Throughout each PLC session, I asked teachers to share their thoughts on the hack from the chapters we discussed. We discussed whether the hack helped or hindered the classroom environment over two weeks. The participants shared various viewpoints during these sessions. Throughout each PLC session, I scribed the teacher's feedback, thoughts, and challenges with that week's hack. Writing down their responses gave me insight into what worked and how it impacted their satisfaction. The responses below

were taken directly from the participants during the PLC sessions and reflect portions of the data collected from each participant.

Teacher 1 began their teaching career in the Fall of 2023. While reflecting on their progress throughout the intervention period, they stated, "The first two hacks went really well. I pulled the students outside and asked them how they were and what happened. Some apologized, and others did not" (Teacher 1). This insight showed that progress was being made, but they were realistic about their expectations. Later, during the intervention, this teacher shared, "It has been helpful in talking to students and checking in with them" (Teacher 1). I hoped that little incremental progress would happen with each hack, and Teacher 1 believed this strategy was helpful. Teacher 1 also stated, "This intervention was really helpful. Instead of calling the administration, I learned to handle these situations myself."

Teacher 2 had taught for less than a semester, beginning in January 2024. When conducting the process measures, they said, "I did the talk with a student about missing work. I told him the consequences if he did not complete the work. He did not, so we will go from there" (Teacher 2). I understood here that this teacher had a formal process to handle challenging student behaviors, which they requested before the study began. This teacher replied, "It was nice to see how other early career teachers handle situations. I can apply what I learned from others" (Teacher 2). During the pre-intervention process, the teachers stated the collaborative environment was essential to them, and this portion of the study achieved that.

Teacher 3 was in their second year of teaching and stated that the hacks positively impacted discipline in their class. This teacher reported, "It has helped with phones. I talked to the students who would not put away their phones" (Teacher 3). This teacher successfully used the hacks discussed in PLCs to address the negative behavior of phone use in the class. When asked if this intervention would cause more early career educators to stay in education, they stated, "Yes. Conflict causes teachers to leave. Support from the administration helps, and without it, teachers wonder why they are teaching" (Teacher 3). This teacher shared how a supportive administration would cause more teachers to stay in education because there would be fewer conflicts to work through with a helpful and attentive administration.

Teacher 4 is in the third year of their teaching career. This teacher enjoyed the conversations some of the behavior hacks lead to, saying, "I talked with students when they would not take notes. We talked about why and the purpose of teaching them ways to learn" (Teacher 4). These hacks helped create engaging conversations between the students and teachers, an area of the relationship-building process the teachers stated would be helpful in this study. When asked about their plans, this teacher said, "A lot of teachers want to be heard. When you have the administration supporting and listening, it reaffirms I am in the right place and want to come back" (Teacher 4). Teacher retention is tied to teacher satisfaction, and Teacher 4 proved how administrative interventions can lead to teacher feeling like they are in the right working environment.

The results from the process measures, which were the check-ins during each PLC session, gave me insight into whether the intervention positively or negatively

impacted the teacher's satisfaction. It also showed me how the participants responded to the intervention. As one can see from the data shared above, the process measure of checking in with each participant during the PLC session allowed the teachers to share positive feedback during the implementation process.

Fidelity of the Intervention

During each PLC session, the participants shared their experiences with the classroom and behavior management hack and discussed how implementing the hack impacted their classroom environment. To check for fidelity, I began each PLC session with reflection questions about their thoughts on the intervention. The teachers completed a check-in survey detailing how participating in the intervention impacted their satisfaction. Throughout these reflections, both in person and in writing, I determined the participants' level of implementation and asked about any challenges. One of the teachers still participated but in a different manner than the other participants. I learned from the process measures, or informal check-ins, that the teacher progressed slower, taking more time to implement the hacks. It allowed me to ask where this teacher experienced setbacks and obstacles. Through these conversations, we discovered they used the hacks only after the student displayed behaviors rather than trying to stop them beforehand. The process measure of discussing each hack in the PLC sessions provided insight into the success of my study. Throughout these check-in sessions during PLCs, I found that teachers were using the hacks and experiencing varying levels of success each time.

The intervention adhered to the scheduled timeline with minor challenges. The main challenge was the spring break, which occurred during the implementation of the

change idea. I realigned the PLC dates to account for spring break, which added time to the implementation of the change idea. However, this added time allowed the participants to implement the change idea in their classrooms.

Balance Measures

I utilized tracing the retention of teachers not participating in the study as a balance measure to determine whether the change idea had any unintended consequences. At the end of the 2023-2024 school year, three teachers not included in the study decided to leave Crosstown High School's Ninth Grade School. Two retired from the profession, and one teacher moved to another state for family-related reasons. I can confidently say these departures were unrelated to the teacher's lack of opportunity to participate in the study and not the result of professional dissatisfaction or unmet needs. The study did not lead to unintended consequences that negatively impacted the school-wide retention rate of other teachers. The balance measures did not provide any meaningful data or insight into the overall success of my study. The teachers who left did so for the end of their careers and family moving reasons.

Spreading Changes

Based on the findings, I worked with teacher satisfaction levels. Even though this specific group of teachers wanted support with classroom discipline and challenging student behaviors, the change idea of surveying teachers to try and identify areas of need is promising. Keeping the teacher's voice in mind and soliciting information directly from them about increasing satisfaction levels yielded positive results. The potential for spreading change can range from working with early career educators to veteran teachers.

When they take the initiative to determine what satisfies educators, school leaders demonstrate that they have the teacher's best interest in mind and want them to feel supported.

Factors that may hinder the spread of the intervention include the number of early career teachers entering the profession compared to the number of veteran teachers. Each year, the number of veteran teachers outweighs the number of newly hired teachers. Even though the intervention impacted the less experienced group in my study, the number of potentially impacted early career teachers reflects a small proportion of the teaching force. Expanding the change idea to teachers of all experience levels could lead to positive change. Expanding this intervention to all stakeholders shows those same stakeholders the mindset the school leaders have. This mindset is centered around keeping teachers satisfied while holding them to high instructional expectations.

Adapting the Intervention

I will expand the study to teachers with various experience levels to continually improve and adapt the intervention to different contexts. For this PDSA cycle, I focused on teachers with less than five years of experience in education. Moving forward, I can combine the teachers into experience bands. For example, I can include teachers with six to 10 years of experience and then teachers with 11 or more years of experience. This will deepen my understanding of what teachers of different experience levels desire to remain professionally satisfied with intentions of returning year after year.

Lessons Learned

Limitations and Lessons Learned

Creating an intervention for four teachers had its challenges. Ensuring fidelity among the entire group provided obstacles, as well. I wanted to implement a unique intervention for each teacher based on their needs. Even though the same intervention was used for each teacher, they each identified challenging student behaviors as an area that was impacting their satisfaction. I was able to create a personalized plan that fit the needs of each teacher. This process allowed me to study each participant's surveys and interview responses, analyze them for meaning, and truly understand them to identify the support that would bring the teacher's satisfaction, and make them want to stay and teach the next year.

I learned that putting in effort and hearing what teachers say can positively impact their satisfaction. School leaders will do well to remember that the teachers know their needs better than anyone The teachers provided ample feedback and shared their concerns, challenges, and successes when given the opportunity.

Lessons Learned and Insights for the Future

Early in the process, I learned that teachers, especially less experienced teachers, crave feedback and learning opportunities. The teachers did not state they wanted disruptive students removed and punished. They wanted support in these types of situations. This insight was crucial in helping me form the idea for a PLC with teacher voice and choice.

These insights will inform future efforts in raising teacher satisfaction because even though the specific PLC curriculum may differ, going directly to teachers and asking them their opinions will not. Educational leaders must continue working with and alongside teachers to ensure they return each year. I learned that working with teachers, treating them as professionals, and soliciting their advice impacts their satisfaction. This was a massive learning moment because this was the core of my study: studying if it was possible and how it impacted teacher satisfaction.

Factors and Unexpected Issues that Influenced the Outcomes

No specific factors or unexpected issues influenced or changed the outcomes. However, breaks in the school calendar impacted the overall timeline. These breaks affected the progression of the study. Teachers were away from school for one week in February and one week in April, which ensured I consistently checked in via email during those breaks. It was impossible to see the teachers over break, forcing me to send one email each break rather than have a face-to-face conversation.

Broader Implications for the Field of Improvement Science

An overarching lesson I learned when embarking on this improvement science journey was how essential it was to not go in with a shallow understanding of the problem and an already determined solution. Having a prescribed solution to the challenge without fully understanding the problem or the system producing the problem may lead to a biased study. I collected teacher feedback throughout the study as part of my research. This benefitted me greatly because I provided the teachers with the timely and meaningful learning opportunities they wanted. Collecting data brought in new

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learning but allowing participants to look at and provide feedback on the data offered lasting impacts. I invited teachers to provide feedback on the initial data collection step, and this gave me the idea to use a PLC model because I found the participants wanted sessions to discuss these ideas with other participants.

Improvement science is designed to accelerate learning by doing models. The user and problem-centered approach leads to efforts that aim to improve teaching and learning. My study, specifically collaborating with teachers to create the change idea, directly impacted teaching and can affect learning in the long term. Supporting teachers can raise satisfaction levels and create a more nurturing and structured classroom culture. If improvement science studies can help researchers understand the significant problems of practice in education, they can directly enhance educators' experiences.

Conclusion

The main finding from the study can be described in a few short words: working with teachers to find out their specific needs impacts their satisfaction positively, thus leading to higher retention rates. When school leaders take the time to work alongside their teachers and support them uniquely and personally, this affects teacher's retention decisions. In chapter four, I will discuss the implications of my findings, how the data will impact future research, and the potential changes this study will have on practice and policy.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

Introduction

The problem of practice is the high number of teachers leaving the Crosstown

School District for other schools after recently being hired. This is a problem nationwide,

statewide, and even locally in Crosstown. Looking more closely at this problem of

practice, the research suggested that satisfaction levels played a significant role in

teachers choosing to return year after year or leave. The purpose of my study was to

understand the role of I aim that administrators can play in impacting teacher satisfaction

levels. Teacher's satisfaction levels are directly tied to their retention decisions. I aimed

to focus on positively impacting their satisfaction levels by creating systems to help them

feel supported.

Chapter four will focus on my reflections from the study, the implications of my

research and results, my conclusions based on the findings, and my recommendations for

future research. This is an opportunity for me to discuss my overall findings and the

potential impact they and future research can have on the future of educational policy and

practice.

Reflection on the Improvement Science Process

There was one critical moment from this study that I have reflected upon multiple

times. The first crucial moment was when one of the teachers discussed how she had

wanted to do this and tried to have these conversations but needed a starting point or

structure for where to begin. This was poignant for me because it showed me right there that this study had the potential to impact their satisfaction significantly. The teacher shared right at the beginning that they wanted to learn this, but I needed to figure out where to begin.

Reviewing the challenges, I ensured these sessions were timely and compelling to the teachers' daily challenges. I did not want to simply pull information from a book, use the one-size-fits-all approach, and move forward each week. The challenge here was to ensure that each session was helpful for each participant. It would not be beneficial if only one to two teachers found value in the PLC sessions. I had to work with what the teachers reported in their surveys and bring that to the table each week. Key insights included the simplicity of listening to teachers and surveying their needs, which was so much more beneficial than I could have ever imagined. I was worried I would not have enough information to complete the study initially, but after the interviews, I had enough information to plan three practical and successful PLC sessions.

The iterative nature of improvement science can best be described through the PDSA cycle. No matter how many cycles there may be, this approach allows for findings through research, repetition, and revision. I researched various reasons why teachers stay and why they choose to leave. This gave me a deeper understanding of teacher's mindsets and motivations. The overall nature of the PDSA cycle allowed for both repetition and revision. The repetition of working with teachers to understand their satisfaction was genuinely inspiring, and being able to revise and tweak the study to meet their needs best made it meaningful and personal.

My perspective evolved throughout the study in one significant way. When starting the PLCs, I had a plan for each session and how they would go. However, administering the check-in survey changed this process. I used this information to adapt the sessions and make them more personalized. This changed my thinking because it was the first time I saw teachers giving their input, a study being adapted, and positive results following. Initially, I thought the plan would drive the study, but the critical insight from teachers evolved the study, research, and my thinking.

Revisiting the Theory of Improvement

For the theory of improvement, I focused on positively impacting teacher satisfaction levels by creating systems to help them feel supported. I did this by interviewing teachers, surveying teacher needs, creating a supportive environment, and increasing collaboration opportunities. These theories led to a PLC group that instructed teachers on school discipline strategies, which they identified as a need and desired to learn more about. Focusing on school discipline positively impacted teacher satisfaction levels because there were any number of curriculums I could have covered in the PLCs. However, I listened to the participants' voices and targeted what they identified as something that would make them happy and professionally satisfied.

Modifications to the Theory of Improvement

Initially, I planned to cover three hacks every two weeks for a total of nine school discipline hacks throughout the study. Early on, I realized this would have been more work for the teachers to stay caught up on their reading and run a classroom. I modified

and only focused on five hacks throughout the study, giving them the information in manageable chunks. This insight allowed me to analyze the hacks with the teacher and get their insights into how this affects their students and classroom. Continuing on the path could have overwhelmed the participants with information and potentially negatively impacted the outcome.

The Effectiveness of the Theory of Change

Listening to teachers and using their feedback to guide the PLC curriculum ensured a higher level of effectiveness throughout the intervention. It would have been less effective if I had preselected the curriculum, stated that PLCs were the change idea, and not given teachers any choice regarding the subject material in the PLCs. However, allowing the teachers to interview and complete surveys to identify needs forced me to adapt and adjust my process to ensure the teacher's voice was at the forefront of this study.

Spreading the Intervention

As a school leader, I can sustain the change idea of supporting teachers by interviewing them about their areas of need and analyzing whether this impacts their satisfaction. Treating teachers like the professionals they can have lasting impacts because this theory is ever-changing. School leaders are responsible for consistently assessing teacher needs; this intervention has that as its core. I plan on revising the intervention by extending it to educators of all experience levels. Placing teachers into groups based on their experience levels can ensure all teachers have access to this

intervention, not only early career educators. The intervention has not spread to other teachers, but the early career educators have been discussing it with other educators. The participants have been sharing the successes of the interventions with other school leaders. There have been multiple instances of school administrators sharing what the participants have expressed to them how the intervention impacted their classroom.

Reflecting on the Aim

This study aims to understand the most effective ways to lift teacher morale. A central idea throughout this process has been centered around uplifting teachers' voices, improving their morale, offering support, and listening to them. I aimed to understand the most impactful and effective way to raise teacher morale. Retention is strongly related to providing strong leadership and implementing effective strategies for teachers. By working with teachers to identify their needs in the classroom, I wanted to understand further how to lower teacher turnover and raise satisfaction.

Impact of the Study

This study achieved the intended impact affecting teacher satisfaction levels by listening, interviewing, and surveying them. My goal was to impact teacher satisfaction, leading to positive results with teacher retention decisions. This study showed me and future researchers that listening to teachers and identifying their specific wants and professional needs will go a long way in raising their satisfaction.

The potential for meaningful impact is vast regarding understanding and implementing strategies to impact teacher satisfaction. Locally, Crosstown School

District is a growing district with students coming in each year ready to learn. When teachers leave abruptly, the negative impacts are wide-reaching. It impacts district finances, school staffing numbers, and students' learning ability in a consistent environment. Creating systems that overcome this problem of practice can bring more stability and consistency to the staffing challenges being experienced. Statewide, the ceiling is so high because this study can be morphed into different brackets depending on the teacher's experience level. Even though I studied early career teachers, I want this intervention implemented by school leaders for teachers of all experience levels.

Implications of Findings

Broad Implications

The findings from this study suggest that schools with administrators who focus on listening to and identifying teacher needs have a higher probability of positively affecting teacher retention and satisfaction. Each participant reported they felt valued and appreciated that an administrator took an interest in their well-being and work.

Implications for Similar Interventions

Researchers wanting to conduct similar interventions should remember critical information: Do not go into a study with the problem and solution already identified. The teachers are a wealth of information and expertise; they know what they need to thrive. I listened to the teachers, adapted the intervention to their needs, and found promising results regarding retention and satisfaction. If I had begun with a pre-designed idea and

executed my vision, there would have been no buy-in from the participants, and the change idea would have become stagnant.

Implications for Educational Leadership

This work profoundly impacted my leadership capacity. I have read and personally gone into situations where I thought I knew the problem and solution before identifying what was happening. I would sometimes use my experiences to shape the training or strategies used with teachers. This study shifted that focus by continuously working to improve teachers' experiences by using their thoughts and feelings on the matter. Leading in educational contexts forces school administrators to make difficult and quick decisions. However, the process I learned most from was including teachers in the process, adapting any change to their needs, and leading with their needs in mind.

Implications for Equity and Justice

This work impacted teachers' lives through the implementation of improved systems of support and collaboration. Early career educators are one of the most vulnerable groups regarding retention. My work ensured they received written, verbal, and professional development support. Supporting early career teachers, in turn, helps students in their educational journey. As stated earlier, teacher retention impacts students of color and lower socio-economic status at a higher rate. By implementing systems that lead to higher satisfaction levels, teachers are more inclined to stay in the profession longer. This will impact future generations of students, especially vulnerable populations,

because other schools and districts can implement this process to affect their retention and satisfaction levels.

The findings in chapter three relate to various literature and theories I discussed in chapters one and two. When discussing why teachers leave, I cited research that stated student behavior and schools' responses to negative student behaviors are areas of concern for teachers. My initial data collection substantiated this research. The teachers all wanted support in improving their classroom environment by targeting and overcoming negative student behaviors. My findings showed that supporting teachers with the PLC, which they chose and adapted to their needs, raised their satisfaction levels. In chapter two, I analyzed how giving teachers autonomy in organizational decision-making can impact their satisfaction and retention decisions. I quoted research that showed teachers who contributed to schoolwide decision-making, such as scheduling, selection of materials, and selection of professional development experiences, were more likely to return each year. My findings supported this notion because the teachers reported feeling supported by being given a choice over the curriculum in the PLCs.

Implications for Policy and Decision-Makers

Locally, school boards would benefit from this study and working with their schools to implement something similar. It was important that participation in this study was not mandated. I invited teachers, and they could decline if they wished not to

participate. With this in mind, school leaders and board members can identify volunteers who want to participate and grow the study.

Regarding decision-makers, they would benefit from looking at the data from my study and comparing it to the end-of-the-year teacher surveys. Even though my sample was smaller, the findings show an increased satisfaction from all participants. The work to begin will be creating systems to help studies like this reach more interested parties.

Practical Implications

The potential value of this study can lead to effective and immediate positive outcomes. Surveying and interviewing teachers to uncover what they want from their jobs is something all school leaders can do. It is not out of the question to expect this study to impact school leaders in a way that encourages them to lead their interviews and surveys in their schools. This study can extend to all areas and all experience levels of educators. Whether a teacher has been in the classroom for one or 25 years, learning about their needs can make teachers feel supported and happier.

Contributions to Research and Practice

My study contributes to the overall body of literature in one specific way. Much of the literature states that PLCs are practical tools for creating a positive atmosphere and allowing teachers autonomy. Mine is different because even though PLCs were one of the results, it specifically listened to and surveyed teachers about what they want in their careers. In my study, teachers reported wanting help with challenging student behaviors. The most efficient way to deliver this support was through teacher-driven PLCs. In

summary, PLCs are thoroughly researched as practical tools to impact teacher satisfaction; for me, PLCs were the tool used to empower teachers and identify their professional needs.

Gaps in the Literature

The gaps in the literature I found were identifying the type of PLCs to implement in school leaders' efforts to support teachers. I read many articles stating that PLCs help build camaraderie in a school. However, I decided to survey the teachers to find out what was timely and what should be the focus according to them. This decision gave me keen insight into addressing teachers professionally and studying their answers to deliver the most efficient and effective intervention.

Opportunities for future research include working with teachers outside of their first five years of teaching. Research shows how vital the first five years of an educator's career are; however, implementing this intervention with teachers of all ages could be beneficial. This intervention may need a few more iterations, but it could be expanded to work with teachers based on years of service in the future. The teachers in my study shared that the training was appreciated, making them feel more supported in the classroom.

Recommendations for Practice and Policy

Recommendations Based on the Findings

I recommend school leaders begin small with implementation. It is essential to find a core group of teachers who are excited about this and can champion its progress. Rather than starting with a whole school mandate, administrators can make it optional and allow teachers to volunteer to participate. This will create buy-in, and it is of the utmost importance to ensure the teachers drive the intervention and adapt it to fit the needs that will impact their satisfaction.

Applying the Lessons Learned

Educators and practitioners can apply the lessons learned from this study in many ways. Every school has teachers to support. Whether the administration starts with early-career educators or teachers of all experience levels, they now know that working with teachers to choose interventions and supports can significantly impact their satisfaction. Satisfied teachers are more likely to return the following year. Applying this knowledge to the yearly plans allows teachers to work in a school where they can receive support and feel valued and appreciated. If this intervention goes well, the school administration can work with this core group to expand the study and reach more teachers.

Conclusion

Concluding Thoughts and Reflections

Reflecting on the study, each participant's willingness to participate without any reservations was critical. Each teacher has varying levels of early career experience, but their participation in this study taught me about teamwork when in a leadership role. I learned that working alongside the teachers and not "above them" will improve their satisfaction and increase their leadership capacity on campus. The teachers went from sharing their experiences to offering advice on how they would handle certain situations based on the scenario.

Significance of the Study

In the context of improvement science, this study was rich with information. It is significant because how this study was adapted to meet the participants' needs shows how imperative it was to conduct multiple PDSA cycles. A study with a prescribed solution and no revision based on initial findings can miss the mark when uncovering profound and essential results. My study was significant because I conducted three survey rounds while checking each step to track the teachers' satisfaction levels and overall growth.

In education, studies like these are vital to the future of teaching because they show the equity that can be born from listening to teachers. It seems simple: listen to the employees for their needs. The challenge is that many schools want to do this but need a system to achieve it. Expanding this research to other teachers and individuals in

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nonteaching roles can impact the quality of education students receive because they will work with more satisfied individuals.

Initial Problem of Practice

When I think about the problem of practice that motivated me to begin this study, I did not think of teachers simply leaving the profession. I thought about the frustration teachers nationwide must feel about working so hard every day but not feeling supported. I also thought about the students not receiving the high-quality education they deserve because teachers are leaving the profession at an alarming rate.

As previously stated, from 2015-2024 about 22% of teachers who left Crosstown, chose to leave for another South Carolina school district. During the second five year period (2019-2024) that number rose to 31%. Two of the 27 newly hired teachers to start the 2022-2023 school year have already left. One of those chose to teach in another South Carolina school district. Regarding teachers in my study, all four will return for the 2024-2025 school year. This is a retention rate of 100% for the four early career educators who participated in my change idea. All the data and research stated above proved how important it was to find ways to support educators early and often. I created the concept of impacting teacher satisfaction by listening to teachers and implementing strategies to target their needs.

Key Takeaways

This experience taught me the value of trusting and treating teachers as professionals. Often, there is a lot of noise about what teachers should and should not do,

but rarely do teachers get to share their input. The change idea of trying to impact teacher satisfaction by working with teachers could have led to any intervention. It could have been curriculum support, lesson planning support, or other areas. However, we focused on classroom management and managing student behaviors because the teachers identified this as an area of need. That is most powerful to me. The teachers expressed themselves and stated what they needed, improving their satisfaction.

Appendices

Figure 1.7

Please answer the questions below using the following measures. 1 = Strongly Disagree,
2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree

Questions Relating to Support
The intervention has helped me to feel more supported as an early career teacher.
Questions Relating to Culture and Climate
The intervention impacted my job the past two weeks in a positive way.
The intervention has contributed a positive climate and culture in my classroom.
Questions Relating to Organizational Decisions
The intervention helped me grow in my profession over the past two weeks.
Closing
Is there any question I missed, or anything else you would like to share?
Do you have any suggestions about how to improve or modify the intervention to better support you?

Figure 1.8

Please answer the questions below using the following measures. 1 = Strongly Disagree,
2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree

Questions Relating to Support
I feel supported as an early career teacher by my school administrator
Questions Relating to Climate and Culture
The culture and climate in my classroom is healthy.

The culture and climate in my building is healthy.
Questions Relating to Organizational Decisions
I have influence in decision-making over how I teach my class
I have access to opportunities to grow as a teacher.
Questions Relating to Satisfaction
I am satisfied with working at Crosstown High School's Ninth Grade School
I am satisfied as a classroom teacher.
I intend to remain in the profession for the foreseeable future.

Figure 1.9

Hello, my name is Will Dyer, and I am a researcher from Clemson University. Thank you so much for expressing an interest in the study "How School Leaders Can Increase Teacher Satisfaction in a Rural Fringe High School in South Carolina." The goal of today's interview is to ask you questions about your satisfaction levels in your current role, areas that would increase your level of satisfaction, and why you believe teachers choose to leave the profession. This meeting will last approximately 30 minutes, and I will transcribe your answers as you share them. I want you to feel comfortable and safe during this process, so no information that can identify you or your place of employment will be shared in this study, and you will remain anonymous.
Thank you very much.

Introduction questions:

1. How many years have you been in education?
2. Why did you choose teaching as a career path?
3. Where do you see yourself in five years?

Questions Relating to Support
Define support for teachers.
What does support in your job mean to you?

Do you think it is possible for school leaders to positively impact teacher's jobs? If so, how?
How can I help you in my role as a school leader?
Questions Relating to Culture and Climate
What dissatisfies you as a teacher?
What can school administrators do at Crosstown High School's Ninth Grade School to help teachers?
If you had to choose, what would you change about our school?
What brings you the most joy in your job?
What areas in your work responsibilities do you like the most? - Why this area?
When I say teacher satisfaction, what comes to mind?
What causes you to feel dissatisfaction in your job on a day-to-day basis?
Questions Relating to Organizational Decisions
What causes teachers to stay in education?
What causes teachers to leave education?
What areas of your job would you like to grow in and strengthen?
How can school administrators help teachers?
Closing
Is there any question I missed, or anything else you would like to share?

Figure 1.10

- We will work with one book titled *Hacking School Discipline.*
- The administrator will present this book to the teachers. The administrator will buy each participant a copy. The book contains a total of 9 hacks for school discipline.

- The administrator will create a Google Slides presentation detailing new hacks every two weeks.
- The administrator will present this at an in-person professional learning community session every two weeks.
- After the presentation, the teachers will use the book to read and learn more about each hack. The goal will be to implement at least one hack every two weeks.
- The administrator will check in with the teachers weekly to gauge progress.
- At the start of each PLC, participants will complete a check-in survey and discuss how this impact impacted their classroom.
- The PLCs will be used to reflect on the previous two weeks, learn the next set of hacks, and discuss how to handle discipline situations.

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