

Teacher Attrition and School Leaders' Capacity for Leading, Practices and Behaviors – A Comparative Study

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Abstract

Teacher attrition, as part of the bigger issue of teacher shortage, has caused increasing concerns in the past decades for both policymakers and educational leaders. Its negative effects impact various aspects of a school. Historically struggling schools serving students in poverty areas are perennially and negatively affected by high turnover rates at deeper levels. Building on existing literature that examines the correlation between school contextual factors and teacher attrition, this study examines the responses of 300+ teachers from Western and Southeast Michigan, gathered through a 24-questions survey. Data was analyzed against the study's research questions using the Cronbach's alpha test and one-way ANOVA. For the first research question, the study looked at the effects of the school principal and his/her leadership capacity on the teachers' decision to leave a school, a school district, or the teaching profession altogether. The second research question dealt with differences related to how teachers from various backgrounds were affected by the quality of their school principals and work environments. The findings support the study's hypothesis that the principal's role in building a positive school culture, along with the principal's behaviors, practices, and leadership capacity significantly affect teacher satisfaction and retention. Some differences do exist with respect to how teachers from various grade levels are affected by their learning environments (including principal leadership), and to what organizational factors influence their decisions to stay.

Keywords: teacher attrition, retention, principal leadership

Introduction and Background

Teacher shortage is far from being a US problem. As of 2015, 93 countries in the world have experienced a shortage of teachers (The Borgen Project, 2015). Statisticians predict that more than 69 million new teachers would be needed by 2030 to teach the world's children (UNESCO, 2009). More than half of those would be needed to replace teachers quitting the profession or retiring (UN News, 2016). Schools serving children from poverty are significantly more impacted by this crisis than affluent schools.

Teacher shortages have been frequently associated with teacher attrition. The constant revolving door – especially for early career teachers in American schools – has been an increasing concern for both educational leaders and policymakers. Unlike teacher shortages, early career teacher attrition doesn't seem to be a problem spread globally (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005). However, a number of Western countries have experienced same negative effects as the United States – especially Ireland, Australia, Spain, Britain, Sweden, and Canada (UNESCO, 2009).

In the United States, teacher turnover has had negative and costly effects on school finances, student achievement, staff morale, instructional continuity, parent satisfaction, and school culture. According to a report from Alliance for Excellent Education (2014), "roughly half a million U.S. teachers either move or leave the profession each year—attrition that costs the United States up to \$2.2 billion annually". Earlier studies also establish the financial impact that attrition has on organizations. In examining the cost of teacher attrition, Watlington, Shockley, Guglielmino, & Felsler, (2010) show that the cost of early attrition is not only economic: when highly effective teachers leave their classrooms, the impact on both student achievement and school budgets are "significant and deleterious" (Watlington et al., 2010).

High teacher attrition rates destabilize schools and rob the remaining staff of opportunities to grow professionally. While teacher expertise is developed in three to seven years, teachers are not staying in education long enough to become highly

skilled. In the United States alone, 40% of new teachers are leaving the profession within their first five years, with almost half of the teachers leaving from highly impoverished schools in rural or urban areas, or schools teaching large populations of minority students (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014). Students learning from uncertified, inexperienced, or ineffective teachers struggle academically and are more likely to fall behind and drop out of school. Approximately 30% of these teachers leave for personal reasons. What about the others? And what role does teacher retention play in the bigger scheme of teacher shortage?

The reasons for teacher attrition have been studied frequently and from various perspectives: as a function of the teachers' individual characteristics, as influenced by economic necessities, and from a sociological perspective – that of the organization itself. While changing the individual characteristics of people or influencing the economic growth might prove to be daunting tasks, improving teachers' work conditions and feelings of self-efficacy are areas that educational leaders and policymakers could address.

At the organizational level, key contextual factors influencing a teacher's decision to stay may include the composition of the student population; hiring practices; the availability of resources for instructional spending; workload; teacher compensation and benefits; lack of collegiality; administrative support; and availability of professional development (Corbell, Osborne, & Reiman, 2010; Le Maistre & Pare, 2010). Not surprisingly, current research shows a direct correlation between teacher retention rates and school principals' level of support. However, are there any differences in contextual reasons why teachers with various characteristics stay or leave?

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to build on existing literature that examines the correlation between teacher attrition and school contextual and interpersonal factors - in particular the principal's behaviors, practices, and capacity to lead. The responses of teachers in different school environments in Western and Southeast Michigan are compared. The study looks at contextual reasons why teachers with various demographic characteristics, teaching experiences, teaching assignments, and levels of influence remain in a school or leave. The quality and the role of the school principal in retention is examined. Finally, recommendations are made to help educational leaders and policymakers better understand what they could do, from an organizational and legislative perspective, to help the retention of teachers.

Although this study examines various types of schools in Midwestern USA (specifically in Michigan), some extensions could be made to the global educational field, since neither the recommendations made, nor the teachers' aspirations towards a better work environment are regionally specific, and this research might inform a broader context.

Research Question 1: What are the effects of the school leadership on teachers' attrition?

Research Question 2: Are teachers from various demographic backgrounds, school systems, rural-urban areas, etc. affected differently by the quality of their school principals and work environments?

Literature Review

Numerous studies in the past decades have established a direct correlation between student learning and the quality of teachers, even when controlling for external factors such as students' low socio-economic status and English language proficiency levels (Aaronson, Barrow, & Sanders, 2003; Hill, Rowan, & Ball, 2005; Sanders, Ashton, & Wright, 2005). The ability to secure quality teachers is lower for historically underachieving, high-poverty schools in large urban areas and rural districts than it is for wealthier, more successful schools (Gill, Posamentier, & Hill, 2016).

More retirements; fewer candidates matriculating in teacher preparation programs; relocation to a different geographical area; loss of licensure – all are valid reasons why the profession is losing some of its cadre. However, current research suggests that, in general, there is no shortage of qualified teachers to fill the number of extant vacant positions in the United States (Darling-Hammond, 2001). Supporting this finding, Voke (2002) argues that the so-called "shortage" comes from the distribution of teachers, and not from a general teacher supply problem. Shortages exist in highly impoverished schools; in certain geographical areas of the country; in schools serving English Language Learners (ELLs) or minority students; and in particular subjects - such as math, science, special education, or bilingual education (Voke, 2002; Bradley, 1999).

As a response to teacher distribution theories, a substantial body of empirical research centered on the reasons why teachers leave a school or the profession through the lenses of various theoretical and methodological perspectives. In

general, these studies explain the attrition phenomenon in the context of teacher personal characteristics, economic considerations, and sociological factors.

Various studies associate the high attrition rates with the personal characteristics of teachers. Teacher demographics (age, race, ethnicity, gender); the proxy measures of their qualifications (degrees, teaching experience, certifications); their personal characteristics (life outlook and resilience); and overall personality, have been analyzed in relationship to teacher attrition (Newton, Rivero, Fuller, & Dauter, 2011). Looking at longitudinal studies informing teacher retention and attrition since mid-1999, it appears that individual factors associated with teacher burnout, resilience, demographic features, and family characteristics were the biggest influences on leavers (Schaefer, Long, & Clandinin, 2012). Other personal factors include self-efficacy beliefs (Caspersen, 2013); alignment between work expectations and reality (Le Maistre & Pare, 2010); teaching orientation (Lam & Yan, 2011); and attaining a work-life balance (Cinamon & Rich, 2005).

Beginning with the early 2000's, research that was carried out by Richard Ingersoll started to look at teacher attrition through economic lenses. Ingersoll noted that trying to simply increase the supply of teachers through recruitment efforts or increased matriculation to teacher preparation programs without addressing why teachers are leaving would not fix the availability of teachers in low-income communities (Ingersoll, 2001). The centerpiece of his work is the theory that it is the high rates of teacher attrition in impoverished urban schools that causes a teacher shortage in these particular schools, and that any solution must focus more on retention initiatives than recruitment (Ingersoll, 2001).

Within the same conceptual framework grounded in economic theories, Grissom, Viano, and Selin (2015) argue that teacher turnover, in particular, and employee mobility in the public sector, in general, is influenced by the laws of labor supply and demand.

In looking at reasons for teacher attrition, Borman and Dowling (2008) reject a unilateral causation, naming both the teachers' individual characteristics and the organizational characteristics of their schools as main causes. At the school level, contextual factors include the composition of the student population; hiring practices; the availability of resources; student discipline; workload; teacher compensation and benefits; and opportunities to contribute to the decision-making process (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Corbell et al., 2010; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Le Maistre & Pare, 2010; Renzulli, Parrott, & Beattie, 2011).

Several studies emphasize the importance of looking at teacher attrition through the lenses of the sociology of organizations, in the context of the organization where the employees work (Ingersoll, 2001; Ladd, 2011). The theoretical framework of this study is deeply grounded in the sociology of organizations – specifically in the belief that teacher attrition can neither be solely explained as a function of teachers' individual characteristics, nor based on economic factors, without looking at the characteristics of the organization itself.

Some contextual factors of the organization that have an influence on a teacher's decision to leave include: the composition of the student population; hiring and onboarding practices; the availability of resources for instructional spending; the degree of teacher influence over organization policies; principal instructional leadership; workload, teacher compensation and benefits; teacher innovation; and availability of professional development (Allensworth, Ponisciak, & Mazzeo, 2009; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Johnson & Simon, 2015).

Some literature on teacher attrition also highlights the role that racial misalignment between students and their teachers has on teachers' levels of satisfaction with their work environments and subsequent departure from that organization. Two variables that affect job dissatisfaction and teacher turnover the most are the racial composition of their student population and the type of school they work in (traditional public v. charter). This affects white teachers from traditional public schools more than charter school teachers. Additionally, while charter school teachers enjoy more satisfaction with their jobs due to greater autonomy, they are also more likely to leave the teaching profession (Renzulli, Parrott, & Beattie, 2011).

A more explicit shift in the teacher attrition literature is made with the realization that some of the most important organizational factors affecting teacher retention are at the interpersonal level – things such as administrative support; positive and trusting relationships among staff; principal – teacher trust; degree of parent collaboration; student – teacher rapport; and mentor guidance (Bennett, Brown, Kirby, & Severson, 2013).

Especially interesting from a sociological perspective is the effect of the principal leadership on a teacher's decision to leave. More effective principals create environments where teachers thrive, thus preventing the retention challenges

common to schools with less effective school leaders (Ingersoll, 2001; Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012; Ladd, 2011). In addition, principal's capacity to lead has been identified as one of the strongest predictors of teachers continuing in the same school year after year, or leaving the organization (Boyd et al., 2011; Grissom, 2011; Ladd, 2011).

In looking at the correlation between principal's level of support and teacher attrition in hard-to-staff schools, Hughes, Matt, and O'Reilly (2014) found that teachers who were planning to remain at the same school based their decision on the following areas of support (listed in the order of importance): emotional support, environmental support, instructional support and, lastly, technical support. There were no significant differences between the grade levels of teachers with respect to the importance of principal support in their decision to remain at the same school or leave (Hughes et al., 2014).

Methodology

In this section, the researcher presents the methodology used in accessing primary sources, beginning with a description of the data collection instrument (the survey); continuing with the selection of research participants; the data analysis procedure; and, finally, addressing some of the limitations of the data collection and analysis.

The Survey

A survey of 24 questions was developed to collect information leading to finding answers to the two research questions (see Appendix A). The survey contained both closed questions and open-ended questions.

Five types of demographic data sets were collected: type of school where respondent taught; grade level of the teaching assignment; teacher's years of experience; teacher's gender; and teacher's age. There were also four different sets of numerical answer questions that focused on teachers' perceptions of leadership effectiveness, staff culture, level of influence, and likelihood of moving schools based on the principal's capacity for leading, practices, and behaviors. Additionally, there were short answer questions that solicited responses related to the reasons for leaving the respondent's previous job; the aspects of the teaching job that produced most and least satisfaction for the respondent; and the areas of influence on school issues the respondent had. One question on the survey asked about the teacher's performance – as evidenced by the annual official teacher effectiveness rating based, in part, on student academic achievement or growth.

The survey was distributed on line, via Qualtrics, to preserve the anonymity of respondents. The assurance of anonymity was important to participants, since the subject matter addressed respondents' perceptions about their supervisors' capacity to lead schools and concerns about use of information had to be addressed. Participants were provided with a Consent Form incorporated in the very first pages of the actual survey. There were no pre-test or post-test procedures. This survey took approximately 20 minutes to complete and closed after six weeks from when participants received the invitation email.

The Participants

Voluntary participants included teachers of different ethnic backgrounds, age, gender, teaching experience, effectiveness ratings, etc. Participants were recruited through an email invitation to fill out the survey. The email was distributed in two ways: a) to the entire teaching staffs of traditional public and public charter schools in both rural and urban areas in Southeast (Metro Detroit) and Western Michigan areas; and b) randomly, to teachers at various schools in the targeted areas. A universal link to the survey was included; the link allowed the recipient to share with other teachers, through teacher networks and personal connections. Recipients of the email invitation were provided with a Consent Form incorporated in the very first pages of the actual survey. All subjects who fit the description "teacher," have worked in a targeted school; and filled out the survey were included in the preliminary data analysis.

Data Analysis Procedures and Limitations

Roughly 315 responses were collected using this survey. The initial step included a "data cleaning" phase, which resulted in the elimination of approximately 15 surveys – those from respondents other than "Teacher"; from Central Office or Intermediate School District staff; and those missing too many answers to be of any value for this study. The "Private School" and the "GED" (General Educational Development) groups were too small to analyze with a high degree of statistical certainty; therefore, responses from these 2 groups were excluded for some items.

The next step involved an analysis of whether the initial survey data was organized in a way that was appropriate for statistical analysis. Three main problems were identified that required correcting: missing data; too many numerical

questions to have short, meaningful summaries; and uncategorized short answer questions. As stated before, there were several respondents who opted out of answering one or two questions or sub-questions. To adjust for this, these responses were ignored on a need-by-need basis, and still used for all the answered questions, as they still provided valuable information.

To determine the internal consistency of the Likert-type questions and to resolve the problem of too many numerical questions to have short, meaningful summaries, the Cronbach's alpha test was employed. The goal was to determine if it was possible to combine the sub-questions of the sliding scale questions into single variables. Questions 8, 12, 13, and 24 were analyzed using this method. Based on the results of this test, questions 8, 12 and 13 were converted to a super-score. This super-score was an average of all of the respondent's answers for all of the sub-questions, meaning that 4 super-scores were calculated for each individual. The purpose of the super-score was to keep each individual answer independent and usable for further analysis.

The third challenge to resolve was the short answer questions. These included questions 14 through 23. Categories needed to be created to group the answers into a useable form. This was done manually, by going through all of the observations for each question, determining similarities in responses and developing categories to use. This method is a limitation because of the possible subjectivity in the groupings and the large amount of manual effort needed to change the dataset.

Although the numerical questions were treated as hard numbers, answers to "Likert-scale" questions on the survey could be somewhat subjective. To solve for this problem and because the questions are on a scale of 1 to 100 instead of the more common 1 to 10, the researcher chose to treat them numerically, as the alternative of converting the answers into bins, groups of ranges of answers, or different numbers takes away much of the variability of the data.

A last data collection and analysis limitation is also related to variability. The act of converting the sliding scale questions into solitary variables could be problematic because this can hide some information that might be interesting to look at in a future study. However, the researcher believes that it was important to balance this limitation with having a concise frame of data on which to make decisions, and that using three variables that effectively elicit the information needed to address the research questions is a worthwhile approach for this study.

Findings

The results and findings of this research study are consistent with findings from previous research, and provide additional insights to why teachers choose to stay at a school and in the profession, or leave. The results also indicate that there are some differences between what high school teachers would need to remain at a school and teachers from the elementary or middle school levels.

Description of Participants

Roughly 300 responses submitted from all grade levels were used consistently for this study. The largest group (n = 145, 63.0%) reported teaching at the elementary level. The second largest group was comprised of high school teachers (n=59, 19%). Forty-three (13.6%) teachers were teaching at the middle school level. There were 24 teachers (7.6%) who reported that their certification and teaching assignment span from Pre-k to Grade 12. A somehow non-traditional school configuration was the Grade 6 – Grade 12 group: nine teachers (2.8%) taught in these schools. Finally, two teachers (0.6%) worked in the General Educational Development (GED) Program. Fifteen respondents (4.7%) either missed to answer the question, or indicated they were not working as teachers, disqualifying their responses from being included in the data analysis.

The majority of teachers (n = 274, 87.0%) were female and forty-one (13.0%) teachers were male. This gender distribution aligns with data from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), whose 2016 report on Distribution of Gender and Age for teachers in the United States indicated 87.1% women.

The teachers were asked to indicate their age, the number of years they had been teaching, and the type of school where they worked when they took the survey. The largest group of teachers (n = 116, 36.8%) were between 30 and 39 years old; the second largest group (n=74, 23.5%) were the teachers between 40 and 49 years old; sixty-three (20%) reported being between 20 and 29 years old; and forty-nine (15.5%) were between 50 and 59 years old. There were thirteen (4.1%) teachers who did not provide a response to this item.

The largest group of teachers (n=97, 30.8%) had been teaching for more than 16 years; the next largest group (n=46, 14.6%) were teachers with 4 to 6 years of experience in teaching; thirty-five (11.1%) teachers reported between 7 to 9 years in teaching; while thirty-four teachers (10.8%) had both between 10 to 12 years of experience and 1 to 3 years. Finally, thirty-one (9.8%) teachers reported between 13 to 15 years of teaching, and eleven (3.5%) were in their first year of teaching when they took the survey. Twenty-seven (8.5%) respondents did not respond to this item or were in a non-teaching position at the time of the survey.

When asked about their annual effectiveness rating for teacher evaluation purposes, 157 (52.3%) of teachers responded that they were rated "Effective" in the past 3 years; 140 (46.7%) were rated "Highly Effective"; and 3 (1%) were rated "Minimally Effective".

For the type of school where they worked, the largest group of respondents (n=141, 47%) worked in traditional public schools. Seventy-one teachers (23.6%) were employed by Grand Valley State University (GVSU) chartered public schools, while 54 teachers (18%) worked in charter public schools authorized by other entities in Michigan. A small group of teachers (n=7, 2.3%) reported employment in private schools and six (2.0%) worked in Special Education Centers. Twenty-one (7.0%) respondents from the teaching ranks did not indicate the type of school where they worked.

Cursory observations of these data sets showed that for the grade level and school type categories, the "Special Education Center" and "Private School" groups are too small to be analyzed with a high degree of statistical certainty. Problems within the student grade level demographic include small sample sizes for the "GED Program".

Research Question 1: Data Analysis, Findings, and Discussion

Research Question 1 asked: "What are the effects of the school leadership on teachers' attrition"?

For this summary, the main numerical question is 24, designed to elicit perceptions about the importance of school leaders' experiences, attitudes, actions, and practices. This question has a 6-part sliding scale response format, where each of the sub-questions is related to a respondent's likelihood of leaving their school based on specific reasons. It was determined via the Cronbach's alpha test that the separate responses could not be grouped together as one overarching question. Across the various age groups, number of years teaching, and the grade level for the teaching assignment, all teachers indicated that school leadership had a considerable impact on their decision to stay at a school. There was very little difference in how the sub-questions were answered, except between the different school types.

The analysis of numerical questions treated as hard numbers on a scale 1 to 100 (where 100 means "the most important" and "most likely") revealed that teachers from Non-GVSU-Authorized Charter Schools had the most likelihood of being influenced in their decision to leave a school by the principal's level of experience, attitudes, actions, and practices – with an average around 86.6%. The least likely teacher group to be influenced by the principal's attitudes and actions were teachers from Private Schools. This could be explained, partially, by the fact that this was the smallest group analyzed (with n=7), and partially by the specific profile of teachers working in nonsectarian private schools. In general, these teachers are more satisfied with their class size (smaller than in traditional public schools) and the level of control they feel they have over school curriculum, the choice of textbooks, and class content (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). Teachers from private schools might also have stronger community ties that could influence their decision to stay at a school more than their principals' attitudes and actions.

Looking at sub-questions 5 and 6, it could be inferred that teachers are not as likely to quit the teaching profession based on the principal's or other administrators' attitudes, actions, and practices, except for those who teach at GVSU-Authorized Charter Schools. It is important to note that, although this group of teachers is more likely to quit the profession, the average answers were still relatively low (around 50 on a scale of 1 to 100).

One of the specific sub-questions (24_4) asked about the likelihood that a teacher would be willing to change schools to follow a principal. Based on an answer average of 50 or higher, in all cases except for Private Schools and Special Education Centers, teachers would at least consider this possibility. We hypothesize that the reason we see a difference in these two school types is that there is a distinguishable difference in how these particular teachers view their roles. Teachers who are associated with a private school system, may have more autonomy and community ties, so they are not as beholden to the principal and other administrators as teachers from more traditional schools. We also hypothesize that "special needs" teachers are more likely to be attached to their students, regardless of the principal or administration.

These teachers could have overlapping managers: their principal and a Special Education Supervisor, who might be responsible for their teacher evaluation. So, this category of teachers might not be as tied to their principal as others.

Question 17 asked about the last time participants left a school, including whether they were planning to leave their school at the end of the current school year and the circumstances of their departure: if they left at will; were encouraged to leave; were laid off, or terminated. The majority of those who left at will were from traditional public schools (n=147, 49.1%). The next highest demographic was GVSU-Authorized Charter Schools (n=68, 22.6%), followed by Non-GVSU Authorized Charter Schools (n=51, 17.0%). Looking at the percentage breakdown of how many responses participated in the survey, by school, approximately 50% of the respondents were from traditional public schools, and the next highest percentages were again GVSU-Authorized and Non-GVSU-Authorized Charter Schools. This means that the responses for leaving at will follow the same distribution as the number of responses from each school type, which means that there is no school type where the teachers are leaving at will at a higher rate than other school types.

As a follow-up to question 17, question 18 asked those who indicated they left their school at will about their reason. This was one of the open-ended questions that was manually re-categorized. Approximately one third of the teachers (29.9%) left because of poor or unstable leadership. Teachers from traditional public schools (17%), followed by both GVSU-Authorized (12%) and Non-GVSU-Authorized (12%) charter schools had the most responses in this category.

The next analysis pertains to responses given to question 21, "Under what conditions under the control of your principal would you have remained at the school?". A manual re-categorization was required for this question. The 3 key conditions that teachers feel are under the control of the principal that would have affected decisions to stay were "more support" (7.7%) at par with better compensation and benefits (7.7%), followed by more respect (4.8%).

Research Question 2 Data Analysis, Findings, and Discussion

Research Question 2 asked, "Are teachers from various demographic backgrounds, school systems, rural-urban areas, etc. affected differently by the quality of their school principals and work environments"?

The One-Way ANOVA statistical test was performed on the sliding scale questions 8, 12, and 13. The analysis revealed that the only demographic where there seemed to be some degree of difference is within the grade level of the teacher's assignment. Both sets of ANOVA tests agreed that there is a score difference for questions 8 and 13. To find out which groups are different from each other, a post-hoc test called Tukey's Honest Significant Difference was performed. This test checks every pairwise combination of groups within the demographic variable and returns a p-value similar to the ANOVA test to help indicate which groups are significantly different.

After running the TukeyHSD test, we found that there is one group that is significantly different than two others for the Teaching Grade Level demographic: the high school teachers, who have significantly different scores with respect to the school environment and teacher influence. To find out the reason for this, the researcher looked at the average scores for these three main teaching grade levels for questions 8 and 13. The high school teachers have an average score of 10 less compared to the other school types. Because the averages comprise over 50 observations, the volume means that seemingly smaller differences are much more important. One key finding of this analysis then is that high school teachers are less satisfied with their school environment and teacher influence than teachers from other grade levels.

To gain a deeper understanding of the teachers' specific concerns, the short answer questions were analyzed. Question 10 asked about the frequency of work-related social gatherings organized by school leaders. While there were some small differences, the percentages were roughly the same for each teaching grade level group. This consistency across grade levels could be attributed to the fact that this question could be associated more with staff culture than with the school work environment and teacher influence.

Question 23 asked about what the teachers would change at their current school, given the opportunity. The most standout responses are a need for a supplies budget, higher compensation, and better student discipline. Additionally, the response rate for school leaders' communication, better teacher evaluation, consistency, curriculum input, and school culture are all fairly high for high school teachers. These teachers are more focused on specific things an administrator needs to provide them in terms of support. While elementary teachers are looking for constant feedback and collegial contact, high school teachers see themselves as more entrepreneurial in the classroom: they want to be provided with the materials and supplies they need, make curriculum decisions, and then be allowed to do their job without much interference.

Seven of the eight categories fit the parameters of “school environment” and “teacher input”, leading to the conclusion that these areas are important to address in a high school environment. Furthermore, these categories had relatively larger response rates from elementary and middle school teachers, too, pointing towards areas of improvement for all schools, regardless of the grade level taught.

Finally, question 20, “What specific aspects of your job did you least enjoy?” could also reveal discrepancies between teachers assigned to different grade levels. Although this question is phrased in a way that asks about the teacher’s previous job, the information provided could still be relevant to the same grade level because teachers’ certification rarely changes from one year to another. There are many response categories for question 20; however, there are some that stand out from the rest. These include “Lack of Administration Support”, “Paperwork”, “Students”, and “Staff Issues”. Three out of the four of these are common problems among all three grade levels. The exception is “Staff Issues” that appears to be more of a concern for high school teachers. The four areas indicate some of the organization and leadership-related issues that would need to be addressed if higher retention of teachers is desirable.

To conclude the findings for the second research question, the only sizeable difference found within the demographics concerns the grade level of teachers’ assignments related to the school environment and teacher influence variables. The data analysis was accomplished via a One-Way ANOVA test, and the post-hoc tests revealed that the high school teachers group was significantly different. Upon looking into the high school group further, it was evident that the biggest points of complaint were fiscally motivated (supplies budget and greater compensation); and desiring of better administration support (teacher evaluation practices, student discipline, and more curriculum input). Furthermore, we found that some of the common issues that teachers of all types of students had with their previous jobs that are likely still issues were with a lack of administration support, students and their behavior, staff issues, and excessive paperwork.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of this study support the claim that more effective principals know how to create environments where teachers flourish, consequently preventing the attrition challenges common to schools with less effective school leaders. While it is true that a number of problems identified have to do with finances, which can be harder to solve, some of the most important organizational factors affecting teacher retention are at the management and the interpersonal level. The implications of this study for principals include finding and providing resources; creating systems and structures that lead to order in the organization; encouraging collaborative environments; better practices in supporting, developing, and evaluating teachers; reducing bureaucratic tasks for instructional staff; implementing strong induction and mentoring programs; showing and giving respect – attributes that result in better working conditions and job satisfaction for teachers.

The implications of this study for those developing future leaders are related to best ways to teach supportive leadership skills to aspiring principals. With similar findings across contextual factors, should the development of teacher leaders have some variations because of the different contexts of specific schools? One example would be developing leaders of schools with limited resources to know how to access and utilize community resources. Similarly, since principals might need a different skill set depending on the environment where they will work (urban settings v. rural; less affluent v. affluent; schools where there is a large discrepancy between the racial composition of students v. teachers; etc.) should educational leadership programs train principals to lead differently? This aspect has not been yet addressed in previous literature.

Finally, recommendations for policymakers include creating policies to promote a more equitable distribution of experienced teachers and to prevent the concentration of beginner teachers in high-needs schools, as well as strengthening educational finance reforms that have multiple goals: to attract new individuals to the profession; to provide adequate resources to existing teachers and school administrators (including increased instructional spending and salaries); and to increase the overall effectiveness of school finances and operations.

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Appendix A

Survey Questions

Q1	Intro and permission to use question
Q2	At which type of school did you teach during the 2017-2018 school year?
Q3	Choose all that apply
Q4	What is your current age and gender?
Q5	Indicate the number of full time professional years of teaching experience you have, since graduating with a teaching degree to date (exclude student teaching).
Q6	Is teaching your first professional/degreed career?
Q7	In the past 3 years of my teaching, my teaching effectiveness for evaluation purposes has been mostly:
Q8_1	Using the scale provided below, rate each of the following with respect to your perception about school effectiveness, with 100 being the most satisfactory: Overall instructional leadership (school leader involvement in planning, classroom observations, data analysis meetings, etc.)
Q8_3	School safety
Q8_4	Your own classroom culture
Q8_5	Your own classroom safety
Q8_6	Instructional planning
Q8_7	Observation-feedback
Q8_8	Teacher evaluation clarity and fairness
Q8_9	Professional development usefulness
Q8_10	Timely interventions for struggling students
Q8_11	Career progression opportunities
Q8_12	Compensation and Benefits
Q8_13	Non-monetary recognition from your school leader
Q9	During this last school year, did teachers have opportunities to earn bonuses or incentives for exceptional work?
Q10	How often did the principal or the admin team organize work- related social gatherings?
Q11	How often did the principal or the admin team hold team building activities?
Q12_1	Using the scale provided below, rate each of the following with respect to your perception about staff culture, with 100 being the most satisfactory: How well you worked with the principal on a professional level?
Q12_2	How well you worked with the principal on a personal level?
Q12_3	The level of communication you had between yourself and the principal
Q12_4	The level of professional support you felt the principal provided
Q12_5	The level of trustworthiness you felt the principal had amongst teachers
Q12_6	Using the scale provided below, rate each of the following with respect to your perception about staff culture, with 100 being the most satisfactory: The level of respect the teachers had for the principal
Q12_7	The respect level the principal had for the teachers
Q12_8	How well you worked with non-teaching staff members
Q12_9	How well you worked with other teachers
Q12_10	How well the principal handled issues of teacher-to-teacher conflict
Q12_11	The overall sense of community within the school
Q12_12	The degree to which any concerns you brought to the principal were adequately addressed
Q12_13	How well the principal showed genuine teacher appreciation
Q12_14	The level of accessibility of the principal
Q12_15	The level of comfort you felt going to the principal with work-related problems
Q13_1	Using the scale provided below, rate each of the following with respect to your perception about teacher influence, with 100 being the most satisfactory: Curricular decisions
Q13_2	Instructional materials

Q13_3	Instructional strategies
Q13_4	Professional development choices
Q13_5	Your teaching schedule
Q13_6	Student discipline and behavior interventions
Q13_7	Student academic interventions
Q13_8	Budgetary decisions, as appropriate
Q14	Please list one or more areas in which you felt most satisfied with respect to the amount of influence you had:
Q15	Please list one or more areas in which you wish the principal had allowed you to have more influence
Q16	How large was your average class size?
Q17	Last time when you changed the school where you worked, which of the following best reflects the circumstances under which you left the school?
Q18	If you selected option "I left the school at will", please provide one or more factors that contributed most to your decision to leave the school
Q19	What specific aspects of your job did you most enjoy?
Q20	What specific aspects of your job did you least enjoy?
Q21	Under what conditions under the control of your principal would you have remained at the school?
Q22	What has been most rewarding about working at your current school?
Q23	What would you change in relation to working at your current school, if you could?
Q24_1	Using the scale provided below, rate each of the following, keeping in mind that 100 means "the most important" or "most likely": Importance of principal's experiences, attitudes, actions, and practices in your decision to stay at a school
Q24_2	Importance of other school administrators' experiences, attitudes, actions, and practices in your decision to stay at a school
Q24_3	Likelihood of you staying at a school mainly because you trust/like the principal
Q24_4	Likelihood of you moving to another school mainly because a principal you trust/like is moving to that school
Q24_5	Likelihood of you quitting the teaching profession within 1 to 3 years because of a principal's attitudes, actions, and practices
Q24_6	Likelihood of you quitting the teaching profession within 1 to 3 years because of other administrator's attitudes, actions, and practices