Re-Examining Teacher Turnover in the Era of COVID-19

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated first and foremost to my wife Joyce for her fervent prayers and unwavering support, my daughter Neema, and my sons Samuel (Baraka) and Isaac (Ahadi) for agreeing to give up some of their special daddy moments to support me to achieve a childhood dream. This dissertation was also a testament to them, that you can achieve your goals through dedication and hard work. Secondly, this dissertation is dedicated to my late father, Norman Mwapea, who did not live to see this day, but encouraged me when I was an undergraduate student to pursue the highest level of education; and to Gladys Mwapea, my mother, for believing in education and supporting me from a very young age despite never having had a chance to education herself.

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Abstract

Background: Teacher turnover is a global problem that continues to have serious ramifications on many governments' ability to educate their children. Nationally, the estimated annual turnover rate ranges from 13 to 15%, with some recent figures showing beginning teacher turnover rates in Texas to be 36% after four years on the job. With the outbreak of the coronavirus in late 2019 and the subsequent global crisis that resulted in the worldwide closure of educational institutions, the problem of teacher turnover has taken a new dimension. **Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on teacher turnover and identify strategies school leaders have used to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on turnover. This study also explored pandemic leadership lessons from the principals' perspective and how these lessons can be used effectively as a strategy to retain teachers. Research questions: Three research questions guided this study: 1) What measures have school leaders put in place to support teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic? 2) What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the measures school leaders put in place to support them during the COVID-19 pandemic? 3) What do teachers and principals perceive as the major determinants of teacher turnover since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic? **Methods:** This qualitative study used the methodological approach of interview research to collect data from fourteen teachers and thirteen principals. Through semi-structured open-ended interviews, the study gave a deeper understanding of teachers' and principals' perceptions of the reasons for turnover. For data analysis, a combination of Microsoft TEAMS software for recording and transcription, and Dedoose for coding and analysis was used. Additionally, *a priori* codes were used based on the theoretical framework, the research purpose, and the research questions. **Results:** This study affirmed

the central and multifaceted role principals play in teacher turnover decisions. The key drivers of turnover are perceived differently by teachers and principals. COVID-19 was also found to have a significant impact on teacher turnover due to health and safety concerns, but principal leadership played an outsized contribution. **Conclusion:** COVID-19 upended education in unparalleled ways in the history of education. The endemic problem of teacher turnover was exacerbated by COVID-19, but school leaders, through their support, have the biggest influence on teacher turnover decisions. As such, school districts must refocus their principal hiring protocols to meet the challenges of leading today's schools. Furthermore, teachers place a high value on teacher voice and respect for their professionalism, so principals must factor these qualities in their daily practice to reduce turnover.

Keywords: COVID-19, teacher turnover, crisis leadership, pandemic

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Chapter I

Background Information

Researchers continue to identify teacher turnover as a global problem that has serious consequences for the field of education in terms of quality of instruction and student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Hanushek et al., 2016; Henry & Redding, 2020; Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). Ever since Ingersoll (2001) coined the term "revolving door" to explain the large number of teachers leaving teaching for reasons other than retirement, a plethora of empirical studies have examined teacher turnover through many different lenses (Boyd et al., 2005; Freedman & Appleman, 2008, 2009; Johnson et al., 2012; Prather-Jones, 2011; Shields & Murray, 2017).

Nationally, the estimated annual turnover rate ranges from 13 to 15% (Ingersoll, 2001), though some studies have shown that between 5 and 50% of early career teachers leave teaching by their 5th year on the job (Boe et al., 2008; Guarino et al., 2006; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Of those who leave the profession, only a third are estimated to return at some point in their career (Sutcher et al., n.d.). Recent figures of beginning teacher turnover in Texas found that after four years on the job, 36% of teachers moved to a different campus, 28% had left teaching altogether, and only 35% of teachers were still employed at their original campus (Davis & Anderson, 2020). An earlier study using Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS) data for 2000-2001 found comparable estimates with 25.5% of teachers leaving in the first 3 years, 32.0% in the first 4 years, and 38.5% in the first5 years (Boe et al., 2008).

Teacher turnover has been defined as either movement within the teaching profession, such as changing schools or school districts, changing the subjects to be taught, or leaving the teaching profession altogether (Cook & Boe, 2007; Ingersoll, 2002). For this proposed study, however, teacher turnover is defined as any movement of teachers, including retirement, resignation, changing schools, or moving to remote teaching and for which the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) was a contributing factor. Within the school movement (such as changing subjects taught) will not be considered turnover for this study, unless it occurred specifically as a result of the pandemic. The rationale for this definition lies in the fact that administrative decisions in response to the pandemic may influence teachers to leave their schools for a different one where they feel more supported.

Beginning in late 2019, when the first case of COVID-19 was discovered, the virus quickly spread to all corners of the globe, upending education. By March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared COVID-19 a global pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020). Globally, education was disrupted as governments scrambled to respond to the pandemic as news of mass fatalities was reported all over the world. Lack of scientific knowledge regarding the deadly nature of the coronavirus, its transmission, and its impact on the health of teachers and students meant schools worldwide had to take drastic measures never seen in the history of education (Lordan et al., 2020; Tarkar, 2020;). Some of these measures included closing schools and transitioning to remote learning. The challenges posed by this transition were unprecedented, considering the enormous resources that would be required to keep children learning remotely including technology devices and internet connectivity for

both teachers and students, in addition to the challenges of technology training. The uncertainty surrounding what mode of schooling to adopt, and whether to open schools for face-to-face instruction became a regular conversation in school board meetings across the country even as state education agencies offered guidance based on available data (Mäkelä et al., 2020; Tarkar, 2020; Texas Education Agency, 2020)

By the Fall of 2020, COVID-19 cases were soaring, and there was no vaccine in sight. As such, most schools were faced with the arduous choice of balancing the health concerns of teachers and the community with children's rights to in-person schooling (Lordan et al., 2020). School and district leaders burned the midnight oil trying to find a proper balance on the best course of action (Will, 2020). With the number of infections and deaths rising by the day, teachers were faced with the strenuous choice of staying in the classroom or leaving teaching altogether, with data showing that female teachers were impacted more than male teachers (Collins et al., 2021)

The influence of COVID-19 on teaching and learning became such a hot topic for discussion, not only within schools but at the state and federal level, with teachers' unions vowing not to let their members go back to school until there was a vaccine available and their members were fully vaccinated (Marianno, 2021; Will, 2020). For school districts that opted to allow face-to-face instruction, teachers were caught between a rock and a hard place: going back to the classroom and risking their lives or resigning and losing their livelihood. Preliminary data showing widening achievement gaps and learning loss among virtual learners and especially in underserved communities (Kuhfeld et al., 2020; Texas Education Agency, 2021), meant that schools were confronting multiple crises for which there was no clear solution amid urgent calls to save a

generation of children. This was indeed uncharted territory that required educational researchers and policymakers to take urgent steps to explore both short-term and long-term solutions to a crisis of unimaginable proportions and for which there were no quick fixes.

A recent study on the impact of COVID-19 on educational achievement has shown a worrying but not entirely unexpected trend. In a survey targeting educational researchers, Bailey et al. (2021) concluded that achievement gaps between low- and high-income students would grow substantially, a trend that was recently affirmed by the Texas Education Agency (2021) STAAR data. Bailey et al. identified several factors that contributed to this trend including the fact that low-income students are likely to have parents who are "front line" workers who are extensively exposed to COVID-19. These parents are also unlikely to afford high-quality health care, have low-quality internet service, and likely have no computers for their children to access online instruction (Stelitano et al., 2020). All these factors exacerbate the inequality achievement gap between the low- and the high-income students. Additionally, recent research found that nearly half of the public-school teachers who left teaching after March 2020, and before their scheduled retirement did so because of the COVID-19 pandemic (Diliberti et al., 2021). Diliberti's findings suggest that COVID-19 may have had an early impact on teacher turnover even before much was known about the virus, a situation that calls for more research, hence the reason for this proposed study.

Statement of the Problem

Teachers have been described as the single most important resource that can transform a student's life (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Sanders et al., 1997). Other

researchers have found that teachers influence student achievement gains more than any other school-based factor (Chetty et al., 2014; Jackson, 2012; Jackson et al., 2014; Koedel & Betts, 2007; Rivkin et al., 2005; Rockoff, 2004). According to Sanders and Rivers (1996), teacher effects on student achievement are both additive and cumulative, and the lowest-achieving students are the first to benefit from having an effective teacher. Chetty et al. (2014) concluded that students assigned to effective teachers are more likely to attend college and earn higher salaries. Other studies have found teachers to have a bigger impact on math and reading achievement (Nye et al., 2004; Rivkin et al., 2005). As such, all measures must be taken to ensure that quality education is achieved by retaining this resource. Unfortunately, with the outbreak of coronavirus in late 2019 and the subsequent global crisis that resulted in the worldwide closure of educational institutions in March 2020, the problem of teacher turnover has taken a new dimension and a new focus. Researchers are no longer dealing with the traditional reasons for teacher turnover like toxic school climate, lack of administrative support, student discipline, or low salary, but with a health crisis of unimaginable proportions. COVID-19 seems to have had a profound impact on teacher turnover, further complicating this major problem facing public education.

Since coronavirus is such a new phenomenon, its real impact on education in terms of teacher turnover is still evolving. However, preliminary findings suggest that there could be a much bigger COVID-19 influence on turnover with some teachers opting to retire rather than go back to the classroom, while others just want to take a break from teaching until after COVID. For example, a recent study on the impact of COVID-19 on the California workforce reported that early evidence suggested the pandemic would

worsen the already critical teacher shortage, especially in high-need fields and high-need schools (Carver-Thomas et al., n.d). This, in turn, will have significant implications on the stability of schools, student achievement, and educational equity. These early findings suggest that the problem of teacher turnover will likely be exacerbated as a consequence of the pandemic. Still, and because of how recent COVID is, there is not much research available on the issue to understand what specific aspects of teaching and learning are driving this turnover. This is indeed problematic because COVID variants continue to emerge as nations rush to vaccinate a plurality of their citizens. The disruptive nature of teacher turnover to educational quality, coupled with the compounding factors of COVID-19 have necessitated the current study.

Purpose of the Study

Teachers have been described as the single most important resource that can transform a student's life (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Unfortunately, teacher turnover has been a threat to this noble course. The current outbreak of COVID-19 has exacerbated the problem of turnover even further, therefore new research is needed to understand the real impact of COVID-19 on teacher turnover. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on teacher turnover; identify strategies school leaders have used to mitigate the effects of COVID-19, and understand teachers' and principals' perceptions of the reasons for teacher turnover, especially in the era of COVID-19. Specifically, this study aimed to gain a better understanding of how measures instituted or foregone by schools to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 played a role in teachers' decision to stay or leave teaching from the teachers' perspective. This study also sought to compare teacher perceptions of safety measures versus those of principals,

and how this related to turnover decisions. Lastly, this study aimed to explore pandemic leadership lessons from the principals' perspective and how these lessons could be used effectively as a strategy to retain teachers.

Finally, although substantial research has been conducted on the factors that contribute to the high rate of teacher turnover, far less research effort has gone into understanding teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the reasons for turnover in comparative terms. This study aims to bridge that gap by identifying any mismatch in perceptions and how this might be used to propose policies and programs that support teachers to offer a long-term commitment to schools.

In one of the first empirical studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, Pressley (2021) identified several factors related to COVID-19 that increased teacher burnout. These include COVID-19 anxiety, teaching anxiety as a result of the fear of contracting the virus, anxiety communicating with parents, and support from the administration. Since teacher burnout and anxiety were identified in other studies as some of the reasons teachers leave teaching (Ferguson et al., 2012) even before COVID-19, the pandemic has potentially compounded this problem. Owing to the increased uncertainty surrounding COVID-19, especially with new and more contagious variants being discovered, the problem of teacher turnover took a very different dimension that necessitated this study.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide my study:

RQ1: What measures have school leaders put in place to support teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the measures school leaders put in place to support them during the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ3: What do teachers and principals perceive as the major determinants of teacher turnover since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic?

The purpose of these questions was to help guide my research in a way that would fulfill the purpose of my study. Whether put in place by the district or otherwise, question one helped me to gain insight from the leaders' perspective on why they put in place certain measures and why they thought those would be necessary to support teachers during the pandemic. Question two helped me to understand from the teachers' perspective what they thought of the measures put in place to support them during the pandemic and compare them to principals' perspectives. Question three helped me to understand from both the teachers' and principals' perspectives how they thought the reasons for turnover had changed since the onset of COVID-19.

Scholarly Significance

The extent to which COVID-19 has affected teaching and learning, in general, has not been fully understood. This study will give insight into the impact of COVID-19 on teacher turnover. With COVID-19 being such a new phenomenon with no equal in history, I did not find any study that looked at the impact of COVID-19 on teachers' decisions to stay or leave the classroom by focusing on teacher perceptions of administrative support to date. Moreover, in my review of the literature, I did not find a study that compared principals' and teachers' perceptions of teacher turnover using symbolic interactionism as the theoretical framework. This framework assumes that people act towards things based on the meanings they attach to them, and the "meanings

of such things are derived from social interactions of one with others" (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 60). Therefore, this study will seek to fill this gap of knowledge, especially considering that COVID-19 health protocols required limited social interactions in the form of social distancing, a symbolic part of this framework. The other aspect of this study was to conduct a comparison of the measures implemented by school leaders to keep teachers safe during the pandemic, as well as teachers' perceptions of those measures versus those of the administrators. It is hoped that the findings of this study will shine a new perspective on how pandemic leadership can be used to provide vital leadership lessons to reduce teacher turnover and inform future leadership practices.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guides this study is symbolic interactionism. According to Blumer (1980), social interactions inform choices humans make when making meanings of their world. In this study, the symbolic part is based on policies and procedures put in place that are deemed meaningful and supportive by the participants in the study, such as mask mandates, personal protective equipment (PPE), social distancing, and small class sizes. Others may include flexible scheduling, contact tracing, daily COVID-19 cases count email, and individual notification of staff when a case of a possible close contact was reported. Given the social nature of the study, understanding the social reality experienced by participants through daily interactions and the meaning made through these interactions is imperative in understanding participant choices. According to Schwandt (2000), meaning-making is constructed "against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, language, and so forth" (p. 197). Crotty (1988) posited that meaning is constructed by the interplay between human beings and their worlds. In

this study, whatever meaning participants attached to their interactions within the school setting, especially with the administrative team, likely would have implications on turnover decisions.

Methodology

This study utilized interview study methodological approaches because they allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of both the teachers' and principals' perceptions of the reasons for turnover. Through semi-structured open-ended interviews, participants narrated their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how they were able to make decisions to support teachers in the case of principals, or how they felt about the support provided in the case of teachers. This study used purposeful sampling to select study participants. To have a rich and diverse perspective, I selected fourteen teacher participants who had moved schools or jobs at least once in the past to capture the reason for leaving their employment, the reasons that might cause them to move again or stay, and to gain their perspective on how those reasons may have changed during COVID. Teachers were from different school districts in the Gulf Coast region. Care was taken to ensure participant diversity by race, gender, and experience level. I also interviewed thirteen principal participants purposefully selected based on years of experience at their current school, their race, gender, and school demographics.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms were used throughout this study. Definitions are provided to help readers better understand the terms used within the context of this research study.

Coronavirus: A type of a highly contagious virus that mostly infects bats, pigs, and small mammals, but can jump from animals to humans, and from one human to another (Meena, n.d.).

COVID-19: Shortened form for Coronavirus Diseases 2019 (Zhang, 2020).

Turnover: For purposes of this study, turnover was defined as any movement of teachers, including retirement, resignation, changing schools, or moving to remote teaching and for which the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) was a contributing factor. Within the school movement (such as changing subjects taught) was not considered turnover for this study, unless it occurred specifically as a result of the pandemic. The rationale for this definition lies in the fact that administrative decisions in response to the pandemic may influence teachers to leave their schools for a different one where they feel more supported.

Retention. Retention was used to refer to a school's ability to keep teachers from leaving their positions (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

For a research study to be conducted, some assumptions must be made. According to Salvador (2016), assumptions are aspects of a study that must be considered true for the research to be conducted. In this study, the assumptions made are that participants will respond to the interview questions honestly and provide information that is to the best of their knowledge.

Limitations are elements that have the potential to weaken a study, but over which the researcher has no control (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). This is especially true because qualitative research is generally based on information collected from lived

experiences of a small sample of participants (Maxwell, 2012). One limitation of this study was that some teacher participants were recommended to me by their principals, which may have impacted their willingness to honestly report on their experiences. Another limitation was concerns about anonymity since the respondents did not completely trust that their responses will be confidential. Lastly, one of the school districts did not allow me to reach out to the participants before they gave their approval, which may also have limited the participants' willingness to discuss any experiences that may be deemed critical to the district.

Delimitations are aspects of the study typically controlled by the researcher to set boundaries so that the study goals do not become impossible to achieve (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). One delimitation for this study is that participants were purposefully selected from the researcher's professional network. Another delimitation is selecting participants who have had at least one career move in the past. Lastly, this study is delimited by collecting data from teachers and principals in the Gulf Coast region of Texas through virtual interviews.

Researcher Positionality

Throughout my education career, I have taught in several places both nationally and internationally, in public, public charter, private and international schools. My experiences in public and public charter schools have had the greatest influence on my views about teacher retention. In one particular school year, we had five different principals, not to mention the number of teachers who came and left or got fired. And in one of the meetings with my public-school principal, alarmed at the large number of new teachers during the new teacher orientation meeting, I asked why there were so many

new teachers. The answer I got was that teachers left because they did not agree with the mission of the school. My experience in international schools was the exact opposite. The only time we had new teachers was when the contracts of expert teachers had expired, so teacher turnover was very low. Looking back at my previous experiences, especially with charter schools, I can see the big role that principals played in teachers' decisions to leave. The daily interactions between teachers and administrators were minimal and one that teachers dreaded! It is one reason that I wanted to research more about teacher turnover because I desired to offer better leadership that would bring a sense of stability to schools.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on teacher turnover; to identify strategies school leaders have used to mitigate the effects of COVID-19, and to understand teachers' and principals' perceptions of the reasons for teacher turnover, especially in the era of COVID. The outbreak of COVID-19 upended education in ways that have not been seen in the history of schooling. Even before the outbreak of COVID-19, however, teacher turnover was already a problem that has plagued the education system for many decades. There is a superabundance of empirical studies that have examined the problem of teacher turnover through many different lenses (Boyd et al., 2005, 2011; Freedman & Appleman, 2008, 2009; Hanushek et al., 2004; Hanushek et al., 2016; Guarino et al., 2006; Hughes, 2012; Johnson et al., 2012; Prather-Jones, 2011; Shields & Murray, 2017). Available research provides strong evidence that turnover has a deleterious effect on student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Henry & Redding, 2020; Ladd, 2011; Ronfeldt et al., 2013), and that of all school-based factors, the influence of teachers on student achievement gains is the most conspicuous (Chetty et al., 2014; Jackson, 2012; Jackson et al., 2014; Koedel & Betts, 2007; Rivkin et al., 2005; Rockoff, 2004). The findings from these studies are important especially because the future and success of any nation lie in its ability to educate its citizens (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Many other researchers have studied the disparate reasons for teacher turnover including administrative support (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Johnson et al., 2012; Kraft &

Papay, 2014; Viano et al., 2020), school demographics (Guarino et al., 2006; Hanushek et al., 2004; Hughes, 2012; Henry & Redding, 2020; Ingersoll, 2001), student discipline (Borman & Dowling, 2006; Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Wynn et al., 2007), school environment (Boyd et al., 2011; Simon & Moore Johnson, 2015; Sorensen & Ladd, 2020), and salaries (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Hanushek et al., 2004; Hendricks, 2014; Stinebrickner, 2002; Viano et al., 2020; Wynn et al., 2007), among others.

Regardless of the reasons for turnover, however, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic changed these traditional dynamics, especially considering the grim health impact COVID-19 unleashed on a global scale and the unimaginable loss of human life. When combined with the lack of scientific knowledge regarding its spread and treatment, the outbreak of COVID-19 did prove a challenge to the school system in a way never seen in the history of global education. This literature review is an investigation of past and current research on teacher turnover, including causal factors and mitigation strategies.

As a reminder, this study sought to build on the insights provided by past literature and contributed to those earlier studies by seeking to understand how COVID-19 has impacted teaching and learning and changed the dynamics of schooling. In addition, this study attempted to understand how daily interactions between teachers and administrators in the face of COVID-19 contributed to teacher perception of support, and how this played out in their decisions to stay or leave the classroom. The social interaction aspect informed my choice of symbolic interactionism as the theoretical framework that guided my study. As human beings make decisions based on their

perceptions of the environment around them and their interactions with the people in that environment, I deemed this framework appropriate for this study. Moreover, COVID-19 came with a lot of symbolism from health and safety protocols involving masks, personal protective equipment (PPE), and social distancing, all of which carry great significance in a COVID-19 work environment and may have considerable influence on teacher turnover decisions. This study also attempted to compare teacher and administrative perceptions of support and examined how principal leadership may have morphed as a result of COVID-19, and whether any pandemic leadership lessons could be used to mitigate teacher turnover post-pandemic. Through in-depth interviews, this study also attempted to examine how the reasons for teacher turnover including lack of administrative support, student discipline, low salary, and school environment may have transmuted during the COVID-19 pandemic. As stated previously, this qualitative interview study was guided by the following research questions:

Research Questions

RQ1: What measures have school leaders put in place to support teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the measures school leaders put in place to support them during the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ3: What do teachers and principals perceive as the major determinants of teacher turnover since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic?

The remainder of this chapter begins with a more in-depth background and additional evidence that teacher turnover is a problem that supports the underlying justification for carrying out this study. Following that, I transition to an examination of

the problem of teacher turnover. The section on teacher turnover is divided into two broad categories: individual and organizational factors. Under organizational factors, the review delves into the key role that organizational structures like school administration play in shaping the school environment, and how this in turn influences teacher turnover decisions. The role played by school demographics, student discipline issues, and salary in teacher turnover is also examined. Strategies that have been attempted to mitigate the problem of teacher turnover including teacher preparation, mentoring, and induction, and their impact on teacher turnover are discussed. The review then examines teacher turnover during times of crisis and the impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning based on emerging literature and discusses ways in which pandemic leadership lessons may be used to provide solutions to teacher turnover problems in the future. Finally, this literature review discusses the proposed theoretical framework and makes a case as to why this framework is appropriate for this proposed study.

Is Teacher Turnover a Problem?

Each year, about half a million teachers leave their schools across the United States. Of these, only 16% leave because of retirement while a staggering 84% leave because of transfer to other schools, school districts, or leave teaching altogether (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004). This is indeed a problem given the lasting negative effects of turnover on the quality of instructional staff and student achievement (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). Addressing the problem of teacher turnover has been at the center of numerous initiatives by school districts across the United States (Dee, 2012; Henry et al., 2020; Morettini, 2016), but the problem has persisted causing a big challenge to the goals of providing quality education to the nation's children. Overall,

studies have shown that 20% to 50% of teachers leave the profession within the first five years (Guarino et al., 2006; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Latham & Vogt, 2007; Wynn et al., 2007). Data from Texas Education Agency (1995) indicates that between 30% and 40% of all teachers leave the profession within five years, regardless of the certification route. A more recent study in Texas found that after four years on the job, 36% of teachers moved to a different campus, 28% had left teaching altogether, and only 35% were still employed at their original campus (Davis & Anderson, 2020).

Studies have shown that the rate of teacher turnover is greatest among those serving poor, low-performing, non-White students from historically under-served communities (Boyd et al., 2005; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Hanushek et al., 2004), and among young and old teachers compared to middle-aged ones (Guarino et al., 2006; Johnson et al., 2012). The high rate of turnover in high-poverty, high-minority schools mean a high concentration of inexperienced, ineffective, and underprepared teachers which contributes to the widening of the inequality gap (Podolsky et al., 2016). Research by Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) has shown that turnover in these schools (commonly referred to as Title I schools) is nearly 50% greater than in non-Title I schools, with mathematics and science teachers recording up to 70% higher turnover rates in Title I compared to non-Title I schools. With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, contributing factors have likely been compounded especially with data showing higher infection and death rates among low-income and minority populace.

From a financial perspective, schools also suffer because teacher turnover has substantial monetary costs. For example, some studies have found that school districts in the United States spend between US $10,000 and US $17,000 to replace each teacher

who leaves (Barnes et al., 2007; DeFeo et al., 2017). The Texas Center for Educational Research (2000) estimated the state's annual costs of turnover, including a 40% turnover rate for teachers in their first three years of teaching to be 329 million dollars. Other studies found that the annual financial costs of recruiting, hiring, and training new teachers are staggering, with estimates of a total national replacement cost of US $2.2 billion per year (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Perhaps, more than the financial cost is the hidden cost of turnover described as having a marked and lasting negative impact on the quality of instructional staff and student achievement (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020)

Why Teachers Leave: The Literature

Over the years, teacher shortages, retention, and attrition have been addressed in a plethora of empirical studies (Boyd et al., 2005, 2011; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Guarino et al., 2006; Hanushek et al., 2004, 2016; Henry & Redding, 2020; Hughes, 2012; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Ingersoll and Smith (2003), for example, stated that teacher shortages and recruitment initiatives have been around since the mid-1980s. Ingersoll and Smith found that teachers most likely to leave are those that are the brightest, indicating that we are potentially losing the most effective instructional staff. In their study to examine the short careers of high-achieving teachers in low-performing schools in New York State public schools, Boyd et al. (2005) concluded that "Teachers, especially highly qualified teachers, are more likely to transfer or quit when teaching lower-achieving students, even after accounting for student and teacher race" (p. 171). Other studies have shown that younger teachers are more likely to leave teaching in their first five years (Billingsley, 2004; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Guarino et al., 2006; Macdonald, 1999), while Ingersoll (2001) noted

that the "relative odds of young teachers departing are 171% higher than for middle-aged teachers" (p. 518). The factors that lead to turnover can be broadly categorized into individual and organizational factors.

Individual Factors

Individual factors have been found to play a significant role in teacher turnover, with women constituting a substantial percentage of teachers exiting for personal reasons. According to some estimates, sixty percent of female teachers leave the workforce altogether, and not just teaching (Stinebrickner, 2002). In his study using the National Longitudinal Study of 1972 (NLS-72) and subsequent surveys taken over five years ranging from 1973 to 1986, Stinebrickner found that those changes in family situations like the birth of a child played a significant role in female teachers' decisions to leave teaching. Another important finding from Stinebrickner's study was that about 33% of those who leave teaching return at some point in time, possibly after the children have reached school-going age. Stinebrickner's finding reinforced an earlier study by Wayne (2000) who concluded that about a fourth of teachers hired are those who, though not currently teaching, have some form of prior teaching experience.

Issues of race have also been found to be a factor in teacher turnover with studies suggesting a higher proportion of teachers of color remaining in urban high-poverty, hard-to-staff schools than White teachers (Achinstein et al., 2010). Achinstein et al. identified three interrelated factors that might explain why teachers of color stayed longer in hard-to-staff schools: "teachers' humanistic commitments, the multicultural capital of schools, and innovative approaches in the professional preparation of teachers of color" (p. 94). Humanistic commitments refer to teachers' desire to make a difference in

students' lives. According to the authors, teachers of color show a greater commitment to making a difference in the lives of low-income students of color by improving their educational opportunities. Some teachers of color viewed their humanistic commitments as "giving back" to the communities with which they identified culturally or racially. Multicultural capital refers to the general lack of support of teachers of color in their effort to help students of color to succeed, low expectations or negative attitudes towards students of color, or general lack of support for programs meant to help these students succeed. Innovative teacher preparation programs that explicitly focused on preparing and supporting teachers of color have been found to positively affect retention.

Other studies suggested that among teachers of color, men were more than twice as likely as women to leave the profession (Kissel, et al. 2006; Kirby et al., 1999). For example, in an analysis of statewide longitudinal data set from 1980 to 1995 on public schoolteachers in Texas, Kirby et al. (1999) reported that African American males and White females had the highest turnover rates of all groups; and African American males had consistently higher attrition rates than African American females. Kirby et al. also found that White teachers in high-risk schools had up to 25% lower retention rates compared to those in low-risk schools, while Latino teachers had about 10% higher retention rates in high-risk schools than in low-risk schools. This was consistent with Hanushek et al.'s (2004) study which found that the probability of White teachers leaving was higher in schools serving higher percentages of minority students. Hanushek et al.'s investigation also revealed that African American teachers tended to move to schools serving higher proportions of African American students, while White teachers tended to move to schools with fewer students of color.

In their analysis of SASS and TFS data from 1999 to 2001, Kissel et al. (2006) found that among teachers of color, certification in the subject taught was a factor in their turnover decisions. According to the authors, minority teachers certified in their main teaching field were twice as likely to stay in the profession compared to those certified outside their main teaching field. Another surprising finding related to teachers of color is the issue of "giving back" or humanistic commitments (Lewis, 2006). Teachers of color reported a greater desire to teach in urban high schools to make a difference in the lives of low-income students of color compared to White teachers (Lewis, 2006; Su, 1997). For example, in a survey of 147 new male African American teachers in urban districts in Louisiana on issues of recruitment and retention, Lewis (2006) found that job security was rated as the most important factor, followed closely by contributions to humanity. Similarly, Kottkamp et al. (1987), in a survey of 2,718 teachers in Dade County, Florida, found that African American teachers generally placed higher importance on reaching students than White teachers.

Teacher age has also been related to turnover rates. For example, using the most recent data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the School and Staffing Survey (SASS), Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) found that the youngest and oldest teachers left teaching at higher rates than mid-career teachers. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond also found that teacher preparation pathway did influence turnover with teachers certified through the alternative certification route turning over at rates 25% higher than traditionally certified teachers.

Organizational Factors

Principal Leadership

Principal support is imperative to teachers' decision to stay or leave the classroom. Of the reasons teachers give for leaving the profession, lack of support from school administration has been identified to be a key factor (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Johnson et al., 2012; Kraft & Papay, 2014). Some researchers have found administrative support to be crucial in reducing teacher turnover by providing a school climate that supports teachers and improve job satisfaction (Boyd, et al., 2011; Hughes, 2012), while others have reported principal leadership style has a strong influence on teachers' capacity to build resilience and continue working in a challenging school environment (Day & Hong, 2016).

In their investigation of New York City schools, Boyd et al., (2011) found that "teachers' perception of the school administration has by far the greatest influence on teacher retention decisions" (p. 303), while Torres (2018) found that teacher perceptions of leadership were a stronger predictor of teacher retention than other school-based factors. In a study of 80 teachers in 20 different sites, Hughes et al., (2015), specifically examined the influence principal support has on teacher retention and concluded that principal support is central to teachers' decision to stay or leave the classroom. Using descriptive statistics, Wynn et al. (2007) found that satisfaction with the school leadership was positively correlated to beginning teacher decisions to remain in the school district, and overall teacher decisions to remain in the school site. Wynn et al.'s participants cited lack of administrative support behind salary and student discipline at 43% as the main reason they would leave their current position.

Using the most recent National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) School and Staffing Survey (SASS) data, Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) found

that perceived administrative support is the workplace condition's most predictive reason for teacher turnover. The authors concluded that teachers who strongly disagreed that their administration was supportive were twice as likely to move schools or quit teaching than those that strongly agreed that their administration was supportive. An earlier study by Ekstrom et al., (1985) using the Educational Testing Service (ETS) data to survey New York City first-year teachers found that non-supportive school leadership was the most important factor in their decision to leave.

In their examination of the preferences of teachers working in low-performing schools in Tennessee, Viano et al. (2020) reported that among other school attributes, teachers viewed administrative support as having a strong influence on their decision to continue teaching in these schools. Earlier studies examining why teachers leave high-poverty schools revealed cognate findings and concluded that teachers in these schools are not fleeing their students, but poor working conditions including poor school leadership which makes it hard for them to serve their students (Johnson et al., 2012; Simon & Moore Johnson, 2015). The principal's leadership style has also been found to have a positive influence on teachers' capacity to build resilience in the face of a challenging school environment associated with low socioeconomic status (SES) schools (Day & Hong, 2016).

Principal support for both veteran and new teachers is imperative in creating an atmosphere of trust and belonging which in turn improves teacher retention decisions (Ingersoll, 2001; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). In their longitudinal study of 50 new teachers through extensive interviews, Johnson and Birkeland (2003) concluded that teachers who felt successful were those in schools that offered them support. Principals

are in a unique position to create a school climate and develop programs that support teachers and reduce turnover. For example, Kraft et al. (2016) examined the relationship between school organizational contexts, teacher turnover, and student achievement in New York City (NYC) middle schools using factor analysis and found that improved school leadership and teacher relationships were associated with reduced teacher turnover. The findings of Kraft and others also demonstrate the importance of school interactions in teacher turnover decisions.

Research also shows that teachers expect leaders to serve as role models and advocates for work/life balance (Edge et al., 2016). According to Edge et al., both leaders and teachers place high importance on leaders' ability and willingness to be supportive, understanding, and approachable, and that teachers expect leaders to understand that they are people with lives beyond school. In times of high stress like during a pandemic, principal leadership and guidance can have a positive impact on teachers' decisions to stay on the job. A similar finding by Prather-Jones (2011) concluded that for teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders, continued administrator support is critical during their initial and subsequent years on the job. According to Prather-Jones, when teachers felt respected and appreciated, they felt supported and were more likely to stay in their current position. In another study on administrator influence on middle school math teacher turnover, Redding et al. (2019) found that high-level administrative support was more powerful in deterring new teacher turnover than more direct support such as mentors and professional development. The findings of these authors further solidify research on the central role of campus leadership on teacher turnover.

School Environment

The conditions under which teachers work matter a great deal and generally influence their decisions to stay or leave the school. Examples of such conditions include poor working conditions, discipline issues, administrative support, large class sizes, increased workload, and decision-making among others. Several researchers have found school climate to be perhaps the strongest indicator of teacher retention (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Wynn et al., 2007). Ingersoll and Smith (2003) concluded that the "roots of the teacher shortage largely reside in the working conditions within schools and districts" (p. 32). Several other studies have documented how organizational characteristics of the school influence teacher decisions, concluding that teachers leaving these schools are fleeing dysfunctional and unsupportive work environments (Boyd et al., 2011; Ladd, 2011; Simon & Moore Johnson, 2015).

On the other hand, **s**chools offering a positive work environment have been found to keep their teachers longer regardless of demographics (Johnson et al., 2012), and a positive school climate played a significant role in beginning teachers' decision to remain at the school (Wynn et al., 2007). According to Wynn et al., as perceptions of working conditions improve, so does the likelihood of teachers remaining in the school. School leadership helps to shape the school climate and set up an atmosphere that supports teachers to build resilience in the face of a challenging school environment (Day & Hong, 2016).

Demographics

School demographics have been found to have varying associations with teacher attrition and turnover (Guarino et al., 2006; Hanushek et al., 2004; Henry & Redding, 2020; Hughes, 2012; Ingersoll, 2001). In his examination of data from the School and

Staffing Survey (SASS) and the Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS), Ingersoll (2001) found that teacher turnover in urban, public schools with high rates of poverty was slightly higher than average and that the rate of turnover in small private schools was even higher, specifically 17% higher than for public school teachers. In his analysis, Ingersoll found that the rate at which teachers leave small private schools is more than double those who leave urban high-poverty schools. Other related studies have found a relationship between teacher transfer and student demographics where high turnover exists in schools with high numbers of low-income, low-achieving non-White students (Boyd et al., 2005; Hanushek et al., 2004)

In her study, however, Hughes (2012) discovered a contradictory conclusion. Close to 84 percent of her sample of 782 teachers indicated that they were more likely to teach until retirement in the lowest SES schools than in the highest SES schools. While the reasons for this unusual finding could not be determined, Hughes speculated that it could be a result of the rural nature of the schools studied, the community or "home" feeling, and the lack of other career options for the teachers in the study. Although not related, Hughes' study seems to corroborate Viano et al. (2020) who concluded that teachers ascribe little importance to demographics if other factors like administrative support are present. It also confirms research by Simon and Moore Johnson (2015) which concluded that teachers leaving high-poverty schools are not fleeing their students but poor working conditions. School leaders in high-poverty schools may want to find ways of improving teachers' working conditions to motivate them to stay on the job.

Student Discipline

Researchers in several studies have found student discipline problems to be a significant contributor to teacher attrition (Borman & Dowling, 2006; Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Wynn et al., 2007). For example, Viano et al. (2020) found that consistent enforcement of discipline is among the factors that teachers considered important in their decisions to stay or leave. In their analysis, Viano et al. posited that teachers are more likely to stay in a school with high rates of suspension because of consistent enforcement of discipline. Similarly, Ingersoll and Smith (2003) found that among the top four reasons given for teacher dissatisfaction, student discipline was second at 35 percent.

In their study, Wynn et al. (2007), cited disruptive students behind pay at 58 percent as a major reason for teachers' decision to leave, while Allensworth et al. (2009) opined that teachers tend to leave schools with the highest levels of misbehavior, especially at the high school level. Using SASS data, Kukla-Acevedo (2009) reported a link between teacher satisfaction, student behaviors, administrative support, and teacher turnover, and concluded that turnover diminished when principals maintain direct involvement in dealing with difficult and disruptive students.

Salaries

Teacher compensation has been cited in several studies as a factor influencing teacher attrition with higher salaries found to lower the probability of turnover (Hanushek et al., 2004; Hendricks, 2014; Wynn et al., 2007), while other studies have linked performance-based pay with better retention (Springer & Taylor, 2016; Swain et al., 2019). For example, Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019), using the most recent data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the Schools and

Staffing Surveys (SASS) found that "teachers in districts that offered salaries up to $72,000 to $78,000 were 20% less likely to turn over" (p. 14) compared to those in the bottom quintile where maximum district salaries were less than $60,000. Similarly, Ingersoll and Smith (2003) found that of the 29 percent of teachers who cited job dissatisfaction as a reason for leaving, three-fourths pointed to a desire to pursue a better job with better salaries.

In a survey of 217 first-and second-year teachers regarding the reasons they consider most important to keeping them motivated to stay in the profession, salary was the most cited at 82% (Wynn et al., 2007). In related studies, Stinebrickner (2002) found that "teachers with higher wages are significantly less likely to change occupations" (p. 208), Viano et al. (2020) reported that a higher salary was a key factor in teachers' decision to stay; and Hendricks (2014) concluded that an increase in base pay reduces teacher turnover. In a survey of over 60,000 teachers who participated in the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and its supplemental Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS) sponsored by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), Liu and Ramsey (2008) concluded that one of the primary reasons why teachers leave is dissatisfaction with wages.

Strategies to Reduce Turnover

Teacher Preparation

Finding effective strategies to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers has become increasingly difficult for urban schools. This shortage of professionally certified teachers is a problem due to the number of teachers who leave urban schools within districts, in addition to those who leave to teach in more desirable suburban schools or

other occupations altogether (Ingersoll, 1999). Teacher preparation programs have been identified as crucial in preparing teachers for the demands of the profession.

Freedman and Appleman (2008, 2009) followed a cohort of beginning teachers who had studied in a multicultural urban secondary English (MUSE) teacher education program for five years. The authors recorded a lower attrition rate and identified several factors that contributed to the lower attrition rate. These included (a) the cohort model in teacher education, which provided ongoing support as they began to teach, (b) a match between teacher education students' values and ideals with the program, and (c) preparation for the micro-politics in urban teaching settings. In a related study, Alkins et al. (2006) suggested the need for more support from institutions of higher education for beginning teachers in three categories: (a) instruction theory and practice, (b) establishing a culture for learning, and (c) teacher development/transformation. Teacher residency programs and partnerships with teacher preparation programs have also been found to reduce turnover by providing a degree of certainty about the number and quality of teachers school districts can expect to hire (Carver-Thomas et al., n.d.). In addition to high retention rates, evidence also suggests that residency-prepared teachers positively impact student achievement (Yun & DeMoss, 2020).

Mentoring

Research on mentoring programs has shown very promising results in retaining teachers and reducing turnover. In a study involving alternatively certified teachers housed in a large university, Morettini (2016) found that when faced with the challenges of teaching in hard-to-staff schools, mentoring support was central to the participants' decision to remain in the classroom. Survey responses showed that all participants agreed

that social/moral support and encouragement from their mentor helped them surmount emotional challenges. These conclusions imply that mentoring programs for first-year teachers are key to retaining them in the classroom, especially in hard-to-staff schools. One of the hallmarks of Morettini's findings was that mentoring programs need to be longer than a few weeks in the summer for them to be effective, and they do not have to be costly because the research indicated that emotional/social support and general encouragement had the greatest impact of all forms of mentoring, and these do not cost money.

Induction

Researchers have found that induction programs are promising in reducing beginning teacher turnover. For example, Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017) using three of the most recent SASS and TFS and the Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Study found that there was reduced migration and attrition among teachers who received induction support. The authors also found that the level of induction support was fairly constant for different kinds of teachers and schools except for Black teachers who seemed to require higher levels of induction support when they were teaching more students who were English Language Learners (ELLs). In a related study using the same data but excluding teachers who left for unavoidable or involuntary reasons, Kang and Berliner (2012) concluded that the three types of induction activities that were most significant in reducing beginning turnover included seminars, common planning time, and extra classroom assistance.

Though research has shown that induction programs are effective in reducing beginning teacher turnover, Ingersoll (2012) opined that the kinds and amounts of support

received are especially important. Ingersoll found that induction programs are instrumental in retaining teachers, improving their instructional practices, and consequently increasing student achievement. In an earlier comprehensive review of 15 empirical studies on the effects of induction programs on beginning teachers conducted since the mid-1980s, Ingersoll and Strong (2011), discovered a strong relationship between induction support and teacher commitment and retention, teacher classroom instructional practices, and student achievement. In their analysis, however, Ingersoll and Strong found notable exceptions to the overall pattern when they used a large randomized controlled sample of urban, low-income schools. Data from this sample showed significant positive effects on student achievement, but no effects on either teacher retention or teachers' classroom practices, suggesting further research needed to be done to attempt to understand these contradictory findings.

Education, Turnover, and School Leadership in Times of Crisis

Although many natural and man-made disasters have happened in the past, none has disrupted education to the scale of COVID-19. Much of the available research on crisis leadership has focused on man-made threats such as crime and civil unrest (Dirani et al., 2020). Accordingly, there is little available research on leadership in the aftermath of natural disasters (Potter et al., 2021), or research that addresses leadership challenges such as teacher turnover in times of crisis like the one caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic. As such, this study hopes to fill in the gap in knowledge by providing empirical evidence on how the lessons learned can be used to provide leadership in times of a crisis or disaster. In this section, I describe some natural and man-made crises and how they impacted education. I also describe some of the available literature on school

leadership during crises and suggestions on how best practices can be used to reduce turnover during a crisis. Finally, I discuss COVID-19 and emerging literature on its impact on teaching and learning.

The Earthquake in New Zealand

In a study to investigate teachers' burnout perceptions following the Christchurch earthquake in New Zealand, Kuntz et al. (2013) found that schools' ineffective disaster responsiveness, the impact of the disaster on school facilities and teaching, and perceptions of role overload were associated with increased levels of burnout which in turn increased turnover intentions (Chambers Mack et al., 2019). Research has demonstrated a relationship between teacher burnout and student academic outcomes (McLean & Connor, 2015). In a related investigation conducted after the Christchurch earthquake on the role of principal leadership during and after natural disasters, Fletcher and Nicholas (2016) concluded that principal leadership was paramount in supporting both students and teachers deal with post-traumatic after-effects of the earthquake. McLean and Connor (2015) examined the associations among third-grade teachers' symptoms of depression, quality of the classroom environment, and student's performance in math and literacy, and found that teachers who reported more depressive symptoms were less likely to maintain a high-quality classroom environment, and this in turn affected student outcomes. Preliminary findings on the impact of COVID-19 on teachers suggest similar perceptions of burnout resulting from increased workload arising from a steep learning curve occasioned by hybrid learning, health and safety fears, and uncertainty regarding the transmission of new variants and vaccine effectiveness (Carver-Thomas et al., n.d.), all of which are directly related to teacher turnover decisions.

Katrina and Other Disasters

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina devastated communities along the Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama Gulf Coast, displacing over 300,000 students and disrupting K-12 education (Picou & Marshall, 2007). Research done in the aftermath of Katrina revealed that children struggled to reestablish routine, adjust to different socioeconomic environments, form new friendships and cope with disaster-related anxiety (Fothergill & Peek, 2006). Educational systems, schools, principals, teachers, and counselors play critical roles in promoting long-term recovery (Picou & Marshall, 2007), yet available research on the impact of Hurricane Katrina on teachers' emotional well-being showed inadequate support systems to help teachers cope with hurricane-related problems (DeVaney et al., 2009), and little research on the impact of the hurricane on teacher turnover.

In a study on the role of school leadership in surviving a school shooting, Brown (2018) highlighted the challenges school leaders face when making split-second decisions that can mean life and death. In managing the situation, Brown explains how the principal had to deal with multiple scenarios, including helping a suicidal teacher, who even though ended up quitting the profession, did not kill herself. Brown makes a point that "Principals should not have to experience a violent incident at their schools in order to learn ways of responding" (p. 3). Understanding the critical role that school leadership plays during such times of crisis is crucial in helping teachers to cope with traumatic events which can in turn reduce turnover.

Leadership in Crisis

One of the most critical lessons that COVID-19 has taught us is the importance of sound school leadership practices during times of crisis. According to Smith and Riley (2012), leadership in times of crisis encompasses strategies for dealing with events, emotions, and consequences in ways that minimize personal and organizational harm to the school and community. Unfortunately, over the years, researchers have honed down on best practices that exemplary leaders follow during normal times (Dirani et al., 2020), but little has been said about leadership in times of crisis. The current pandemic has proved to be the ultimate test for leadership across the world, with about 561 commercial organizations filing for bankruptcy in the United States by Spring 2020 (Miller & Berk, 2020), and these numbers are expected to keep on rising. Education institutions have not been spared in this lack of leadership preparedness, though the full impact on teaching and learning has not yet been fully understood. A recent qualitative study involving 30 school leaders in Ohio's urban and suburban districts found that leaders altered their leadership styles to focus on people rather than programs and policies (Brion, 2021). Perhaps, this is a glimpse of how leadership has morphed since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic as school leaders grapple with unprecedented staffing challenges and try to reduce teacher turnover.

Studies have shown that natural disasters negatively impact students' educational outcomes and well-being (Potter et al., 2021) and can be traumatic to students who would often need substantial support in their aftermath (Baum et al., 2009). Research conducted in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic showed that students experienced learning loss. For example, in their analysis of recorded learning loss between March 2020 and

March 2021, Donnelly and Patrinos, (2021) identified seven studies that found evidence
of student learning loss. Additionally, the authors also observed increases in disparity,
with some student demographics experiencing considerably more learning loss than
others.

Furthermore, studies have also found that after a natural disaster, families, and
communities rely on schools for support with resources such as food, clothing, and
shelter, yet according to Potter et al. (2021), school principals lack the necessary skills
and training on the best way to respond to such crises. Luongo (2021) concluded that
burnout and turnover are realities for many principals as the educational system lacks
structures to support principals in their job. Luongo argues that school districts need to
design structures to support school administrators to work through times of emotional
stress and the impacts of trauma that the school setting creates. COVID-19 undoubtedly
has added to the stress that school administrators face on a scale few ever imagined, and
their leadership is crucial in maintaining the stability of their schools and reducing
teacher flight.

COVID-19 Impact on Teaching and Learning

COVID-19 has stretched the already critical teacher shortage as school districts
have to hire more teachers to accommodate social distancing requirements as schools
transition back to in-person learning (Carver-Thomas et al., n.d.). The exact impact of
COVID-19 on teaching and learning has not yet been fully understood, but early research
suggests that supporting educators' well-being is critical for workforce retention (Eadie et
al., 2021). In their survey involving early childhood educators in Australia, Eadie et al.
(2021) found that even amid a global pandemic, supportive organizational structures and

culture can help educators to meet the demands and expectations of their role and increase their intention to stay. In a survey of more than 7,800 teachers in 206 schools and 9 states on the importance of teachers working during COVID-19, Kraft et al. (2020) found that district and school-based leadership support in areas of communication, meaningful collaboration, fair expectations, and recognition of their efforts had a positive impact on the teachers' sense of success during the pandemic hence increasing their likelihood of staying in the profession. The findings of these authors provide an important pandemic lesson that can be used by school leaders to help reduce turnover.

Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical perspective that guided this study is symbolic interactionism. According to Blumer (1980), social interactions inform choices humans make when making meanings of their world. Blumer believes that meaning emerges as a result of the interactions between members of a group and identifies three core principles in symbolic interaction perspective: *Meaning, language* (symbols), and *thinking*. Human beings give meaning to symbols and express these through language which consequently determines the kind of social interaction that exists within the group and the decisions they make. Charmaz and Belgrave (2013) stated that the symbolic interactionist perspective helps us understand relationships between individuals and the larger society as accomplished through people's actions and interactions. Similarly, Schwandt (2000) posited that meaning-making is constructed "against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, language, and so forth" (p. 197).

Symbolic interactionism was appropriate for this study because teachers attach high importance to the social interactions that exist within the school setting. According

to Crotty (1988), meaning is constructed by the interplay between human beings and their worlds. Prather-Jones (2011) also posited that teachers need support from other teachers in their school and that principals play an important role in developing these relationships. In this proposed study, whatever meaning participants attached to their interactions within the school setting, especially with the school leadership team, likely would have implications on turnover decisions. In the era of COVID-19, these interactions have assumed an added significance making this theoretical perspective even more relevant especially because of the symbolic nature of COVID-19 safety protocols like masks, social distancing, handwashing, personal protective equipment (PPE), and all the signage that comes with it. In addition, there are safety policies and procedures put in place by school districts like small class sizes, contact tracing, special HVAC units in school buildings, remote learning, and daily health screening. Given the social nature of this study, understanding the social reality experienced by participants through daily interactions and the meaning made through these interactions was imperative in understanding participant choices.

Finally, symbolic interactionism shaped my study in several ways. First, COVID-19's social-emotional influence on teachers presents a compelling case for a theoretical framework that recognizes the teaching profession's interactionist nature. Secondly, teachers operate in social spaces, and most of their decisions are based on the kind of interactions that occurs in these spaces, be it with students in their classrooms, with fellow teachers in PLCs and teachers' lounges, or with administrators in staff meetings, hallways, or classroom evaluations. Third, my research questions were informed by the understanding that teacher turnover decisions are heavily influenced by the kind of

interactions that occur on a daily basis. These interactions have become even more important in the era of COVID-19 where daily symbols like masks and social distancing will elicit strong reactions from almost every human being including children, while other symbols like safety protocols adopted by the district will likely influence teacher decisions. Finally, symbolic interactionism has influenced my interview protocol and the kinds of questions that I asked participants. For example, one interview question specifically asked teacher participants how teacher-to-teacher or teacher-to-principal interactions influenced their decisions to stay or leave.

Summary

Teacher turnover is a global problem that has continued to negatively impact teaching and learning, especially in the developed world. Regardless of the reasons teachers leave, researchers agree that teacher turnover negatively affects students' achievement (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Significant research has gone into examining the reasons for teacher turnover, but despite all that is known, teacher turnover has continued to be a challenge to many school districts across the United States. The research reviewed in this article has dwelt on the reasons for teacher turnover, including individual factors like gender, age, and race; and steps that have been taken to mitigate this problem and provide some solutions. Administrative support plays a key role in shaping the school environment and providing stability in schools which in turn reduces teacher turnover (Boyd, et al., 2011; Hughes et al., 2015). Of particular importance is the identified role of the principal in building resilience among teachers who serve in challenging school environments (Day & Hong, 2016). Perhaps there is no better way to explain the importance of the school leadership in reducing teacher turnover than the study by

Johnson et al. (2012), and Simon and Moore Johnson (2015), who concluded that teachers in high-poverty schools are not fleeing their students, but poor working conditions including poor school leadership. Other causes of turnover identified include school demographics where researchers have found turnover to be higher in high-minority, high-poverty schools (Ingersoll, 2001). Closely related to school demographics is student discipline which has been found to be a significant contributor to teacher attrition (Borman & Dowling, 2006; Wynn et al., 2007). Additionally, salaries have been cited in several studies to be a factor driving turnover (Hanushek et al., 2004; Hendricks, 2014).

Besides identifying the reasons for teacher turnover, researchers have examined different strategies that have been used to mitigate this problem. For example, teacher preparation programs have been found to have a positive impact on teacher retention in some respect (Freedman & Appleman, 2008, 2009). According to the authors, factors that contributed to a lower attrition rate included a cohort model, a match in values and ideas between teachers and students, and preparation for the micro-politics of urban teaching. Mentoring support (Morettini, 2016), and induction programs (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017) were also found to have a positive impact in helping new teachers navigate the often stressful first few years on the job, consequently increasing retention.

Educational leadership in times of natural and man-made disasters was analyzed and parallels were drawn between principal leadership during times of crises and the current pandemic to see if practical leadership lessons learned can be applied to reduce turnover. However, although substantial research exists on natural and man-made disasters, very little research has been done on their impact on teacher turnover. As such,

the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic happened during a time of substantial knowledge gap with so many unknowns regarding what impact the pandemic has had on teacher turnover despite its worldwide impact on teaching and learning. Therefore, new, and further research is needed to more clearly understand how COVID-19 has changed the dynamics of schooling and offer some solutions on how the lessons learned during the pandemic can be used to reduce the problem of turnover. What is clear, however, is that principal leadership will likely play a significant role in shepherding the school through the pandemic. This research study examines the intersections of principal leadership, COVID-19, and teacher turnover through the lens of symbolic interactionism as the theoretical framework.

The next section of this study dives deeper into the methodology used to collect data to answer my research question. In this qualitative study, semi-structured, in-depth interviews are used to understand the perceptions of teachers and principals regarding how the reasons for teacher turnover have changed as a result of COVID. This study also seeks to examine how the interactions that occurred in the schools have impacted teacher turnover decisions, including perceptions of support on safety protocols from the lens of both teachers and principals. The methodology section is followed by the research design including details on the choice of participants, demographics, and interview protocol. This section will be followed by a detailed analysis of results followed by a discussion of the findings and conclusions. Implications for practice and further research will also be discussed.

Chapter III

Methodology

In this qualitative study, I investigated the perceptions of fourteen teachers and thirteen principals regarding the reasons for teacher turnover, particularly in the era of COVID-19 by examining teacher versus principal perceptions of the measures taken by schools and school districts to support teachers during the global pandemic. Using a symbolic interactionist framework, I answered the following research questions:

RQ1: What measures have school leaders put in place to support teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the measures school leaders put in place to support them during the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ3: What do teachers and principals perceive as the major determinants of teacher turnover since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic?

This chapter includes the following sections: 1) selection of the participants, 2) data collection, 3) data analysis, 4) validity, reliability, and trustworthiness, 5) strengths/limitations, and 6) summary.

Selection of the participants

Purposive sampling was used to select study participants. All teacher participants were selected from secondary schools (middle and high) in different school districts across the Gulf Coast area. Middle and high schools were selected because teachers in these grade levels experienced similar challenges compared to elementary school teachers. Principal participants were selected from all grade levels (elementary, middle, and high) in school districts across the Gulf Coast area. In general, teacher participants

came from five different school districts, and principal participants came from eight

different school districts varying in size from major urban to major suburban, and charter

school districts. Schools varied in both size and demographics of the students served.

Care was taken to ensure participant diversity by race, gender, and experience level. To

have a rich and diverse perspective, I selected 14 teacher participants with at least five

years of experience. The teachers should have moved schools (or changed jobs) at least

once in the past to capture the reasons for leaving their previous school or job, and the

reasons that might cause them to move again or stay in their current position, and to gain

their perspective on how those reasons may have changed during COVID. I also

interviewed 13 principal participants purposefully selected based on years of experience,

their race, gender, and school demographics. Principal participants should have at least

three years of experience at their current school or district including being a principal or

assistant principal before and during COVID. The rationale for this was based on

available research that shows about 50% of principals remain after four years and 20 -

40% remain after six (Gates et al., 2006; Papa, 2007). As this is the second school year

with COVID, principals who recently retired after the first COVID year were also

selected. By selecting principals who served before and during COVID, I would be able

to answer my research question on how teacher turnover has changed during the era of

COVID-19 from the principals' perspective, in addition to learning about how their

leadership changed during the pandemic.

Data Collection

Study data were collected via virtual in-depth semi-structured interviews.

Although a semi-structured interview guide was used, interviews were informal, open-

ended, and conversational which allowed participants to share their personal and

professional experiences and beliefs. Additional questions were often asked to probe

more deeply and allow participants to clarify their responses. The interview protocol was

developed by piloting the questions before final adoption, to ensure that the questions

were not misunderstood. Piloting was done in the Spring Semester when I took the

qualitative methods class. As part of my final project, I conducted a pilot project where I

interviewed two teachers using the interview protocol. I then used the feedback provided

by the teachers and my professor to refine my interview questions. According to

Gudmundsdottir and Brock-Utne (2010), piloting helps to focus on the necessity to

modify research questions or other procedures that do not elicit appropriate responses or

enable the researchers to obtain rich data. The authors also emphasize the importance of

piloting in enhancing reliability and validity in research. Chenail (2011) also identifies

"instrumentation rigor" and management bias as important issues which may arise during

the piloting of interview data collection instruments enabling the researcher to take

remedial action before the main study.

After the pilot study, I refined the questions accordingly before the actual

interviews. As stated previously, this study employed the symbolic interactionist

approach as the theoretical framework. According to Blumer (1980), social interactions

inform choices humans make when making meanings of their world. Interview questions

were framed to allow participants an opportunity to explain whether social interactions

between staff members played a role in their decision-making. For this study, the

symbolic part was based on policies and procedures put in place that are deemed

meaningful and supportive by the participants in the study to mitigate or protect against

COVID-19, such as mask mandates, personal protective equipment (PPE), social distancing, and small class sizes among others. Similarly, whatever meaning participants attached to their interactions within the school setting, especially with the administrative team, likely would have implications on turnover decisions. Specific questions that captured teachers' perceptions in this regard were included in the interview protocol (see Appendix A) to allow me to conclusively answer my research questions.

I obtained approval from the University of Houston Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to beginning my investigation. Boddy (2016) suggested that sample sizes in qualitative studies vary widely, and a sample size involving one case can be highly informative and meaningful, Creswell and Poth (2016) suggested selecting a diverse group of 3 to 15 participants with experience in the phenomenon under investigation, while Polkinghorne (1989) recommended interviews with 5 to 25 participants. For my study, I chose to interview 27 diverse participants which included 14 teachers and 13 principals from different schools in school districts around the Gulf Coast region. After the university granted IRB approval, I began contacting potential study participants through my social and professional network, and references from friends.

Initial contact was made in several ways including phone calls, text messages, emails, face-to-face recruitment, and referral from professional colleagues. The method of initial contact depended on whether I had already established a professional relationship with the participant. During the initial contact, I explained to prospective participants the purpose of my study and the voluntary nature of their participation, including confidentiality requirements. I also informed them that they were under no obligation to answer questions they did not feel comfortable answering and that they

were free to end the interview at any time. After obtaining informed consent, I met the participants virtually or in person for an informal chat to build rapport depending on their availability and whether they were comfortable meeting face-to-face.

After confirming participation, I sent each participant an informed consent form (see Appendix B) and a pre-interview questionnaire (see Appendix C). The purpose of the pre-interview questionnaire was to collect participants' personal and professional information such as demographics data, education, years of experience, and types of schools taught. I then scheduled dates for interviews while giving myself time between interviews to conduct transcription and preliminary data analysis to help inform myself about meaningful questions to ask in subsequent interviews (Bhattacharya, 2017). The interviews were semi-structured and open-ended (see Appendix A) which allowed me to ask follow-up questions and points of clarification. This also allowed me to probe participants (Vagle, 2014) on their responses rather than assuming I understood what they meant so as to reduce the chance of bias stemming from my own experiences as an educator during COVID-19. All interviews lasted between 45-90 minutes and were conducted virtually on Microsoft TEAMS and recorded and transcribed using the Microsoft TEAMS software allowing me to capture both audio and visual as well as the transcript. This was important during the process of cleaning up the transcription as it helped me to connect the audio to the facial expressions of the participants and in the process aided in my recollection of facts and my data analysis.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, I used a combination of Microsoft TEAMS software for recording and transcription, and Dedoose for coding and analysis. Once the interviews

were transcribed, I checked each transcription for errors by listening to the transcript and checking for omissions or commissions. I then used inductive analysis to analyze my data with an emic focus which means representing the setting in terms of the participants and their viewpoints, rather than my viewpoint (etic). According to Bhattacharya (2017), "inductive analysis assumes that the researcher is not starting the data analysis with any kind of pre-established testable hypothesis about the data" (p. 150). Stake (1995) opined that qualitative data analysis is an iterative and reflexive process that begins as data are being collected rather than after data collection has ceased. With this in mind, I made notes during the individual interviews, often using them to adjust my interview process if it seemed like additional concepts needed to be investigated, or if some questions needed to be clarified or modified.

During the process of inductive analysis, I read and re-read the transcripts and listened to the interviews several times, to familiarize myself with the data, each time reflecting on my subjectivities, emotions, and questions that arose. I systematically coded using both *a priori* codes, which are pre-determined or deductive (Stuckey, 2015) adapted from the research questions, the purpose of the study, and theoretical framework; and emergent codes arising from participant statements, actions, or meanings that evolved from the interview data. I then sorted, and categorized the interview data based on emerging themes and frequently occurring patterns, particularly salient themes in teachers' and administrators' explanations, and the emphasis placed on them by the participants, again connecting them with my research purpose, questions, and theoretical framework. In addition, I analyzed individual narratives from the interviews to provide direct quotes from the study participants. The inductive analytic procedure was also used

to compare data across interviews, and within each interview, as participants responded to different questions. This parallel comparative analysis enabled me to compare teacher versus principal perceptions of the safety measures put in place to support teachers during the pandemic, as well as their perceptions of the reasons for teacher turnover. I then conducted member checking (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) by discussing the process and findings with participants to ascertain that I accurately captured what they discussed and that the interpretations of the data were accurate, to improve the validity. Only one participant had some corrections to make on his transcript.

As an additional way of improving the validity and trustworthiness of my findings, I had a peer check over my data coding and analysis. The person that I chose as my peer had qualitative methodological expertise, as well as scholarly knowledge in qualitative research. In addition, she was experienced in K-12 education, so she provided useful insight into my research findings and helped to validate my findings.

Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness

According to Creswell and Poth (2016), validity in qualitative research is trying to assess the accuracy of the results as best described by the researcher, the participants, and the readers. Whittemore et al. (2001) identified four primary validation criteria including credibility, authenticity, criticality, and integrity. The authors argued that authenticity has to do with an accurate interpretation of the participants' meaning, authenticity refers to the diversity of the voices of the participants, criticality deals with evidence of critical appraisal of the research process, while integrity looks at critical self-reflection and humble presentation of findings. In this study, I ensured validity by conducting member checking with the participants of the study to ensure the accuracy of my interpretations.

As a researcher, I enhanced the validity of my findings by engaging in an in-depth interview study of a diverse group of people, often asking participants to clarify their responses to reduce biases that may arise from my own experience as an educator.

According to Silverman (2005), reliability in a qualitative study can be done in several ways like taking detailed field notes or employing good quality tape recording and transcribing the tape. In my study, reliability was enhanced by using Microsoft TEAMS software to capture both audio and video as well as on-the-fly transcription of the interview. Additionally, the use of Dedoose for coding and analysis reduced potential researcher bias associated with coding due to my positionality as an educator. Creswell and Poth (2016) opined that "reliability often refers to the stability of responses to multiple coders of data sets" (p. 210).

Trustworthiness or rigor of a study refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study (Polit & Beck, 2014). As such, trustworthiness is a critical component of any high-quality research. To ensure that the results of my study were accurate without researcher bias, I provided my researcher's positionality as a current educator, used in-depth questioning to ascertain clarity, and sent completed transcripts to participants to approve or make amendments.

Data Triangulation

Data triangulation was achieved in several ways. First, the semi-structured nature of the interviews made it possible to start from some key issues identified through the research questions and allowed for spontaneity, flexibility, and responsiveness (Triangulation, 2014) in an open discussion. Secondly, documents on safety protocols were obtained from the district website and used to compare with participant responses.

Thirdly, the diverse nature and location of the study participants ensured that their

responses were independent of each other in what Patton (1999) called data source

triangulation as they enabled me to gain multiple perspectives on the phenomenon under

study. Fourth, using both inductive and deductive (*a priori*) analysis helped me to

conduct a deductive analysis of emergent themes and locate additional data to support or

refute emergent propositions (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Lastly, member checking and

feedback from the peer were valuable tools in data triangulation.

Strengths/Limitations

Though qualitative research has several limitations, the universal nature of the

conditions under which this study was conducted makes for a very unique situation. First,

all educators globally were experiencing similar challenges brought about by the

COVID-19 pandemic, so the results of the investigation will likely resonate with a large

group of educators and may be considered standard. Moreover, the pandemic leadership

lessons learned can be replicated in many emergencies, crises, and any future pandemics

or natural disasters.

Secondly, the sampling method that I used may be considered a weakness because

I selected participants from my professional network which may be considered narrow.

However, I consider this a strength because having that personal relationship came with a

degree of trust, which ensured that participants felt comfortable enough to share their

experiences freely, and openly, which increased the validity and truthfulness of their

interview responses. This would not have happened had I recruited strangers for the

study, regardless of how much effort I would have put to strike a rapport before the

interviews. Having a personal connection helped ensure that participants provided authentic responses to the interview questions.

Summary

In this qualitative study, I used an in-depth interview approach to investigate the perceptions of teachers and principals regarding the reasons for teacher turnover specifically during the era of COVID-19. Data were collected by conducting open-ended semi-structured interviews with 14 teacher participants and 13 principal participants from diverse schools and backgrounds. Data analysis included a digital transcription of the interview transcripts followed by a personal review of all interviews and transcripts to ensure accuracy. Transcribed data were then inductively coded, sorted, and categorized to identify themes and patterns that emerged among the participants while identifying salient quotes. Member checking was then carried out to clarify the accuracy of the interpretation and to clarify possible investigator biases before conducting a parallel comparison between teacher and principal responses to identify areas of agreement and/or maladjustment.

The remaining part of this study describes in detail the participants of the study, including their professional experiences and current positions. This is followed by a detailed analysis of the findings of the study including individual participant quotes, themes, and patterns that were identified, and a narrative comparison summarizing teacher versus principal perceptions. The final chapter discusses in detail the results of the study compared to existing research, followed by implications for policy and practice, and recommendations for future study.

Chapter IV

Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on teacher turnover; to identify strategies school leaders have used to mitigate the effects of COVID-19, and to understand teachers' and principals' perceptions of the reasons for teacher turnover, especially in the era of COVID. Specifically, this study aimed to gain a better understanding, from the teachers' perspective, of how measures instituted or foregone by schools to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 played a role in teachers' decision to stay or leave teaching. This study also sought to conduct a parallel comparative analysis of teacher perception of safety measures versus those of principals, and how this related to turnover decisions. Lastly, this study aimed to explore pandemic leadership lessons from the principals' perspective and how these lessons can be used effectively as a strategy to retain teachers.

Using my research questions as the basis for data collection, I organized this chapter into themes that emerged from the interviews. The interviews were conducted in the Spring of 2022 (January and February) when Omicron was the dominant strain of the coronavirus. During this period, cases of hospitalization and death were on the rise, and although many schools had lifted the mask mandate following the Governor's directive, certain school districts continued to require masks. It was also a time when the debate over masks dominated school board meetings, with supporters and opponents of the mandates frequently at odds.

During data collection, all interviews were recorded and transcribed using Microsoft TEAMS software. I then read and re-read the transcripts and used Dedoose for

coding and analysis. First, I systematically coded using *a priori* codes adapted from my research questions, the purpose of the study, theoretical framework; and emergent codes that arose from participant statements. Next, I categorized the interview data into themes that emerged from participant narratives to answer my research questions. The results presented here represent a synthesis of the emergent themes around the research questions, the research purpose, and the theoretical framework.

This chapter is organized into eleven sections. The chapter begins with a detailed description of the study participants including two tables summarizing teacher and principal participants (see Table 1 and Table 2). The next section focuses on the major themes around the major causes of turnover. This is followed by the section on the impact of COVID-19 on teacher turnover. Subsequent sections include the impact of safety protocols on turnover, teacher support, the impact of instructional decisions, learning gaps, the impact of social interactions, advice to principals, and principal and pandemic leadership lessons, in that order. The chapter concludes with an executive summary of the major themes identified in this chapter.

Detailed Description of Participants

Teacher Participants

Ali is an Asian male in his fifth year in education. He holds a bachelor's degree and currently teaches at a major suburban (city-large) school district in the Gulf Coast region. Before transferring to his current school, Ali taught at another medium-size suburban school district. He is a middle school teacher on a campus serving over 1100 students. According to his campus demographics, 79% of the students are classified as economically disadvantaged. About 41% of the teachers at the school have over 10 years

of experience, 23% have between 5 and 10 years while the rest have less than five years of experience. Ali wanted to become a teacher because of the influence that his college professor had on him, and the desire to help young people just like he was helped when in college.

Mary is a Caucasian female in her 14th year in education. Over the years, Mary has taught in three different high schools including teaching General Education Development (GED) classes through a community college. Currently, Mary teaches high school mathematics at a major suburban (suburban-large) school district in the Gulf Coast region. School demographic figures show that the school is predominantly Black and Hispanic with these two groups making up 78% of the student population. The school serves over 2600 students with 40% of them classified as economically disadvantaged, and 52% classified as At-risk.

Alison is a Caucasian female in her 22nd year of teaching. She holds a master's degree and has taught in four different schools. Before becoming a teacher, Alison worked as a teacher assistant and a teaching fellow at the University while earning her master's degree. Currently, she is a teacher at a major suburban school district serving over 43,000 students. She teaches at a predominantly Black and Hispanic high school, with Blacks making 36% of the student population and Hispanics making 54%. Over 70% of the students at her school are classified as At-risk, and about 70% are economically disadvantaged.

John is a Caucasian male in his 8th year of teaching. He holds a master's degree and a principal certificate. Before becoming a teacher, John worked as an engineer but quickly realized that he had a calling to change the lives of young people. He did

substitute teaching before getting certified to become a teacher. Currently, John serves as a content specialist at a high school in a major suburban school district serving over 52,000 students. According to the campus demographics, 68% of his students are classified as economically disadvantaged, and 37% are classified as At-risk. Over 86% of the students at the school are Hispanic.

Sophia is Caucasian female teaching at a major suburban school district serving over 27,000 students. She holds a bachelor's degree and has taught at two other schools including a middle school before moving to her current school. She is currently in her 6th year in education and serves as a team lead at a high school serving over 2000 students. According to the campus demographics, 52% of the students are economically disadvantaged, 50% are At-risk, and 80% are minorities.

Juan is Hispanic male teaching in a major urban school district where he also serves as a team leader in his department. He is in his 9th year of education and previously taught in public charter schools. He holds a master's degree and currently teaches in a large secondary school serving over 2300 students in grades 9-12. The campus demographics include 92% minority enrollment with Hispanics making 79% of the student population, 11% Black, and 8% White. Over 70% of the students are classified as economically disadvantaged.

Amelia is an Asian female with a doctorate serving in a major urban district. She has been teaching for 10 years, all at the high school level. Besides her current school, Amelia also taught in two other schools. Currently, Amelia also serves as the department chair at her campus, a large 9-12 school serving over 2900 students. Campus demographics include 19% White, 43% Hispanic, 29% Black, and 7% Asian. About 57%

of the students are classified as economically disadvantaged, 56% as At-risk, and 13% with limited English Proficiency.

Nancy identifies herself as a White/Hispanic female. She has a master's degree and has been teaching for six years. Previously, she taught in a middle school before transferring to a high school serving over 2200 students in a major suburban district serving over 52000 students. According to the campus demographics, 98% of the students are minorities with 87% Hispanic and 10% Black. Over 78% of the students are classified as economically disadvantaged, 65% At--risk, and 22% with limited English Proficiency.

Tonya is an African American female in her 11th year in education. She has a bachelor's degree and currently teaches in a large school serving over 2600 students in a major suburban school district serving over 42000 students. According to campus demographics, 90% of the students are minorities with Hispanics making 54%, and Blacks making 36% of the total enrollment. Tonya has taught in 2 other school districts before her current teaching assignment.

Liam is an African American male with a master's degree. He has been in education for 33 years and currently serves as a teacher and a coach in a large middle school in a major urban district serving over 1100 students with an 83% minority enrollment. The campus demographics include 38% Hispanic, 35% Black, and 7% Asian. About 57% of the students are economically disadvantaged and 51% are classified as At-risk. Liam has worked in 16 different schools over more than three decades in education.

Mateo identifies himself as a White/Hispanic male teaching in a major urban district. Before launching his education career, Mateo served as a journalist for many years. Before his current assignment, Mateo taught in a charter school for several years.

He is currently serving his 12th year in education and has been a teacher in both middle and high school. Mateo holds a bachelor's degree.

David is an African American male in his 18th year in education. He holds a bachelor's degree and has worked in 4 different schools in two different states. He also taught in charter schools for many years before joining the public school system. Currently, David teaches in a secondary school in a major urban district. According to campus demographics, the school's minority enrollment includes 35% Black, 38% Hispanic, and 7% Asian.

Brett is a Caucasian male in his 24th year in education. He has a bachelor's degree and teaches at a major urban district. He has been teaching at his current school for 14 years. Over the years, Brett has taught in 3 different schools, all at the secondary level. He has previously been a department chair for many years and currently serves as an informal advisor to new teachers. Campus demographics include 72% minority enrollment including 28% Black and 45% Hispanic in a school with over 2700 students in grades 9-12.

Donna is a Caucasian female in her 30th year of teaching. She has taught in two different schools and school districts, both at the secondary level. Her first teaching job was in a major suburban district serving over 52,000 students. Currently, she teaches in a major urban school district at a school where 89% of the students are minorities and 60% are economically disadvantaged. Although Donna has a master's degree and principal certification, she chose to remain in the classroom because she believes that classroom teachers have much more impact on students than administrators do.

A summary of all the teacher participants is shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1

Teacher Participant Information

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Highest Degree	School Type	Years in Education	Current Position
Ali	Male	Asian	Bachelors	Public	5	Teacher
Mary	Female	Caucasian	Bachelors	Public	14	Teacher/Team Lead
Alison	Female	Caucasian	Masters	Public	21	Teacher
John	Male	Caucasian	Masters	Public	8	Teacher/Math Specialist
Sophia	Female	Caucasian	Bachelors	Public	6	Teacher/Team Lead
Juan	Male	Hispanic	Masters	Public	9	Teacher
Amelia	Female	Asian	Doctorate	Public	10	Teacher
Nancy	Female	White/ Hispanic	Masters	Public	6	Teacher
Tonya	Female	African American	Bachelors	Public	11	Teacher
Liam	Male	African American	Masters	Public	33	Teacher/Coach
Mateo	Male	White/ Hispanic	Bachelors	Public	12	Teacher
David	Male	African American	Bachelors	Public	18	Teacher
Brett	Male	Caucasian	Bachelors	Public	24	Teacher
Donna	Female	Caucasian	Masters	Public	30	Teacher

Principal Participants.

Julie is an Asian female with a doctoral degree. She has been in education for 22 years including 13 years in higher education, 5 years as a teacher, and 4 years in campus administration. Currently, she serves as an assistant principal at a charter school in a large charter school district in the Gulf Coast region.

Troy is an Asian male with a doctoral degree. He has been in K-12 education for 18 years including 11 years as a teacher in middle and high schools in different school districts, and 7 years in campus administration. Currently, he serves as an assistant principal at a large high school in a major urban school district. According to campus demographics, 69% of the students are classified as economically disadvantaged, and 89% are minority students.

Jessica is a Caucasian female in her 15th year of education. She holds a master's degree and previously worked in elementary and middle schools. Jessica taught for 4 years before transitioning to campus administration, where she served as an assistant principal for 6 years before assuming the principal role. Jessica has been at her current campus as an elementary school principal in a major suburban district for 5years. Campus demographics show minority student enrollment of 71% including 48% Asian and 11% Hispanic.

Andrea is a Caucasian female who recently retired after 23 years in education including 13 as a principal. After a tough COVID first year, she retired from actively serving as a campus principal, but still serves as a guest principal for a major urban district. Throughout her extensive career, Andrea served as a teacher for 3 years and an assistant principal for seven years. She holds a master's degree and worked in 7 different

schools and school districts including charter and public schools at all levels (elementary, middle, and high).

Elijah is a Caucasian male currently serving as an associate principal at a large high school in a major suburban school district. He holds a doctorate, and previously served as a principal and an assistant principal in different schools, school districts, and states. Elijah has been in education for a total of 18 years, including 5 years as a classroom teacher, 7 years as an assistant/associate principal, and 6 years as a principal. According to campus demographics, minority enrollment is at 91% including 55% Hispanic and 36% Black. In addition, 69% of students are classified as economically disadvantaged, and 70% are At-risk.

Jason is a Caucasian/American male in his 25th year in education. He has a doctorate and has been an administrator for 22 years including 15 years as a principal. Over the course of his career, Jason worked in seven different schools in all grade levels. Currently, he serves as a principal of a secondary school that he opened four years ago. According to campus demographics, 24% of the students are Black, 33% Hispanic, 37% White, and 4% Asian with a total enrollment of over 1200 students.

Lucy is a Caucasian female with a doctoral degree. She is in her 20th year in education and previously worked at seven different schools in several capacities including as a teacher and a school counselor. She was recently promoted to a principal role after serving as an assistant principal for five years. Currently, she is a principal of a secondary school in a major urban school district serving over 1100 students with an 83% minority enrollment. According to campus demographics, 35% of the students are Black, 38% are Hispanic, and 7% are Asian.

James is an African American male in his 24th year in education. He holds a master's degree and has been an administrator for 15 years including 5 years as a principal, and 9 years as a teacher. Currently, he serves in a secondary school in a major suburban school district serving over 117,000 students. The total enrollment at his school stands at over 1200 students, 90% of whom are minorities including 31% Black, 47% Hispanic, and 8% Asian. Additionally, 76% of the students are economically disadvantaged, 61% are At-risk, and 12% have limited English proficiency.

Erika is a Hispanic female in her 23rd year in education including 13 years as a principal. She has a master's degree and has worked in 5 different schools and 3 different school districts. Throughout her career, Erika served as a teacher, a counselor, an assistant principal, and a principal. She has always worked at elementary schools, mostly leading dual-language schools. Currently, she serves as the principal of an elementary school serving over 700 students in a large suburban school district serving over 20,000 students. According to campus demographics, 54% of the students are Hispanic, while 39% are White.

Jacob is an African American male with a master's degree. He has been in education for 21 years, serving in various capacities including classroom teacher for 6 years, assistant principal for 10 years, and principal for 5 years. Currently, Jacob serves as an assistant principal in a secondary school serving over 2600 students. Campus demographics include 42% Black, 36% Hispanic, 16% White, and 4% Asian.

Amy is an African American female in her 20th year in education. She holds a master's degree and has worked in six different schools and school districts. Amy served for 6 years as a teacher, 2 years as a coach, 4 years as an assistant principal, and 8 years

as a principal. Throughout her protracted career, she worked in elementary and secondary schools as well as public charter schools. Currently, she serves as a school principal at an elementary school in a large suburban district serving over 35,000 students. According to the campus demographics, the total minority enrollment is 94% with Blacks making up 43% of the student population, Hispanic 40%, and Asians 11%. Over 85% of the students are classified as economically disadvantaged, and 72% are At-risk.

Alex is a Hispanic male with a master's degree and is in his 27th year in education. Over the years, he has served in several capacities including a teacher, a magnet coordinator, and a principal. Currently, Alex is in his 11th year as a campus principal including 5 years at his current school, a large middle school with over 1400 students. Campus demographics show that the school has a total minority enrollment of 87% including 34% Black and 52% Hispanic. Slightly over 60% of the students are classified as economically disadvantaged, and 54% of them are At-risk.

Lucas is an African American male in his 22nd year in education. He holds a master's degree and has held several positions over the years in different schools and school districts including teacher, director of instruction, assistant principal, summer school principal, and principal. Overall, he has 18 years of experience in campus administration including five years as a principal. Currently, Lucas is serving his 3rd year as the principal of a large middle school serving over 1500 students. According to campus demographics, 55% of the students are Hispanic, 16% are White, 14% are Black, and 10% are Asian. About 62% of the students are economically disadvantaged while 52% are At-risk.

A summary of all the principal participants is shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2

Principal Participant Information

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Highest Degree	School Type	Years in Education	Years in Administration	Current Position
Julie	Female	Asian	Doctorate	Charter	22	5	Assistant Principal
Troy	Male	Asian	Doctorate	Public	21	7	Assistant Principal
Jessica	Female	Caucasian	Masters	Public	15	11	Principal
Andrea	Female	Caucasian	Masters	Charter	23	20	Principal
Elijah	Male	Caucasian	Doctorate	Public	18	13	Associate Principal
Jason	Male	Caucasian/ American Indian	Doctorate	Public	25	22	Principal
Lucy	Female	Caucasian	Doctorate	Public	20	5.5	Principal
James	Male	African American	Masters	Public	24	15	Principal
Erika	Female	Mexican American	Masters	Public	23	15.5	Principal
Jacob	Male	African American	Masters	Public	21	15	Assistant Principal
Amy	Female	African American	Masters	Public	20	12	Principal
Alex	Male	Hispanic	Masters	Public	27	20	Principal
Lucas	Male	African American	Masters	Public	22	18	Principal

Major causes of turnover

As previously stated, the purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on teacher turnover. In chapter two, I detailed the main reasons for teacher turnover from the available literature. During my interviews, many of those reasons were repeated, but while there was agreement on most of those reasons between teachers and

principals, there were also some notable differences. The most recurring themes from the

teachers' perspective were principal support, proximity to work, lack of teachers' voice,

lack of respect for their professionalism, student discipline, and the overall culture of the

school. The most common recurring themes from the principals' perspective were

teachers moving up due to promotion, moving out of town because of a spouse

relocating, career changes, support, or teachers not being a "good fit." In areas of

agreement, principal support was described as central to teacher decision-making by both

groups before, and more importantly, during COVID. For example, in response to what

would make him leave his current school before the pandemic, John stated that:

> I would know I would leave if I felt like there was no administrative support for
>
> the teachers. If I felt like they were trying to do more focusing on just students
>
> and not considering the teachers' perspective and what they might be experiencing
>
> in the classroom, for example, always assuming the student is just right.

Julie repeated a similar message when she stated:

> Prior to COVID I mean, in general, I would say they [Teachers] were unhappy
>
> with where they were working. I think a lot of the time it's the support. When I've
>
> had experienced teachers come to our school, well, it's often because they didn't
>
> feel supported in the other school. They just felt like they're, they have no voice.
>
> So, I think that was probably the biggest thing.

Juan also describes how he ended up transferring to a different school because of poor

leadership, and a feeling that the visions were not aligned. He stated that:

> There was definitely not a lot of support for the teachers. So almost kind of a
>
> hostile work environment and I just didn't see myself growing as an educator

anymore at that school. I felt like I needed to move on to a place that provided more support.

Understandably, teachers who felt supported at their campuses were more likely to stay even during the pandemic, because they felt their administration had done enough within their power to support them. For example, in describing how turnover decisions have changed during the COVID-19 pandemic, Mary declared:

> I wouldn't leave my school for another school at this point like there's no way I would do that because I am still in the best place that I could be right now…. so I wouldn't ever leave here for another teaching job. But I have considered possibly not teaching anymore just because they have made it impossible, like the proverbial "They." Basically, TEA [Texas Education Agency] and the people who run it! Uhm, the people who haven't been in a classroom forever….We are doing the same things we did before COVID, during COVID, and it's not working, and we are still doing it!

Mary's frustration stemmed from the fact that TEA was still requiring schools to assess students this year in the middle of the pandemic and amid the well-documented learning loss among students. To meet compliance requirements from the TEA, school districts are pushing principals to assess students so they can have data, which, according to Mary has no meaning since it will falsely show that teachers are not teaching. Nevertheless, the support that Mary received from her administrative team ensured that she felt confident enough to stay at her job. Similarly, in describing administrative support and how it played a role in her decision to continue teaching, Sophia stated:

They do care about us as teachers. As far as the leadership, they are always trying their best to make do with what the TEA is telling them that they need to be doing. I feel like they support us and my principal even said, you know, if you have to take too many days off work for COVID and you run out of days she's like, I have 300 plus days. She's like you can have some of my days if you need them and so they support us at the school that I'm at.

Principals Versus Teachers

Some of the major areas of disagreement or mismatch on the reasons for turnover between teachers and principals revolved around teachers' voices, respect from administrators, and the desire to be treated like professionals. While this was a recurring theme among teacher participants, principal participants hardly mentioned it. For example, Alison described a desire to be treated like a professional and allowed to make professional decisions. For her:

Leaving usually comes down to the point of there's a conflict, either in teaching philosophy or management style or even just, I mean, anymore they call it respect, but I call it, you know professionalism is usually what pushes me to leave when there comes a point where I have more bad days than good when I don't feel like the admin is at least giving me a fair hearing. Or when I feel like at some point, I am not a professional anymore, they don't trust me, they don't trust my professional decision and it's more like I didn't go to college, I'm not a responsible adult. I become just kind of this, you know little machine that they want me to do it their way, and whatever I do is not right unless it's their way.

Some teachers also thought that principals were aloof from the realities of the classroom and that once "they go up" or get promoted to administration, they tend to forget what it was like to be in the classroom.

As previously noted, before COVID, one of the most common themes related to teacher turnover from the perspective of the principals was teachers moving up owing to promotions. As an example, Troy stated that they had an incredibly low turnover, and when they did have turnover, it was almost always a case of promotions. Similarly, Jessica explained that at her campus, people "left for retirement, if they moved a physical location like they moved cities or they were moving in, Houston is so big, a different part of Houston. We had very few transfers to other district campuses. Our campus has a low transfer rate," she concluded. It would seem from most principal responses that though they acknowledged teacher turnover as being an endemic problem, they did not see much of it at their campuses.

Impact of COVID-19 on Teacher Turnover

Most of the participants agreed that COVID-19 created an unprecedented amount of stress on teachers, but its exact impact on turnover was very varied among the participants, though there were some recurring themes. On how COVID-19 has changed the reasons for turnover, most participants first stated that the reasons have not changed much, but then added that the biggest issue was "fear of the unknown" as COVID is still highly active and new variants are still being discovered. However, administrative support was still the dominant narrative implying that the level of stress or burnout was lessened or exacerbated depending on the amount of support the administration provided and this, in turn, influenced turnover decisions. For example, Juan stated:

I don't think they really have changed for me to leave. Because I still feel like even after the COVID pandemic happened, a lot of teachers have been very stressed and we're having a hard time transitioning into all the rapid changes. But the school that I was in was supporting us left and right and being very understanding with the situation we were in, so their ideals were realistic, and their goals were realistic.

Donna went a little further and explained the connection between COVID-19, school culture, and administrative support. She elucidated:

I don't think that COVID would drive a change in school. I think culture. And I, you know the big thing about COVID is do you feel safe? And everybody is really on a different continuum of what they feel like they need to do to be safe. I think that the issue is not the COVID and the safety of the COVID. I think the issue is how does the administration support where you are in what your safety needs are…... I don't think that it's COVID that is driving teachers away from education. I think it's how the administration supports and recognizes and encourages everyone to be mindful of each other's safety within the school community.

Donna's reaction encapsulates the overarching role that principals play in teacher turnover decisions and backs up previous studies that identified administrative support as critical in minimizing turnover (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Johnson et al., 2012; Kraft & Papay, 2014)

Some principal participants also expressed similar viewpoints. For example, Jacob, while explaining how COVID-19 has changed the reasons for turnover opined that "a whole lot of it, honestly has to do with the leadership and the messaging of that

leadership and whether or not you were going to you know, add to the fear." While

acknowledging that leader support was paramount, Jessica related it to her own

experience and how it played a role in teacher resilience (Day & Hong, 2016). She

explained:

> So, at my campus specifically, they [reasons for turnover] didn't. I had very little
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> turnover. The people that were there were hopeful it was going to end, and I think
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> that I think the teachers still are. I think that they are a pretty hopeful group in
>
> general.

While expressing that she did not think COVID-19 changed the reasons for turnover,

Amy had a unique perspective. She stated that COVID-19 just made things more

convenient in the sense that there are more opportunities because there are more funds

available. To clarify her point, she gave an example of her school where she was able to

hire an interventionist due to the availability of the Elementary and Secondary School

Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds that the federal government provided as part of the

Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act to help schools cope with

the effects of the pandemic. So, for her, the difference was because "there is a notion of

more availability."

Another surprising reason for teachers to stay was the realization that COVID-19

was everywhere, and the need for a paycheck to support their families. These teachers felt

that despite the dangers caused by COVID-19, they still needed to pay their bills, and so

for them, the need for a paycheck outweighed the risks due to COVID. Furthermore, they

reasoned that COVID-19 was a global pandemic, so regardless of where you worked, you

were likely to face the same challenges. For example, in response to how COVID-19 would impact his turnover decisions, Juan responded:

> I assumed that [COVID] was gonna be everywhere at that time. Probably if I left that school I don't know if I would have gone to another school just because I feel like I would have run into the same problems.

Several teacher participants mentioned the need for a paycheck as a reason they kept teaching despite all the risks. For example, Nancy explained that she has recently bought a house and needed a paycheck to pay her mortgage. Alison also stated that she couldn't afford to stay home because she needed to pay her bills. On the other hand, while not specifically addressing the need for a paycheck as the reason teachers stayed, Jessica introduced a remarkably interesting dynamic. Describing how people assumed teaching after losing their jobs due to COVID and the need for a paycheck, she predicts what may happen when COVID is no longer a threat. She explained:

> I think that we also are experiencing people becoming teachers out of need…And we're taking on a whole group of people that need jobs. So, a lot of alternative certifications. A lot of I got laid off from my other position, you know, and they need a steady job with insurance, so they become a teacher. So, I would probably predict that when COVID balances out and other industries rebound that they'll bail. I don't think we are recruiting. I think we are recruiting for immediate need. We're not recruiting for longevity in teaching right now.

Safety and Health

Safety and health concerns were a dominant theme around how COVID impacted teacher decisions to leave the classrooms, especially among older teachers, the

immunocompromised, or those who had elderly parents or family members. Teachers gave examples of several of their colleagues who opted to retire early, and principals gave examples of some of their teachers who, despite assurances that they would be supported did not think it wise to take the risk. For example, Amelia described several veteran teachers who decided to retire early due to safety concerns, or because they had family members who had health issues. Similarly, Julie stated that "since COVID people are leaving because of unsafe standards and a lack of communication about safety." To emphasize the importance of safety in teacher decisions, Ali stated:

> As of right now, there is 101 reason to quit, to be honest. Whether it's safety over health concerns…I mean to me, health has to be number one. The fact that the masks aren't mandatory, there is a new variant every month, there are many different things going on. So yeah, there's way too many reasons to quit right now.

Similarly, while describing the decision of some of his teachers to quit, Troy explained how the uncertainty caused by the pandemic forced them to make difficult choices. He explained that "we had two teachers who said I would rather stay home to take care of my young children than to go back and teach another year that looks like [a] COVID teaching year." Elijah made a similar observation when he stated:

> I think that people who were in the bubble of retirement have accelerated retirement and we're seeing a lot of people that as soon as they're becoming eligible getting out. We see people because of their fear and there's a lack of understanding around COVID and how you could get it and what it would mean in who's going to be hospitalized and those types of things that lead to fear? Also, people are fearful in the educational environment where we have, for instance, the

school I'm at now is almost 2900 students and 250 staff members. That's a lot of

people in a small, confined space. And a lot of unknowns. Anytime we place

people in an environment with a lot of unknowns that leads to fear and

speculation and so we see people getting out of the profession.

On the same question, Alex also explained how one of his teachers resigned due to fear of

bringing COVID home to her elderly parents. He stated:

I did have one teacher that left last year because she was just definitely afraid of

COVID and also after she shared her situation with me and, you know, had

elderly parents, had people that were, you know, not doing well health-wise at

home. She was just very afraid that she was going to bring it back to them…. and

she was close to retirement age, so she just felt like this is it. I just don't wanna

take any more chances.

Clearly, concerns over health and safety were a major cause of turnover during COVID-

19. This affirms Pressley's (2021) study which found that teaching anxiety caused by fear

of contracting the virus was a major cause of burnout among teachers leading to turnover

intentions.

Stressed, Burnout, Tired

Many principals mentioned stress and burnout as being the main drivers of

teacher turnover during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the stress and burnout were

caused by having to teach in a hybrid environment while trying to stay safe and meet the

many demands that come with being a teacher. Julie best captured this situation when she

said:

I think that there are some things that are totally out of the control of a principal like the policies of masks or no masks, or the kid is sick so they can't come to school for five days, or they're online or whatever the systems were. I think that left a lot of teachers feeling burnout. Being pulled in 5 million different directions especially now with the teacher shortage and all of the needs to be flexible. You know you might be teaching something that is not your area like you are a math teacher and really good at teaching math, but now you got to help teach some science because you happen to be certified in it, or because there's no science teacher and so you know, here you are prepping something you've never prepped for. And then the resources, I mean, they're not all there. Or if they're there, you need a PD to teach you how to make that go well. Then there are a lot of expectations for testing. Still, a lot of expectations for kids learning, which I get, but without this support a lot of people, they're just burned out. They're tired. They can't switch like that and then also to keep their level of expectation of what high-quality instruction looks like. I think teachers know at the end of the day what they're giving their kids is not what they've given them in the past. And then they break it and they're disappointed by it. I mean they tried their best, but they just know it's not what they would. That's not the ideal.

While explaining how COVID-19 had exacerbated teacher burnout, Andrea gave the main reason that teachers leave during the pandemic as a lack of support. She explains that schools and school districts are not taking care of the social and emotional needs of their teachers which makes them "frustrated, scared and angry." In describing the dilemma caused by COVID-19, Elijah observed that "It seems like teachers feel a lot

of stress. It's like it's a triple whammy. You got the people retiring as quickly as I can in the stress of the current situation and then a lack of students in the pipeline to become teachers." Perhaps Jason had the best explanation of how COVID-19 has changed the dynamics of teacher turnover. He stated:

> Well, I think the pandemic itself has caused people not to be able to get along very well, for some reason….I have this year has been one of the most challenging years in just getting parents and students to work together for the common goal of education. And I had a couple of teachers retire at Christmas time. I've never had a teacher retire at Christmas time in all my 20-plus years of education. They're doing it this year because they're just worn out, tired, fighting.

While fear of the unknown was culpable during COVID-19, Jacob also talked about how misinformation, disinformation, and political messaging impacted people's perception of safety during the pandemic. On top of all these, he described how teachers were being asked to do so much under exceedingly difficult conditions including hybrid teaching. He explained:

> The adjustment that teachers were required for some given their background, psychologically it may have been a little too much… Being able to facilitate instruction both in a classroom setting as well as virtually and having to balance both of those at the same time…. that was a heck of a lot to ask of everybody, and being accountable, the frustrations that came with being accountable for those students who were in a virtual setting didn't have the teacher in front of them. General fear, you know, just for their own health and being concerned with possibly taking COVID back to their family.

For his part, Alex described how state and district mandates meant that teachers were operating under very stressful conditions and suggested alleviating some of those by removing some compliance pieces. He stated:

> Everyone has been under a tremendous amount of stress, and there's been a lot of anxiety and I think that as these things started to build and accumulate, teachers did not really ever get a break from any of it….So I really strongly feel that right now we're seeing a lot of teachers that have a lot of I was gonna say post-traumatic stress disorder. But even, but we're not even past the trauma yet. 'cause, we're still in this pandemic right now. We're seeing pandemic fatigue….. A lot of the things that we're still required of teachers from the state, or the district continue to pile up and teachers just felt very, very overwhelmed. And I see that, you know it's just become too much and it's not because they don't love the kids. It's not because they don't love to teach, it's not. It has nothing to do with the actual profession of teaching. It had a lot more to do with just the stress of the pandemic and also a lot of the compliance pieces that were coming down that they just felt like I don't have time to do this. Is it really necessary?

Impact of Safety Protocols on Turnover

On measures that the school leaders put in place to support teachers during the pandemic, there was a general agreement among the principals that they did all that they could within the limits of their power. Most of the principals agreed that matters to do with safety were decided at the district level, but what happened at the campus level had the biggest impact on teacher decision-making and perception of support. For example, two teacher participants from the same school district but working on different campuses

had completely different views when asked about principal support. While Mary was full of praise for her principal for the phenomenal support he accorded his teachers, describing him as "the best principal who is willing to fight for us for things that they know are right," Tonya felt very frustrated with her administration's apparent lack of visibility and support, noting:

> I feel like it's just been hands-off, I feel like the admin is not there, I don't even get to see them, I don't know, maybe they are overwhelmed, or I just don't want to think about it. Sometimes I just want to come with no expectation because it's totally hands-off. I guess sometimes I wanted to go in, just not expecting too much just throughout the years 'cause I did have a lot of high expectations and now it's just like, well, I guess this is just how it's going to be….. It was just like survival, just trying to get through without complaining and just trying to make it to the end of the school year.

Nevertheless, the consensus was that there were enough safety measures that school districts put in place to support teachers and mitigate the impact of COVID-19. Most of these measures were universal because they came from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the Texas Education Agency (TEA). In addition, the federal government provided funds to help school districts plan for safe return and operation. These measures included Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) with the mask becoming the biggest symbol for these measures, and the most divisive. The politicization of COVID-19 and its mitigation strategies meant that different districts took different approaches when it came to safety protocols. In this section, I will describe some specific

safety protocols adopted by different campuses, and the impact those safety protocols had on teacher decision-making, both from the teachers' and principals' perspectives.

Principal Perspectives

As stated previously, most mandates were decided at the district level, and principals stated as such. For example, Julie explained that some of her district policies included wearing masks, air purifiers in every room, sanitizers, social distancing, and virtual meetings, among others. In addition to these, Troy explained cleaning period by period, one-way hallways to minimize traffic, and extra masks for teachers to try to ease their concerns. Jessica explained that in addition to all the safety mandates coming from the district, there was "a campus committee that took the district expectations and catered them to our campus." A similar protocol was adopted by Alex who stated "I put together a committee of administrators, teachers, and parents. I wanted everyone to know what we were doing. We're gonna do this together and we call it the reopening task force. And so, we really came up with some strong systems." To minimize interaction between students, James also explained how they had grab and go breakfast, while Lucas added that they also had staggered release procedures, contact tracing protocols, and a "whole dossier of safety protocols on campus."

On what impact the safety protocols had on teacher decisions, most principals thought that teachers appreciated those efforts as it made them feel like the schools were doing everything possible to keep them safe. For example, Alex explained that teachers "appreciated it because they saw all the effort that went into it. They saw all the changes that we made. They felt like we were taking every step that we could to protect them." Alex's statement exemplifies the significance of the symbolic interactionism theoretical

paradigm that guided this study. As previously stated, the symbolic component focuses on safety protocols which include all the steps taken by school districts to ensure staff safety during COVID.   Erika stated that the "teachers definitely appreciated….it made them feel comfortable to work," Lucy simply stated that the impact on teachers was huge, while P6 was a little more detailed, explaining:

> If they [teachers] did not feel safe if they didn't feel like we were addressing the concerns, well, I think they would leave in a heartbeat. But at least that minimum expectation of yeah, we're doing everything we can to make sure teachers are safe, and they feel comfortable coming to work. I think that's a that really helped them stay. It really did.

Teacher Perspectives

Teacher participants while describing the safety protocols implemented at their schools complimented their districts, but they had very varied responses on what impact those safety policies had on their decision-making process. Mary, for example, while acknowledging safety was of concern bluntly stated that "I needed money," but again mentioned that "it was probably the support of my principal because like I said, he would absolutely back us up," suggesting that regardless of the safety protocols put in place, principal support was still paramount. Alison had a remarkably similar response, stating "Honestly because I have to have a paycheck to feed my family, I mean, I'll be honest." However, she was also quick to add that the decision by the district to give COVID leave "definitely made it a lot more, I can't say easy, but mind relieving to stay up." The other positive thing that made it easy to stay, according to Alison was the district setting up vaccine and testing sites that made it easy to test locally in a smaller setting. For Tonya,

apart from needing to work, she stated that she was "very hesitant about returning with everything that was going on" and added "I think last year I do feel like we had some protocols as far as safety in place. The mask mandate, disinfecting the place that did help. That did make me feel a little bit safer…I wish we still had that [mandate] in place because I think it was effective."

Other teacher participants also credited the support more than the safety protocols themselves in their decisions to stay. For example, Sophia and Juan stated that the support from the administration team kept them going as they felt that they were all learning together. Another layer of support that teachers felt helped them to stay on was the mask mandate that many districts had at the beginning of the pandemic. Even though masks were politicized, some teachers felt that keeping the mandate made them feel supported and more likely to keep teaching. For example, Amelia stated, "Then there was the mask mandate even as I told you, even when the state decided not to make it mandatory, our district went above and beyond and that is I know not all the teachers kind of accepted that, but I support the district on that for my health, so I felt fully supported." Brett also explained that "When the district made masks mandatory, that took a lot of pressure off me as a teacher" while David explained:

> Masks, weekly testing, doing all the other rules or regulations for COVID that made me feel more comfortable of saying okay, I can continue in education because like I said my mother is getting old and I don't want to take anything to her that will cause any illness, so them making it mandatory for students to wear their mask and now they're doing the testing, that regular basis testing…. Those things made me feel more comfortable returning to work.

Similar sentiments were echoed by Nancy who added that the initial re-opening plans that started with 100% virtual were particularly helpful in her decision-making. She stated:

> I was really appreciative of the social distancing of the mask mandate and of you know, even going hybrid or virtual for the first semester for the first month. That was very helpful for my anxiety and helpful for our own health as teachers and students….[so when] the governor announced that schools and public systems cannot have a mask mandate, and then my anxiety went high.

In conclusion, though there was a consensus on the role the safety protocols played in keeping everyone safe, there was a clear mismatch between teacher and principal perceptions on what impact the safety protocols played in teacher decision-making.

Teacher Support

Principals' Perspective

In this section, I describe the perception of the principals concerning the support they gave their teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. This will be followed by the perception of the teachers and a brief comparison of areas of agreement/disagreement. When asked to describe the support they gave teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic, most principals provided varied accounts, but the constant theme was personal check-ins, socio-emotional support, instructional support, PPE availability, district COVID leave days, and general administrative and parental support. For example, Julie explained how just checking on the teachers and taking a genuine interest in wanting to know how they were doing was important, stating:

I think a lot of it is just checking on them, you know, on a very personal level, how are you? You know and giving them an opportunity to talk or to even you know, just notice. Hey, I noticed you're a little down today. Do you need a break?

Jason repeated the same theme when he explained how he helped teachers by "just being more understanding, giving more kindness, helping them more, caring about them more, making sure they have a support system… just being very appreciative to them." For her part, Erika described herself as offering her teachers a "human connection or human side" where they can just come in when stressed and have someone that will listen and give reassurance. In addition to the personal connection, Alex gave a detailed description of the support he provided. He stated:

I feel like I've been very empathetic, you know, right now more than ever they needed somebody just to listen to them. Uh, and I've always been very quick to let them know like your family comes first. Your health comes first. Your mental health comes first. Those things you have to be the best version of you in order to come in and just be the teacher that we need for the kids. So, I think the teachers have appreciated and responded to that. And then during the pandemic, they've also seen that myself and my leadership team, we were in the trenches with them. You know, we were not hiding in our offices. We were scared too. But guess what, we were covering multiple classrooms in the auditorium and the cafeteria. You wouldn't find us in our office. You'd find us out there with the teachers teaching or with the students. And doing these things. And I think that went a very long way with my staff and seeing that we weren't just talking but walking the talk. Everything that we're asking of them. We were doing the same. And if a teacher

needs a reprieve, if they needed help. If they needed a time out, whatever,

someone on my team was there to give it to them and I think they really

responded to that and really felt like we were holding their hands. We were all

holding hands together and we're going to get through this thing together. So, I

think the most important thing that I did was just listen and then I just jumped in

with them.

Troy described how they supported teachers with the new virtual schooling by

providing tools like instructional materials, modern technology, webcams, and

microphones, and training them on the Learning Management System (LMS) adopted by

the district. In addition, they offered social and emotional support by starting a biking

club as a way to connect and make the working environment more enjoyable. Jessica

explained how in addition to administrative support there was an "upturn" in parental

support, stating that in her community, parents "kind of backed off of criticizing the

teachers" and were instead so appreciative of them. Another recurring theme was

transparency. There was a general feeling that open communication was important in

making sure that teachers felt supported. For example, Andrea explained how she was

open to her staff regarding expectations, but how she was also very transparent by letting

them know to take care of themselves and their families first, and in return, "they

supported our kids. They were glad to support our kids." Lucas expanded on the theme of

transparency when he stated:

I believe it's just transparency. It's allowing them the opportunity to have input on

procedures and protocols and, you know keeping it personal they have the ability

to contact me personally. You know if they have questions or feel sick in the

mornings, I mean to shoot me a text, give me a call talking to them, and keeping

them abreast of updates with regards to COVID…. you know making sure that

our procedures were very transparent and making sure that we were actually

implementing those procedures and communicated to our teachers our numbers or

procedures.

Elijah explained how the availability of PPE for all teachers and the district initiative on

COVID leave took the pressure off of the teachers because they wouldn't have to worry

about running out of their sick days if they contracted COVID. On district-run initiatives,

Jason also explained how free testing and daily sanitization helped to ease teachers'

safety concerns.

Teachers' Perspective

On teacher perception of principal support during COVID-19, several themes

emerged. While some teachers were full of praise for their principals, some were not

incredibly happy and thought they could do more. Some teachers also had the

understanding that the principals' hands were sometimes tied as they had to meet district

and state mandates. One of the recurring themes was a feeling that students received way

too much grace, and that the same was not given to the teachers. Another key area of

support was on administrators actually going to classrooms and teaching under a mask

just to experience it for themselves. Then some teachers reported social-emotional

support from their principals. Another common theme that emerged was a lack of

communication from the administration which left some teachers feeling unsupported.

In describing the support he received from his principal, for example, Ali

explained that "they have their hands tied and they're trying to look at both sides of the

coin…[but] I feel like they can be leaning a little bit towards the teachers as much they are on the students." Similarly, Mary while full of praise for her principal for the phenomenal support he accorded his teachers, also added that "they do have us do the things that are mandated, because of course they're mandated." In describing principal support, Alison explained how her principal was open to staff and communicated the expectations in a timely fashion including being very understanding when teachers approached her seeking to break their contracts. In Texas, there are penalties for breaking a contract, but Alison added:

> As far as I know, she hasn't gone for any of those, like they've been able to tell her, hey look, this is my family situation and this is what's going on you know. And the ones I know well enough, who would have said something about it were actually, you know, very happy with whatever you know had come out of that conversation.

However, she was also of the opinion that students were given too much grace, "more grace than some of us are comfortable with," and even though she felt supported whenever she needed to vent, or when she sent a student out for discipline problems, she felt that the kids got a lot more support than the teachers.

In describing how his administration supported teachers by getting to the trenches, John was full of praise for his principal. He explained:

> I think the biggest support that myself and the teachers experienced from our administrators were Uh, them coming in the classroom and actually doing what the teachers were doing. So, like teaching in a virtual environment. So, like kind of you can't really suggest ways to improve instruction in a way that you haven't

taught yourself or done yourself and allowing teachers to see you become

vulnerable and try it and see that it's not as easy as, hey turn on your camera. So, I

think when that happened it created a feedback loop because now your feedback

was valued, and it was something that had meaning because we knew that you

had experienced what it was like to be on that end. So, I think that was a big win

for our administration and supporting our teachers in COVID.

Emotional support was also mentioned as an area that some principals excelled in,

and it really made a difference in teachers' perception of support. For example, Juan

explained how his principal would have meetings to discuss district expectations but

would also let them know to "take care of yourself, take care of your students and try to

be as sympathetic as possible" even as you try to meet your expectations within reason."

Another form of support was when the principal reached out to individual teachers via

what Amelia called "individualized emails" which helped the teachers to feel appreciated.

However, she also laments that often, there was a lack of communication regarding

district expectations, and last-minute directives which left teachers feeling very

frustrated. Liam also had kind words for his principal saying "I think she has been a great

principal because she constantly tells you I want everybody to be safe. Everybody has

been treated right. So, they've been more, even more than just a leader, they've been

almost like a caregiver." Similar sentiments were made by David stating:

> We have Deans over curriculum, and we always have PLC meetings where they're
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> updating us on information. Even the principal, l speak to her almost every
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> morning in the hallway. She asks me how everything is going. It is open

communication, and they are there to assist me in anything I need to do as far as students' curriculum and instruction.

Explaining the measures that his administration took to support them, Brett described how the administration walked around a lot, supported students, kept class sizes small, supplied safety tools like masks, Plexiglas, and sanitizers, and made sure they had all things they needed to stay safe in class. As an example of how principal support played the biggest role in teacher decisions, Donna gave an example of a time she was teaching virtually via Microsoft TEAMS when she took her mask off for a minute just so that her students could see her facial expression. At that point, a student took a screenshot of her and emailed it to her principal to complain that she was teaching without her mask off even though the student was not in the building. Here is how Donna describes how the situation was managed by her principal:

> …So my principal forwarded that to me. And so I went down and said, what do you want me to do about this? He said, I just want you to be aware right now. This is small potatoes. Uhm, your name was on it, I thought you'd be interested to see what was happening. I don't, I know you're doing what you need to be doing. I know you're teaching behind a shield, I know your kids are on the other side of the room but I just want you to see what I'm getting. So it wasn't me being called out by him. It was being called out by a student, which I felt like was completely inappropriate. I felt like he [the principal] was very supportive. He was aware, you know, he was aware something was brought to his attention. He brought it to my attention, but to get all wound up about it. No.

Donna concluded by saying that her administration has all been phenomenal in supporting them and credited the school district for taking measures that made it safe to return to work.

Impact of Instructional Decisions

Apart from safety protocols and administrative support, another factor that had a considerable influence on teacher decision-making was the mode of teaching adopted by the school districts during the pandemic. At the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, as there were still so many unknowns about COVID-19, almost all schools went 100% virtual. At the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, however, there were varied modes of instruction that were adopted by different school districts. In this section, I describe how the different modes of teaching impacted teacher decisions, first from the teachers' perspective, then from the principals' perspective.

Teachers' Perspective

First, all the participants agreed that hybrid teaching, in which the teacher simultaneously instructs both virtual and face-to-face students was the most difficult style of instruction. In hybrid teaching, teachers were required to teach both via the computer to the virtual kids and in-person to those kids that were in the school building. To do this, teachers had to be in a position where all students could see them. This meant using external web cameras and microphones, and it sometimes forced the teacher to teach from a desk. More often, teachers reported that the in-person students felt neglected as the teacher concentrated on the virtual students. It was such a difficult balancing act because no matter what you did, one group always felt left out, which made teachers very frustrated. Some of the words used to describe this mode of teaching include stressful,

difficult, burnout, high stress, very tough, and frustrating among other similar phrases, even for those teachers who consider themselves tech-savvy. Ali for example described hybrid teaching as "very tough teaching students while in the classroom and you have to be online," explaining that all students did not know how to use technology, so you had to teach them that as well. Amelia described 100% virtual instruction at the beginning of the pandemic as "very stressful and very challenging" because of the many recent changes and adjustments to the lesson plans that happened so suddenly. Similar sentiments were expressed by Mary who stated:

> So, I had both in-person and virtual students that I had to teach, and that made it really hard because you don't teach virtual as you do in-person, so it was like having an extra prep on top of it. We had to redo everything that we had built in previous years and make it digital, so it was very hard because we were building a completely new curriculum in like no time.

Describing her experience and some of the challenges of what she called "hybrid or dual learning," Alison spoke of the frustrations she went through trying to juggle between the two groups of students. According to her, administrative demands did not help matters because they were asking her to do things beyond her control. She explained:

> I was kind of frustrated with the fact that they tried to train us, but very little training so you felt definitely overwhelmed and asked to do things very far outside your comfort zone. And then you were assessed on it, and you were assessed over a lot of things you cannot physically control…[for example], I can encourage them to have their cameras on, but I can't physically make them, I can

encourage them to talk, but I can't physically meet them and it got very, very frustrating because it felt like I was being graded on things that I can't control.

Mateo also expressed his frustration with hybrid teaching explaining that it was difficult because he had to push hard for students to do any work. He added that having no control over their online behavior in terms of participation made it even harder. He explained that only those students who had parental support at home were engaged and that some of them "were not even in front of the computer" which made it "very, very difficult." On his part, David explained the frustration he experienced teaching virtual students with no grade and accountability requirements which made it "seem like I was wasting energy because you were planning these lessons, your duty is 20 minutes, and you have these Pear deck presentations, and then you would only get 2% participation." Donna expressed related sentiments when she said, "There are a lot of expectations for education that within the hybrid environment or online environment were not realistic expectations." She added that teachers were doing the best they could while balancing their stress and emotional strain. However, Donna credits the district and her administrators for providing support systems to help them cope with these anxieties while navigating online teaching.

Principals' Perspectives

From the principals' perspective, there was a general feeling that a great deal was required of the teachers, which caused them stress, but they also thought that they did an excellent job supporting their teachers and shielding them from some of the pressures from the district and the state. For example, while explaining her district's decision to use hybrid instruction, Julie stated that "the teachers were frustrated, to say the least, and we

just tried to protect them to make sure that they felt okay." When asked what the impact of hybrid teaching was on their teachers, Troy simply responded "frustration," James described it as "extremely heartbreaking," and Lucas said that it "drained [and] was exhausting for our teachers," while Andrea stated, "it was horrible." In giving his detailed observation, Elijah deliberated:

> It causes a lot of stress and uncertainty and when you have stress and uncertainty, you have anxiety, and you have people who want some…you have a large group of a population that needs a much more stable environment, and so it leads to higher levels of turnover. People getting out pausing their professional growth and getting out for a short amount of time. I hope, I hope to see a lot of people want to come back at some point, but I also want to just say, though, that all the policies that all these things are peoples' best guess as to what is the best approach.

Describing his experience with Hybrid teaching, Jason explained that his teachers initially enjoyed the 100% virtual teaching environment, because he had spent the previous three years putting systems in place for technology usage schoolwide. To him, therefore, it was a seamless transition for his teachers. What was difficult, though, was when the district transitioned to a hybrid model. He elucidated:

> So basically, they were doing double the prep, they were doing the prep for the tactile environment in front of them, as well as prepping for those students that we're still online. And that's caused a lot of extra stress because there's not enough virtual students to actually have one teacher be all virtual. So, they would have to have an overlay class of teaching in-person and then making sure that everything's

out there at night for working with those virtual students. And that was, that was a big stressor.

For her part, Jessica explained that her campus did a dual model where parents chose to have their kids either 100% online or 100% face to face. However, because of the nature of COVID at the beginning, and the need to balance classes depending on enrollment in each model, Jessica had to constantly make changes to the roster, and by extension the teachers. As a result, she explained that:

Teachers had heightened stress every time they knew I was counting kids because they didn't know if their teaching assignment was gonna change, or if they were going to have students added, or what that would do to their classroom dynamic. Every time they would have to readjust. So even in March of 2021, I had to pull teachers from online to face to face. And that was a big shift as they hadn't taught in a face-to-face class for a year at that point.

In summary, given all that the principals discussed hybrid learning, it was not surprising that when asked what else they could have done to support teachers during the pandemic, most of them said they wished they didn't have to do hybrid teaching. The most common suggestion was to create a virtual school so we can have either 100% virtual or 100% face-to-face like the one adopted by Jessica's school. As an example, James noted that if he had a choice, he would "create a system to where if you want to teach kids online you teach online if you wanna teach the kids that come back, you teach the kids that come back because that dual-modality burned our teachers out." Likewise, Lucy expressed that she would have limited the hybrid style of teaching because "it was not effective," while Jason averred:

It would have been nice if the district or you know…They could create a virtual

school so that all those kids that decided to be virtual could just enroll in that

virtual school. I would say that would have been the biggest help to the teachers

so that they didn't have to do both and double their workload, and still, you know,

try to reach kids, I think that would have probably been the one thing that really

would have been nice to be able to do.

Learning Gaps

One of the themes that naturally arose out of the interviews was the unintended

consequence of learning gaps and loss of teaching time as a direct result of instructional

decisions made during the COVID-19 pandemic. There was a general feeling of

frustration and helplessness especially among the teacher participants when they had to

work so hard to prepare lessons but not be able to effectively deliver them. Teachers felt

that the administration gave students so much grace, and the students took full advantage

of that to game the system. This was especially true at the start of the pandemic when it

was publicly announced that grades would not count for the last half of the Spring 2020

semester. Some examples mentioned by teacher participants were students not showing

up for virtual meetings, logging in just for attendance purposes, having minimal to zero

engagement with content, and integrity issues when it came to taking online exams,

among others. These issues led to learning loss (Donnelly & Patrinos, 2021), and

unfortunately, such behaviors were more pronounced among the minority student

population. Another concern raised by one of the principal participants was the fact that

minority and bilingual students, who needed the most support were the ones more likely

to opt for a virtual school, and this exacerbated the existing achievement gap.

In this section, I explain the perceptions of the participants on the unintended consequences of widening the achievement gap as a result of COVID-19 and subsequent instructional decisions taken by school leaders. When describing some of the difficulties of hybrid instructions, Ali said there were a lot of loopholes that students used, like "there is no internet" to avoid coming to class, making online learning very tough. As if to corroborate what Ali mentioned, Sophia explained how, when her online students finally came to campus, they admitted to not paying attention when they were virtual. While explaining the challenges of online learning, Alison expounded:

> The kids were supposed to either be on campus or online. But in general, they were either online or on-campus slash online because they went back and forth depending on a lot of things, and they'll even tell you: Well, I didn't feel like getting out of bed today, so they logged in online because they knew they could log into zoom and be counted present.

Tonya had a similar experience explaining: "You would have students come in 30 minutes late or not turn the cameras on or not coming in at all and they still get attendance credit" since that was the district requirement. On his part, Mateo explained how it was difficult getting the kids to participate, saying "some students were not even on the computer", while David expressed frustration at putting so much effort to prepare lessons only to end up with "2% participation", stating "It's like the principals or the district didn't implement anything to hold the kids responsible." Elucidating how diverse student engagement was during hybrid teaching, Elijah stated:

> The big thing that happened, you know, the great students, the good students that are self-driven, that don't need the modification, motivation, they did well. Those

that were not self-motivated are the ones that were dropping, and not doing very

well, and not logging on to the Zoom sessions or not, not getting into Schoology

checking their work and making sure it was turned in.

Erika, a principal of a dual language school also expressed concern that at her campus, it

was mostly the Latino parents that were choosing to keep their kids virtual even though

"they were the ones that actually needed the most support at school." She explained how

they made home visits to encourage the parents to send their kids to school because they

were seeing the learning gaps for these students widen due to lack of home support.

Impact of Social Interactions

In times of crisis, human beings tend to find comfort by leaning on each other. In

this section, I describe the perspective of teachers on how their interactions with each

other and with the administration motivated them to keep teaching during the pandemic.

Most teachers agreed that their colleagues were the reasons that they kept pushing on

despite all the anxiety caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. When that interaction was

also positive with the administrators, there was a general net positive feeling of support

among the teachers and happiness at their job. This in turn translated to less desire of

intent to turnover. For example, Brett described teacher to teacher interactions as follows:

We really take care of each other in our department and so that interaction right

there just solidified during COVID. We would have, you know when the day was

over sometimes, I would just get everybody on a TEAMS meeting and we would

just chat and talk give chance for venting, tell me what their problems are, what's

going on so it really kept a close-knit family here.

David also described how they had an incredibly positive experience with both teachers and the principal and how that:

> interaction keeps me wanting to come back to work every day because I know if something does happen in my room, I can go to the Dean, I could go to the principal, I can go to even another teacher, and then we can get things done.

With his principal's open-door policy, David felt that she had his back. Similarly, Nancy described the close working relationship with her team, describing it as "amazing" and "super supportive" in giving each other feedback "which I don't think teachers hear enough of, and so that definitely has kept me going", while Ali explained how the support from his colleagues played a role in him staying, stating that "if it wasn't for my co-workers, I would have quit a long time ago." Perhaps it was Mary who really exposed the importance of staff interactions during the pandemic. She stated:

> Teachers leaned on teachers constantly. We were each other's psychologists we were therapists to each other like it was, and the principals too. I can't tell you how many times I've sat in my principal's office and just you know, exploded in her office with emotions. I could not have done it without any of them, honestly.

Advice to Principals

Teacher participants had a lot of advice for principals most of which centered on what they thought their principals could do better. Common themes centered on teacher support, open communication, discipline support, visibility, relationships, and evaluation. For example, John explained that principals need to meet their teachers in informal settings as well as in classrooms. He stated:

Being empathetic, and when I say empathetic, I mean don't just say oh I

understand. Well then, how could you understand if you don't live it? Right, and

your evaluation feels empty because it feels like, well, how can you provide me,

how can you tell me I need to grow in something that maybe you haven't even

grown in like you know, I haven't even tried. And if you don't do it so you know

that's another big piece, get in the classroom and do it. Try it, feel it, see what it's

like to try to balance wearing a face mask and teaching.

For her part, Nancy stated "I think it's nice to have more administration in the classroom

just to see the challenges and the difficulties," while Tonya noted "I would definitely say

be there, like go in and see what's going on in the classroom. Don't spend 5 minutes in

there and think and say OK, they are acting crazy" emphasizing that they end up not

capturing the good things happening in the classroom. Tonya also felt that principals need

to have more empathy because it feels like when "they move up, they detach [and] it feels

like they never were a teacher at all."

Along with meeting teachers informally, Juan also emphasized emotional support,

and "one-on-one talk" to make teachers feel appreciated and that their "voices and

opinions matter" especially during a global pandemic. He believed that teachers' needs

differ, but you don't get to know them unless you talk to them. For his part, Ali talked

about the importance of principals giving positive feedback to teachers whenever they see

them "going the extra mile." To this end, teachers proposed principal visibility to not only

notice the positive things but to be able to build relationships and support with discipline.

As Donna put it, "I think it's really important for principals to be visible and available"

and to be seen "working alongside the teachers." Support with discipline was also

mentioned as critical by most teachers with many of them expressing disappointment at students with behavior problems being sent right back to class with what they thought were zero consequences. For example, Donna explained:

> One of the problems…. the most direct way, maybe, that a principal supports me is with discipline. When I get to a place where I cannot handle a student, and I send them to the office do not send them back with a warning. I've already warned them, trust me. I think the biggest, most fundamental support that principals can give to teachers overall is managing discipline.

Another pet peeve for teachers was when principals send out blanket emails when only one teacher is at fault. Teachers want principals to address only those specific teachers that need correction. As Brett put it:

> Quit sending out messages that tell everybody to do one thing when you know there are specific people that should be doing that. So, if you have a teacher that doesn't check IDs and doesn't do that, you need to go say to that teacher. You need to do this and leave all the teachers who are doing it alone. When you send blanket emails out, that doesn't work… be specific. It's like you know, they talk about feedback, timely and specific feedback. Well, it's going to be timely specific, into the right person feedback.

> Teacher voice also came up as a pressing matter that teachers need to be addressed. Most of them felt that principals made decisions without seeking their input, and yet they were expected to implement them without question. Teachers felt they need to be listened to, and like Alison stated, "If we have another pandemic, treat your professionals like professionals and you might be surprised what they come up with for

you." Nancy also expressed her desire to be listened to more. According to her, most of their meetings were about "pointing fingers at us instead of saying let's have a talk, let's chit chat. What is preventing you from turning in your grades? What can we do to help you turn in your grades?" and so she felt that taking time to talk to the teachers would go a long way in understanding their struggles.

Open communication between teachers and principals was another theme that dominated teacher discourse. Most teachers felt that there were times when they were completely in the dark regarding expectations. There was a general feeling that having a way to directly communicate with the principal, especially for emergency purposes was vital. Some teacher participants alluded to this and averred that when this happened, there was a general feeling of support among the teachers. More importantly, teachers also felt it was paramount for principals to communicate their struggles. For example, Nancy stated that "I wish they would communicate more like tell us the struggles that you're facing…. Is it the district? Is it the government? is it TEA? What is it that's preventing you to be the team leader that you're supposed to be?"

Principal and Pandemic Leadership Lessons

On how COVID-19 has changed their leadership, principals gave remarkably diverse responses from not at all to slight adjustments. Nevertheless, most of them acknowledged that there was a greater degree of self-reflection and intentionality when it came to decision-making. For example, Alex categorically stated that "I don't think my leadership has changed…[but] I think I opened up a lot more because here at work I've always just been, you know, very professional, kind, respectful." While expressing the significance of relationships during the pandemic, Erika stated being intentional in

building relationships and learning to appreciate instruction that "didn't look like the traditional classroom" and being more appreciative of her teachers. Similar sentiments were expressed by James, emphasizing that he appreciated his staff "a whole lot more than I did before the pandemic hit." Jacob stressed how communication took an incredibly special meaning in terms of being very "intentional and measured in what you send out to the community", while Lucy stated that "flexibility and thinking outside the box have been crucial" since she had to make quick adjustments based on the rapidly changing information regarding COVID and conflicting messages from the district. She also learned to be open-minded and adaptable and go away from "one way is my way" to being able to listen and adjust. Another key theme was on prioritizing because there were so many moving parts. As an example, Alex explained how he always had to read all his emails before the end of the day but had to change and quickly learn how to scan through them during the pandemic especially after getting over 400 emails between 8:00 AM and noon one day.

On pandemic leadership lessons, most participants agreed that empathy was amplified, and even those leaders who thought they were empathetic before acknowledged that COVID brought a new dimension to empathy. For example, Amy while acknowledging a change in her leadership stated:

> I think I've always been compassionate, but I think I became more empathetic during COVID because so many issues were affecting so many people… I became super reflective and more empathetic to see how I can support my teachers and my teams beyond just the mundane.

Also, as James put it, "Be present…be that ear… make it all about them. Put your computer down, put your phone away and hear them because they need you." Amy also mentioned having to "pause" and think about "What can I do differently. So that self-reflective piece and literally listening, talking to people, slowing down long enough to listen." Lucy amplified the same message when he stated:

> Make sure that you are aware of all of the paranoia, it's out there, from teachers, from students from the community, and being very cognizant of trying to understand where they're coming from, whether they have health issues in their home, whether they're elderly in the home, and whatever kind of decisions that you do make, that there can be repercussions all the way down the line, and just being able to be there for them and being able to support them in all those different situations." As a campus leader, Jessica stated how much people look to you "for so much more than what your job role is" and gave an example of even parents calling her to ask for advice regarding decisions about their children and stated, "people depend on you to lead the community.

In conclusion, there was a general feeling among principal participants that the pandemic provided them with an opportunity to re-evaluate their leadership in a way that will make them more responsive to the needs of their staff. Many of them had to re-adjust the way that they conducted business to make sure that they were supporting staff that was stretched so thin and facing unprecedented challenges in their teaching career. This agreed with Brion's (2021) study which found that leaders altered their leadership styles to focus on people rather than programs and policies during the pandemic.

Summary

This study involved interviews with a group of fourteen teachers and thirteen principals from diverse schools and school districts in the Gulf Coast region. Participant demographics including race, gender, and ethnicity reflected the diverse nature of schools and school districts represented in the study.

According to this study, from the teachers' perspective, the major causes of turnover include lack of administrative support, proximity to work, lack of teachers' voice, lack of respect for their professionalism, student discipline, and the overall culture of the school. From the principals' perspective, the major causes are teachers moving up due to promotion, moving out of town because of a spouse relocating, career changes, support, or teachers not being a "good fit." Both teachers and principals agreed on the vital role of administrative support in teacher turnover decisions but conflicted in areas like teacher voice, respect for professionalism, and promotion as driving factors.

This study found that COVID-19 impacted teacher turnover mostly out of fear for the health and safety of the teachers, especially because of the many variants that are still being discovered, creating a sense of "fear of the unknown." This fear, coupled with instructional decisions made during the pandemic like hybrid teaching, added to the stress and burnout which in turn increased turnover decisions. However, this study also found that administrative support played an outsized role during the pandemic, with principals playing a key messaging role that either diminished or exacerbated this fear, and hence turnover intentions.

COVID-19 required that school districts observe robust safety protocols to mitigate its spread. Some of these included mask mandates, social distancing, PPEs, deep cleaning, staggered breakfast and lunch, and one-way hallways among many others. This

study found that most teachers were satisfied with the measures that school districts put in place to support them during the pandemic. The mask mandate, though the most controversial earned broad support from the teachers in this study. Principals also reported satisfaction with all the steps they took to ensure the safety of everyone at their campuses during the pandemic. According to this study, safety protocols played a significant role in teachers' decision-making during the pandemic.

On teacher support, this study found that principals were satisfied with the level of support they offered their teachers which included things like socio-emotional support, instructional support, and general administrative support. On the other hand, the teachers' perception of administrative support was varied, ranging from an expression of satisfaction to complaining about absent and aloof principals and inadequate communication. However, the study found that most teachers were happy with some district initiatives like free COVID testing, free vaccines, COVID leave days, and free PPE, among others.

The mode of teaching adopted by school districts had an enormous impact on teacher turnover decisions, according to this study. Hybrid teaching was especially found to have led to heightened stress and burnout among teachers because they had to teach two classes: virtual and in-person. Both teachers and principals agreed that hybrid teaching was a bad idea. In addition, this study found virtual schools to be the major reason for increased learning gaps and learning loss seen during the pandemic.

Social interactions played a vital role in helping teachers to navigate the stress brought about by the pandemic. According to this study, teachers found solace in leaning on each other during times of stress. When there was a positive teacher-teacher as well as

administration-teacher interaction, teachers felt more supported, were happier, and were more likely to keep teaching. This study also found that teachers want to see more support, open communication, discipline support, visibility, and positive relationships with their principals. Finally, principals acknowledged that even though the pandemic did not change their leadership style, nevertheless, it made them more appreciative of their staff, more empathetic, and more intentional about their decision-making.

Chapter V

Discussion

Teacher turnover is a problem that has been researched extensively over the years. Many researchers have identified diverse reasons for turnover, but the recent outbreak of COVID-19 and its pernicious nature have forced many teachers to make life-changing decisions exacerbating this problem in the process. With the innumerable challenges that teachers have had to navigate during the pandemic, school districts found themselves in uncharted territory trying to run schools amid an unprecedented shortage of qualified staff. While significant research has been done on teacher turnover, few studies have examined the impact of COVID-19 on teacher turnover especially as it relates to the health and safety of the teachers, and their perception of administrative support.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to fill a void in the literature regarding the extent to which COVID-19 has impacted teacher turnover from the perspective of both teachers and principals and to examine teacher perception of administrative support and its impact on turnover decisions. This chapter presents a synthesis of the key findings of this study, the interpretation of the results, and a discussion of the implications for research, policy, and practice.

Summary of Results

For several decades, the problem of teacher turnover has continued to confound educational leaders and policymakers. In this study, I utilized qualitative methodology to investigate the perceptions of teachers and principals regarding the reasons for turnover, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. I interviewed fourteen teachers and thirteen principals to gain insight into the thinking of these key stakeholders that are at the heart

of schooling. Both teacher and principal participants had served both before the onset of the pandemic and during the pandemic, so I captured their perspectives on the reasons for teacher turnover pre-COVID and during COVID. The following section presents a synthesis of the results of the study specifically connected to the research questions that guided the study as well as the research purpose.

Major Causes of Turnover

Overwhelmingly, principal support was perceived as one of the most significant causes of teacher turnover by both teacher and principal participants. Principals acknowledged that their position gives them the power to make decisions that have a direct impact on school operations which in turn influence teacher decisions. On their part, teachers opined that principal support was paramount for their success and that having a good working relationship with the principal was vital to their decisions to remain at the school. These perceptions confirm studies by Borman and Dowling (2008), Johnson and Birkeland (2003), Johnson et al. (2012), and Kraft and Papay (2014), who identified administrative support as a key factor driving turnover.

However, among the key findings of my study, there was a clear divergence of perception between teachers and principals on what was considered the main drivers of teacher turnover. Most teachers placed a high premium on teacher voice and respect for their professionalism among factors they value in a school and one that they would wish to see more of on a day-to-day basis. Teachers felt that principals made decisions without consulting them, yet they expected them to actualize those same decisions with constancy. Such an approach caused tension within the teaching fraternity, a feeling of being undervalued, and ultimately decisions to leave the school. For example, one of the

teachers shared that she felt like she was treated not as a professional, but as someone who needed to be taught what to do or as someone who had never been to college. Significantly, among teachers who reported that their voices were heard, there was a general feeling that they were very supported and unlikely to transfer or leave for any other school. This reinforced the finding that teachers were more likely to stay in their current position if they felt respected and appreciated (Prather-Jones, 2011).

Among principals, there was no mention of respect for professionalism, and only one mentioned teacher voice as a reason she thought teachers left. I found this to be a major area of dissonance and one that could be exploited by school principals in their efforts to retain their staff and reduce turnover. Most principals perceived career changes like promotions to be the main causes of turnover. For example, one principal shared that he had an incredibly low turnover rate and when it did occur, it was "almost always as a result of a promotion."

Proximity to work was perceived to be another principal factor driving turnover by both teachers and principals, although it was more pronounced among teachers. Most teachers liked to work in a school that is closer to home, and when that was not the case, they felt the need to move schools even when other factors like support were present. This was aggravated by the fact that most participants worked in a crowded city with crushing traffic delays. One teacher, for example, explained how she moved schools so she could be closer to where she lived, and where her children would also end up going to school. Another teacher shared that with low compensation, teachers would find it beneficial to stay within reasonable commute distance. Therefore, I would argue that

principals need to keep this in mind when hiring their teachers and include a question about proximity and commute times.

Research Question 1

What measures have school leaders put in place to support teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The safety of everyone in the school was the number one priority of all school districts, especially given the virulent nature of COVID-19. The responsibility to institute these measures fell on the central office, while the school administration was tasked with enforcing and adapting them to their local situations. Owing to the global nature of COVID-19, most safety measures came from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the Texas Education Agency (TEA). As such, most principals explained how they implemented these measures at their campuses. Many of them felt that they did all they could within the constraints of what was known about COVID at the time, and they adjusted accordingly. Examples of some of the measures that principals took to ensure safety are one-way hallways, staggered release, grab-and-go breakfast, period-by-period sanitization, daily deep cleaning, social distancing, contact-tracing, PPE, plexiglass, additional instructional tools like microphones and webcams among other measures.

Some principals went above and beyond and set up campus safety committees that looked at the district safety protocols and "catered them" to their campus. For example, one principal shared how he put together a committee made of "administrators, teachers, and parents" in an effort to ensure that all stakeholders had a voice in deciding campus safety protocols. Such an approach was important as it had the potential to gain greater acceptance, especially at a time when mask mandates were being politicized.

Overwhelmingly, most principals felt that teachers appreciated all the safety protocols they put in place to ensure they were safe.

Regarding specific supports that they put in place to support teachers; many of the principals posited that they offered social-emotional support which was very much needed during a global pandemic. This was especially important because research has shown that there are inadequate emotional support systems for teachers during disasters (DeVaney et al., 2009), and supporting educators' well-being is critical for workforce retention (Eadie et al., 2021). According to Smith and Riley (2012), leadership in times of crisis encompasses strategies for dealing with events, emotions, and consequences in ways that minimize personal and organizational harm to the school and community. The ability to be more understanding and appreciative of the teachers was one that principals felt went a long way in reassuring the teachers of their support. One principal explained how they started a bike club to connect with the teachers and make the work environment more enjoyable while also maintaining social distance. Open communication was also critical at a time when there was so much misinformation around COVID, and principals felt that by being transparent, teachers would be in the know regarding district policies and this would help reduce anxiety (Kraft et al., 2020).

Research Question 2

What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the measures school leaders put in place to support them during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Most teachers complimented the efforts made by their districts to keep them safe amid the pandemic. Generally, they submitted that their districts did a respectable job with safety protocols and messaging at the beginning of the pandemic, but that these

measures were relaxed too soon in some districts. The mask mandate, though the most divisive, was the single most important safety measure that teachers appreciated the most. This was mostly because teachers spend all their days in enclosed classrooms which put them at an increased risk of contracting COVID without the mask mandate. Significantly, teachers that were in districts that had no mask mandates were full of accolades of those who kept the mandate a little longer. In addition to masks, other district protocols like on-site testing, free vaccinations, COVID leave, contact tracing, and deep cleaning were perceived as cardinal measures that contributed to the teachers' feeling of support.

Regardless of the safety measures in place, however, teachers felt that principal support was still paramount in their decisions to keep teaching during the pandemic. Again, this reinforces Kraft et al.'s (2020) finding that school-based leadership support had a positive impact on the teachers' sense of success during the pandemic hence increasing their likelihood of staying in the profession. Given that most safety protocols emanated from the district, some teachers were also cognizant of the fact that the principals' hands were tied regarding what they could or could not do. Despite this, however, teachers felt that they did not receive as much support as the students, especially when it came to "extending grace" during the pandemic.

Some teachers expressed their satisfaction at the level of emotional support offered by their principals, stating that even just sending out individualized emails went a long way in assuring them of support. Hence, while principals perceived safety protocols as being key to teachers' decision to stay during the pandemic, teachers felt that without principal support, safety protocols would do little to keep them teaching amid the pandemic.

Research Question 3

What do teachers and principals perceive as the major determinants of teacher

turnover since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic?

There was consensus that COVID-19 has impacted teacher turnover in significant

ways. However, most participants were conflicted when it came to the exact ways that

COVID-19 impacted teacher turnover decisions. The foremost self-evident way was

perceived as in health, safety, and fear of the obscure which led to heightened stress that

impacted decision-making. Interestingly, most teachers perceived administrative support,

rather than COVID-19 as the major course of turnover. For example, one teacher

suggested that the way the administration supported and recognized everyone's safety

concerns drove change. One principal expressed analogous sentiments when he explained

that leadership messaging had the potential to either exacerbate or alleviate safety

concerns due to COVID. Therefore, principal leadership was perceived as vital during

times of crisis. This aligned with literature that identified principal leadership as foremost

in supporting both students and teachers deal with post-traumatic after-effects of a crisis

(Fletcher & Nicholas, 2016). It also confirms Eadie et al.'s (2021) finding that even amid

a global pandemic, supportive organizational structures and culture can help educators to

meet the demands and expectations of their role and increase their intention to stay.

Despite all the efforts made by schools to ensure safety, however, one of the biggest

impacts of COVID-19 was accelerated retirement for those approaching retirement age

and those with underlying health conditions. This was also the case for those who were

healthy but lived with elderly relatives or family members with compromised immunity.

This particular group felt that the risks of being infected with COVID far outweighed any benefit to continuing teaching.

COVID-19 forced many school districts to switch to virtual and/or hybrid schooling. The mode of schooling turned out to be the biggest course of stress and burnout due to increased workload, which ultimately led to increased turnover. Hybrid teaching was profusely blamed for heightened stress and burnout among teachers, with principals agreeing that a lot was required of teachers both in terms of lesson preparation and delivery, not to mention some compliance pieces. Perceptions of role overload have been associated with increased levels of burnout (Chambers Mack et al., 2019), and hybrid teaching was reported to be incredibly stressful by most participants in this study. Apart from role overload from having to prepare and deliver instruction to two sets of students, there was the added stress of having to quickly learn the Learning Management Systems (LMS) adopted by most districts. Veteran teachers who were not very tech-savvy, and those who preferred traditional teaching methods found it especially hard to adapt to the steep learning curve, leading to feelings of failure on the job. This also aligns with literature that has identified feelings of inadequacy among teachers during periods of high stress as a reason that many turnover (McLean & Connor, 2015).

Impact of COVID-19 on Learning

One of the most consequential impacts of COVID-19 was learning gaps that developed and exposed the glaring inequities in our educational system. Both teachers and principals shared that they worked so hard to reach students, especially during virtual and hybrid teaching, but there was little they could do in some instances because some things were beyond their control. The frustrations that the teachers endured were palpable

as they sought to reach virtual kids who had found ways to game the system and still earn credit. One teacher, for example, explicated the many loopholes that students used to avoid coming to class, while another one talked of the frustration of having to spend an enormous amount of time preparing for a lesson only to have "2% participation." Moreover, as one principal put it, minority students "who needed the most support at school" were the ones that opted for virtual school. She explained how they made home visits to try to reassure families of safety at the school so that they can bring their children back, but often, this was not remarkably successful. Consequently, the already existing learning gaps gradually ballooned during the pandemic with some students losing as much as a year if not more of schooling.

As the learning loss increased, teachers were being asked to do the impossible to engage the students. For example, one teacher expressed disappointment at being evaluated on students not turning their cameras on, something that was physically out of her control. In some school districts, a principal shared that the issue of cameras was one requirement they had to eliminate because it was a battle they could not win. Expounding on this decision, she explained that most of the students live with extended families and did not have the luxury of a private study room, so they were genuinely uncomfortable turning on their cameras. As much as schools had little control over their virtual students, teachers opined that giving them too much grace made it even harder for the typical students to engage in any meaningful learning. When the students returned to school, for example, they openly acknowledged not paying attention, according to one teacher, or even being close to their computer during virtual instruction.

Social Interactions

Most teachers elucidated how the relationships they built during the pandemic helped them to navigate an exceedingly difficult COVID year. From leaning on each other to being each other's psychologists, teachers hailed these informal social gatherings as essential in their decision-making. According to one teacher, the daily conversations with each other, encouraging and giving each other feedback, and words like "please don't leave us," were instrumental in pushing her to keep teaching even when things were very stressful. This reinforced Schwandt's (2000) finding that meaning-making is constructed "against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, language, and so forth" (p. 197). When there was a positive interaction between teachers and principals, the teachers' feeling of support was strengthened which aligned with Prather-Jones' (2011) findings that teachers need support from other teachers in their school and that principals play a significant role in developing these relationships.

A Lesson for Principals

Teachers had a lot of advice to school leaders on ways they can be supported both in normal times and especially during pandemics. Significantly, some principals were doing an excellent job supporting their teachers and implementing some of these measures. Some key areas identified were empathy, open communication, discipline support, visibility, relationships, and classroom evaluation. Empathy and emotional support cannot be overemphasized especially during a global pandemic. Teachers need to see a genuine expression of sympathy and willingness to help and not just empty words. Additionally, empathy must be accompanied by a desire to understand what teachers are going through. Having "one-on-one talk" made teachers feel appreciated which in turn improved their motivation to commit to continuing teaching.

Another suggestion, in the words of one teacher, is "how could you understand if you don't live it?", explaining that administrator evaluation of a teacher feels hollow if they don't physically get into the classroom and try to teach, say, with a mask on or teach virtual kids who won't turn their cameras on. Absent this, he explained, principals would not fully comprehend the difficulties experienced by their teachers. This desire was shared by several teachers who thought that their administrators were aloof to the realities of the classroom. If principals are instructional leaders, they need to model instruction in a real classroom instead of conducting professional developments and expecting teachers to implement them in their classrooms. For them to appreciate the struggles and the challenges teachers go through in their classrooms, they need to also spend a lot more time than the "5-minute" walkthroughs. Instructively, teachers were full of respect for those principals that came and taught in their classrooms during the pandemic, and as one teacher shared, this led to a whole new level of respect, not only for the administrators but for the feedback that they gave after visiting classrooms. Comparably, teachers also questioned principal effectiveness when they got into administration after only a few years in the classroom. They posited that this could be a sign that they got into teaching with their eyes firmly on administration and that may be the reason that they find it hard to effectively support teachers. Though not related, a similar argument was shared by one of the principals regarding central office staff with no experience on what it is like to be a pandemic teacher or principal, but still, be in a position to make decisions affecting school operations during the pandemic.

Principals also need to give more positive feedback to their teachers, especially if they see them going above and beyond. Teachers love public recognition for going

beyond their line of duty, and they did not think principals did a particularly good job at that. One reason was because of a lack of visibility, which teachers argue would allow principals to not only notice the positive things but build relationships with their staff as well. For example, one teacher explained how she never gets to see the administrators except during formal meetings like classroom observations making it next to impossible to build a relationship with her. Teachers cherished meeting the principal in casual situations like hallways because it made them feel supported and like they were working toward a common goal.

Teachers also expressed their desire for more support with student discipline and to be trusted when they make certain decisions concerning students. A good example is when a teacher sends a student to the office only to be returned to class with a warning. Teachers want principals to know that before sending them to the office, typically, they would have given them enough warnings. As such, when they come back with another warning, teachers felt helpless, while students felt like they have won. In many cases, the problems will persist because now, the teacher has lost authority.

Another key piece of advice for principals was to stop sending out blanket emails to all teachers when they know only one teacher is at fault. Teachers felt that a more effective way was for the principal to address that teacher one-on-one or through an individual email. The consensus was that when a blanket email is sent out, the people it was meant to address do not usually get the message, or do not even read it, while the teachers who do the right thing feel unappreciated.

Teachers place a high premium on teacher voice and respect for their professional judgment. Principals need to listen to their teachers and seek their input on decisions

affecting them. As one teacher put it, "If we have another pandemic, treat your professionals like professionals and you might be surprised what they come up with for you." Seeking teacher input has the advantage of creating buy-in and ultimately a much smoother and more impactful implementation. Similarly, teachers want staff meetings to be productive and conversational rather than places for "finger-pointing." Having conversations with teachers and seeking to know their reasons for defaulting or not meeting targets would yield much better results than blaming them and demanding compliance. Along with teacher voice is open communication so that teachers are in the know. Some teachers shared that their principals excelled in this area, but many others pointed to frustrations at not knowing what the expectations were until the last minute. Teachers appreciated those principals that had an open-door policy and those that provided a way to communicate directly with them either by providing their cell phone number or emergency contact information. All these are factors that teachers felt had a direct impact on their perception of administrative support and ultimately their decisions to stay or leave their schools.

Pandemic Leadership Lessons

Principals agreed that COVID-19 presented unprecedented challenges to their leadership and although most of them said they did not have to change their leadership style, nevertheless, there was consensus that they had to be a lot more conscious in their decision making. This was true whether they were composing an email or simply engaging with staff because an email could be misinterpreted or be perceived in a variety of ways. They also had to be more self-reflective and more accepting of standards that they would normally not accept in a normal year. This was especially true when it came

to classroom instruction, and what they considered good instruction because now it was taking place on the computer. Additionally, with a biting shortage of teaching staff, and many teachers being out on quarantine every week, principals learned to be very flexible, think creatively, and make quick changes when necessary.

Empathy was perhaps the overarching theme for virtually all of the principals, and although most of them considered themselves empathetic before the pandemic, this word took a whole new meaning for them, and to some, on a very personal level. Principals shared that they appreciated their teachers a lot more, sometimes just for making it to school every day. Though not explicitly stated, principals shifted their focus from programs and policies to people (Brion, 2021). The lessons learned during this pandemic will undoubtedly serve as a roadmap for future crisis leadership.

Implications for Research, Policy, and Practice

The findings of this study have significant implications for further research, policy, and practice as described below. This chapter concludes with a reflection regarding the significance of the study.

Further Research

This study attempted to understand the impact of COVID-19 on teacher turnover from the perspective of teachers and principals. Given that COVID-19 is still a relatively new phenomenon, there is not much research that has been conducted on it, so one implication of this study was to contribute to both the existing and emerging literature on the subject.

This study only represented the experiences and perceptions of fourteen teachers and thirteen principals in several schools and school districts in the Gulf Coast region of

Texas. As a result, there are several opportunities for future research that can illuminate the disparate ways that COVID-19 impacted turnover decisions. One way is to include teachers that physically left teaching due to COVID to understand their perceptions of the reasons for leaving. Another way is to examine the perception of principals who left or retired after the first year of COVID to understand their reasons for leaving. Even though I had one retired principal in my study, this pool can be expanded to include more retired principals from different school districts to have a broad perspective from school leaders who actually left. Further research is also needed to include both the teachers who turned over and those who did not, so as to understand the differences in perceptions between the two groups. This can also include focus group interviews involving teachers and principals in order to have a side-by-side comparison.

Additionally, given the widespread availability of vaccines and the relaxation of safety protocols, further research should be conducted in a few years to identify the percentage of teachers who took a break from teaching but returned once the hazards of the pandemic had ceased.

Practice

This study has several implications for practice. First, with teacher turnover rates reaching unprecedented levels due to COVID-19, there is a lot that school leaders can do to support teachers and try to minimize teacher exodus. One of the main themes that emerged as the key reasons for turnover was principal support. It is worth noting here, that even amid a global pandemic, the support of the principal was still identified as central to teacher decision-making. The implications for practice are that principals should reflect on their practices and review their leadership abilities using some of the

major lessons identified in this study as a basis. The implication for the central office is that superintendents should refocus their principal hiring to include more leaders who can create strong and authentic relationships with their teachers as well as those who will listen to the teacher's voice. Moreover, as this study found, teachers had profound respect for principals that actually led from the front, which means being ready to model instruction in the classroom and being willing to be vulnerable. School districts may want to include this as part of their hiring protocol for principals and as part of the yearly principal evaluation.

Furthermore, this study identified a mismatch between what teachers perceive as the primary causes of turnover and what principals believe. The implications for practice are that school leaders can use the findings of this study to re-evaluate their leadership to incorporate the elements that teachers value most and attempt to address those concerns in their day-to-day operations. Moreover, this research might be used to refocus teacher hiring practices by integrating the qualities that instructors look for in a school in interview questions, allowing administrators to select the best fit for their schools.

Policy

Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) need to include some aspects of what principals value when hiring teachers like relationship building to make sure that teachers are well prepared for what principals consider essential skills for success as a teacher. As this study identified principal experience as a crucial component of successful leadership, the central office should revise this criterion for aspiring administrators. Though the actual number of years of classroom experience was not discussed, the three-year

classroom experience required for entry into administrative positions was considered too short to be an effective instructional leader.

The most common source of frustration and stress among teachers was hybrid teaching. It was also the reason for the expanding learning disparities seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to both principals and teachers. The policy implication is that if hybrid teaching is adopted again, school districts must ensure that sufficient safeguards and regulations are in place for students who choose to be virtual. A better approach is to have 100% virtual or 100% in-person as suggested by most participants in this study. This will also require school districts to allocate more funds for technology and maintenance.

Principal Preparation Programs should also consider a course on crisis leadership to help prepare principals for the challenges they may confront in the event of a crisis like the one generated by COVID-19. This is especially true given that over the years, researchers have honed down on best practices that exemplary leaders follow during normal times (Dirani et al., 2020), but little has been said about leadership in times of crisis. Although principals in this study acknowledged that nothing can effectively prepare you for a catastrophe of the magnitude of COVID-19, having these skills included in their training would go a long way toward preparing them for such an eventuality.

Reflection

COVID-19 upended education in ways unparalleled in the history of education. Unfortunately, even before COVID-19, teacher turnover was a problem that had a significant impact on education. The sheer loss of human life at the beginning of the

pandemic, coupled with the lack of scientific knowledge regarding its transmission sparked panic resulting in teacher exodus leaving schools scrambling to find replacements. With no literature on the impact of COVID-19 on teacher turnover, this study was conducted to fill this knowledge gap.

In this study, I employed qualitative research methods to understand the perceptions of teachers and principals, two key stakeholders in education, regarding some of the ways that COVID-19 has impacted teacher turnover. By examining their perceptions, a deeper understanding was gained, not only of the major causes of turnover but also of the distinct aspects of COVID-19 that impacted teacher decisions through the framework of symbolic interactionism. The findings of this study provided insight into teacher perceptions of administrative support which principals may use to effectively lead their schools in retaining their teachers, and district leaders can use as a blueprint for recruiting effective principals. Additionally, the findings of this study provided insight into the various aspects of COVID-19 that contributed to turnover, which school districts and policymakers can use to plan for future pandemics or times of crisis. Finally, the findings revealed pandemic leadership lessons from the perspective of principals, which will be useful in training future leaders to effectively support and retain their teachers.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I am the principal

researcher for this study to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on teacher turnover, to

identify strategies school leaders have used to mitigate this problem, and to understand

teachers' and principals' perceptions of the reasons for teacher turnover. This interview

will take about 1 hour. May I have permission to record? At any time during the

interview process, if you wish to discontinue the interview or want me to stop the

recording, you are free to do so. Your participation in this interview is completely

voluntary. With your permission, I will now start the interview.

Teacher Participants:

1. Tell me a little about yourself?

2. What motivated you to enter the teaching profession?

3. When applying for a job in a school district, what do you look for?

4. Before the pandemic, what would make you stay in your current position, transfer
   to a different school, or leave teaching altogether?

5. How would your reasons change during the COVID-19 pandemic?

6. How would you describe the support you have received from your principal or
   administrators during the COVID-19 pandemic?

7. What form of teaching (hybrid, virtual, Face-to-Face) did your school adopt
   during COVID, and how did that affect your perception of principal support?

8. What specific policies/support systems have played the biggest role in your
   decision to keep teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?

9. How would you describe administrator-teacher, or teacher-teacher interactions during COVID-19, and to what extent has that motivated you to keep teaching during the pandemic?

10. What else do you wish your current or former principal should have done to support you in your job during the pandemic?

11. If you were to advise a principal on ways to support teachers during pandemics or otherwise, what would you say and why?

12. Do you have anything else you would like to add?

Principal Participants

1. Tell me a little about yourself professionally. How long have you been an administrator? How long have you been leading your current school?

2. What motivated you to pursue the principal role?

3. What qualities do you look for when hiring a teacher?

4. How has COVID-19 changed the way you hire teachers?

5. Before the pandemic, why did teachers leave or transfer to a different school?

6. How have those reasons changed during the COVID-19 pandemic?

7. How would you describe the support you have given teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic?

8. What form of teaching did your school adopt during COVID, and how did you decide that was the right approach? What impact do you think that decision had on your teachers?

9. What specific policies/practices have you put in place to support teachers during COVID-19, and what impact do you think they have had on your teachers' decision to stay during the pandemic?

10. What other things do you wish you should have done to support your teachers during the pandemic?

11. How has your leadership morphed during the pandemic, and how has this impacted your practice?

12. How has COVID-19 changed the way you interact with teachers or other staff at your school?

13. Do you have anything else you would like to add?

Appendix B

Informed Consent Letter

Title of research study: Re-Examining Teacher Turnover in the Era of COVID-19

Investigator: The principal investigator for this project is Chrispus Mwapea. This project is part of thesis being conducted under the supervision of my advisor, Dr. Bradley Davis, Program Director, Department of Educational Studies and Policy Studies, College of Education, University of Houston.

I invite you to take part in a research study entitled "Re-Examining Teacher Turnover in the Era of COVID-19" because you meet the following criteria:

1. You were a teacher or principal before and/or during COVID-19

2. You have changed schools at least once before

3. You have been teaching for at least 3 years, or principal for at least 4 years, including before and during

In general, your participation in the research involves a 45–90-minute audio-recorded semi-structured interview and completing a brief pre-interview questionnaire. All information and responses obtained will be treated confidentially, and your name will not be used or identified anywhere in the study. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts for participating in this study. Possible benefits include the ability to provide insight into the impact of COVID-19 on teacher turnover and the role of school leadership during pandemics, data which can be used to prepare future school leaders to be more effective in reducing turnover.

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty or loss of benefit for deciding not to participate in this study. If you decide to participate in this study, you may opt out at any time without any penalty or having to explain your reason for opting out. You can ask all the questions you want before you decide and can ask questions at any time during the study.

Please respond to this email to confirm participation in this study or have questions regarding your potential participation. Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Chrispus C. Mwapea

University of Houston.

Signature Block for Capable Adult

Your signature documents your consent to take part in this research.

_____	_____
Signature of subject	Date

_____
Printed name of subject

_____	_____
Signature of person obtaining consent	Date

_____
Printed name of person obtaining consent

Appendix C

Pre-Interview Questionnaire

Name_____Gender_____Race___
____

School_____

District_____

Highest Level of Education (a) Bachelors, (b) Masters, (c) Doctorate

Total Number of Years in Education_____

Current Position (a) Teacher   (b) Principal

Number of Years as (a) Teacher_____ (b) Assistant Principal_____ (c) Principal_____

Number of schools Worked_____

Number of Years in Current School_____Position_____

Current Grade Level
   (a) Middle (b) High

Grade Levels Previously Worked
   (a) Elementary (b) Middle (c) High