Building-level Administrators' Experiences and Perceptions Regarding Preparation for their Role in Teacher Retention: A Basic Qualitative Study

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Abstract

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to describe experiences of building-level administrators in one urban school division in Virginia regarding preparation for having a role in retaining teachers and their perceptions of how well prepared they feel for that role. The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with 15 administrators, representing 21.4% of all administrators in the subject-site division. The study investigated three research questions: (1) What beliefs do building-level administrators have regarding their role in the retention of teachers? (2) What experiences have building-level administrators undergone to prepare them for a role in retaining teachers? and, (3) How well prepared do building-level administrators perceive themselves to be for their role in retaining teachers? The study asked participants to consider principal preparation programs, principal professional development, and on-the-job experiences. Findings indicated that participants believed their role in teacher retention to be important; however, they tended not to have experienced explicit preparation for teacher retention. Though participants reported experiencing some preparation for creating workplace conditions favorable to retention, there was a notable diversity in viewpoint and few workplace conditions listed by participants aligned with those noted in prior research. Participants reported that their preparation had been acquired primarily through on-the-job experiences. Findings indicated that participants did not feel they had been well prepared for a role in teacher retention. This study proposed implications to be considered by those who develop and provide principal preparation and principal professional development, state and local educational agencies, and building-level administrators who seek skills and knowledge that promote the retention of teachers in their buildings.

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General Audience Abstract

The purpose of this study was to describe preparation experiences of school administrators in one urban school division in Virginia relevant to having a role in retaining teachers, as well as their perceptions of how well prepared they believe they have been for that role. The researcher interviewed 15 administrators, representing 21.4% of all administrators in the division, to answer three research questions: (1) What beliefs do building-level administrators have regarding their role in the retention of teachers? (2) What experiences have building-level administrators undergone to prepare them for a role in retaining teachers? and, (3) How well prepared do building-level administrators perceive themselves to be for their role in retaining teachers? The study found that participants believed their role in teacher retention to be important; however, they tended not to have experienced explicit preparation about retaining teachers. Though participants reported experiencing some preparation for creating workplace conditions favorable to teacher retention, there was little agreement among participants about which workplace conditions do so. Few of the workplace conditions listed by participants in this study matched those noted in previous studies by other researchers. Participants reported that their preparation for having a role in teacher retention had been acquired primarily through on-the-job experiences. Participants reported that they did not feel they have been well prepared for a role in teacher retention. This study proposed implications to be considered by those who develop and provide principal preparation programs and principal professional development, state and local educational agencies, and building-level administrators who seek skills and knowledge that promote the retention of teachers in their buildings.

Dedication

I have had the great privilege of working with and for an impressive array of teachers and students over my 25-year career, to date. This dissertation is dedicated to them with sincere humility, utmost respect, and what I hope they know to be genuine gratitude. Thank you. With appreciation for all you have done for me and given me, I hope I've done well by you here.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Schools and school divisions across the United States find themselves grappling with a shortage of qualified teachers, some comprehensively and some only in certain subject areas or related to specific student populations (Cowan et al., 2016; Dee & Goldhaber, 2017; García & Weiss, 2019b; Sutcher et al., 2016a). Teacher shortages impact both student achievement and school finances (Learning Policy Institute, 2017b; Hanushek et al., 2016; Synar & Maiden, 2012; Watlington et al., 2010). Sutcher et al. (2016a) found that the major contributor to teacher shortage is not aging out (retirement) but preretirement attrition—teachers leaving the profession or school due to "school staffing decisions, life changes, or dissatisfaction with teaching" (p. 18). Given this context, schools and school divisions could benefit from exploring ways to retain teachers (García & Weiss, 2019c; Katz, 2018; Ladd, 2011; Learning Policy Institute, 2017a; Loeb et al., 2011; Nguyen, 2020; Podolsky et al., 2016; Watlington, 2010). This study seeks to investigate the building-level administrator's role in teacher retention with regard to how and how well administrators are prepared for it.

Context/Background

This study is seated within an American educational context where teacher shortage is a primary concern (Cowan et al., 2016; Dee & Goldhaber, 2017; García & Weiss, 2019b; Sutcher et al., 2016a). The phrase *teacher shortage* broadly refers to an insufficient supply of teachers relative to demand (Behrstock-Sherratt, 2016). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2019), the number of teacher preparation program enrollments and completers has decreased over the past ten years. At the same time, the U.S. Department of Education (2020) reported that the number of public school students has steadily risen and is projected to continue rising. In Virginia, teacher shortage mirrors the national outlook. From 2000 to 2015, the total school enrollment in Virginia grew by 12.1 percent; furthermore, growth in student

enrollment in Virginia is projected to continue through 2027 (U.S. DOE, 2020a). The number of Virginia teacher preparation program completers decreased from 4,015 in 2016 to 3,167 in 2020, declining by an average of 200 completers each year (U.S. DOE, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020b). The state annually reports teacher vacancies in multiple subject areas and grade levels (U.S. DOE, 2021; VDOE, 2016).

One reason teacher shortage is a concern is its potential impact on student achievement. Teacher shortages have been shown to have a negative impact on the quality of a school's teaching staff (Adnot et al., 2016; Hanushek et al., 2016; Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Sorensen and Ladd (2018) found that high rates of teacher turnover result in a faculty disproportionately composed of inexperienced teachers. Sorensen and Ladd (2018) and Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) found that this negative effect of teacher turnover tends to be more pronounced in schools with greater levels of poverty and higher percentages of students of color. Kini and Podolsky (2016) reviewed 30 research studies and found that years of teacher experience is associated with student achievement, with less-experienced teachers correlating to lower student test scores. The researchers concluded that retention of experienced teachers is important to student achievement.

An important key to retaining teachers, according to multiple studies, may be building-level administrators (Boyd et al., 2011; Burkhauser, 2017; Fuller et al., 2016; García & Weiss, 2019a; Johnson et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2016; Ladd, 2011; Learning Policy Institute, 2017a; Olsen & Huang, 2011; Simon & Johnson, 2015; You & Conley, 2015). Boyd et al. (2011) wrote that, "We find that teachers' perceptions of the school administration has by far the greatest influence on teacher retention" (p. 303). Kraft et al. (2016) concluded, "We find that improvements in school leadership especially, are independently associated with corresponding reductions in teacher turnover" (p. 1411). Burkhauser (2017) stated, "Teacher

ratings of the school environment depend on which principal is leading the school, independent of other school and district contextual factors" (p. 126). Harmon et al. (2017) assert that the proliferation of studies indicating school leadership as integral to teacher retention was one cause for the authors of The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) to include educational leadership as a focus for school improvement.

Despite the key role in teacher retention held by building-level administrators, there is limited research focused on how administrators are prepared for that aspect of the job. Principal Professional Development (PPD) was the subject of the 2017-2018 National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS); however, that study did not include principal's PPD as related to teacher retention. Among its recommendations for addressing the effects of teacher shortage, a recent Virginia legislative report did not consider the role of building-level administrators or their preparation for retention of teachers (VDOE, 2016). Some tangentially related studies exist. Hairston (2020) examined whether Virginia school leaders perceived their principal preparation to have been aligned to national standards for educational leaders, and Barnett (2017) studied leadership practices of principals in one Virginia division relative to teacher retention. Neither of those studies was focused on administrators' preparation for having a role in retaining teachers. In his study of principals' preparation and confidence about their role as instructional leaders, Thomas (2015) recommended that future studies should examine building leaders' preparation and feelings of preparedness for other roles embedded in educational leadership. This study attempts to do that with regard to an administrator's role in teacher retention.

Statement of the Problem

Teacher shortages exist (Cowan et al., 2016; Dee & Goldhaber, 2017; García & Weiss, 2019b; Sutcher et al., 2016a) and can have a negative impact on the quality of a school's

faculty, which impacts student achievement (Adnot et al., 2016; Hanushek et al., 2016; Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Because nonretirement attrition accounts for approximately two-thirds of teacher demand (Sutcher et al., 2016a), retention of teachers is an important means of addressing teacher shortage. Building leaders have been shown to have an outsized role in teacher retention (Boyd et al., 2011; Burkhauser, 2017; Fuller et al., 2016; García & Weiss, 2019a; Johnson et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2016; Ladd, 2011; Learning Policy Institute, 2017a; Olsen & Huang, 2011; Simon & Johnson, 2015; You & Conley, 2015). In Virginia, administrators are evaluated in part based on how well they perform that role (VDOE 2020a).

Research is lacking about how building-level administrators are prepared for their role in retaining teachers. Moreover, research is not available concerning how well prepared principals perceive themselves to be for that role. It has been suggested by at least one researcher that administrators' preparation for the various roles that make up educational leadership be studied further (Thomas, 2015). Though building-level administrators play a major part in teacher retention and are evaluated in part on how well they do so, we currently have little knowledge of how they are prepared for the role or whether they feel well prepared to fulfill it.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of building-level administrators in one urban school division in Virginia regarding their preparation for a role in retaining teachers and how well prepared participants believe themselves to have been for that role. In the study, the researcher addressed considerations such as principal preparation programs, professional development experiences, and on-the-job experiences as they relate to how well prepared building-level administrators perceive themselves to be for teacher

retention. The study focused on administrators' perceptions of how prepared they feel to make an impact on the likelihood of teachers in their buildings choosing to stay rather than leave. A desired outcome of this research was that it might provide insight to schools and divisions that could impact development of policies or practices surrounding administrator professional development.

Overview of the Study

While this research did not adhere strictly to tenets of phenomenology to the degree that it could be described as a purely phenomenological study, it employed strategies associated with phenomenology by seeking to understand "several individuals' common or shared experiences of a phenomenon" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75). The phenomenon studied was building-level administrators' preparation for having a role in the retention of teachers. In order to gather data about the lived experience of participants, this basic qualitative study employed one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The study noted participants' familiarity with five workplace conditions that fall within the purview of building administrators and have been shown by prior research to favorably impact teacher retention. Those workplace conditions include perceived teacher autonomy (Boyd, 2011; García & Weiss, 2019a; Learning Policy Institute, 2017a; You & Conley, 2011), perception of pressure and expectations placed on teachers by superiors (Byrd-Blake et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2016; Learning Policy Institute, 2017a), student discipline, safety, and order (Boyd, 2011; García & Weiss, 2019a; Kraft et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2016; Learning Policy Institute, 2017a; Simon & Johnson, 2015), level of input or shared vision felt by teachers (Burkhauser, 2017; Johnson et al., 2012; Learning Policy Institute, 2017a; Simon & Johnson, 2015), and teachers' perceptions of their instructional time being infringed upon (Burkhauser, 2017; García & Weiss, 2019a; Johnson, 2012; Kraft et al., 2012; Learning Policy Institute,

2017a). In addition to gathering data regarding building-level administrators' preparation experiences, the study examined participants' perceived level of preparation specifically for having a role in retention of teachers.

Research Questions

In order to address the purpose of this research study, the following research questions were identified:

1. What beliefs do building-level administrators have regarding their role in the retention of teachers?
2. What experiences have building-level administrators undergone to prepare them for a role in retaining teachers?
3. How well prepared do building-level administrators perceive themselves to be for their role in retaining teachers?

Research Paradigm & Conceptual Framework

The research conducted represents a basic qualitative study, grounded in the researcher's pragmatic worldview and employing research strategies associated with phenomenological philosophy. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe a basic qualitative study as research with a primary goal of collecting and analyzing non-numerical data to discover and interpret the ways people make sense of their lived experiences. The researcher for this study was interested in the lived experiences of participants, how participants interpret those experiences, and what meanings they attribute to them. Specifically, the study asked participants how they have gained preparation for a role in retaining teachers and how well prepared they perceive themselves to be for that role. The study resulted in a description and discussion of participants' experiences and perceptions. A desired practical outcome of this

research is that it may provide insight to schools and divisions that could impact development of policies or practices surrounding administrator professional development.

The researcher's interest in providing insight that may impact decisions related to principal professional development links the study to a pragmatic paradigm, or worldview. Processes of research and inquiry are guided by philosophical assumptions a researcher makes about gaining knowledge, often referenced as the researcher's *paradigm* (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). A research paradigm is a philosophical outlook on the nature of the world, which carries implications about the ways we attempt to understand how meaning is constructed (Maxwell, 2013). Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) use the term *worldview* as a synonym preferred over *paradigm* and stress the importance of acknowledging the researcher's worldview as foundational to a study. Those who favor a pragmatic worldview are primarily concerned with the solution of practical, real-world problems; therefore, researchers who approach inquiry through pragmatism are concerned with the potential practical applications of their research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Pragmatism suggests that "the most important question is whether the research has helped to find out what the researcher wants to know" (Dawadi et al., 2021, p. 26) and, further, whether knowledge acquired through research has potential to make a practical difference (Maarouf, 2019). This study is grounded in such a pragmatic worldview.

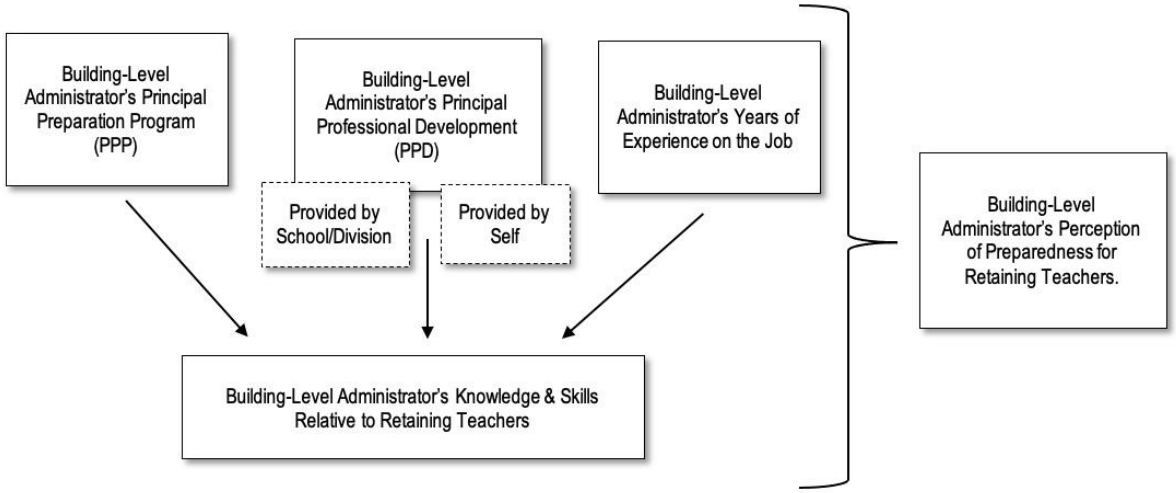
In addition, this basic qualitative study is undergirded by the philosophy of phenomenology, as most qualitative studies are to at least some degree (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The study's focus on the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants underscores its root in phenomenological philosophy (Creswell & Creswell, 2020; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016); accordingly, the researcher employed study design elements and methodologies typically associated with phenomenology, such as coding data

then organizing them according to theme, sometimes referred to as *reduction*, and writing an exploration of personal experience with the phenomenon prior to interviewing participants, a process known as the *epoché* (Patton, 2015).

A conceptual framework was created to guide the crafting of interview questions and aid the researcher in focusing the study on those experiences that are most likely to relate to participants' perceptions of preparedness for a role in teacher retention. Figure 1 is a visual representation of the conceptual framework.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



The framework recognizes that building-level administrators acquire knowledge and skills necessary for leadership through principal preparation programs (PPP), principal professional development (PPD) and on-the-job experience (Braun et al., 2011; Grissom et al., 2019; Pannell et al., 2015; Taie & Goldring, 2019; Vogel & Weiler, 2014). Some PPD is provided to administrators through their workplace while some PPD, such as professional reading or workshops, may be self-selected and sought out by the administrator for self-edification (Davis et al., 2020; Lavigne et al., 2016; Lewis & Scott, 2020; NCES, n.d.c.). The

researcher referenced the dissertation of Thomas (2015) when constructing this conceptual framework. Thomas postulated that preparatory activities from PPP and PPD contribute to an administrator's sense of confidence about being an instructional leader and, in recommendations for further study, suggested the same is true for other roles associated with educational leadership.

The conceptual framework provided a starting place for the study. Due to its emphasis on participants' actual lived experiences, the study was not limited to deductive codes dictated by this framework or to those that emerged from the review of literature; on the contrary, new codes were permitted to emerge as participants shared their experiences with PPP, PPD, and job-embedded preparation. Those inductive codes allowed the researcher to detect and describe themes not anticipated via the conceptual framework but present in collected data, nonetheless.

Definitions of Key Terms

Building-Level Administrator. For the purposes of this study, the term *building-level administrators* includes the main principal for a building as well as assistant principals (Goldring et al., 2021). The study also includes administrators who fulfill the same roles and are evaluated by the same evaluation standards as principals but hold the title of coordinator or director.

Nonretirement Attrition. Teachers who leave the profession, school, or division not due to reaching retirement age but instead due to "school staffing decisions, life changes, or dissatisfaction with teaching" (Sutcher et al., 2016a, p. 13). Also referred to in some literature as *preretirement attrition*.

Principal Professional Development (PPD). Job-related learning activities embarked upon after being licensed for an administrative role (Lewis & Scott, 2020; Rodriguez et al., 2021). PPD may take many varied forms and may be supplied by, and perhaps

mandated by, an administrator's school division. PPD may also be sought out by the administrator individually and obtained voluntarily. PPD can be developed and offered by school divisions, universities or colleges, professional organizations, or outside providers (Davis et al., 2020).

Principal Preparation Program (PPP). Refers to the preparation program used by the administrator to gain necessary licensure prior to being hired as a building-level leader. Adkins (2009) identified four categories of PPP provider: nonprofit university or college programs; for-profit organizations such as Capella or Strayer; state-based alternative certification programs; and district-based preparatory programs, sometimes associated with third parties such as New Leaders for New Schools or The Wallace Foundation. State-based and district-based alternative certification programs exist but remain a far less common route to certification than nonprofit or for-profit university-based programs (Adkins, 2009).

Teacher Retention/Teacher Attrition. Broadly, *teacher retention* refers to a school or school division keeping hired teachers in the school and/or division (Sutcher et al., 2019). *Teacher attrition* refers to a school or school division losing teachers to another school or division; in addition, it includes teachers who leave the profession entirely. Kukla-Acevedo (2009) defined *stayers* as those teachers who remain in their current teaching post, *movers* as those who switch schools within a division or switch divisions, and *leavers* as those who leave the teaching profession altogether. This study focuses on administrators' preparation for retaining teachers within their building-level domain. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, teacher retention means keeping teachers from moving to a different school, even within the same division, or leaving the profession.

Limitations

The following limitations were beyond the control of the researcher: The validity and reliability of the study was subject, to a large extent, on the voluntary disclosures of the participants. The nature and extent of disclosures made by participants were subject to their level of comfort with the interview setting and protocol and the researcher. While a one-on-one interview protocol was selected over focus-group format to increase the likelihood that participants would feel comfortable and be forthcoming in terms of their responses, there remains the possibility that some participants may have withheld full disclosure, may have camouflaged facts, or may not have possessed a high level of memory and/or self-awareness regarding their level of preparedness and/or their preparatory experiences.

Delimitations

The study did not focus on retention of any specific subset of teachers (new teachers, quality teachers, mid-career teachers, etc.); it focused on administrators' perceptions of how well prepared they feel to increase the likelihood of any teacher in their buildings choosing to stay rather than leave. Research was limited to school administrators in one urban school division in Virginia, with a potential participant pool maximum of 65 (70 total administrators in the division minus five employed within the same building as the researcher). Building-level professionals who may hold a K-12 administrative license but were not employed in a building-level administrative position with the subject site division at the time of the study were not included. Central office personnel who had been building-level administrators prior to their central office employment were not included. The study focused on participants' perceptions of preparedness but did not collect data or present analysis of participants' empirical effectiveness in terms of retaining teachers in their buildings.

Organization of the Study

The research is presented in a five-chapter dissertation. Chapter One provides an introduction to the study, including contextual background information, a statement of the problem, explanation of the purpose of the study, an overview of the study along with research questions that guided the study, the study's conceptual framework, key definitions of terms used in the study, and a brief summary of limitations and delimitations. Chapter Two presents a review of the literature associated with teacher shortage, the principal's role in teacher attrition and retention, working conditions that impact teacher retention and fall within the purview building-level leadership, the relationship of Virginia principal evaluation standards to teacher retention, and principal professional development for teacher retention nationwide and specifically in Virginia. Chapter Three details the methodology employed in the study; including population sample; data collection; protocol design; and the collection, treatment, and analysis of data. The focus of Chapter Four is to describe the results of the study. Chapter Five provides findings, discusses implications, and offer suggestions for further research as well as a summary of the study.

Chapter Two: Review of the Current Literature

The literature review that follows begins with an examination of scholarly writings about the nature, prevalence, and extent of teacher shortage in the United States (U.S.) and then more specifically in Virginia. The next segment discusses available scholarly literature about the possible impact(s) of COVID-19 on teacher shortage. Following that initial review of literature about teacher shortage, literature surrounding impacts on student achievement are examined. Next, this literature review presents a discussion of recent scholarly writings on the principal's role in teacher retention and an examination of studies concerned with the working conditions relevant to teacher retention and also associated with building-level administration. The literature review then includes a segment examining published standards employed by local education agencies in Virginia for the evaluation of building-level administrators, as related to the creation of working conditions associated with teacher retention. The chapter ends with a review of the scholarly literature relevant to principal preparation programs and principal professional development regarding teacher retention in both the U.S. and Virginia.

Teacher Shortage

Teacher shortage has been identified as a hurdle facing United States public schools since the early 1980s, when the U.S. National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) published the following in the seminal *A Nation at Risk* report:

> The Commission found that not enough academically able [college] students are being attracted to teaching; that teacher preparation programs need substantial improvement; that the professional working life of teachers is on the whole unacceptable; and that a serious shortage of teachers exists in key fields. (p. 30)

Despite being a longstanding concern, teacher shortage is not well understood. In the second of a five-part report series for the Economic Policy Institute, García and Weiss (2019c) stated that

"the [teacher] shortage is poorly understood because the reasons for it are complex and interdependent" (p. 2). In a report for the American Institutes for Research, Behrstock-Sherratt (2016) also lamented how confused policymakers' understanding of teacher shortage can be:

> Despite a saturation of research about why teachers leave the profession and the policy interventions that might convince them to stay, remarkably little research details the nature of teacher shortages—that is, how teacher shortages have been measured and framed over time....Increasingly, states are stepping up their efforts to gather teacher supply-and-demand data to assess the severity of teacher shortages in their districts. But past efforts to report these data have too often painted a muddled picture of little use in policy dialogues and targeted policy development. (p. 1)

For divisions and schools considering their teacher retention policies and practices, there are benefits to taking the time to understand the nature of teacher shortage (Behrstock-Sherratt, 2016; Katz, 2018).

Sutcher et al. (2016a) analyzed multiple sources of data regarding teacher supply, including data about teacher preparation programs from the U.S. Department of Education collected under Title II of the Higher Education Act as well as the Baccalaureate and Beyond (B&B) longitudinal study. The B&B "examines students' education and work experiences after they complete a bachelor's degree, with a special emphasis on the experiences of new elementary and secondary teachers" (NCES, n.d.a). Sutcher et al. (2016a) estimated diminishing teacher supply totals using the average annual attrition rate reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) plus re-entry rates and the timing of return for those re-entrants that had been made previously by researchers Grissom and Reininger (2012). In addition, the authors noted that just five percent of ACT-takers indicated an interest in pursuing education as a career, a decrease of 29% from 2010 to 2014. They also stated that, "in

an annual national survey of college freshmen, only 4.2% of students indicated their probable field of study would be education" (p. 26). That represents fewer than half the number who showed interest in 2007, and the "lowest proportion of students considering teaching in the last 45 years" (Sutcher et al., 2016a, p. 26). The findings of Sutcher et al. (2016a) indicate a decreasing trend in U.S. teacher supply that is projected to continue.

To analyze and project demand, Sutcher et al. (2016a) used data sources that included the national Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS); the SASS Teacher Follow–Up Survey; the Common Core of Data (CCD); and public school teacher projections from 2000 to 2025 as published in the Digest of Education Statistics. Their analyses resulted in categorization of teacher demand due to four causes. The first two are related to reductions in teacher supply: retirement attrition and nonretirement attrition. The other two categories relate to an increase in demand: a reduction in pupil-to-teacher ratios and student enrollment increases (Sutcher et al., 2016a). According to the data analyses of Sutcher et al. (2016a), the projected teacher workforce need for 2019-2020 due to pupil-teacher ratio reduction and increased student enrollment, combined, went up 10% from the previous two school years. The retirement attrition rate stayed in the range of 28-31% in the comparison school years 2017-2018, 2018-2019, and 2019-2020. The nonretirement attrition range remained between 59-67% for the three comparison school years. In other words, teachers leaving the profession due to "school staffing decisions, life changes, or dissatisfaction with teaching" (p. 18) consistently caused approximately 2/3 of annual demand in the comparison years, indicating that retention of teachers is an important concern for schools and divisions who are faced with teacher shortage.

Teacher Shortage as Related to Quality

Sutcher et al. state their definition of *teacher shortage* as "an inadequate number of qualified individuals willing to offer their services for available jobs under prevailing wages

and conditions" consistently and repeatedly (2016a, p. 10; 2016b, p. 2; 2019, p. 4). The researchers emphasize the issue of quality as critical to the definition of shortage, asserting, "We can always find ways to fill vacancies in the teaching force. But that does not mean shortages are solved" (2016b, p. 5). García and Weiss (2019b) concur by emphasizing that "not all current teachers meet the education, experience, and certification requirements associated with being a highly qualified teacher" (p 4). García and Weiss (2019b) examined 2015-2016 NTPS survey data regarding four key credentials: being fully certified, completing a traditional teacher preparation program, having five or more years of teaching experience, and having educational background in the subject they were assigned to teach. The quality criteria examined by García and Weiss aligned with the criteria for a teacher to be deemed a highly qualified teacher (HQT) under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002). The study's analysis showed that large numbers of teachers across the United States lacked those credentials associated with being a HQT in 2015-2016 (García and Weiss, 2019b) despite the fact that a 2007 interim evaluation of how states were implementing NCLB had determined that, "most teachers met the HQT requirement as determined by their states" (Birman et al., 2007; Remer, 2017). What is consistent in both the interim evaluation of NCLB implementation (Birman et al., 2007; Remer, 2017) and the data analyses of García and Weiss (2019b) is the determination that schools primarily serving low-income students were and continue to be more likely to have teachers who do not meet high quality criteria.

Sutcher et al. (2016b) state, "The key issue is not whether there will be enough warm bodies to enter teaching. The key issue is whether there will be enough well-qualified individuals willing to offer their services in the specific fields and locations that currently lack an adequate supply" (p. 2). Cowan et al. (2016) found that schools serving underrepresented minority students, including American Indian, Black, or Hispanic students, have considerably

more difficulty with staffing. Burkhauser (2017) found that multiple recent studies confirm that "the negative impacts of teacher turnover disproportionately affect schools with higher proportions of minority, low-income, or low-achieving students" (p. 126). García and Weiss (2019b) emphasize this point as well, stating that "There is no sign that the large shortage of credentialed teachers—overall, and especially in high-poverty schools—will go away" (2019b, p. 15). Their analysis of NTPS survey data from 2015-2016 indicates that the number of inexperienced teachers (five or fewer years in the classroom) is 4.8 percentage points greater in schools designated as high-poverty, and that this is a marked increase from the same survey results in 2011-2012 (García & Weiss, 2019b).

Teacher Shortage as Regional and Local

One common counterargument against Sutcher et al.'s analyses and reporting (2016a) is that it can be problematic to quantify teacher shortage on a national level (Aldeman, 2016; Antonucci, 2016; Cowan et al., 2016). Responding to this criticism, Sutcher et al. (2016b) acknowledge the problem by stating, "We emphasize in our report that the current shortages differ from state to state, across districts of different types, and among subject areas" (p. 2). In a subsequent report, Sutcher et al. (2019) expand on this acknowledgment by writing, "There are, in fact, 50 separate labor markets for teaching, plus local labor markets nested within states" (p. 5) and go on to explain that the conditions affecting teacher supply and demand—compensation, working conditions, and turnover rates—vary a great deal by region and district. Darling-Hammond and Carver-Thomas (2019) emphasize that turnover of teachers varies considerably from state to state and region to region, even among school divisions and teachers of specific subjects. There is a great deal of consensus among the literature that consistent evidence exists of perennial staffing shortages in certain disciplines such as STEM subjects and special education, as well as in certain contexts such as urban, rural, and socio-economically

disadvantaged locales (Cowan et al., 2016; Dee & Goldhaber, 2017; Glazerman & Max, 2011; Goldhaber et al., 2015; Ingersoll and Perda, 2010; Isenberg et al., 2013; Katz, 2018; McCarthy & Campbell, 2019; Nguyen, 2020; U.S. DOE 2021).

Teacher Shortage in Virginia

Sorensen et al. (2018) reported differences within Virginia regarding access to qualified teachers, and concluded that, "the local-level distribution of qualified teachers appears to be a less tractable problem than the overall, statewide balance between teachers and enrollments" (p. 4). In analyzing demand for teachers in Virginia, the researchers found that four factors are key: student enrollment, high-need subgroups, age distribution of teachers, and teacher turnover. In terms of K-12 student enrollment in Virginia, the data analyses of Sorensen et al. (2018) revealed a higher rate of increase than that of the nation for the past two decades, with high school enrollment showing the most growth. The National Center for Education Statistics projects that enrollment in Virginia schools will grow 3.3% between 2016 and 2027, which is commensurate with the projection for the nation as a whole (U.S. DOE, 2020). Student subgroups, including English language learners and socioeconomically disadvantaged students, showed a marked increase in enrollment in Virginia, according to Sorensen et al. (2018) who stated, "Rapid growth in student populations requiring specialized instruction or greater resources may place additional demands on the teacher workforce in the state" (p. 7). In the spring of 2016, this concern lead Virginia Governor McAuliffe to call for an advisory committee to study teacher shortage in the state and make policy recommendations.

Virginia's Advisory Committee on Teacher Shortages (2017) noted that average teacher turnover among the commonwealth's public schools was 10.2% between 2015-16 and 2016-17, higher than the national average of 8%. Sorensen et al. (2018) proposed that, "the gap between Virginia and U.S. turnover rates suggest the possibility of state-specific factors

pushing up attrition" (p. 8). The authors cited data from the SASS indicating that the median age of Virginia teachers is 43.2 years, which is 2.2 years older than the median age of teachers nationally; however, Sorensen et al. (2018) did not conclude that the age of Virginia's teaching force is the sole or most important factor impacting teacher turnover. "School staffing problems," the authors noted, "are much more likely to be related to turnover than to teacher retirements" (p. 8), which agrees with the data analyses conducted by Sutcher et al. (2016a, 2019) at the national level.

The Advisory Committee on Teacher Shortages (2017) indicated that teacher turnover rates in ten specific Virginia school divisions in 2016-2017 were between 23.7- 31.1%, which was much higher than the statewide rate of 10.2% for the same year. These divisions were typically high-poverty and located in the south, central, and eastern regions of Virginia. Referencing this information from the Committee's report, Sorensen et al. (2018) concluded that teacher turnover rates in Virginia vary a great deal depending on locality. The Advisory Committee on Teacher Shortages (2017) concurred: "Not surprisingly, divisions with highest concentrations of poverty tend to have the hardest time attracting and retaining high quality teachers" (p 6). These findings echo studies and analyses of national data in emphasizing the regional, local, and subject-specific nature of teacher shortage.

Potential Impact of COVID-19

While few conclusive studies related to the actual impact of COVID-19 on the teacher workforce are yet available, researchers and policymakers are working to assess the potential impact of the pandemic and several reports have been published within the past two years. Bill et al. (2021) studied the teacher supply pipeline in Maryland by surveying 1,254 undergraduates at the University of Maryland who had indicated an interest in teaching as a career. The research team found that 35% of respondents indicated deciding not to pursue

teaching as a result of pandemic-related concerns. Respondents cited fears about "teaching's heavy workload and low reward in terms of social respect and salary" in the wake of COVID-19 (p. 39). Data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics indicate that 44% of public schools in the United States report vacancies for the current school year and that 61% of those schools "specifically identified the COVID-19 pandemic as a cause" (NCES, 2022, para. 1). Diliberti et al. (2021) surveyed 1,000 former public school teachers and found that "almost half of the public school teachers who left the profession early and voluntarily since 2020 listed COVID-19 as the main reason" (p. 2). Steiner and Woo (2021) examined survey results from 1,006 teachers, reporting that 15% of those surveyed indicated they were likely to leave for pandemic-related reasons. Among the "likely pandemic leavers" subgroup of teachers in the study, 96% cited working conditions and feelings of job-related stress. Carver-Thomas et al., (2021) interviewed superintendents and human resources administrators in California, finding that those district leaders estimated their teachers' workloads had at least doubled because of the pandemic, causing concern over the role burnout may play in teacher attrition. While not a U.S. study, it is interesting that Fullard (2021) surveyed 2,000 teachers in the United Kingdom about their intentions to stay in the profession, finding that respondents were twice as likely to leave as they were before the pandemic. Fullard (2021) notes that the study involved teachers' expected attrition and not actual attrition, acknowledging that vaccination roll-out and lack of alternate employment could cause actual attrition to be much less than their study indicates in terms of teacher intentions.

Some early reports on actual teacher attrition rates in the United States indicate that teachers thinking about leaving during the pandemic and expressing their concerns about working conditions do seem to have been more common than actual leaving, to date (Bastian & Fuller, 2021; Bacher-Hicks et al., 2021, Zamarro et al., 2022). Barnum (2022) noted that

"comprehensive national data on teacher turnover is not available" (para. 5); however, the reporter was able to obtain and analyze data from 19 large U.S. school divisions and concluded that "turnover going into this school year was comparable to rates before the pandemic" (para. 6). In an online article about a survey conducted by *EducationWeek*, Lieberman (2021) talks about a "perfect storm of frustration and chaos for schools" (para. 12) relative to teacher workforce; however, he acknowledges that "shortages are hardly a new phenomenon for schools" (para. 10). Data from the study presented by Lieberman (2021) indicate that 40% of districts report severe to very severe teacher shortage in 2020-2021. The study report's value is limited, however, as it does not indicate how many districts were surveyed.

Zamarro et al. (2022) note that teachers' perceptions of stress and burnout associated with pandemic impacts on working conditions, while perhaps not resulting in actual large scale resignations or retirements, could yet have a negative impact on their effectiveness and student progress. As noted by Madigan & Kim (2021), teachers' feelings of dissatisfaction with the workplace can negatively impact a school, even if those teachers opt to stay rather than leave. In examining factors related to teacher burnout during the pandemic, Pressley (2021) noted the role of administrative support as one area that "schools, districts, and researchers need to attend to in order to maintain the critical teaching workforce" (p. 327). In the second of a 3-part blog report on the state of teacher shortage *vis a vis* the COVID-19 pandemic, Carver-Thomas (2022) emphasizes that reductions in divisions' teacher workforces, no matter how small, could result in "serious disruption for schools" (p. 1). The author recommends focusing on teacher preparation, recruitment, and retention as important for long-term benefit to the teacher workforce.

Impacts of Teacher Shortage on Student Achievement

In their review of 30 research studies of teacher effectiveness as it relates to teacher experience level, Kini and Podolsky (2016) concluded that teacher experience in years of teaching is positively associated with student achievement as seen in both increased standardized test scores and student attendance. In a study of New York City data related to 850,000 observations of students in grades 4 and 5 over the course of 2001 to 2010, Ronfeldt et al. (2013) found a link between student test scores in math and English language arts and traits of teachers. Their findings suggest that "in both ELA and math and for all model specifications...students of teachers in the same grade level team in the same school do worse in years where teacher turnover rates are higher, as compared to years with less teacher turnover" (p. 18). Hanushek et al. (2016), analyzing data from the Texas Education Agency, found that teacher turnover had a negative impact on the quality of instruction in schools with lower-achievement overall; however, the researchers did not find the same evidence of adverse turnover effect in higher-achieving schools. In their quasi-experimental study of the impact of teacher turnover on student achievement in District of Columbia Public Schools, Adnot et al. (2016) studied turnover specifically as it related to the IMPACT mentoring and incentive program in DCPS, finding that turnover can have positive effects when it is the result of strategic, purposeful replacement of low-performing teachers by a school division; however, their study found that the effect of teacher attrition not related to such programs tended to be negative.

Sorensen and Ladd (2018) used data from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction to follow individual teachers and specific classrooms longitudinally from 1994-1995 to 2015-2016, restricting the sample to math and English teachers for grades of six to eight. The stated goal was, "to estimate the causal effects of subject-specific teacher turnover

on the composition of teachers and average classroom characteristics at the school level" (p. 13). The study found that teacher turnover resulted in a large number of inexperienced teachers remaining in a school, an increase in the proportion of faculty with provisional licenses, a decrease in the average teacher licensure exam score for a school, and an increase in the proportion of teachers assigned to subjects outside of their area of expertise. The researchers' models demonstrated that schools serving large proportions of low-income students were more likely to face these consequences of turnover related to faculty quality. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) analyzed NCES data from the Schools and Staffing Survey. That analysis concluded that students in low-socioeconomic schools are more likely to experience teacher turnover effects. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) noted that teachers in Title I schools have greater turnover rates than non-Title I schools and, additionally, that teachers in schools that serve primarily students of color have greater teacher turnover rates. Data analysis by Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) concludes that "in schools serving predominantly low-income students and students of color, students are often subjected to a 'revolving door' of less-experienced teachers" (p. 14).

Principal's Role in Attrition/Retention

In recent years, multiple studies have emerged with the aim of determining which work conditions impact teachers' decisions to stay or leave. Twelve studies and data analyses related specifically to the relationship of working conditions to teacher attrition were examined for this literature review. All twelve concluded that the dominant workplace factor influencing or predicting teacher retention is school leadership (Boyd et al., 2011; Burkhauser, 2017; Fuller et al., 2016; García & Weiss, 2019a; Johnson et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2016; Ladd, 2011; Learning Policy Institute, 2017a; Olsen & Huang, 2011; Simon & Johnson, 2015; You & Conley, 2015). The proliferation of documentation pointing to the potential impact of

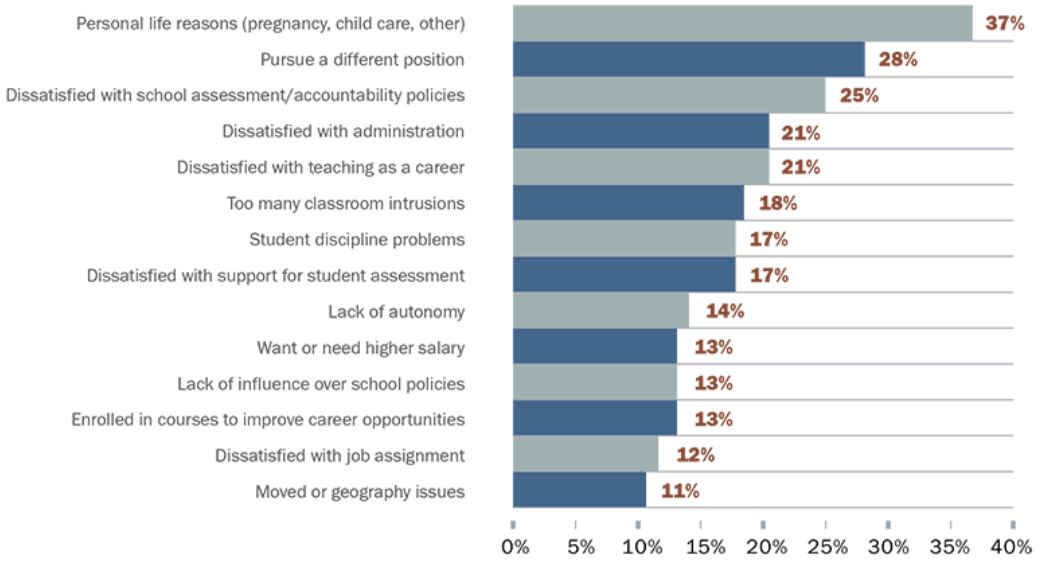
school leadership on teacher retention is, in part, a driver behind the focus of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) on educational leadership as integral to school improvement (Harmon et al., 2017).

Burkhauser (2017) looked at four years of panel data based on the North Carolina Teacher Working Condition Survey and found that "teacher ratings of the school environment depend on which principal is leading the school, independent of other school and district contextual factors" (p. 126). Fuller et al. (2016) conducted surveys and interviews in 13 schools in a single large division, including 602 teachers, to evaluate the influence of multiple predictors on a teacher's decision to stay or leave. The data analysis and probability modeling revealed that, "Overall, how teachers see the material and social support offered by school leaders and colleagues appears to shape their desire to stay or leave, separate from the intrinsic rewards they experience" (p. 559). You and Conley (2015) examined national SASS datasets to develop and test two models. The results indicated that "the effect of administrative support on work and career commitment was uniform and significant for teachers" (p. 561).

In 2017, researchers from the Learning Policy Institute (LPI) published a research brief with their analysis of the 2013 Teacher Follow-Up Survey (TFS) from the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). The report analysis is summarized in Figure 2. A factor labeled by researchers as "dissatisfied with administration" earned 21% of the teachers' responses, ranking it as the fourth most significant contributor to teachers' decisions to leave. The Learning Policy Institute (2017a) concluded that, "principal leadership and support are among the most important factors in teachers' decisions about whether to stay in a school or in the profession" (p. 1). Other factors included in the survey, such as "dissatisfied with school assessment/accountability policies," "too many classroom intrusions," and "lack of autonomy" also relate to the role of building administration.

Figure 2

Why Do Teachers Leave?



Note. Percentages do not add to 100 because survey respondents could select multiple factors. From *The Role of Principals in Addressing Teacher Shortages* (research brief) by the Learning Policy Institute, 2017, p. 2. (https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/role-principals-addressing-teacher-shortages-brief), licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.

Boyd et al. (2011) studied New York City data to examine the relationship between school contextual factors and teacher attrition. The researchers conducted a survey of new teachers and matched their responses to data provided by the NYC Department of Education and New York State Education Department. The study compared first-year teacher's responses to survey questions about six contextual factors identified against retention data related to those teachers one year later. The researchers then used that data to predict retention of all teachers at that school using a school-level average for each factor. Boyd et al. (2011) found that administration was the contextual factor with the strongest correlation to teachers' decisions to transfer or leave.

Working Conditions Related to School Leadership

Ladd (2011) studied new teachers' perceptions of working conditions, using data from a 2006 North Carolina statewide survey. Like Boyd et al. (2011), Ladd's study sought to combine the survey responses with data sets to determine the relationship between teacher perceptions of contextual conditions and their intended and actual departure data. Ladd studied six contextual factors included on the NC survey, which included 24 questions related to school leadership. The researcher reclassified survey questions into "more coherent domains" (p. 241), combining all the survey questions categorized under *leadership* with several questions included in the category of *teacher empowerment*. At the elementary and middle school level, the study also included questions related to teacher evaluation, but the researchers kept that as a separate contextual category at the high school level. The working condition variables studied by Ladd were then incorporated into models with school, district, and respondent characteristics, as well as both intended and actual departure data. According to Ladd's report, "For all three levels of schooling, the higher the perceived quality of school leadership, the less likely teachers are either to plan to leave or actually leave the school" (p. 256). Ladd states repeatedly in her report that leadership emerged as the most clearly aligned with teacher attrition or retention.

Beyond the general concept of school leadership, examination of studies related to teachers' reasons for leaving revealed five common themes that fall within the purview of the school administrator and were also commonly found to be predictive of retention or attrition of teachers. The level of perceived teacher autonomy in a school was found to be an influential factor in four of the studies reviewed (Boyd, 2011; García & Weiss, 2019a; Learning Policy Institute, 2017a; You & Conley, 2011). Teachers' perception of pressure and expectations placed on them from superiors was found to be a contributing factor in four reviewed studies

(Byrd-Blake et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2016; Learning Policy Institute, 2017a). Teachers' perceptions regarding student discipline, safety, and order were also tied to the probability of teacher retention in half of the twelve studies reviewed (Boyd, 2011; García & Weiss, 2019a; Kraft et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2016; Learning Policy Institute, 2017a; Simon & Johnson, 2015). Four reviewed studies found that the level of input and/or level of shared vision felt by teachers had an impact on the probability of teachers staying or leaving (Burkhauser, 2017; Johnson et al., 2012; Learning Policy Institute, 2017a; Simon & Johnson, 2015). Finally, five of the studies reviewed found that teachers' perceptions of their time being infringed upon and/or instructional intrusions had an impact on their decision to stay or leave (Burkhauser, 2017; García & Weiss, 2019a; Johnson, 2012; Kraft et al., 2012; Learning Policy Institute, 2017a). These five factors that recur as predictive factors in studies of why teachers choose to leave or stay are also reflected in the Virginia standards used to evaluate the work of building principals.

VA Principal Standards as Related to Working Conditions

In adherence with Sections 22.1-215.13:5 and 22.1-294 of the *Code of Virginia*, the VDOE developed principal performance standards to facilitate the evaluation and development of school principals and assistant principals (2020a). Included in the guidelines are seven VDOE overarching standards for principals: instructional leadership, school climate, human resources management, organizational management, communication and community relations, professionalism, and student academic progress (VDOE, 2020a). Each of these standards is accompanied in the published guidelines by a description and a set of performance indicators. The standard designated as *human resource management* (Performance Standard 3) has the following description: "The principal fosters effective human resources management by assisting with selection and induction, and by supporting, evaluating, and *retaining* [emphasis

added] quality instructional and support personnel" (p. 7). There are nine performance indicators related to this standard. The indicators concern staff selection, new staff support and mentoring, supervision and evaluation, making feedback and recommendations, documentation, and provision of opportunities for staff growth and development. The guidelines published by VDOE state that these indicators represent examples but are not limited to those published. This leaves opportunity for individual divisions or schools to modify or expand on those provided by the state.

While Performance Standard 3 and its nine performance indicators have been dedicated specifically to human resources management in the VDOE guidelines for principal performance, mostly as they relate to supervision and evaluation, other VDOE standards also relate to the working conditions that have an impact on teacher retention. Four studies reviewed found that the level of input and/or level of shared vision perceived by teachers had an impact on the probability of teachers staying or leaving (Burkhauser, 2017; Johnson et al., 2012; Learning Policy Institute, 2017a; Simon & Johnson, 2015). That factor is addressed by VDOE Principal Performance Standards indicators 1.1, 1.2, 1.5, 2.3, 2.4, 2.10, 4.9, 5.1, 5.4, 6.8, 7.1, 7.4, and 7.8 — all related to shared responsibility, shared power, seeking and incorporating teacher voice, and collaborative decision-making. Building a high level of teacher autonomy, indicated by several studies as being predictive of teachers' decisions to stay or leave (Boyd, 2011; García & Weiss, 2019a; Learning Policy Institute, 2017a; You & Conley, 2011), is not explicitly addressed by the VDOE Principal Performance Standards indicators; however, any of the VDOE indicators addressing shared decision-making and respect for teacher voice could potentially be interpreted as supporting teacher autonomy. Indicators that may relate to teacher autonomy in this way include 1.5, 2.3, 2.8, 4.9, 5.1, 5.4, and 7.4. Teachers' perceptions regarding student discipline, safety, and order were also tied to

the probability of teacher retention in multiple studies (Boyd, 2011; García & Weiss, 2019a; Kraft et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2016; Learning Policy Institute, 2017a; Simon & Johnson, 2015). This factor is explicitly addressed by VDOE Principal Performance Standards Indicators 2.7, 2.8, 2.9, 4.1, and 4.2. Multiple studies reviewed also found that teachers' perceptions of their time being infringed upon and/or instructional intrusions had an impact on their decision to stay or leave (Burkhauser, 2017; García & Weiss, 2019a; Johnson, 2012; Kraft et al., 2012; Learning Policy Institute, 2017a). The VDOE Principal Performance Standards indicators addressing this factor include 1.6, 1.8, 1.12, and 2.6. Indicator 2.6 states verbatim that it is a principal's responsibility to "provide positive working conditions *to encourage retention* [emphasis added] of highly-effective personnel" (p. 10). It is clear from the published principal evaluation standards that the VDOE recognizes the role of the building level administrator in the creation and maintenance of a workplace that fosters retention of teachers. What is less clear from the literature is how Virginia school administrators are prepared for that role.

Principal Preparation and Development

School administrators are equipped for the demands of the position through principal preparation programs (PPP) and principal professional development (PPD). Principal preparation programs are formal education programs that take place prior to a principal taking on the position, in the form of preservice licensure programs and post-graduate programs provided by colleges and universities, state-based alternative certification programs, or district-based preparatory programs (Adkins, 2009; Grissom et al., 2019; Pannell et al., 2015). Braun et al. (2011) define the role of such programs as the preparation of educational leaders to guide school communities through the inherent daily challenges associated with school management. In the past decade, there have been many studies related to PPP and the measurement of its

effectiveness (Grissom et al., 2019; Backor & Gordon, 2015; Campanotta et al., 2018; Clifford et al., 2016; McCarthy, 2015; Ni et al., 2017; Pannell et al., 2015; Patterson, 2012; Perrone & Tucker, 2019; Yoder et al., 2014). None of those studies focused on the principal's preparation for a role in teacher retention.

Principal professional development, also sometimes referred to as principal professional learning (PPL), is comprised of development and learning activities a principal undertakes once placed in the role of building administrator (Lewis & Scott, 2020). PPD can take many forms, including learning activities such as mentoring/coaching, professional reading, participation in workshops or conferences, networking, professional association membership, and taking continuing-education university courses (Davis et al., 2020). It is aimed at helping principals hone their leadership skills and support instructional practices in their schools and divisions (Harman et al., 2017, Rodriguez et al., 2021). Rodriquez et al. (2021) studied the alignment of PPD with standards used to evaluate administrators, finding a "lack of intentional alignment of principal professional development with professional standards" (p. 71). Several studies and analyses exist that have explored the effectiveness of PPD in terms of which types of principal learning activities tend to positively impact student achievement (Grissom & Harrington, 2010; Harman et al, 2017; Lavigne et al, 2016; Taie & Goldring, 2019); however, there is a paucity of research related specifically to PPD that is specifically relevant to the principal's role in teacher retention or preparation of principals to meet the standards associated with creating working conditions that have been shown to curtail teacher attrition.

PPD for Teacher Retention in the United States

PPD was a focus of the 2017-2018 National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS). The NTPS is a survey of public and private K-12 schools with state and national representation that

collects data using mailed questionnaires as well as online instruments, followed by in-person and telephone interviews (Lewis & Scott, 2020; NCES, n.d.c; Taie & Goldring, 2019). Data collection began in September 2017 and ended in August 2018, focused on 2016-2017 school year activities, and had a weighted response rate of 70.2% for public school principals (NCES, n.d.c). Public school principals who participated in the NTPS had an average of 6.8 years in the principalship and had spent an average of 4.2 years at their current schools. The NTPS for 2017-2018 included a total of 10,600 public and charter school principals; of that number, 95% reported participation in professional development of some kind during the previous school year (Lewis & Scott, 2020; NCES, n.d.c; Taie & Goldring, 2019). The fact that a large majority of principals report taking part in PPD complements Lavigne et al.'s 2016 analysis of the earlier 2011-2012 School and Staffing Survey (SASS), precursor to the NTPS, in which 99% of the principals surveyed reported participating in some PPD, mostly workshop or conference attendance.

Beyond asking principals whether they participated in professional development, the 2017-2018 NTPS collected data regarding principal participation in development activities associated with nine specific topics. The most common professional development topics reported to have been experienced related to support of effective instruction (91.9%) and analysis/interpretation of achievement data (85.5%), followed closely by PPD regarding school safety or climate (85.1%). A large majority of principals also reported taking part in PPD activities regarding student engagement (77.2%), use of technology (78.5%), school improvement (77.1%), and school management (65.3%). After student social services (54.2%), the PPD topic least reported to have been experienced was management of human resources (48.8%). Fewer than half of the 10,600 principals who took part in the NTPS for 2017-2018 reported participating in any kind of professional development regarding human resource

management. The NTPS did not stipulate whether PPD relative to teacher retention was included in the category called "human resources management"; therefore, those 48.8% of respondents may or may not have encountered retention related PPD among other human resource (HR) development topics such as hiring teachers, observing teachers, evaluating teachers, and HR law.

PPD for Teacher Retention in Virginia

A recent VDOE report aimed at examining teacher shortages in Virginia in general, and specifically within specific teaching endorsements, did not address principal preparation or professional development aimed at supporting principals in retaining teachers as a means of counteracting teacher shortage (VDOE, 2016). The report included several recommended strategies to address teacher shortages. Those recommendations focus on ways to support and improve teacher preparation programs, ways to provide funding and resources for teacher recruitment, strategies school divisions might employ related for recruitment and hiring practices, collaborative initiatives between the VDOE and the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), and VDOE policies related to teacher preparation requirements, licensing, and endorsements. The report did not address the role of educational leaders in retaining quality teachers nor their preparation to meet VDOE standards associated with teacher retention.

Hairston (2020) recently studied the degree to which Virginia school leaders perceived the effectiveness of their principal preparation programs in terms of how well their experiences with those programs aligned to national Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (2015). The non-experimental study of 46 doctoral students found that those included in the snowball sample did, overall, perceive their preparation program experiences to be aligned with the national standards document. This study was limited in terms of the participants'

varied occupations. While the study was titled with regard to "principal" perceptions of preparation programs, the study sample consisted of doctoral students regardless of whether they were currently or had ever been school principals. The Hairston study compares participants' perceptions to a national set of professional standards that may be tangentially aligned with the Virginia principal evaluation standards but is not used for principal evaluation in Virginia, the state in which the study took place. It did not focus specifically on the evaluation standards correlated to working conditions shown to improve teacher retention. Hairston's study focused on principal preparation programs through universities and colleges but did not include principal professional development.

Barnett (2017) conducted a qualitative study of leadership practices of principals in rural, hard-to-staff urban schools in southeastern Virginia, focusing on practices that participants believed to have an impact on teacher retention. While the study did focus specifically on teacher retention and principal traits in the Commonwealth of Virginia, the study was limited to surveys and interviews of five principals and seventeen teachers. Study findings corroborated many of the larger national studies in noting that administrative support, shared leadership, and strong leader-teacher relationships were key to teacher retention; however, Barnett's study did not seek to address principals' preparation, professional development, or perceived readiness for having a role in retaining teachers.

In 2020, Davis et al. conducted a review of fifty articles published between 1997 and 2018 regarding principal professional development (PPD). The review resulted in a set of five overarching themes for what makes PPD effective: (1) required, individualized, and based on data; (2) job-embedded, ongoing, and sustained; (3) collaborative; (4) reflective; and (5) supported through ongoing coaching or mentoring (Davis et al., 2020). Following the literature review, Davis et al. consulted a panel of experts who validated the themes, revised them into

criteria, and identified indicators for each criterion. All told, the researchers and panel of experts found 22 identifiers related to the five effective PPD criteria. They then evaluated 27 U.S. states' PPD requirements, including Virginia, regarding how well each met those 22 indicators. States were noted as meeting an indicator if their publicly accessible policy information included language similar to it. Virginia's PPD requirements met fewer than half of the 22 effective PPD indicators in the study.

The Davis et al. (2020) study has some limitations of note: Data collection was limited to policies available publicly in each state and did not include "local policies or programs geared towards the continuous development of principals" (p 15). The report of the study did not make it clear which specific public documents or policies were consulted for each state. The VDOE public website includes a manual for renewal of licensure that includes parameters for all licensed personnel, indicating no difference in professional development requirements for principals seeking renewal of a Virginia K-12 administration and supervision license endorsement than those for a teacher seeking renewal of an instructional license. Based on publicly available documentation, the Virginia license-renewal professional development requirements for principals do not differ from the requirements for teachers. The Virginia requirements for all educators are based on a total number of hours in any one or more of eight professional development activity categories, at the option of the licensee (VDOE, 2020b). In an email response to an inquiry about sources utilized in the Davis et al. study, primary author K. Davis confirmed the following:

> The VDOE website was our only frame of reference regarding principal professional development expectations in Virginia. The policy at the time included the required number of professional development hours for all educators, including principals, as

> well as activities that qualified for professional development in Virginia. (personal communication, May 30, 2021)

Davis summarized principal professional development in Virginia by stating, “There was no true plan for PPD in Virginia” (personal communication, May 30, 2021). Though Virginia has standards in place for principal evaluation that address how well the principal fosters working conditions shown to improve retention of teachers, Virginia does not have PPD requirements in place aligned to those standards. This may be reflected in the national 2017-2018 NTPS survey results, where fewer than half of the principals who reported participating in professional development—including those from Virginia—indicated that their PPD participation was considered as part of their performance evaluation (NCES, n.d.c).

Bizzell (2011), in a study of principal professional development in the rural Appalachian region of Virginia, also notes the lack of focus on PPD, remarking, “There appears to be little research on principals’ professional development at all” (p. 29). Bizzell reviewed literature from 2000 through 2009 and concluded that, “None of these studies have evaluated professional development approaches or the achievement of professional development goals through the examination of principal behaviors” (p. 36). Bizzell’s own research—a qualitative study of 13 principals conducted using an interview tool—stated a primary purpose of gathering “information on the nature of professional development experiences of some principals,” (p. 39). Though Bizzell fleetingly mentions a study by Béteille et al. (2009) as having referenced principal’s importance to teacher recruitment and retention, neither Bizzell’s 2011 study nor Béteille’s older study focused on PPD for teacher retention.

Summary

There have been many studies of principal preparation programs and their relationship to principal outcomes and/or effectiveness in recent years (Grissom et al., 2019; Backor & Gordon, 2015; Campanotta et al., 2018; Clifford et al., 2016; McCarthy, 2015; Ni et al., 2017; Pannell et al., 2015; Patterson, 2012; Perrone & Tucker, 2019; Yoder et al., 2014); however, studies that focus on principal professional development are far more scarce, and none have been located for this review that focus on how PPD in Virginia aligns with the specific VDOE principal evaluation standards that correlate to the workplace conditions research has shown to be associated with teacher retention. Nationally, the 2017-2018 NTPS focused on the types of PPD principals experienced and quantified how many surveyed principals experienced PPD related to human resource management in general; notably, that survey did not specify any particular facet of human resource management. The study's data provide the insight that fewer than half of the 10,600 principals surveyed engaged in PPD related to human resources management, but include no details regarding what aspects of human resource management were covered by that PPD. Although Bizzell (2011) studied the PPD experienced by principals in the specific setting of the rural Appalachian region of Virginia, that study did not focus on how principals were prepared to meet the VDOE standards associated with teacher retention or workplace conditions associated with teacher retention. While Hairston (2020) studied principal's perceptions of how effective they felt their PPP had been in preparing them to meet national PSEL (2015) standards, that research did not discuss teacher retention nor focus on standards employed in evaluating Virginia administrators. Finally, Barnett (2017) studied principal's perceived impact on teacher retention in Virginia through leadership behaviors but did not study their preparation for that role. Existing research focused on how Virginia school leaders are prepared for their role in retaining teachers is very limited.

There are concerns regarding teacher shortage in Virginia in at least certain subjects, contexts, and locales (Sorensen et al., 2018; VDOE, 2016; U.S. DOE, 2021). Data analyses indicate that a major contributor to teacher shortage, nationally as well as in Virginia, is nonretirement attrition (Sorensen et al., 2018; Sutcher et al., 2016a). Multiple studies have found that specific workplace conditions are related to teachers' decision to stay or leave (Byrd-Blake et al., 2010; Dee & Goldhaber, 2017; García & Weiss, 2019a; Goldring et al., 2014; Katz, 2018; Kraft et al., 2016; Ladd, 2011; Loeb et al., 2011; Podolsky et al., 2016; Simon & Johnson, 2015; You & Conley, 2015). Further, an abundance of studies indicate that the building principal has an impact on those workplace conditions and on teachers' decisions to stay or leave (Barnett, 2017; Boyd et al., 2011; Burkhauser, 2017; García & Weiss, 2019a; Johnson et al., 2012; Katz, 2018; Kraft et al., 2016; Ladd, 2011; Learning Policy Institute, 2017a; Loeb et al., 2011; Olsen & Huang, 2019; Podolsky et al., 2016; Taie & Goldring, 2019; You & Conley, 2015). Considering that VDOE principal evaluation guidelines include standards and indicators correlated to the workplace conditions shown to retain teachers most effectively as well as standards and indicators explicitly related to human resource management (VDOE, 2020a), further research regarding principal professional development geared toward the edification of principals for their important role in teacher retention could help inform professional development policies and practices in Virginia schools and divisions.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of building-level administrators in one urban K-12 school division in Virginia regarding their preparation for having a role in the retention of teachers as well as their perceptions of how prepared they have been for that aspect of educational leadership. In the study, participants considered their principal preparation programs, professional development experiences, and on-the-job experiences as they related to teacher retention. The study focused on workplace conditions that fall within the purview of a building-level administrator and have been shown by previous research to positively impact teacher retention. This study examined building administrators' perceptions of how well prepared they feel to increase the likelihood of any teacher in their buildings choosing to stay rather than leave, without focusing on a particular subset of teachers such as first-year teachers, high quality teachers, or minority teachers. A desired outcome of this research is that it may provide insight to schools and divisions that could impact the development of policies or practices surrounding administrator professional development.

Research Questions

The following three research questions drove the study:

1. What beliefs do building-level administrators have regarding their role in the retention of teachers?
2. What experiences have building-level administrators undergone to prepare them for a role in retaining teachers?
3. How well prepared do building-level administrators perceive themselves to be for their role in retaining teachers?

Research Design: Methodology

The research took the form of a basic qualitative study, as described by Merriam & Tisdell (2016), wherein data are collected through interviews, analysis of data involves the identification of recurring patterns or themes, and the "the overall interpretation will be the researcher's understanding of the participants' understanding of the phenomenon of interest" (p. 24). The researcher was interested in how participants gained preparation for a role in retaining teachers, what beliefs they hold about that role, and how well prepared they perceive themselves to be for that role. This research borrowed from traditions of phenomenology but is not being labeled a phenomenological study. "Although all qualitative research draws from the philosophy of phenomenology in its emphasis on experience and interpretation" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 26), this study does not necessarily seek to find a single essence of a shared experience as do purely phenomenological studies (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015). Though the study sought to determine common themes regarding experiences, the researcher was prepared for the possibility that there could be several very different experiences that would not converge into one essence at all. The study resulted in a description and discussion of participants' actual experiences and perceptions relative to having a role in the retention of teachers. The study did not seek to generalize findings to a larger population.

To gather data about the lived experience of school leaders and their perceptions, this basic qualitative study employed one-on-one interviews with 15 building-level administrators from an urban school division in Virginia. The data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview protocol created by the researcher (Appendix A). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), interviewing is one of the most common forms of data collection in the field of education. DeMarrais (2004) defined an interview as a conversation between the

researcher and the participant, focused on a particular topic or question. For this study, the topic of focus was participants' preparation for having a role in teacher retention.

The interview protocol created by the researcher for the study qualified as "semi-structured" according to the description afforded by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). While a list of questions was asked of each participant in a prescribed order, interviews took a conversational tone and participants were encouraged to elaborate on their responses through organic prompting by the researcher. This protocol format "allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 111). The study's interview protocol began with three closed-ended questions related to participant demographics, including the number of years in the classroom, the number of years as an administrator, and the type of principal preparation program each participant underwent. These questions were followed by more extensive focus on open-ended interview questions related to the study's research questions. The interview protocol used the tradition of phenomenological research by seeking to elicit participants' descriptions of lived experiences more than statements of opinion or belief (Moustakas, 1994).

Study participants were volunteers. The interviews were conducted virtually using Microsoft Teams. Data were collected and analyzed using a concurrent, spiraling methodology. As interviews were concluded, they were transcribed with any personally identifying information redacted, then analyzed using a system of coding; subsequently, that analysis informed the conduct of the next set of interviews.

Research Design: Justification

One-on-one interview methodology was selected for qualitative data collection due to its appropriateness for gathering information on participants' experiences, beliefs, and perceptions (Creswell & Creswell, 2020; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), interviews "focus on the deep, lived meanings that events have for individuals, assuming that these meanings guide actions and interactions" (p. 153). Conducting focus groups as a method of data collection was ruled out by the researcher because administrators might be reticent about sharing their personal experiences and perceptions about preparation for a leadership role when among a group of their colleagues. Merriam & Tisdell (2016) point out that using focus groups as a data collection method has the potential to exacerbate any underlying feelings of inadequacy a participant may have about the topic or perceived power imbalances among the focus group members, inhibiting participation. The interviews for this study took place virtually via Microsoft Teams, the information communications technology tool (ICT) employed by the subject site school division, because all participants had previously been trained in its use and had ready access to it. As noted by Merriam & Tisdell (2016), virtual interviews can provide convenience of time and place for the interviewee while allowing the interviewer to build a rapport and pick up on facial expressions and gestures that occur during participant responses.

An interview is "a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study" (DeMarrais, 2004, p. 55). Because of that conversational nature, any misconceptions can be clarified as they occur (Moustakas, 1994). Interviews are particularly useful when the researcher is interested in past events or paths taken by participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Patton (2015) noted that using interview methodology allows the researcher to "enter into the other person's perspective" (p. 426). The researcher for this study created a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix A) to take advantage of the fact that such a format "allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 109).

Spiraled data collection and analysis was employed because such a system allows the researcher to organize and refine throughout the study. This involves collecting and analyzing data concurrently rather than conducting all interviews in one step followed by analyzing all data in another step. This allows the researcher to use insights gained from previous data collection to inform upcoming data collection. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) point out that collecting data simultaneously while analyzing data in this way is the "much-preferred method" in qualitative research, stating that researchers who collect all data first and then analyze it afterwards may have "undermined the entire project" by missing opportunities to fine-tune data collection strategies along the way (p. 196).

While this basic qualitative study does not adhere strictly to principles of phenomenology to the point that it could be described as an entirely phenomenological study, it is undergirded by the philosophy of phenomenology, as most qualitative studies are to at least some degree (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The study's focus on the lived experiences and perceptions of participants provides its groundings in phenomenological philosophy (Creswell & Creswell, 2020; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016); accordingly, the researcher employed methodologies typically associated with phenomenology, such as coding data then organizing them according to theme, sometimes referred to as *reduction*, and writing an exploration of personal experience with the phenomenon prior to engaging in interviews with participants, referred to as the *epoché* (Patton, 2015). The goal of the epoché is to prevent the study from being tainted by experiences and assumptions of the researcher, or as phrased by van Manen (2016), "bracketing (disturbing, shattering) the attitude of taken-for-grantedness" prior to engaging in coding and thematic reduction of collected data (p. 222). Because the researcher was employed as a building-level administrator within the subject-site division at the time of the study, this attempt to bracket personal experiences and potential

prejudices by engaging in the epoché was deemed justified and potentially beneficial. The researcher's epoché is available in Appendix B.

Site/Sample

The research site for this study was a K-12 urban public school division in Virginia serving approximately 14,000 students, with 24 schools (2 high schools, 5 middle schools, 17 elementary schools), as well as one technical education center, a gifted/accelerated program, and two alternative education programs. Approximately 60% of the division's students are considered socioeconomically disadvantaged. The site selection represents a form of convenience sampling because the school division is geographically near the researcher (Miles et al., 2020); however, the site was also selected because previous research indicates that school divisions with higher rates of poverty and urban localities tend to be difficult to staff consistently and experience teacher shortage impacts acutely (Cowan et al., 2016; Dee & Goldhaber, 2017; Glazerman & Max, 2011; Goldhaber et al., 2015; Ingersoll and Perda, 2010; Isenberg et al., 2013; Katz, 2018; McCarthy & Campbell, 2019; Nguyen, 2020; U.S. DOE, 2021).

Nonprobability purposeful sampling was utilized for the study, as it focused on the specific context of building administrators within one urban Virginia school division and as generalization to a larger population was not a goal of this research. LeCompte and Schensul (2010) use the phrase *criterion-based selection* to describe this type of sampling. The participant criterion required for inclusion in this study sample was to be employed in the subject site as a building leader whose evaluation is based on the *Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation for Principals* (VDOE, 2020a). At the time of the study, the subject site employed a total of 70 building-level administrators who met the selection criterion, including center coordinators, program directors, principals, and assistant

principals. Fifteen participants took part in one-on-one interviews, representing 21.4% of the total number of building-level administrators in the subject-site division.

Participation Eligibility

The researcher used criterion-based sampling, also sometimes called purposeful sampling, for this qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Eligible participants were center coordinators, program directors, principals, and assistant principals currently employed with the subject-site division as building-level administrators at the time of the study, with the exception of any building administrators employed within the same building as the researcher. Any individuals hired by the subject site division for building-level administration positions at the time of invitation to participate, but who had not yet begun their employment with the subject site division, were also eligible to participate. The researcher collaborated with human resources personnel at the subject-site to verify that all hired building-level administrators were included. Building-level professionals who may hold a K-12 administrative license but were not employed in a building-level administrative position with the subject site division at the time of the study were not included. Central office personnel who had been building-level administrators prior to their central office employment were not included. Potential participants were invited to voluntarily participate. See Appendix C for a sample invitation email. As the study did not seek to differentiate between elementary school administrators and secondary administrators, no selection criteria were put into place to set or limit participation to any certain number of participants per school level.

This study included both the school's main principal and assistant principals as building-level administrators, as schools are typically led by teams of administrators rather than a single building principal. ESSA (2015) defines a school leader as "a principal, assistant principal, or other individual" who is employed by a local educational agency (LEA) and

"responsible for the daily instructional leadership and managerial operations in the elementary school or secondary school building" (p. 297). Goldring et al. (2021) found that the job descriptions of assistant principals typically describe the role as supporting the principal; however, the listing of duties for both assistant principals and main principals includes similar responsibilities. Moreover, Goldring et al. (2021) also noted that professional standards created for the evaluation of educational leaders do not differentiate between the building principal and assistant principals—all school leaders tend to be evaluated according to the same criteria. In the Commonwealth of Virginia, both principals and assistant principals are evaluated against the Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Principals (VDOE, 2020a). This set of standards for school administrators, published by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and applied in the evaluation of school leaders by LEAs in Virginia, includes human resource management indicators for how well principals and assistant principals meet the standard of "supporting, evaluating, and *retaining* [emphasis added] quality instructional and support personnel" (VDOE, 2020a, p. 12).

Participation Incentive

The purpose of incentives is to recruit the highest number of participants possible and desired (Creswell & Creswell, 2020). Coughlin et al. (2011), examined the effectiveness of incentives on response rates for surveys, testing their hypotheses with three sample groups: a group offered no incentive to participate in a survey, a group offered pre-paid incentives (paid at invitation), and a group offered a conditional incentive (paid upon survey completion). The researchers' findings showed that response rates were higher for both groups tied to incentives than for the no-incentive group, with pre-paid incentives returning higher rate of response than conditional incentives. That study's review of literature notes that multiple previous studies show monetary incentives increase response rates more than gifts or lotteries (Goyder, 1994;

Hopkins & Gullickson, 1992; Jobber et al., 2004). A study by van Otterloo et al. (2011) found that gift card incentives helped to achieve high response rates, contingent upon whether the gift card was for a merchant easily accessible to the participant. Likewise, Chen et al. (2016) found that gift cards were an effective way to motivate potential participants.

In order to encourage participation in this study, potential participants were informed in advance that there was a $25 merchant gift card incentive to be provided upon scheduling an appointment for a one-on-one interview. Incentive gift cards were from Amazon, an online merchant accessible to participants regardless of geographic location and therefore mitigating the problems van Otterloo et al. (2011) found when using gift cards for brick-and-mortar merchants. Amazon electronic gift cards are readily available to the researcher and readily redeemed by the participant; furthermore, they allowed ease of distribution via email at the time of scheduling the interview, allowing the researcher to take advantage of the potential higher response rate associated with prepaid incentives (Coughlin et al., 2011). Cost of the gift cards for this study's incentives, $375 in total, was funded by the researcher.

Data Collection

To gather data about the lived experience of participants, this study employed a one-on-one interview protocol (Appendix A) developed by the researcher. One-on-one interview methodology was selected for qualitative data collection due to its appropriateness for gathering information on participants' experiences, beliefs, and perceptions (Ryan, et al., 2009, p. 313). The interviews for this study took place virtually via Microsoft Teams, the information and communications technology tool (ICT) employed by the subject site school division, because all participants had previously been trained in its use and had ready access to it. As noted by Merriam & Tisdell (2016), virtual interviews can provide convenience of time and

place for the interviewee while allowing the interviewer to build a rapport and pick up on facial expressions and gestures that occur during participant responses.

The researcher has completed training that meets the VT Human Research Protection Program *Basic—Social and Behavioral* course training requirement through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI), earning certification on September 12, 2020 (expiring September 12, 2023). See Appendix D for training documentation. Upon approval of the research prospectus by the researcher's dissertation committee, the researcher applied for approval from the VT Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB determined that the proposed study did not require approval because it did not meet the federal definition for human research, since the study would not be generalized to a larger population (Appendix E). Prior to embarking on the study, the researcher submitted an application and obtained approval from the subject-site school division.

Data Gathering Procedures

All potential interview participants were sent an invitation email with an informed-consent informational attachment (see Appendices C and F). Reminder emails were sent to potential participants two times during data gathering, with the permission of the subject-site division, as a way of increasing the participant response rate. Those who responded to the invitation to participate were sent a follow-up email asking them to use Koalendar to schedule an online interview for the available date and time most convenient to them. Koalendar is an online scheduling application that allowed the researcher to designate available interview dates and times, offering a hyperlink that permitted potential participants to select their desired time slots. Once scheduled, Koalendar then sent automated confirmations to both the participant and the researcher, as well as reminders prior to each interview. The researcher responded to interview invitation responses on a rolling basis as they were received. Once an interview was

scheduled, the researcher sent a $25 electronic gift card to the participant via email as a prepaid incentive.

Interviews were one-on-one, with no other individuals present. The interviews were semi-structured, beginning with a set of close-ended questions regarding demographics followed by open-ended questions regarding participants' experiences and beliefs (Appendix A). The researcher employed organic prompting when necessary and beneficial to elicit response elaboration from participants. Interviews were audio-recorded using Trint, an online software application that records and automatically transcribes audio files into time-stamped text. Participants were informed and asked for consent to record prior to beginning each interview. Interviewees were informed that they could opt not to answer any question and could ask to stop the interview at any time.

Instrument Design

The interview protocol for the study was developed by the researcher in alignment with guidance provided by van Manen (2016) for phenomenological qualitative research design. Researcher van Manen emphasized the following two criteria: (1) Whether the study is based on a valid phenomenological question; and (2) whether analysis is based on experientially descriptive accounts more than statements of opinions, beliefs, and views. A valid phenomenological question focuses on describing what participants share in terms of a lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interview protocol for this study centered on the question of what the participants have experienced related to preparation for a role in the retention of teachers, a valid phenomenological question by Cresswell & Poth's definition.

To meet van Manen's second criterion, questions included in the interview protocol (Appendix A) were critiqued by the researcher and also by peers who are building-level administrators but were not included in the study sample. The tool was then revised to reflect

feedback so that the questions focused on collecting participants' empirical descriptions of lived experiences more than their expressions of belief or opinion. As an example, the originally phrased question, "*What things do you think a building-level administrator should do to help retain teachers?*" (asking for opinions and beliefs) was revised into, *"What things do you do as a building-level administrator to retain teachers?* (asking for experiential description). Of the five open-ended interview questions built into the interview protocol, three asked for experiential description while two asked for participants' opinions or beliefs. Table 1 summarizes which interview questions ask for description versus belief or opinion.

Table 1

Alignment of Interview Questions to van Manen's Second Criterion

Interview Question	Description or Belief/Opinion
1. As a building-level administrator, what do you see as your role in retaining teachers?	Belief/Opinion
2. What things do you do as a building-level administrator to retain teachers, and why?	Experiential Description
3. Please describe the preparation you experienced prior to becoming an administrator for having a role in retaining teachers or creating workplace conditions that encourage retention of teachers.	Experiential Description
4. After becoming a building-level administrator, what professional development have you experienced for having a role in retaining teachers or creating workplace conditions that encourage retention of teachers?	Experiential Description
5. Considering both your principal preparation program and professional development you've experienced, how well prepared have you been for having a role in retaining teachers, and why?	Belief/Opinion

Validation & Reliability

Validation

As highlighted by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), "with the wide variety of types of qualitative research, there are bound to be differences in criteria for validity and reliability" (p.

239). Patton (2015) offered no fewer than seven alternative sets of criteria for assessing validity and credibility in qualitative research. Validity is concerned with whether findings of a study—in this case, the researcher's interpretations—are credible given the data presented (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Maxwell (2013) asserted that, "Validity is also relative: It has to be assessed in relationship to the purposes and circumstances of the research rather than being a context-independent property of methods or conclusions" (p. 121). The researcher for this study employed multiple strategies to foster validity, as recommended by Creswell & Creswell (2020), with an emphasis on checks for validity associated with phenomenology. Validation of this basic qualitative study relied upon the focus placed on methodological rigor and coherence (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Morse, 2002) as a means of ensuring trustworthiness. Morse et al. (2002) explained that this coherence occurs when the research question(s) match the methodology, which then matches the data and analytic processes.

One phenomenological tradition, the researcher's engagement with an epoché prior to engaging in interviews, provides some support for validity of a qualitative study. This strategy calls upon the researcher to "examine biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research to be undertaken" (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p. 249). By articulating the researcher's worldview, experience with the phenomenon, and assumptions prior to engaging in the study, greater credibility may be afforded to the interpretations of the data by the researcher. In this way, qualitative research is in part validated by clarifying how "a particular researcher's value and expectations influenced the conduct and conclusions of the study" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 124). See Appendix B for the researcher's epoché.

Researcher Context / Epoché Summary

At the time of the interviews, the researcher was a building-level administrator employed at the subject site and had, therefore, experienced the phenomenon under study.

Thus, the study could be construed as a "backyard study," as coined by Glesne and Peshkin (1992). Such studies have the potential to be problematic in terms of the difficulty of balancing roles (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Glene & Peshkin, 1992; Hatch, 2002); however, conflicts related to researching within one's own educational context are most frequently a problem when teachers are studying their own classrooms or principals are studying their own faculties or facilities (Hatch, 2002). Key reasons for the challenge are that (A) participants may not be able to see the researcher as a researcher rather than as a supervisor or superior, and (B) researchers may not be able to divorce preconceived ideas about the context from the research (Hatch, 2002). While the researcher for this study is employed by the subject-site school division, key study attributes mitigated potential negative effects of the site selection.

First, the researcher was not in a supervisory position *vis a vis* potential research participants at the time of the interviews; therefore, none the interviewees were of a lower power position than the interviewer (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hatch, 2002). All participants were building-level administrators of the same position or of a higher position than the researcher. Second, the researcher had limited opportunity to form preconceived notions about the subject site. The researcher been employed in the school division for just over two years; however, 1.5 years of that tenure took place during the partial school shut-down created by the division's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a relatively new hire to the school division, the researcher had only recently begun to become acquainted with the culture of the subject site and was in beneficial position to learn about the phenomenon being studied without being hampered by collective institutional memory. More empirically stated, at the time of the interviews, the researcher had met fewer than 10 of the site's 70 potential study participants.

In addition to the epoché, the researcher employed two further strategies to alleviate concerns related to conducting a backyard study. First, the researcher eliminated the five same-

building administrators with whom she worked closely on a regular basis from the participant pool in order to offset potential bias. Second, the researcher took steps to ensure anonymity of data. All data for this study was stored and analyzed with any identifying information expunged. No personally identifying information was asked via the study interviews and no personally identifying information volunteered by participants was stored with the data. See *Data Treatment, Management and Security* on page 54 of this chapter.

Validation of Interview Protocol

Because multiple methods of validation are generally recommended for qualitative studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles et al., 2020; Morse, 2002), the researcher also incorporated peer examination of the interview protocol tool. To validate the one-on-one qualitative interview instrument (Appendix A), a four-step peer examination process similar to that used by Yeong et al. (2018) was employed. The process is composed of the following steps: (1) the researcher constructs interview protocol questions, (2) the researcher checks for alignment between interview questions and research questions, (3) the researcher solicits feedback on interview protocols regarding alignment with research questions as well as clarity, and (4) the researcher adjusts the interview protocol according to the feedback received. In addition to soliciting peer feedback on van Manen's (2016) second criterion for phenomenological qualitative research noted earlier, the researcher asked reviewers to read the interview instrument for hallmarks of validity. They were asked to provide feedback on whether interview questions were clearly worded and free of biased language. They were also asked to state which of the study's research questions aligned with each interview question, to ensure best alignment. The interview protocol was then revised according to feedback received. Table 2 summarizes the alignment of interview questions to research questions as validated by peer review.

Table 2

Alignment of Interview Questions by Research Question

Interview Question	Research Question
1. As a building-level administrator, what do you see as your role in retaining teachers? 2. What things do you do as a building-level administrator to retain teachers, and why?	1. What perceptions do building-level administrators have regarding their role in the retention of teachers?
3. Please describe the preparation you experienced prior to becoming an administrator for having a role in retaining teachers or creating workplace conditions that encourage retention of teachers. 4. After becoming a building-level administrator, what professional development have you experienced for having a role in retaining teachers or creating workplace conditions that encourage retention of teachers?	2. What experiences have building-level administrators undergone to prepare them for a role in retaining teachers?
5. Considering both your principal preparation program and professional development you've experienced, how well prepared have you been for having a role in retaining teachers, and why?	3. What perceptions do building-level administrators have about how well prepared they have been for a role in retaining teachers?

Reliability

Reliability is concerned with the dependability of results. It traditionally considers whether a study can be replicated (Creswell & Creswell, 2020; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016); however, reliability in qualitative research is less clearly defined than reliability in quantitative research, "because the inquirer instead emphasizes the value of his or her subjective interpretations" (Creswell & Creswell, 2020, p. 217). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) articulate the issue by stating, "Replication of a qualitative study will not yield the same results, but this does not discredit the results of any particular study; there can be numerous interpretations of the same data" (p. 250). The focus of reliability for this basic qualitative study was on presenting data analysis in such a way that the researcher's interpretation makes critical sense given the data collected. The reliability of this study stands upon the extent to which the findings of the

study emerge from valid data collection and the implications noted by the researcher align logically with those findings.

One way the researcher sought to establish reliability was by engaging in the collection and analysis of data concurrently to the greatest degree possible, a strategy Morse et al. (2002) deem "the essence of attaining reliability" in a qualitative study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) consider simultaneous collection and analysis to be the "more enlightened scenario" than analyzing data only after all interviews have been finished (p. 196). The authors state that data analysis is more reliable using the analyze-as-you-collect method because the researcher has less opportunity to become overwhelmed by "the sheer volume of material that needs to be processed" (p. 197).

Another means to establish reliability was the documentation of the research process in an ongoing research log or "audit trail"—an account of how the study had been conducted and how data were analyzed—as promoted by many qualitative researchers (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016; Miles et al., 2015; Richards, 2015; Silver & Lewins, 2014). Richards (2015) stated that "good qualitative research gets much of its claim to validity from the researcher's ability to show convincingly how they got there" (p. 143). The researcher for this study used the various features of Atlas-Ti software to record codes, memos, and observations, as well as to document emerging thematic patterns related to data coding. The researcher's log for this study is summarized in Appendix G.

Data Treatment, Management and Security

Informed consent was obtained for each participant in this study electronically via Microsoft Forms, with participants indicating consent to participate by reading the informed consent document (Appendix F) and submitting the form online. A Microsoft Excel spreadsheet automatically generated by the electronic consent form recorded all participants'

acknowledgement of informed consent to participate in the study. This spreadsheet was stored on the researcher's password-protected laptop and will be kept there for three years following the study, then deleted.

The one-on-one interviews were confidential. No personally identifiable data were collected as part of the interview protocol and any identifiable information volunteered spontaneously by the participant during the interview was redacted from the interview at transcription. Audio recordings of interviews were deleted after each interview had been transcribed to text and the transcription had been proofread for accuracy. Transcribed interview data will be deleted upon successful defense of the researcher's dissertation.

Trint is online software that was used to automate the process of recording and transcribing audio data, reducing input errors and maximizing efficiency. Trint is ISO 27001 certified; this is the international standard for information security management systems (Akinyemi, 2020; Trint, 2021). Using Trint, uploaded data are encrypted within the researcher's password-protected account using AES 256, a specification for the strongest encryption of electronic data, established by the U.S. National Institute of Standards and Technology (Trint, 2021). Recordings uploaded to Trint as part of this study were deleted from the platform immediately following successful transcription to text. At that point, recordings and text transcriptions—with any personally identifying information fully redacted—were stored solely on the researcher's password protected laptop in ATLAS-Ti software.

Atlas-Ti software was used to collect, manage, store, and analyze interview data. This platform is stored on the researcher's computer laptop. While ATLAS-Ti does offer a cloud-based storage option, the researcher did not use that option for this study in order to best protect participants' data. The ATLAS-Ti account on the researcher's laptop computer is password-protected, as is the laptop itself. No personally identifiable data for any participant

was stored in ATLAS-Ti. All data for the study will be deleted from ATLAS-Ti following successful defense of the researcher's dissertation.

Data Analysis Techniques

Analysis followed the steps favored by Miles et al. (2020), based on the work of Moustakas (1994): (1) Begin with a full description of the researcher's experience with the phenomenon to "set aside the researcher's personal experiences" in order to focus on participant experiences (Miles et al., 2020, p. 201). (2) Develop a list of nonrepetitive, discrete codes within participant data. (3) Group those codes into broader units of meaning, called *themes*. (4) Create a description of themes and patterns of participant experiences, including examples. (5) Write a description of the phenomenon as experienced by the participants.

This basic qualitative study is undergirded by a phenomenological philosophy in that it seeks to understand "several individuals' common or shared experiences of a phenomenon" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75). The phenomenon studied is building-level administrators' lived experiences of preparation for a role in retaining teachers. Analysis, deemed "phenomenological reflection" by van Manen (2016), began with interview recordings being transcribed using Trint software, then coded within Atlas-Ti software using a hybrid system of deductive and inductive coding methodology. As recommended by Miles et al. (2020), analysis of interview transcriptions utilized both *a priori* codes (deductive) and codes that emerged organically during interviews (inductive). See Appendix H for a list of *a priori* codes for the study. Inductive codes emerged from the actual responses of participants.

The researcher employed descriptive coding and concept coding, assigning labels that summarized a basic unit of data, as well as *in vivo* coding, pulling words or phrases from the participant's responses to use as codes. *In vivo* coding is particularly appropriate for "studies that prioritize and honor the participant's voice" (Miles et al., 2020, p. 65). To frame

participants' perceptions of how well prepared they feel for their role in teacher retention, magnitude coding was also employed. Following coding of transcribed interviews, code categories were created to aid thematic analysis of the data collected. Appendix G, the researcher's log summary, includes a list of the code categories that became evident during the data analysis process.

Methodology Summary

The research design for this study used a qualitative one-on-one interview protocol. The researcher began by creating and validating the semi-structured interview protocol through peer feedback (See Appendix A). Before conducting interviews, the researcher embarked on a reflection of personal experience and perceptions regarding the phenomenon being studied (See Appendix B). Interview participants were building-level administrators from one urban K-12 school division in Virginia who volunteered to take part in the study following informed consent (See Appendix F). Participation was confidential, with no identifying information stored with interview data. Data collection and analysis took place concurrently. Analysis involved applying both deductive and inductive codes to data, then gathering those codes into clusters representative of patterns or themes. A research log was kept by the researcher (See Appendix G). The aim of the study was to describe the experiences and perceptions of building-level administrators in one urban school division in Virginia regarding how well prepared they are for having a role in retaining teachers. Those descriptions are summarized in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four: Presentation & Analysis of Data

Introduction

Chapter Four of this basic qualitative study is a descriptive report of the themes that emerged in the data resulting from one-on-one interviews with participants. The chapter is presented in four segments, beginning with a summary of demographic characteristics associated with the study sample. The second section is a review of the alignment between the questions included in the interview protocol and the study's research questions. In the third section, data themes that emerged during participants' responses are presented as they relate to each research question and its aligned interview question(s). The final section of Chapter Four is a summary of the data analysis relative to the study's three research questions. Throughout Chapter Four and Chapter Five, individual participants are referenced according to the order in which they were interviewed, as Interviewee 1 (I-1) through Interviewee 15 (I-15). Line citations provided for quotations associated with an individual participant reference the corresponding line number(s) of the transcribed interview that took place with the referenced participant.

Study Sample Characteristics

One-on-one interviews were conducted with 15 participants who were employed by the school division as building-level administrators during school year 2021-2022. The interviewed sample represents 21.4% of the total number of building-level administrators employed by the school division during that school year. The make-up of the sample that volunteered to participate in the study included seven high school administrators, four middle school administrators, and four elementary school administrators. Interviews were scheduled, conducted, and numbered (I-1 through I-15) in the chronological order in which participants

volunteered. Participants' genders and the level of the school where each served as an administrator (elementary, middle, high) were noted as demographic data. In addition, three closed-ended demographic questions were asked at the start of each interview:

1. How many years were you a classroom teacher before becoming an administrator?
2. What was your principal preparation program (prior to becoming an administrator)?
3. How many years have you been a school administrator?

Table 3 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the individuals comprising the sample.

Table 3

Demographics of Study Sample

Attribute	**Number of Participants**
Position during SY 2021-2022	
Principal/Director	7
Assistant Principal	8
School Level	
High School	7
Middle School	4
Elementary School	4
Gender	
Male	6
Female	9
Years as a Classroom Teacher	
7-10 years	8
11-15 years	5
greater than 15 years	2
Years as a Building Administrator	
1-3 years	3
4-6 years	7
7-10 years	2
11-15 years	1
16-20 years	1
greater than 20 years	1
Type of Principal Preparation Program	
in-person	7
virtual	4
hybrid (in person/virtual)	4

Two-thirds of the participants had been building-level administrators for fewer than seven years at the time of the interviews. Three participants had been a building-level administrator for three or fewer years. Seven participants were between years 4-6 of experience as a building-level administrator. Two participants had 19 or more years of experience as a building-level administrator. The number of years participants had been classroom teachers before becoming building-level administrators ranged from 7-17.

All of the participants had experienced a traditional educational leadership principal preparation program through an accredited, nonprofit university or college. Five participants attended private nonprofit colleges or universities and ten attended public nonprofit universities. Six participants experienced the educational leadership program offered by Radford University. Two participants experienced the educational leadership preparation program offered by Regent University. Two participants experienced the educational leadership preparation program offered by Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. The remaining five participants experienced educational leadership preparation programs offered by Averett University, Davis and Elkins College, Liberty University, Old Dominion University, and the University of Virginia. As noted in Table 3, participants' experiences varied in terms of whether the preparation program was conducted virtually (online), in-person, or as a hybrid of in-person and virtual format. Six participants were male and 9 participants were female.

Alignment of Interview Questions to Research Questions

Participants were each asked a series of open-ended interview questions aligned to the study's research questions. Two interview questions aligned with Research Question 1, two interview questions aligned with Research Question 2, and one interview question aligned with Research Question 3. The alignment of the interview questions to the study's research

questions was summarized in Table 2 in Chapter Three; that table is repeated here for ease of reference.

Table 2

Alignment of Interview Questions by Research Question

Interview Question	Research Question
1. As a building-level administrator, what do you see as your role in retaining teachers? 2. What things do you do as a building-level administrator to retain teachers, and why?	3. What perceptions do building-level administrators have regarding their role in the retention of teachers?
3. Please describe the preparation you experienced prior to becoming an administrator for having a role in retaining teachers or creating workplace conditions that encourage retention of teachers. 4. After becoming a building-level administrator, what professional development have you experienced for having a role in retaining teachers or creating workplace conditions that encourage retention of teachers?	4. What experiences have building-level administrators undergone to prepare them for a role in retaining teachers?
5. Considering both your principal preparation program and professional development you've experienced, how well prepared have you been for having a role in retaining teachers, and why?	3. What perceptions do building-level administrators have about how well prepared they have been for a role in retaining teachers?

Data Analysis

Each interview transcript was initially analyzed using open coding to denote individual segments of data. Both deductive (*a priori*) codes and inductive codes were applied. Types of codes included descriptive, conceptual, *in vivo*, and magnitude. In the final analytical step, code patterns were noted and codes were combined into core categories as they related to the study's research questions. Using this method, the researcher determined themes within the interview data corresponding to each research question. Those data and themes are presented in this section, ordered by research question.

Research Question 1: What perceptions do building-level administrators have regarding their role in the retention of teachers?

Interview Question 1: As a building-level administrator, what do you see as your role in retaining teachers? Participants tended to answer this question by using superlatives to describe a relative level of how important they feel the building-level administrator is to retention of teachers. Responses describing the building-level administrator's role in retention as "extremely important," "crucial," and "very important" emerged as a trend in response to Interview Question 1. As a result of this tendency for participants to quantify their opinions of the importance of building-level administrators to teacher retention, the interviewer prompted any participant who did not voluntarily do so by explicitly asking, "How important do you feel the building level administrator is to teacher retention?" as a follow-up question to Interview Question 1.

Thirteen of the fifteen participants attempted to describe the level of importance of the role of the building-level administrator to retention. Twelve participants stated that the building-level administrator is important to a teacher's decision to stay or leave, eleven of those participants emphasized the role as highly important by using words like "very," "critical," "extremely," or "incredibly" when describing their thoughts on the level of importance. Participant I-10 responded to this interview question by stating, "I think, without a doubt, the biggest percentage. If you look at the whole pie chart, I'm the biggest percentage of—in my opinion—of retention of teachers" (line 21). Another participant said, "I think it [the role] is absolutely critical. I think most teachers will leave because of building level administrators, without question" (I-9, line 23). Participant I-13 stated, "As we go into a modern day era of shortages and really trying to not only retain but bring people either back into or just into education in general, [building administration] is probably one of the more

heavily weighted variables in that equation" (line 33). Another participant stated, "We have every hand in keeping our teachers in our buildings" (I-6, line 67).

Two participants did not specify how important they felt the role of building-level principal is to retention. One participant indicated believing that he did not see himself, specifically, as having a role in teacher retention except in supporting teachers by managing students and discipline well. This participant saw an administrator's role in retention as connected to "evaluations and new teacher orientation" and followed up by stating, "I'm not best suited for that…That's not my strength" (I-7, line 29). Overall, 12 of the 15 participants (80%) declared the building-level administrator's role to be either important or very important.

In addition to stating the relative level of importance they place on the building-level administrator regarding retention of teachers, some participants responded to Interview Question 1 by listing ways they try to affect retention by influencing or creating specific workplace conditions. Those workplace factors mentioned by participants in response to Interview Question 1 were included during data analysis alongside participants' responses to Interview Question 2.

Interview Question 2: What things do you do as a building-level administrator to retain teachers, and why? In response to this question, participants tended to describe various ways they seek to influence conditions of the workplace to favor teacher retention. Workplace factors noted by participants as ones they believe are both within their purview as building-level administrators and influential in terms of teacher retention are summarized by frequency of mention in Table 4. The table also includes any workplace conditions mentioned by participants as being part of an administrator's role in teacher retention when responding to Interview Question 1. "Frequency of mention" indicates the number of participants who noted each factor. If a single participant mentioned the same factor repeatedly while answering the

question, the multiple mentions were counted collectively (as one time) for purposes of this chart. Aside from three factors that were each mentioned by approximately half of the participants, responses indicate diverse perceptions by building-level administrators in the subject school division regarding workplace conditions that impact teachers' decisions to stay or leave.

Table 4

Workplace Factors within the Purview of Building-Level Administrators Believed by Participants to Affect Teacher Retention

Workplace Factors Mentioned by Participants	Frequency of Mention
administrator being available to teachers	8
administrator helping teachers feel valued/appreciated	8
administrator listening to teachers/accepting teacher input	7
administrator providing social/emotional support for teachers	6
administrator providing consistent and effective discipline/safety	5
administrator supporting teacher with students and/or parents	5
administrator communicating clearly	5
administrator working to foster a sense of team and/or family	5
administrator finding ways to protect/provide time	4
administrator working to create a positive school culture & climate	4
administrator finding ways for teachers to feel less overload/pressure	4
administrator providing peer mentoring/peer support system	4
administrator treating teachers with respect	3
administrator placement being consistent (low administrator turnover)	3
administrator holding teachers accountable	3
administrator prioritizing teacher fun/enjoyment	2
administrator putting in effort to build relationships with teachers	2
administrator providing resources/tools	2
administrator providing teacher choice/autonomy	2
administrator recognizing teacher strengths	1
administrator being a role model for teachers	1
administrator celebrating teachers' milestones	1
administrator providing adequate onboarding & new-teacher support	1
administrator providing a buffer for teachers from central office & other people	1
administrator controlling class sizes	1
administrator providing individualized teacher support	1
administrator providing feedback to teachers	1
administrator providing instructional leadership	1
administrator training teachers to communicate well	1

The idea of the administrator being available to teachers and the idea of the administrator listening to teachers (or providing them with opportunity for input) often occurred in tandem during interviews. Participant I-9 emphasized the importance of an environment where teachers "feel as though they can walk in my office, close the door and say what needs to be said without fear of retribution" (line 33). Participant I-15 echoed the idea of an open-door policy by saying, "Sometimes teachers want that open door and to be able to come in and sit down and have a conversation" (line 33). Participant I-13 said something similar, "We opened up our doors, we passed out our extensions" (line 41), as did participant I-11, "I guess teachers just need somebody to have an open-door policy…without being fussed at" (line 31). Being available to teachers was also mentioned by I-15 independent of listening to teachers, as simply "being visible" in the school (line 29). Listening to teachers was mentioned independent of being available by multiple participants in terms of "makings sure they [teachers] have a voice" in decision-making (I-3, line 25) and by simply stating that teachers "want to be heard" (I-1, line 29; I-6, line 25; I-12, line 25; I-13, line 37).

Eight participants mentioned that helping teachers feel valued or appreciated is important to retention. Participant I-12 talked about conducting non-evaluative walkthroughs in classrooms so teachers will be "caught doing good" (line 37) and noted trying to send positive notes to faculty members monthly. Participant I-15 pointed out the importance of "public recognition" for teachers along with "sweet treats" and "small acts of kindness" by the administrator toward teachers (line 33). Participant I-1 noted that "not feeling appreciated" can be a factor that "drives someone away" (line 25). "It is very important as building administrators," stated participant I-5, "to make sure that teachers do feel appreciated" (line 35).

Multiple participants mentioned five additional factors: The administrator providing social/emotional support for teachers (6 participants), the administrator showing support for the teacher with students and/or parents (5 participants), the administrator communicating clearly (5 participants), the administrator actively fostering a sense of team or family among the teachers (5 participants), and the administrator providing consistent and effective school safety/discipline (5 participants). The remaining 21 factors mentioned by individual participants occurred with less frequency and consistency across the interview samples. Those factors are included in Table 4 in order of diminishing frequency of mention.

Factors Mentioned by Study Participants in Relation to the Retention Factors Most Noted in Prior Research. During the review of literature for this study (Chapter Two), five workplace factors emerged across multiple studies as indicative of teachers' inclination to stay rather than leave: The level of perceived teacher autonomy in a school, teachers' perception of pressure and expectations placed on them relative to test scores and other performance measures, teachers' perceptions regarding student discipline and safety, the level of input and/or level of shared vision felt by teachers, and teachers' perceptions of their time being infringed upon. Table 5 shows how frequently those same five workplace factors were mentioned by participants during this study's interviews. Participants' responses indicate that very few building-level administrators in the subject school division have familiarity with workplace conditions noted by research as predictive of teacher retention.

Four of the five workplace conditions were mentioned explicitly by at least some participants: Two participants mentioned making sure teachers had a sense of choice/autonomy. Seven participants mentioned listening to teachers and valuing teacher voices/input. Five participants noted the importance of administrators ensuring safety and discipline in the school. Four participants mentioned finding ways to protect teacher time

and/or provide teachers with adequate time for planning and instruction. The final workplace factor, related to teachers' perceptions of pressure and expectations, was only obliquely referenced by four participants. Those participants did not mention teachers' perceptions of pressure in relation to test scores or other performance measures; instead, the four participants who mentioned teacher pressure as a factor referenced the impact of workload in terms of the number and variety of tasks required of a teacher in the amount of time available.

Table 5

Number of Participants Referencing 5 Key Workplace Factors Associated with Teacher Retention in Prior Studies

Factor from Prior Research	Frequency of Mention
Teacher autonomy	2
Teacher voice/input	7
Safety/discipline	5
Providing and/or protecting teacher time	4
Relieving teacher overload/pressure	4

Research Question 2: What experiences have building-level administrators undergone to prepare them for a role in retaining teachers?

Two interview questions targeted Research Question 2, one focused on PPP experiences and one focused on PPD experiences. Interview Question 3 asked participants to describe their experiences during their PPP. Prior to posing Interview Question 3, the researcher prompted each participant to, "Think about your principal preparation program, including coursework, readings, and learning activities you did to get your administrator license." Interview Question 4 asked participants to describe their experiences with PPD after becoming building-level administrators. Prior to posing Interview Question 4, the researcher prompted each participant to, "Think about the professional development activities you've done since becoming an administrator—both those required by and provided by the division

and also the PD you may have done on your own, like professional reading or taking classes or networking or attending conferences and workshops."

Interview Question 3: Please describe the preparation you experienced prior to becoming an administrator for having a role in retaining teachers or creating workplace conditions that encourage retention of teachers. When asked to recall experiences from their PPP that related to teacher retention, nearly all participants (14) stated that they could not recall any conversations, discussions, or explicit preparation related specifically to teacher retention. Only participant I-10 indicated having received valuable explicit preparation for having a role in teacher retention:

> To be honest with you, like when I talk to my colleagues, I think that I'm the only one who had that. I really believe it….[My professors] all talked about teacher retention….We literally talked about it in every class….It was pretty exceptional, but there's never been a program like it and it's a shame. (I-10, line 29)

Participant I-1 said, "There was nothing explicit in the curriculum" (line 33), and continued by stating, "Part of the reason why it wasn't explicit during the college classes is because I think it's relatively recently that this has become a bigger issue" (line 41). While most participants stated that they had received no explicit preparation for retaining teachers, some participants did mention ways their program offered preparation regarding the creation of an environment favorable to retaining teachers. Table 6 summarizes the preparation received by participants according to topics they feel relate to creating workplace conditions likely to cause teachers to want to stay rather than leave.

Table 6

Principal Preparation for Creating an Environment Conducive to Retention

Topics Mentioned by Participants	Frequency of Mention by Participants
preparation for being effective at teacher observations and evaluations	6
preparation for creating a positive school culture/climate, overall	5
preparation for listening to teacher voices/input	3
preparation for running effective teacher meetings	2
preparation for having difficult conversations with teachers	2
preparation for treating teachers with respect	2
preparation for handling HR concerns/issues	2
preparation for building relationships with teachers	1
preparation for helping teachers with classroom management	1
preparation for communicating effectively with teachers	1
preparation for creating effective policies	1
preparation for onboarding new hires	1
preparation for setting a model for teachers	1
preparation for starting the school year effectively	1

The two most notable themes that emerged in responses to this question were preparation related to human relations (HR) management and preparation for creating a positive school climate and culture. Six participants noted that they received preparation related to conducting teacher observations and evaluations, and two participants pointed out having had preparation for handling HR issues or concerns effectively. “Our preparation was definitely things about evaluating teachers and things you should be looking for in classrooms,” said participant I-14 (line 45). Participant I-9 said, “We did a lot with evaluation and the importance of evaluations” (line 37). Participant I-8 remembered a “human resources class” (line 37) and participant I-6 mentioned learning how to “create a fair environment where there were no instances of sexual or racial harassment” (line 51). Those participants felt that development of these HR skills obliquely, if not directly, had an impact on teacher retention.

Five participants noted that they had preparation for creating a positive school culture and climate and stated that they felt this impacted teacher retention. “They talked a lot about atmosphere and culture inside of the building” said participant I-7 (line 41). Participant I-1 mentioned learning the importance of “how to create a good environment” (line 33) and participant I-9 stated that “we talked a lot about culture” (line 45).

A third theme centered on communication. Various participants noted, as summarized in Table 6, having preparation for listening to teachers, providing opportunities for teacher input, having difficult conversations with teachers, and running effective meetings—habits related to communication skills of building-level administrators. “Other than the communication piece, I wouldn’t say that the program focused on retaining teachers,” said participant I-6 (line 45). Participant I-4 mentioned preparation for “having really effective meetings” (line 29). Two participants mentioned preparation for having “hard conversations” (I-5, line 43) or “strong conversations” (I-4, line 29) with teachers. Participants who mentioned these topics felt that preparation they gained in these areas contributes to teacher retention.

Five participants specified that most of the preparation they received regarding creation of workplace conditions to foster teacher retention came in the form of mentoring or advice from their professors—who were at the time seasoned current building-level administrators or retired building-level administrators—more than from the content of their curriculum, assignments, or assessments during PPP. Participant I-1 stated the following:

> I don’t think we did anything explicit about retention…there was nothing explicit in the curriculum. That came from some great professors who were current superintendents or recent superintendents or whatnot, who were like adjunct to that program, who did a great job of talking about how to handle difficult situations in staff or how to navigate some of those things, or how to create a good environment. (I-1, line 33)

Participant I-15 referenced preparation program professors, stating that they offered “a lot of real life connections and conversations and things you could walk away and it would be applicable” (line 41). One participant noted that preparation came in the form of role playing or field experiences, without elaborating. Participant I-4 said, “I remember role playing those things which would help retain teachers…having real-life field experiences where you had to implement it" (line 29). The remaining participants did not note the form or format of the preparation they received.

Interview Question 4: After becoming a building-level administrator, what professional development have you experienced for having a role in retaining teachers or creating workplace conditions that encourage retention of teachers? Participants were asked about PPD they had participated in that had been offered by their school division during their time as a building-level administrator. In addition, participants were asked to discuss any PPD they had self-selected and participated in without being asked or required to do so by a school division.

Division-Provided Professional Development. Participants were asked to recall division-offered PPD experiences regardless of whether they were offered by the current subject-site school division or a division in which they had worked prior. No participant stated having had division-provided PPD explicitly targeting the retention of teachers. Two participants noted that teacher retention had come up as a discussion topic during a single past principals’ meeting in the form of an idea exchange between colleagues, but that this discussion did not extend to assistant principals. Six participants stated that they could not recall ever participating in division-provided PPD that related in any way to teacher retention or to creating working conditions favorable to retention. Four participants stated that they could recall very little PPD that related to either retention or favorable workplace conditions.

One participant noted having experienced division-provided PPD in this area in the past, stating that it had been "quite a few years ago" (I-1, line 41). Three participants elaborated on their responses to this question by discussing division-provided PPD they had experienced and felt related peripherally to teacher retention. The four PPD topics experienced by those participants are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7

Topics Related to Retention in Division-Provided PPD

Division-Provided PPD Topics Experienced by Participants	Frequency of Mention by Participants
PPD about safety	1
PPD about being trauma-informed educators	1
PPD about staff management	1
PPD about making sure teachers have voice/input	1

Participant I-6 recalled PPD that related to retention "in a very crooked road kind of way"; this participant shared that "active shooter training, gang training, and how gangs are impacting our communities….Those pieces of safety, I think, are very valuable in helping us to support teachers" (line 55). Participant I-15 spoke highly of PPD related to being trauma-informed, indicating that this might help with teacher retention in terms of positive school culture because "it's helped shape who I am and my vision as an administrator, which then I'm able to share that knowledge with my staff to help build their capacity to sustain the culture and the vision" (line 45). Participant I-13 mentioned a division-wide book study for principals (not including assistant principals) that touched on "making sure people are heard" and "making sure that you're consistent and equitable" in staff management (line 57).

Self-Sought Professional Development. Three participants stated explicitly that they did not seek out or take part in any self-selected PPD related to teacher retention or creation of workplace conditions relevant to retaining teachers. One participant noted taking part in self-

sought PPD related to retention, along with other topics, "on a fairly regular basis" (I-1, line 41). Types of self-selected PPD engaged in by participants, as related to teacher retention or creating conditions for teacher retention, are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8

Types of Self-Sought PPD Related to Retention

Types of Self-Sought PPD Experienced by Participants	Frequency of Mention by Participants
learning from peers/mentors	5
professional reading	3
self-taught (on the job)	3
professional conferences	2
professional memberships	1

Five participants mentioned that most of their PPD took the shape of informally learning from mentors or peers who were also building-level administrators. Three noted that they took part in professional reading related to retention and creating conditions for retention. One participant mentioned attending a conference about effective co-teaching, saying it was related to teacher retention because it helped improve teacher efficacy and comfort with the co-teaching model, which that participant felt could contribute to a teacher's willingness to stay rather than leave (I-18, line 41). Three participants mentioned that anything they learned about teacher retention and creating conditions for retention came from their own on-the-job experiences. Participant I-1 talked about "white-knuckling it, trying to figure it out on the fly" (line 45). Participant I-9 said he "kind of taught myself, to be quite honest with you" (line 61).

Table 9 summarizes topics touched on within the forms of self-sought PPD obtained by participants. Three participants mentioned self-sought PPD about building relationships with teachers. Two of those same participants also mentioned seeking out PPD related to creating a positive school culture and climate. Participant I-9 quipped that "I think there is more of that

out there," indicating more PPD is readily available about culture and climate than explicitly about retaining teachers. Participant I-3 talked about having sought and obtained PPD related to managing staff in order to "move the school forward" (line 41), believing that to have a collateral effect on teacher retention. The same participant noted having attended a conference where the keynote speaker talked about the importance of "giving teachers somewhat autonomy in the classroom and giving them opportunities to be experimental" (I-3, line 41).

Table 9

Topics Related to Retention in Self-Sought PPD

Self-Sought PPD Topics Experienced by Participants	Frequency of Mention by Participants
PD about building relationships	3
PD about creating a positive culture/climate, in general	2
PD about increasing teacher capacity/efficacy	1
PD about giving teachers autonomy	1
PD about staff management	1
PD for general leadership capacity/skills	1

To a limited extent, the topics experienced by participants in self-selected PPD correspond to the working conditions participants mentioned as impacting teacher retention. The six topics of PPD noted by participants appear among the 29 influential workplace factors within a building-level administrator's purview that were mentioned by participants (Table 4). It is noteworthy, however, that a large majority (23) of the factors mentioned by participants as important to teacher retention were not likewise mentioned by participants as topics of self-selected PPD.

Research Question 3: What perceptions do building-level administrators have about how well prepared they have been for a role in retaining teachers?

The interview questions for this study were sequenced to give participants an opportunity to reflect on their beliefs and experiences before directly asking them about their perceived level of preparedness. Interview Question 1 caused participants to examine and articulate their beliefs about the role of the building-level administrator in teacher retention. Interview Questions 2-4 caused participants to reflect on their experiences with PPP and PPD relevant to teacher retention. Finally, after bringing those ideas and experiences to participants' minds, Interview Question 5 sought to directly ask how well prepared each participant feels they had been for having a role in teacher retention as a building-level administrator.

Interview Question 5: Considering both your principal preparation program and professional development you've experienced, how well prepared have you been for having a role in retaining teachers, and why? As the last question in the interview protocol, participants were asked to summarize how well prepared they feel they have been for having a role in retaining teachers. Participants were asked to take into consideration both their PPP and PPD in answering this question. Table 10 summarizes participants' responses to Interview Question 5. None of the participants stated feeling well prepared for having a role in teacher retention. Eight participants indicated feeling somewhat prepared and four participants indicated feeling not prepared at all. Three participants did not attempt to describe how well prepared they felt. Of those participants who did not describe a level of preparedness, one participant made a point of saying that he had not put in effort to become prepared. "When I say I'm guilty of not being prepared, I could have explored more, I could have gone to Mr. _____, or I could have called some of my peers" (I-13, line 61). The two additional participants who did not state a perceived level of preparedness avoided the question and follow-up prompting by repeating their own earlier comments about the types of workplace conditions they believe influence teacher retention.

In response to Interview Question 5, 87% of the participants specifically mentioned on-the-job experience in the role of building-level administrators as the most prominent way they had gained preparation for having a role in retaining teachers. In other words, most of the participants feel that they acquired the teacher retention ideas and strategies they now possess through experience rather than through PPP or PPD. Participant I-2 summed this up by stating, "I think that my professional development, honestly, as far as retaining teachers and working at making an environment [conducive to teacher retention], it's simply on the job training" (line 43). Twelve other participants, for a total of 13 out of the 15 interviewed, also mentioned experience on the job as their primary means of learning how to retain teachers.

Table 10

Summary of Participant Responses to Interview Question 5

Participant Response	Number of Participants
Did Not Describe	3
Not At All Prepared	4
Somewhat Prepared	8
Well Prepared	0

Summary

Research Question 1 focused on perceptions that building-level administrators hold regarding their role in the retention of teachers. In response to interview questions designed to answer Research Question 1, 80% of participants (12/15) stated that they feel building-level administrators are important to retention of teachers. The main themes that emerged in the data regarding the types of workplace conditions falling under administrators' purview and also impactful on retention included administrators being available to teachers, administrators listening to teachers, and administrators showing appreciation to teachers. Less than 50% of

participants noted any of the five workplace conditions determined in multiple prior studies to be indicative of teachers' inclination to stay rather than leave.

Research Question 2 asked what experiences building-level administrators have undergone to prepare them for a role in retaining teachers. In terms of PPP, 93% of participants (14/15) indicated that their PPP featured no explicit preparation relative to teacher retention. Of the PPP participants felt tangentially related to teacher retention, most noted were preparation for human resources management and building a positive overall school climate and culture. In terms of PPD, no participants could recall division-provided PPD explicitly targeting teacher retention and 20% of participants (3/15) stated that they did not pursue any self-selected PPD related to teacher retention. Three participants mentioned receiving division-provided PPD tangential to teacher retention, touching on the topics of safety, trauma-informed education, staff management, and listening to teacher input. Five participants mentioned self-sought PPD in the form of peer or mentor interactions. Other types of self-selected PPD included professional reading, attending conferences, and professional memberships. Just three participants noted specific topics they had studied on their own that they believed were tangential to teacher retention. The two most represented topics studied by those three participants included how to build relationships with staff and how to build a positive school culture and climate.

Research Question 3 sought to determine what perceptions building-level administrators have about how well prepared they have been for a role in retaining teachers. In response to this question, no participants stated feeling well prepared. Just over half of the participants (53%) stated that they felt somewhat prepared for this role, and just over a quarter of participants (27%) stated that the did not feel they were prepared for this role at all. The remaining participants (20%) did not specify how prepared they felt for this role. A clear

majority of the participants (87%) felt that they acquired the teacher retention ideas and strategies they now possess through on-the-job experience more than through PPP or PPD.

Chapter Four presented data on the perceptions and experiences of a sample of building-level administrators in the subject school division regarding their role in and preparation for teacher retention. Participants' responses to five interview questions were analyzed and data were presented as they corresponded to the study's three research questions. Analysis of the data associated with each of the research questions led to findings, implications, and recommendations for further research. Those considerations will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five: Findings, Discussion & Implications

Introduction

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to describe the experiences of building-level administrators in one urban school division in Virginia regarding their preparation for a role in retaining teachers and their perceptions of how well prepared they feel for that role. In the study, the researcher sought to describe considerations such as principal preparation programs, professional development experiences, and on-the-job experience as they relate to how well prepared building-level administrators perceive themselves to be for the role. The following questions guided the research:

1. What beliefs do building-level administrators have regarding their role in the retention of teachers?
2. What experiences have building-level administrators undergone to prepare them for a role in retaining teachers?
3. How well prepared do building-level administrators perceive themselves to be for their role in retaining teachers?

To gather data about the lived experience of building administrators and their perceptions, the study employed one-on-one interviews with 15 building-level administrators, representing 21.4% of all building administrators employed by the subject site school division during school year 2021-2022. Data were collected via interviews, codes were applied to data segments, then those codes were organized into clusters and patterns representing themes in the data. What follows in Chapter Five is a discussion of noteworthy findings that emerged, and the implications of those findings.

Discussion of Findings

Finding One

Building-level administrators in the subject school division believe that building-level administrators are important to the retention of teachers. This finding is associated with the analysis of participants' responses to Interview Question 1. Eighty percent of participants stated that building-level administrators are important or very important to a teacher's decision to stay or leave. While the remaining three participants did not specify how important they feel a building-level administrator is to retention, zero participants indicated believing that the building-level administrator is unimportant or irrelevant to retention.

The administrators' belief aligns with previous researchers' findings about the role of the building-level administrator to retention and Virginia's *Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Principals* (VDOE, 2020a). For the literature review associated with this study (Chapter Two), 12 studies and data analyses were examined concerning workplace conditions vis-à-vis teacher retention. Each of those studies concluded that the dominant workplace factor influencing or predicting teacher retention is school leadership (Boyd et al., 2011; Burkhauser, 2017; Fuller et al., 2016; García & Weiss, 2019a; Johnson et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2016; Ladd, 2011; Learning Policy Institute, 2017a; Olsen & Huang, 2011; Simon & Johnson, 2015; You & Conley, 2015). According to Harmon et al. (2017), the proliferation of documentation pointing to the potential impact of school leadership on teacher retention is, in part, a driver behind the focus of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) on educational leadership as integral to school improvement. In further acknowledgement of the importance of the building-level administrator to retention, the published principal standards employed by local education agencies (LEAs) within Virginia include multiple standards and indicators related to this role

(VDOE, 2020a). This finding indicates that participants in this study were attuned to the key impact of their role on teacher retention.

Finding Two

Building-level administrators in the subject school division tend not to have experienced any kind of explicit preparation for teacher retention in either principal preparation programs or principal professional development. This finding is associated with the analysis of participants' responses to Interview Questions Three and Four. Only one participant reported experiencing any kind of PPP that specifically focused on retention of teachers. Zero participants reported experiencing any kind explicit preparation for retaining teachers as part of their PPD. Participants in this study did not encounter preparation in which the topic or focus was the retention of teachers, with the exception of Participant I-10, who stated that teacher retention was discussed regularly as part of her PPP.

Though the researcher was unable to locate any prior studies specifically focused on how much preparation administrators have had for a role in teacher retention, Finding Two is corroborated by the 2017-2018 National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), which included a total of 10,600 public and charter school principals and focused on professional development experienced by administrators in the previous school year. NTPS data indicated that fewer than half of those surveyed (48.8%) reported taking part in any kind of professional development regarding human resource management. In that study, PPD relative to human resources was the topic reported to be the least experienced by participants out of the nine topics included in the survey. Finding Two of this study indicates that participants were not exposed to PPP or PPD that was explicitly focused on their role in teacher retention.

Finding Three

Preparation experienced by building-level administrators in the subject school division tends to have focused on creating certain workplace conditions they believe to be favorable to teacher retention; however, there is a notable diversity of viewpoint. Participants reported experiencing PPP and PPD related to various conditions of the workplace and expressed believing these things relate to teacher retention. The most mentioned workplace factors believed to fall within a building-level administrator's purview and to be influential in terms of teacher retention included being available to teachers, listening to teachers, and helping teachers feel appreciated and valued (see Table 4 in Chapter Four). Of these three factors mentioned by participants, only "listening to teachers" could be cross-referenced with the workplace conditions determined in prior studies to be positively associated with retention (see Table 5 in Chapter Four).

Participants' idea that workplace conditions impact teacher retention are corroborated by prior research. Multiple studies conclude that various workplace conditions existing within the purview of the building-level administrator can impact teachers' decisions to stay or leave (Boyd et al., 2011; Burkhauser, 2017; Fuller et al., 2016; García & Weiss, 2019a; Johnson et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2016; Ladd, 2011; Learning Policy Institute, 2017a; Olsen & Huang, 2011; Simon & Johnson, 2015; You & Conley, 2015). The Learning Policy Institute (2017a) published a research brief with an analysis of the 2013 Teacher Follow-Up Survey (TFS) from the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS); it listed the most common workplace factors contributing to teachers' decisions to leave, which are summarized in Figure 2 in Chapter Two. Data in that study indicated that "dissatisfied with administration" earned 21% of the teachers' responses, ranking it as the fourth most significant contributor to teachers' decisions to leave. Other high-ranking responses included in the survey, such as "dissatisfied

with school assessment/accountability policies," also relate to the role of building administration.

Three workplace factors were mentioned in common by approximately half of study participants: the administrator being available to teachers, the administrator helping teachers feel valued and/or appreciated, and the administrator listening to teachers. Beyond those three factors, interviewed building level administrators in the subject site division do not show a shared understanding about the administrative actions and decisions that most influence teacher retention. This diversity of viewpoint is illustrated by the fact that participants mentioned 29 different workplace conditions they believe play a part in retention, with little in-common agreement outside of the three most mentioned (see Table 4 in Chapter Four). This finding indicates that while participants in this study were aware that their impact on workplace conditions has the potential to affect teacher retention, they do not have a common knowledge base or shared skill base relative to teacher retention strategies.

Finding Four

Workplace conditions mentioned by building-level administrators in the subject school division showed little awareness of the workplace conditions determined by multiple prior studies to be positively associated with teacher retention. Twelve studies and data analyses related specifically to the relationship of working conditions to attrition were examined for the review of literature associated with this study (Chapter Two). Five common workplace conditions were found to be predictive of retention or attrition of teachers across these prior studies: Level of perceived teacher autonomy (Boyd, 2011; García & Weiss, 2019a; Learning Policy Institute, 2017a; You & Conley, 2011); teachers' perception of pressure and expectations placed on them regarding test scores or other performance measures (Byrd-Blake et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2016; Learning Policy Institute, 2017a); teachers'

perceptions regarding student discipline, safety, and order (Boyd, 2011; García & Weiss, 2019a; Kraft et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2016; Learning Policy Institute, 2017a; Simon & Johnson, 2015); the level of input and/or level of shared vision felt by teachers (Burkhauser, 2017; Johnson et al., 2012; Learning Policy Institute, 2017a; Simon & Johnson, 2015); and teachers' perceptions of their time being infringed upon (Burkhauser, 2017; García & Weiss, 2019a; Johnson, 2012; Kraft et al., 2012; Learning Policy Institute, 2017a). Just under half of the participants in this study (7/15) mentioned "listening to teachers" as important to retention. The other four key workplace factors noted in prior studies were each mentioned by five or fewer participants (see Table 5 in Chapter Four). This finding indicates that participants in this study were generally not made aware of researched-based workplace conditions related to teacher retention through their PPP, PPD, or on-the-job experiences.

Finding Five

Building-level administrators in the subject school division believe they acquired their teacher retention ideas and strategies through on-the-job experience and through peers more than through principal professional development. Most participants in this study (87%) stated that the way they learned about and developed beliefs about retention of teachers was on-the-job experience as a building-level administrator. While participants pointed out aspects of their PPP and PPD they believe peripherally related to teacher retention, most of them emphasized that they learned by doing more than they learned through preparation. As examples, Participant I-1 stated, "I was not prepared before I got started by anything" (line 45) and Participant I-2 said, "I think that my professional development, honestly, as far as retaining teachers and working at making an environment, is simply on the job training" (line 43). This finding is related directly to statements of the participants during interviews and is not corroborated by prior research; the researcher was not able to locate any

studies related to how administrators are prepared for having a role in retention of teachers, which was an indicator of a potential need for this study.

This finding indicates that participants have essentially relied on figuring out for themselves, as they embark on their role in building-level administration, what works and does not work in terms of retaining teachers. Additionally, some interviewed building-level administrators in the subject school division believe colleagues and mentors provide the most benefit in terms of preparation for having a role in teacher retention. Multiple participants referenced learning tips and tactics for creating positive workplace conditions from their peers or from administrators above them. Participant I-2 stated, "Most of my professional development is watching my peers and how they conduct themselves, the ones that I respect" (line 43). This finding indicates that building-level administrators' preparation for having a role in teacher retention may be arbitrary rather than intentionally designed, largely dependent upon organic experiences encountered by the administrator in the workplace and on the peers with which the administrator chooses to associate.

Finding Six

Building-level administrators in the subject school division do not feel that they have been well prepared for a role in teacher retention. This finding is associated with the analysis of participants' responses to Interview Question 5. Approximately half of participants (53%) stated that they feel they were somewhat prepared for having a role in teacher retention; however, no participant stated feeling well prepared. In the absence of an interview question or any prompting from the researcher, five participants voluntarily stated that they feel there is a need for better preparation. Participant I-1 stated, "I would say it's a gap [in administrator preparation]" (line 33) and followed up by saying, "I'd like to see that become something that principals talk about more and more explicit discussion because I think it's important for a lot

of people" (line 41). Participant I-11 said, "I think that would be a great PD for somebody to develop in the future and that'd be so good for all of us to go to" (line 39) and "I do think we need more professional development in how to retain" (line 51). This finding is related directly to statements of the participants during interviews; the researcher was unable to locate any studies related to how well administrators feel they were prepared for having a role in retention of teachers, which was an indicator of a potential need for this study. This finding indicates a notable discrepancy: While building-level administrators in the subject school division strongly believe their role is important to teacher retention (Finding One), they largely do not feel as if they have been well prepared for that role.

Implications

Implications listed in this chapter should be considered by those who develop and provide PPP and PPD to administrators, State Education Agencies (SEAs) and LEAs, and building-level administrators who seek skills and knowledge that promotes the retention of teachers in their buildings.

Implications for Developers and Providers of PPP and PPD

Implication One: Developers and providers of principal preparation programs and principal professional development should recognize the importance of the role of the building-level administrator by incorporating teacher retention as an explicit aspect of their programs/curricula. This implication is associated with Finding One and Finding Two. Nearly all participants in this study (12/15) stated that they feel as if the building-level principal is important to retention of teachers. This belief is corroborated by at least a dozen prior studies (Boyd et al., 2011; Burkhauser, 2017; Fuller et al., 2016; García & Weiss, 2019a; Johnson et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2016; Ladd, 2011; Learning Policy

Institute, 2017a; Olsen & Huang, 2011; Simon & Johnson, 2015; You & Conley, 2015) and is acknowledged in Virginia's *Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Principals* (VDOE 2020a), which are used by LEAs when evaluating the performance of building-level administrators. At the same time, as noted in Finding Two, only one participant in this study could recall any explicit preparation within the PPP experienced prior to becoming an administrator and no participant could recall any PPD related explicitly to the retention of teachers. This implication is particularly salient given the importance of retention in the context of teacher shortage, with some researchers estimating that as much as 2/3 of teacher demand stems from non-retirement attrition (Sorensen et al., 2018; Sutcher et al., 2016a). Developing and offering curricula specifically focused on helping building-level administrators prepare for their role in retention of teachers could be beneficial to schools and school divisions experiencing issues related to teacher shortage.

Implication Two: Those designing principal preparation programs and principal professional development should examine the workplace conditions noted in prior research as predictive of teacher retention to create curriculum that will develop an in-common understanding of those factors among administrators. This implication is associated with Finding Three and Finding Four. Plentiful research exists that pinpoints workplace factors, aside from salary and benefits, that most influence teachers' decisions to stay or leave a school or school division. Many of those workplace factors fall within the purview of a building-level administrator, causing the administrator to have a key role in teacher retention (Boyd et al., 2011; Burkhauser, 2017; Fuller et al., 2016; García & Weiss, 2019a; Johnson et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2016; Ladd, 2011; Learning Policy Institute, 2017a; Olsen & Huang, 2011; Simon & Johnson, 2015; You & Conley, 2015). At the same time, most participants in this study (87%) feel that their knowledge and skill relative to

teacher retention comes from on-the-job experience more than PPP or PPD, and state that they learn the role by watching and speaking with their peers (see Finding Five). This means that preparation for having a major role in teacher retention, though established to be important, is left up to a generally organic schema consisting of each administrator's own disposition or prior experience, the culture of the building in which the administrator is working, and the peers with which the administrator chooses to associate. The result is that administrators do not have a common understanding of research-based strategies for retaining teachers and do not have a shared skill set. This could be rectified by developing and offering explicit, intentional PPP and PPD curricula focused on teacher retention and centered on research-based practices.

Implications for SEAs and LEAs

Implication Three: Recognizing the importance of the role, state education agencies and local education agencies should provide high quality principal professional development related to the principal performance standards and indicators regarding teacher retention. This implication is associated with Finding One, Finding Five, and Finding Six. The *Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Principals* document (VDOE, 2020a) is used by LEAs in Virginia to evaluate the performance of building-level administrators in public schools. Those guidelines include one standard (*Performance Standard 3*) directly related to teacher retention: "The principal fosters effective human resources management by assisting with selection and induction, and by supporting, evaluating, and *retaining* [emphasis added] quality instructional and support personnel" (p. 7). In addition, the VDOE's evaluation guidance document includes multiple performance indicators that are related to fostering workplace conditions shown by prior studies to have a positive impact on teacher retention. Indicator 2.6 states verbatim that it is a principal's responsibility to "provide positive working conditions to encourage *retention* [emphasis added]

of highly-effective personnel" (VDOE, 2020a, p. 10). It is clear from the published principal evaluation standards that the VDOE recognizes the role of the building level administrator in creation and maintenance of a workplace that fosters retention of quality teachers. Building-level administrators in Virginia are evaluated based on standards and performance indicators related to teacher retention, yet this study indicates that current PPP offerings do not fully equip them for a role in retention prior to being hired as building-level administrators. It further indicates that they do not receive explicit PPD aimed at strengthening their knowledge base and skill set in this role after being hired. SEAs such as the VDOE and LEAs could rectify that discrepancy by developing and providing intentional PPD related to an administrator's role in retaining teachers.

Implications for Building-Level Administrators

Implication Four: Building-level administrators should recognize the importance of their role to teacher retention by seeking out and participating in principal professional development opportunities that have teacher retention as a focus, either explicitly or peripherally. This implication is associated with Finding One, Finding Two, Finding Five, and Finding Six. While 12 of the 15 participants in this study indicate feeling that the building-level administrator is a key factor in the retention of teachers, only four participants discussed self-sought PPD topics they had experienced and believed to be peripherally related to the retention of teachers. Five participants voluntarily stated in their interviews that they see a need for more or better or more PPD for this role (though this was not an interview question). Building-level administrators who wish to strengthen their knowledge base and skill level with teacher retention would benefit from seeking out and participating in PPD opportunities either focused explicitly on retaining teachers or on ways of creating a workplace environment likely to lead to teacher retention. This could be in the form

of in-person or virtual PPD, if available, or it could take the form of professional reading. Building-level administrators could benefit by reading research studies or meta-analyses of studies about workplace conditions shown to predict teachers' decisions to stay rather than leave a school.

Opportunities for Further Study

This study did not seek to correlate participants' actual teacher retention rates in their buildings with their beliefs and experiences related to preparation for having a role in teacher preparation. The subject site division or other LEAs may benefit from further research that examines each building's teacher retention data alongside perceptions of preparation reported by that building's administrators. Such a study might seek to determine whether building-level administrators' perceived level of preparation and reported preparation experiences appear to align with actual retention data for their schools.

Multiple participants in interviews for this study indicated that they glean most of their beliefs, knowledge, and skills relative to teacher retention from on-the-job experience and from watching or interacting with other administrators (peers). This indicates a need for further research about the role of on-the-job experience and peer mentoring as a means of gaining knowledge and skill, perhaps a study that compares the actual retention statistics for each participant with the types and/or number of on-the-job experiences or mentoring encounters they report. Such a study might seek to determine whether on-the-job experience and peer mentoring are effective methods of building skill and knowledge for teacher retention, whether they do or do not encourage bad habits and culturally ingrained misbeliefs, and under what conditions or circumstances they are most effective.

This study focused on one urban school division in southwestern Virginia. Further research about how well prepared administrators feel for having a role in teacher retention

relative to different geographical locations and in divisions with different demographics could provide additional insights regarding PPD and PPP experiences that support building-level administrators' preparation for having a role in teacher retention.

Summary and Conclusions

This basic qualitative study sought to examine the perceptions and experiences of building-level administrators in one urban southwestern Virginia school division relative to preparation for having a role in teacher retention. The methodology for this research included one-on-one interviews with 15 building-level administrators, representing 21.4% of the administrators employed in the subject-site division during school year 2021-2022. The discoveries of this study are noteworthy to the areas of educational leadership, principal preparation program, and principal professional development. The study reveals implications for PPP and PPD curriculum and offering designers, SEAs and LEAS, and building-level administrators, themselves. This study's research findings suggest that building-level administrators are important to teacher retention, that focusing on teacher retention is a key aspect of mitigating teacher shortage issues, and that building-level administrators who participated in the study do not feel they have been well prepared for a role in teacher retention.

Implications of this study include the following: Developers and providers of PPP and PPD should recognize the importance of the role of the building-level administrator by incorporating teacher retention as an explicit aspect of their programs/curricula and focus on workplace conditions noted in prior research as predictive of teacher retention to develop an in-common understanding of those factors among administrators. SEAs and LEAs in the Commonwealth should provide high quality PPD related to the standards and indicators regarding teacher retention used to evaluate building-level administrators' performance.

Building-level administrators should recognize the importance of their role to teacher retention by seeking out and participating in PPD opportunities that have teacher retention as a focus, either explicitly or peripherally.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Closed-Ended Demographic Questions

1 | How many years were you a classroom teacher before becoming an administrator?
2 | What was your principal preparation program (prior to becoming an administrator)?
3 | How many years have you been a school administrator?

Open-Ended Questions/Prompts

1| As a building-level administrator, what do you see as your role in retaining teachers?

Probe: How *important* are building-level administrators to teacher retention?

2 | What things do you do as a building-level administrator to retain teachers, and why?

Probe: Can you provide examples?

3 | Think about your principal preparation program, including coursework, readings, and learning activities you did to get your administrator license.

Please describe the preparation you experienced prior to becoming an administrator for having a role in retaining teachers or creating workplace conditions that encourage retention of teachers.

4 | Think about the professional development activities you've done since becoming an administrator — both those required by and provided by the division and *also* the PD you may have done on your own, like professional reading or taking classes or networking or attending conferences and workshops.

After becoming a building-level administrator, what professional development have you experienced related to retaining teachers or creating workplace conditions that encourage retention of teachers?

5 | Have you been well prepared for having a role in retaining teachers? Why do you think that?

Appendix B: Researcher Epoché

The researcher's ideas, memories, experiences, and beliefs relative to this study.

A | Researcher's Responses to the Interview Questions
B | Researcher's Bracketing re: Site/Context
C | Researcher's Bracketing re: Personal Experiences/Beliefs

A | Researcher's Responses to Interview Questions

Demographic Questions

1 | **How many years were you a classroom teacher before becoming an administrator?** My answer to this question isn't as straightforward as it may be for other people. I was a classroom teacher for twelve years. I then left the classroom for a role as a pseudo-administrator (as my principal called it at the time). I was an IB Diploma Programme Coordinator for seven years. In the last two years of that role, I returned to the classroom part-time (teaching 1-2 classes a day while also fulfilling the IB DP Coordinator role). So, roughly put, 14 years of classroom teaching total.

2 | **What was your principal preparation program?** I completed an M.Ed. with emphasis on "diverse student populations" from University of Mary Washington (all in-person) that also included completion of a master's thesis centered on supporting new teachers. Then, years later, I took part in a separate and entirely virtual administration and supervision endorsement program through Western Governors University. It included all of the coursework required for a second master's degree in educational leadership; however, I elected not to complete a second master's thesis, so that program resulted in the needed endorsement but not a second master's degree.

3 | **How many years have you been a school administrator?** Following my experience as an IB DP Coordinator, for two years I was a curriculum and instruction supervisor for a small school division. That required an admin and supervision endorsement but was not a building-level administrative role. I became a building-level administrator in 2019, as an assistant principal in my current division. So, I had 2 years in educational leadership at the division level and 2 years as a building-level administrator prior to engaging in this study.

Open-Ended Questions

1 | **As a building-level administrator, what do you see as your role in retaining teachers?** A major part of the reason I wanted to do this study was my earnest belief that building-level administrators hold a critical role in teacher retention. This belief was based on anecdotal observations of my own throughout my career in education. It seemed to me that some administrators inherently "got it" when it came to teacher retention. They knew it was important and knew, somehow, that it was tied to certain workplace conditions that they could intentionally and actively manipulate to create the kind of place teachers where teachers want to be and stay. They prioritized doing those things. Other administrators seemed not to be in on this information and either (a) didn't seem to think they had much to do with teachers' decisions to stay/leave, (b) didn't know what to do or how to do it, or (c) both. I know that as a teacher, the administrators I worked for had a LOT to do with my staying/leaving decisions. I left a school after six years mostly because the principal was distant at best and nasty at worst. You only saw her outside her office when someone (kid or adult) had done something wrong. She was renowned for chewing out employees in public, in front of kids and colleagues…but apologizing for it in private, if she did at all. She lacked warmth and humor and seemed to do nothing to make the building a pleasant workplace. I hated working for her. Then, I worked at a school with a principal who prioritized hiring and keeping quality teachers, put a lot of thought into creating a positive school climate/culture, and knew both why and how to help employees feel it was a good place to work. I stayed there for 12 years, leaving only because an opportunity for growth presented itself elsewhere. I believe that the old saying that "people don't leave a company, they leave a manager/boss" is true. So I believe that my role in retaining teachers is to create an environment where teachers want to work and where teachers want to stay, to the greatest degree possible within the confines of a larger school system.

2 | **What things do you do as a building-level administrator to retain teachers, and why**? The "why" is the easiest part to answer so I'll do that first. I was both told and shown that hiring and keeping quality teachers is possibly the most important task of the building administrator (by the principal I mentioned earlier). I took that to heart and hold it as a truth based on my own anecdotal observations of various schools over the years. For that reason, I have had a keen interest in both the hiring process and the retention of teachers for many years now—even before I became a

building administrator. As a "pseudo-administrator" in my role as IB DP Coordinator, I was involved in many hiring events and did lots of interviewing. I learned a lot about attracting teachers and hiring that way over the years. I like being involved in the hiring process; however, I'm hyper-aware that hiring teachers isn't the end. I believe it's important to keep quality teachers, improve lower-quality teachers who are capable of improving, and move teachers along to other places or careers if they are not capable of improvement or are unwilling to improve. As noted earlier, I also believe that the administration at the building level can impact whether a teacher chooses to stay or leave in key ways.

As an assistant principal, there are several things I do with the idea that they aide in retention of teachers. Most of them I learned from the principal I mentioned earlier who was good at it and placed importance on it. Some of them I learned from being a teacher, myself.

I try to be visible and present in the school—outside my office—so that teachers feel they have access to me throughout the day. That might be for an important talk, a lighthearted joke or shared camaraderie, or just to send the signal that I'm available if help is needed. I try to respond quickly when a teacher requests help. I try to stay on top of my discipline referrals so that they get dealt with in a timely way. I make it a priority to follow-up with teachers to let them know the outcome of discipline issues or other concerns. I try to support teachers in meetings with parents and students. If any teacher-related issue needs to be addressed, I do that after the meeting in private with the teacher. As much as possible, I try not to interrupt teachers when they are in class. As much as possible, I try not to ask teachers to do things outside of contract hours. I encourage teachers not to check/answer email after work hours and on weekends—or at least to restrict the amount of time they do so—as a form of self-care because I believe work/home balance is important and healthy. Beyond those things, I make efforts to create a workplace that is fun and caring. I spend time getting to know those I supervise. I keep track of the birthdays of those I supervise and send a card and small gift on that day (or near it). I write a personalized message in a holiday card to each person I supervise annually—a note that shows I know them each individually rather than a one-size-fits-all message. I periodically provide treats and do social events like hall potlucks. In past divisions, I purchased "team t-shirts" for the department I supervised. Those last few things may seem trivial, but I know that they make the workplace a fun place to be; moreover, they make people feel a sense of belonging and being valued in the school. I think that's important for retention.

3 | **Please describe the preparation you experienced prior to becoming an administrator for having a role in retaining teachers or creating workplace conditions that encourage retention of teachers.** The admin & supervision program at WGU focused a great deal on the Baldrige Excellence Framework for education. Within the Baldrige Framework's "core values" is a focus on "valuing people," and one of the "critical issues" of concern to the Baldrige Framework is "hiring and retaining a high-performing workforce." Having said that, I don't remember much—if any—focus on the role of the administrator in retaining teachers in any class discussion, assignment, or assessment. I had one course called "Workforce Focus for Educational Leaders"; however, it focused mostly on things like performance incentives, professional development for teacher efficacy, management of the workforce to attain organizational goals, legal issues surrounding the workforce, and a great deal on the evaluation of employees by the administrator. The other courses in my admin preparation program focused on process management, stakeholder management, student achievement outcomes, strategic planning, governance, law, and finance. I can say with certainty that I do not remember any explicit or specific focus on retaining teachers in terms of why or how to best do it.

4 | **After becoming a building-level administrator, what professional development have you experienced related to retaining teachers or creating workplace conditions that encourage the retention of teachers?** In terms of PD that I have been required to take and provided with by a division, none of it has explicitly focused on retention of teachers. That has never been the topic or subtopic of a PD event I've been asked to do. I had some brief training for hiring/interviewing on more than one occasion. That was probably the most direct/explicit PD I've had related to the workforce. PD that was required of me as an administrator probably tangentially hits on teacher retention in that a lot of it has been about maintaining discipline and safety or about being trauma-informed. Being knowledgeable and skilled about those things likely contributes to a positive school culture, which probably impact teacher retention to some degree. Certainly, teachers prefer to work in a school where order and safety are prioritized.

I do a lot of PD that I choose for myself such as professional reading, conferences, workshops, and webinars. I can't remember any book, conference session, or workshop focusing specifically and explicitly on retention of teachers; however, much of my self-selected professional reading has at least tangentially impacted my ideas about teacher retention. Examples include *Leaders Eat Last* by Simon Sinek, *Working with Emotional Intelligence* by Daniel Goleman, *Choice*

Theory and *The Quality School* by William Glasser, *Transforming School Culture* by Anthony Muhammad, *What Great Principals Do Differently* by Todd and Beth Whitaker, *The Art of Coaching* by Elena Aguilar, *Shifting the Monkey* by Todd Whitaker, *Motivating & Inspiring Teachers* by Todd Whitaker, et al., and *The Multiplier Effect* by Liz Wiseman, et al.

5 | **Have you been well prepared for having a role in retaining teachers?** Yes and no. I think I have been well prepared in that I had the good luck to work in a school with a principal who placed a high value on hiring well and keeping good teachers. I learned a lot from watching him and talking with him specifically about those things. Because it is a pet interest of mine, I have also been somewhat well prepared by doing a lot of professional reading that touches on the retention of teachers (even if not directly *about* that topic). I cannot say that my M.Ed. program or principal preparation program prepared me much at all for having a role in retaining teachers. Evaluating teachers and improving their performance was a focus, but how to hire and keep good teachers—aside perhaps from mentioning that it was a good thing to do—was not a topic we studied or discussed. The same is true of PD I've had since becoming an administrator. None of it has been about how to retain teachers, except very obliquely. My official and formal training to be an administrator did not include teacher retention as a topic or focus. I did have some instruction and training focused on things related to workplace environment and culture/climate, which I believe tangentially impact retention.

So I would say that I was minimally prepared by a combination of my PPP and required PD, but much more prepared by mentoring by another administrator and professional reading. I don't think everyone gets that, though.

B | Researcher Bracketing re: Site Context

I have been employed by the school division for 2 years prior to beginning this study, as an assistant principal at one of the two high schools. I moved here from northern Virginia and did not have any family or friends who lived or worked in this area or in this school division. I came into this school division "cold," which is probably rare. I had absolutely no personal connections in the city or school division whatsoever. I had no knowledge of the school division's culture or history, other than what could be learned from reading news articles online and reviewing the available VDOE Quality Profile on the division.

Year One (2019-2020) | I was hired in early November of 2019, after the school year had started. I did not experience PD or pre-opening planning with the administrative team at the school. The division went into virtual mode in March 2020 as a response to COVID-19 and state requirements. Between those dates, we had both Thanksgiving Break and Winter Break. In all, I worked in-person with the other administrators at the school for about 4 months in my first year. During that year, I did not work at any other school or with administrators from any other building. I did become somewhat familiar with the administrators at the CTE center and Governors School next to our building but did not work with them or get to know them well.

I attended virtual division training during the summer of 2020. I did not meet or interact with administrators from other schools except in occasional Zoom/Teams meetings.

Year Two (2020-2021) | The same 6-person (including me) administrative team returned with no turnover. I was part of the pre-opening planning for this school year, which took place in a partially virtual/partially in-person context for both students and teachers. I worked closely with the administrative team during this year and got to know some of them better as colleagues and individuals. Working through challenges with co-workers throughout this novel school year created some level of bonding with the other assistant principals. I got to know the administrators at CTE and Governors School more in my role as master scheduler, but did not work closely with them on a regular basis or come to know them very well on a personal level.

Summer (2021) | I worked summer school at the other high school in the division for about a month (4 days a week). I met and worked alongside administrators from other buildings during those weeks. The summer school event had been planned prior to my involvement. The APs typically worked alone during this time in a primarily disciplinary role, but communicated with one another as needed.

I also attended PD in-person for the first time in the division. I met and interacted with some administrators from other schools some during the required in-services and admin sessions.

Overall | As I start this study, I do not feel that I have a strong or in-depth knowledge of the "tribal memory" in the school division. Because of the impact of COVID-19, I feel less familiar with the people, culture, and unwritten codes of this division after two years than I would have expected when I was hired. I have had opportunity to participate in or conduct very little PD

here. People are often surprised when I remind them that I have never met so-and-so, or never been to X location in the division, or not participated in X annual event in the division yet. I've been here since Fall of 2019, but it seems in those ways as if I were just hired at the start of 2020. My first year was sort of a phantom year, marked by virtual meetings and events more than in-person.

In terms of people who may participate in this study, I do know the 5 other administrators in my building pretty well and have worked closely with them for enough time to be concerned that including them in the study could contribute to bias. I can't say that I know any other administrators in this division well enough to have that same concern. Interviewing them will be very similar to interviewing someone from another division altogether.

C | Researcher Bracketing re: Personal Experience/Beliefs

My answers to the demographic questions reveal that I have had an atypical introduction to building administration, having moved from the classroom to a pseudo-administrative position within a school to a division-level supervisory position before heading into a building as an assistant principal. Upon reflection, I am not aware of any reason that unique career path should make me biased during interviewing or data analysis. I feel genuinely curious to learn about other educational leaders' paths to building-level administration.

My answers to the questions about beliefs and experiences reveal that I inherently value teacher retention as a key part of a building-administrator's job, that I have had experience with administrators who were both good and bad in this role, and that most of my preparation for this role were tangentially rather than directly focused on teacher retention.

I will need to remember that there are many possible different ways participants may respond to these questions. My experiences are valid, but so are other experiences. I am prepared to hear that others received more preparation than I did. I am prepared to hear that others received less preparation than I did. I am prepared to hear that others received different preparation than I did. I feel genuinely curious to learn what experiences and beliefs others hold about teacher retention and their role(s) in it.

During interviews and data analysis, I will need to consciously set aside my experiences and beliefs and focus on what the participants are saying/expressing rather than reading my own ideas and experiences into the data. Using a scripted interview tool will help direct my questioning so that it is unbiased, especially once the tool has been reviewed by peers for biased language and clarity of expression. Any probing or follow-up questions will need to focus on asking the interviewee to clarify or expand about what they have already mentioned, without inserting my own ideas. Part of how I can do this is by practicing 'active listening'—repeating back to them what I think they have said and asking if I understand it correctly.

Appendix C: Sample Correspondence

Sample Introduction Email for Subject-Site Division

DATE: [insert date]
FROM: renardspicer@vt.edu
TO: _____
SUBJECT: Request for Approval of Research Proposal

Dear _____,

As you know, I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Program of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (VT). I am undertaking a dissertation study entitled: "Building Leaders' Experiences and Perceptions Regarding Preparation for their Role in Teacher Retention: A Basic Qualitative Study." A desired outcome of this research is that it may provide insight to schools and divisions in Virginia and beyond, to aid development of policies or practices surrounding administrator professional development with regard to preparing principals for their important role in teacher retention.

Attached, you will find my completed *Application for Approval of Research Proposal* form along with all required proposal documentation, beginning with an abstract of the proposed study. Also attached is the required Letter of Recommendation from my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Ted Price.

I am asking for permission to invite all division principals, assistant principals, program coordinators and directors to participate in one-on-one interviews. Actual participation will be limited to no more than 21 administrators (about 30% of the total possible participant pool). Interviews are estimated to take 30 minutes. Participants in interviews will receive a $25 Amazon gift card for their contribution to the study. If my proposal is approved as submitted, the survey and interviews would take place between June 15-August 1, 2022—prior to the start of school year 2022-2023.

Teacher shortage is affecting schools in ways that demand divisions focus not only on attracting and recruiting new hires but also, perhaps even more so, on how to retain the quality teachers already working in our schools. I am confident that the conclusions and recommendations from the study will be beneficial to school divisions and principal professional development practices around the state and perhaps across the nation.

I understand that your time and the time of our principals is exceedingly valuable. I appreciate your consideration.

Respectfully,

Lisa Renard-Spicer
Doctoral Candidate, VT

Introduction Email | Interview

DATE: [insert date]
FROM: renardspicer@vt.edu
TO: _Prinicpals_All_Schools
SUBJECT: Interview Opportunity

Dear [NAME],

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Program of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (VT), undertaking a dissertation study entitled: "Building Leaders' Experiences and Perceptions Regarding Preparation for their Role in Teacher Retention: A Basic Qualitative Study."

I would like to ask you to voluntarily participate in a one-on-one interview that will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. The interview will be confidential and will not ask for or collect any personally identifying information. Upon agreeing to participate in an interview, you will receive an electronic $25 Amazon gift card as a thank-you for your participation.*

The purpose of the study is to determine how well prepared building-level administrators believe they have been for their role in retaining teachers. The interview will ask you about your Principal Preparation Program experiences and Principal Professional Development (PPD) experiences.

The results from the study will be used in the researcher's dissertation. Participation in the study is voluntary. Any decision to participate or not to participate has no bearing on your employment or compensation. Attached you will find informed consent information to look over and consider.

If you agree to participate, please respond to this email and we will collaborate to set up a time, place, and location that is most convenient for you. *If you would prefer a virtual (Teams) interview, please indicate that in your response email.* The total number of interviews will be limited to no more than 21. You will receive an electronic $25 Amazon gift card as soon as we have a date and time set up for your interview.

As a building-level administrator myself, I understand your time is valuable and I highly appreciate your consideration regarding participation in this study. I hope you will participate.

Respectfully,

Lisa Renard-Spicer
Doctoral Candidate, VT

ATTACHMENT: Informed Consent Documentation

**Gift cards will be provided to the first 21 potential participants to schedule an interview and must be redeemed by the participant within 4 months of completing the interview.*

Appendix D: CITI Certification

CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 12-Sep-2020
Expiration Date 12-Sep-2023
Record ID 38406386

This is to certify that:

Lisa Renard-Spicer

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Social & Behavioral Research
(Curriculum Group)
Social & Behavioral Research
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech)

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w5fefa023-a667-4940-ad4b-75e111f1f79e-38406386

Appendix E: IRB Determination

VIRGINIA TECH

Division of Scholarly Integrity and Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
North End Center, Suite 4120 (MC 0497)
300 Turner Street NW
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540/231-3732
irb@vt.edu
http://www.research.vt.edu/sirc/hrpp

MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 11, 2022

TO: Ted S Price, Lisa Renard-Spicer

FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572)

PROTOCOL TITLE: Building-Level Administrators’ Experiences and Perceptions Regarding Preparation for their Role in Teacher Retention: A Basic Qualitative Study

IRB NUMBER: **22-436**

Based on the submitted project description and items listed in the Special Instructions section found on Page 2, the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) has determined that the proposed activity is not research involving human subjects as defined by HHS and FDA regulations.

Further review and approval by the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) is not required because this is not human research. This determination applies only to the activities described in the submitted project description and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made you must immediately submit an Amendment to the HRPP for a new determination. Your amendment must include a description of the changes and you must upload all revised documents. At that time, the HRPP will review the submission activities to confirm the original "Not Research" decision or to advise if a new application must be made.

If there are additional undisclosed components that you feel merit a change in this initial determination, please contact our office for a consultation.

Please be aware that receiving a "Not Research" Determination is not the same as IRB review and approval of the activity. You are NOT to use IRB consent forms or templates for these activities. If you have any questions, please contact the Virginia Tech HRPP office at 540-231-3732 or irb@vt.edu.

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Determined As: **Not Research**
Protocol Determination Date: **May 11, 2022**

ASSOCIATED FUNDING:

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this protocol, if required.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS:

This activity does not meet the definition of research, as defined within the Federal Policy for the Protections of Human Subjects. The primary goal is to describe the experiences of building-level administrators in one urban school division in Virginia regarding their preparation for a role in retaining teachers and their perceptions of how well-prepared they are for that role. The activity involves conducting interviews with 7-21 building-level administrators in the [redacted] school district. This activity does not meet the federal definition of research, since the goal and activity focus on the experiences of teachers in [redacted] and will not be generalizable. Per research protocol: "Findings will not be generalized to a larger population."

Appendix F: Informed Consent for Interview

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
Consent to Take Part in a Research Study

Title of research study: Building-Level Administrators' Experiences and Perceptions Regarding Preparation for their Role in Teacher Retention: A Basic Qualitative Study

Principal Investigator: Ted Price, Ph.D. | Educational Leadership & Policy Studies | (804) 869-2015 | pted7@vt.edu
Other study contact(s): Lisa Renard-Spicer, M.Ed. | renardspicer@vt.edu

Who else can I talk to?
The research team named above. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may communicate the IRB at 540-231-3732 or irb@vt.edu if:

- You have questions about your rights as a research subject
- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team
- You cannot reach the research team

Key Information:
The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of building-level administrators in one urban school division in Virginia regarding their preparation for a role in retaining teachers and their perceptions of how well prepared they feel for that role. For this study, you will be asked to participate in a one-to-one interview. The interview questions will not ask you for any personal identifiers. The interview will be recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Any personally identifying information will be deleted/redacted from the data. We expect that the time it will take you to complete the interview is 30 minutes. A desired outcome of this research is that it may provide insight to schools and divisions that may impact development of policies or practices surrounding administrator professional development with regard to preparing administrators for their role in teacher retention. The decision whether to participate or not participate will have no effect on your employment or compensation. ***All participants in one-to-one interviews will receive a $25 Amazon gift card as a thank-you that is not dependent upon their responses.***

What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?
- *You may ask questions prior to taking part in the interview.*
- *You will be asked a series of closed-ended and open-ended questions by the researcher.*
- *You will not be identified in the study; identifying information will not be stored with your data.*
- *It will take about 30 minutes to complete the interview.*
- *The interview will be recorded and then transcribed by the researcher into text.*
- *You will be able to quit and leave at any time if you wish to terminate participation.*

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?
You can terminate the interview at any time, for any reason, and it will not be held against you. Your data will not be used in the study if you ask to terminate the interview.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me? (Detailed Risks)
There are no known or anticipated risks.

Will being in this study help me in any way?
We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your taking part in this research; however, possible benefits include personal growth as a result of the process of self-reflection regarding your experiences and perceptions related to preparedness for your role in teacher retention.

Gift Card for Participation
Participants in one-to-one interviews will receive an electronic $25 Amazon gift card as a thank-you for your time and contribution. Gift Cards will be provided at the time each interview is scheduled.

What happens to the information collected for the research?
Trint online software will be used to automate the process of recording and transcribing audio data. Within Trint, uploaded data are encrypted within the researcher's password-protected account using AES 256, a specification for the strongest encryption of electronic data, established by the U.S. National Institute of Standards and Technology.

ATLAS-Ti online software will be used to store and analyze data obtained during the interview. The researcher's ATLAS-Ti account is password-protected. No personally identifiable data will be input or stored in ATLAS-Ti.

Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the IRB, Human Research Protection Program, and other authorized representatives of Virginia Tech. Your information or samples that are collected as part of this research will not be used or distributed for future research studies. The results of this research study may be presented in summary form at conferences, in presentations, reports to the sponsor, academic papers, and as part of a thesis/dissertation.

Can I be removed from the research without my OK?
The person in charge of the research study or the sponsor can remove you from the research study without your approval. A participant's data would only be removed from the study if that participant's employment with the subject-site division ended prior to analysis of the data.

What else do I need to know?
We will not share your recorded interview response or transcription with you after the interview has been completed.

Appendix G: Research Log Summary

Date	Research Activity	Notes/Memos
May 23, 2022	**Interviews I-1 & I-2**	
	Clean up I-1 & I-2 Trint transcriptions as needed	Listen to recording to correct AI errors and redact any identifiable information.
	Import I-1 & I-2 to ATLAS-Ti, delete from Trint platform	
May 25, 2022	code I-1 & I-2 in ATLAS-Ti coded all *a priori* codes that arose (Appendix H) and added inductive codes that emerged (see notes)	Inductive codes added to *a priori* codes: "admin very important," "admin important," "feeling valued/appreciated," "treat teachers with respect," "clear communication," "teacher fun/enjoyment," "create pos environment," "no explicit preparation," "advice from professors," "prep for creating environment," "there is a need," "on the job experience," "principals meeting," "retention not a concern," "Div PD not in a long time," "SS PD building relationships," "SS PD creating pos env," "SS prof memberships," "SS learning from mentor," "SS PD general leadership," "SS PD fairly regular basis," "retention as HR concern," "not at all prepared," "self-taught," "create team/family,"
May 29, 2022	**Interview I-3**	
	Clean up I-3 Trint transcription as needed	Listen to recording to correct AI errors and redact any identifiable information.
June 1, 2022	**Interviews I-4, I-5**	
June 3, 2022	Clean up I-4 & I-5 Trint transcriptions as needed	Listen to recording to correct AI errors and redact any identifiable information.
	Interview I-6	
June 4, 2022	**Interview I-7**	
June 5, 2022	Clean up I-6 & I-7 Trint transcriptions as needed	Listen to recording to correct AI errors and redact any identifiable information.
June 6, 2022	**Interview I-8**	
	Clean up I-8 Trint transcription as needed	Listen to recording to correct AI errors and redact any identifiable information.
June 11-14, 2022	Import I-3 to I-8 to ATLAS-Ti, delete from Trint platform, code in ATLAS-Ti coded all *a priori* codes that arose (Appendix H) and added inductive codes that emerged (see notes)	Inductive codes added: "hold ppl accountable," "feeling overloaded/pressured," "train teachers to communicate," "prep for hiring," "prep for observation/eval," "prep to listen to teachers," "SS prof conf," "SS keynote speakers," "SS pd about staff mgmt.," SS about increasing teacher capacity," "Div PD very little," "instructional leadership," "provide resources/tools," "recognize strengths," "peer support/mentoring," "being available," "prep for creating policies," "prep for effective meetings," "prep for having conversations," "field experiences," "SS prof reading," "Div PD none," "provide emotional support," "consistent administrator," "admin supporting teacher," "not well prepared," "celebrate milestones," "prep for HR concerns," "Div PD on safety,"

		"admin not very important," "prep for setting model," "SS PD none on my own," "onboarding," "prep for classroom mgmt."
June 15, 2022	**Interviews I-9, I-10, I-11, I-12**	
June 16, 2022	Clean up I-9 & I-10 Trint transcriptions as needed	Listen to recording to correct AI errors and redact any identifiable information.
June 17, 2022	**Interview I-13**	
June 18, 2022	Clean up I-11, I-12 & I-13 Trint transcriptions as needed	Listen to recording to correct AI errors and redact any identifiable information.
June 22, 2022	**Interview I-14**	
June 24, 2022	**Interview I-15**	
June 25, 2022	Clean up I-14 & I-15 Trint transcriptions as needed	Listen to recording to correct AI errors and redact any identifiable information.
	Import I-9 & I-15 to ATLAS-Ti, delete from Trint platform	
June 25-Aug 15, 2022	Code I-9 to I-15 in ATLAS-Ti coded all *a priori* codes that arose (Appendix H) and added inductive codes that emerged (see notes)	Inductive codes added: "be a role model," "SS exit interviews," "buffer for staff," "explicit preparation," "prep for onboarding," "Div book study," "prep for starting year," "Div PD on staff management," "depends on personality," "new-teacher support," "class sizes," "prep for eval," "Div PD re trauma-informed" Note: *only 13 new codes emerged across all of the last seven interviews combined (that were not already present in first sets of interviews); most codes repeated from earlier interviews; reasonable indication of saturation*
Aug 15-30, 2022	grouped codes by themes/patterns related to interview questions and research questions	See list (below)

ATLAS.ti Code groupings

Years in Classroom
○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○ 6 ○ 7 ○ 8 ○ 9 ○ 10 ○ 11 ○ 13 ○ 14 ○ 16 ○ 17 ○ 19 ○ 23 ○ 25
Type of Prep Program
○ hybrid prep program ○ in-person prep program ○ virtual prep program
Admin Prep School
○ Averett University ○ Davis and Elkins College ○ Liberty University ○ Old Dominion ○ Radford ○ Regent University ○ University of Virginia ○ Virginia Tech
Years as Admin
○1admin ○2admin ○4admin ○5admin ○6admin ○7admin ○10admin ○13admin ○16admin ○19admin ○ 23 admin

Importance of Admin to Retention
○ admin important ○ admin not very important ○ admin very important

Workplace Factors
○ absorb/buffer staff from drama ○ admin being available ○ admin supporting teacher ○ be a role model ○ build relationships ○ celebrate teacher milestones ○ class sizes ○ clear communication ○ Consistent Administrator ○

create positive envi/culture/climate ○ create team/family ○ discipline/safety ○ feeling overloaded/pressured ○ feeling valued/appreciated ○ hold ppl accountable ○ individualized teacher support ○ listen to teachers/teacher voice ○ onboarding/acclimation ○ peer support/mentoring ○ provide feedback to teachers ○ provide instructional leadership ○ provide resources/tools ○ provide social-emotional support ○ provide teacher choice/autonomy ○ provide/protect time ○ recognizing/highlighting strengths ○ specialized new-teacher support ○ teacher fun/enjoyment ○ Train teachers to communicate well ○ treat teachers with respect

Principal Preparation re: Retention
○ advice from prof re staff relations ○ explicit preparation ○ prep for building relationships ○ prep for classroom mgmt ○ prep for communicating w teachers ○ prep for creating environment ○ prep for creating policies ○ prep for effective meetings ○ prep for having conversations with teachers ○ prep for hiring ○ prep for HR concerns ○ prep for observation/evaluation ○ prep for onboarding ○ prep for setting model for others ○ prep for starting the school year ○ prep to listen to teacher input ○ prep to treat teachers w respect ○ retention wasn't a concern during my prep

Division-Provided PPD
○ Div PD about trauma-informed ○ Div PD book study ○ Div PD limited to prin (not APs) ○ Div PD need real examples to discuss ○ Div PD none re retention ○ Div PD not in a long time ○ Div PD on making sure teachers are heard ○ Div PD on safety ○ Div PD on staff management ○ Div PD very little related to retention ○ talked about in principal meetings

Self-Sought PPD
○ SS created & presented PD to teachers ○ SS exit interviews with teachers ○ SS fairly regular basis ○ SS keynote speakers ○ SS learning from mentors/peers ○ SS PD about building relationships ○ SS pd about giving teachers autonomy ○ SS pd about increasing teacher capacity ○ SS pd about staff management ○ SS PD conference about co-teaching ○ SS PD for creating pos env ○ SS PD for general leadership ○ SS pd none on my own ○ SS prof conference(s) ○ SS prof memberships ○ SS professional reading ○ SS self-taught (on the job)

principal professional development (general)
○ depends on size of faculty ○ on the job experience ○ there is a need ○ treated as more of an HR concern

How well-prepared were you?
○ didn't quantify ○ not at all prepared ○ Not well prepared ○ somewhat prepared

Appendix H: Data Analysis *A Priori* Codes

Codes Related to Workplace Conditions

teachers' voice/input	*instructional intrusions*	*teachers' time*
safety/discipline/order	*teacher autonomy*	*pressure/expectations*

Codes Related to Principal Preparation

for-profit online program	*nonprofit uni/college*	*division-based program*
internship/practicum	*3rd party program*	*endorsement prep program*
virtual/online PPP	*brick-and-mortar PPP*	*hybrid in-person/virtual PPP*

Codes Related to Principal Professional Development

college/university courses	*additional degree programs*	*conferences/seminars/workshops*
admin mentoring/shadowing	*admin networking*	*professional reading*
professional membership(s)	*social media based PPD*	*EdCamp style PPD*
division-required PPD	*voluntary PPD*	*division-provided PPD*
self-sought PPD	*PPD related to retention*	*PPD related to climate/culture*

Magnitude Coding (Perception of Preparedness)

very well prepared	*adequately prepared*	*somewhat unprepared*
very unprepared		