

Educational Leadership Impact on Early Career Teacher Retention:  
Making Meaning of School Principal and Classroom Educator Perceptions

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**ABSTRACT**

Teacher retention, specifically early career teacher retention, is a prominent issue facing educational leaders. This dissertation addresses the impact high early career teacher attrition has on student academic achievement, establishes the purpose of my qualitative research study, and clarifies the problem of study. Integrated into Chapter 1 is a conceptual framework that outlines leadership and non-leadership factors impacting early career teacher retention. The literature review in Chapter 2 examines current teacher attrition trends as well as practices and policies implemented to improve teacher retention. Literature included in the review is peer reviewed and published between 2012 and 2024. Articles produced from the search criteria were derived from the Virginia Tech remote library's Education Research Complete from EBSCO host, ERIC from EBSCOhost, Educators Reference Complete from Gale, and Teacher Reference Center from EBSCOhost in addition to articles referred to me by Virginia Tech faculty. The connection between leadership practices or behaviors and new teacher retention is supported by current literature. Teacher retention is discussed as a global and national issue as well as an issue facing educational leaders in the state of Virginia. Monetary and non-monetary costs of teacher attrition are discussed in addition to the monetary and non-monetary factors impacting teacher retention. School leadership and the connection to mentorship literature are analyzed to determine the connection between leadership behaviors and new teacher retention. Using the identified

research questions in Chapter 1, I outlined my research methodology and framework for my qualitative research study in Chapter 3. The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence educational leadership has, specifically building level principals, on early career teacher retention decisions. The study specifically focused on the secondary level in a medium sized school division in southwest Virginia. I wanted to gain a better understanding of how principals at the secondary level positively contribute to the retention of early career teachers within their schools. New teacher, beginning teacher, novice teacher, and early career teacher are used interchangeably throughout this dissertation. Chapter 4 presents an analysis of individual semi-structured early career teacher interviews and principal interviews. Chapter 5 presents implications and meanings generated from this research study. Meanings made and implication from early career teacher interviews and principal interviews are presented in this study. This study has value in its potential to inform school policy makers, drive future leadership practices, or influence the practice of future school leaders.

Educational Leadership Impact on Early Career Teacher Retention:  
Making Meaning of School Principal and Classroom Educator Perceptions

A Qualitative Study

Heather V. Riganti

**GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT**

Teacher retention, specifically early career teacher retention, is an issue facing educational leaders. The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence educational leadership has, specifically building level principals, on early career teacher retention decisions. The study specifically focused on the secondary level in a medium sized school division in southwest Virginia. The researcher (I) wanted to gain a better understanding of how principals at the secondary level positively contribute to the retention of early career teachers within their schools. Five semi-structured interviews were completed with secondary principal participants and eight semi-structured interviews were completed with early career teacher participants. Each research participant completed a demographic survey (see Appendices D & E). Meanings and implication from early career teacher interviews and principal interviews are presented in this study. The researcher (I) outlined themes relevant to the ways principals influence the retention of early career teachers. This study has value in its potential to inform school policy makers, drive future leadership practices, or influence the practice of future school leaders.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Anthony, and my children, Rosalie and Jax. Throughout this period in my life, they have supported me and offered encouragement as I worked toward this accomplishment. There were moments of our lives that were put on hold or that I missed to attend class and make progress in this program. I hope my daughter and son see the value in this degree and that their goals are worth working for. Most importantly, I hope they see the value in an education and that they find something they love learning about as much as I did. When I was a child, I never thought it would be possible for me to earn a doctoral degree. Because of my family's love, support, and constant encouragement, it was. I love my husband and children more than they will ever know, and I am thankful that I had three incredible people cheering me on the whole way.

I also dedicate this study to my paternal grandparents who told me from a very young age that education was my path to a better life. My grandmother, Rhonda Lee George, listened to me vent about my frustrations with work, school, or my personal life. She helped me work through roadblocks and continuously reminded me that finishing my doctoral degree "would be worth it." She reminded me of my goals when I lost sight of them. When I was overwhelmed, she would ground me in the fact that this experience was "only temporary." Because of her, I know that one day I will look back on this time of my life with fondness and pride. My grandfather, Olma David George, taught me that my past did not define my future. He also selflessly made sure that I had everything I needed to complete my degree and that resources were never an issue. I cannot express how grateful I am to my "Pa" and "Ma" for helping me with whatever supplies I needed from my time in undergrad through the completion of this doctoral program. I would not have

been able to do this without their support. Because of “David” and Rhonda George, I did not become a statistic. I won the lottery when God gave me them as grandparents.

Finally, I want to dedicate this dissertation to my students and the staff that I have the privilege of serving. It is the students, teachers, leaders, and other educators with whom I work that have continuously inspired me to be a better administrator and educator. Everything that I do, including this study, is to make sure our school continues to be the amazing place it is to work and learn.

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encouragement helped me more than I know how to put into words. Little did I know that we would be where we are today when we met over Zoom three years ago. Not only did I gain a colleague through this program, but I found a lifelong friend in you. I will cherish the memories we made together, our inside jokes in this “marathon,” and the fact that we will walk across a stage together on graduation day. Congratulations to you as well! You’ve earned this!

To my grandma, Rhonda Lee George, for being my first and constant friend in life. You listened to me and believed in me when I didn’t. There will never be enough words to describe how much I love you and how thankful I am to be your granddaughter. Thank you for instilling a love of learning in me. Without you, I would not be an educator.

I am thankful to my committee chair, Dr. Charles Lowery, for reading and providing feedback on multiple drafts of this dissertation. You always made time to check in when I had questions or experienced nervousness or unease before an exam. I felt incredibly supported even when I was incredibly confused. When I set obscure goals for myself, as silly as some of them were, you made sure that I reached them. I truly felt like my research, my questions, and my educational journey was important to you. I thank you for your advice, your constructive feedback, and the resources you shared with me throughout this program to make my dissertation what it is. Without you, I would not have completed this dissertation or this program.

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A special thank you to Dr. Carol A. Mullen for sparking my interest in studying teacher retention. You assisted me in solidifying early career teacher retention as my research focus. Starting this program without a direct area of focus was terrifying. You structured your literature review class in a way that guided me to my research area, and I was able to hit the ground running with a topic I was passionate about on an academic and professional level. Thank you!

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The quality of education that children receive is connected to school staffing and the ability of school leaders to retain quality educators (Frahm & Cianca, 2021; Garcia et al., 2022; Ulferts, 2015; Zavelevsky et al., 2022). Teacher retention, particularly early career teacher retention, is not new to qualitative research. However, following the Covid-19 pandemic, school leaders are tasked with the staffing responsibilities and the challenge of retaining teachers in their schools (or divisions) as teacher attrition continues to increase. Schools with high minority and poverty student populations often experience greater teacher attrition, making it difficult to develop and grow quality teachers that positively impact student academic performance.

Research has found that monetary and non-monetary factors contribute to early career teacher retention (Castro, 2023; Garcia, 2022; Goldhaber, 2022; Gunther, 2019; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Olsen & Huang, 2019; Ulferts, 2015; UNESCO, 2022; Vanderslice, 2010; Zavelevsky et al., 2022). Principals, alongside classroom teachers, are identified as having a significant impact on student achievement and teacher retention (Castro, 2023; Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Zavelevsky et al., 2022). It is important to determine the various ways that administrators positively impact teacher retention to continue to retain quality teachers beyond their first years in the classroom. Fewer qualified teacher candidates who have successfully completed teacher preparation programs are entering the workforce. Furthermore, data from colleges is indicative of a decline in student enrollment and completion of teacher preparation programs.

The intention of this qualitative study was to identify the impact school leadership has on early career teacher retention within a medium sized school division in southwest Virginia. I sought to gain insight from early career teachers employed at secondary schools as well as

building-level principal behaviors on practices or behaviors that they identify as impacting early career teacher retention. Secondary principals were interviewed to identify their behaviors or practices that they perceived to positively impact early career teacher retention within their buildings. I hoped to identify common principal behaviors or practices identified by both early career secondary teachers and secondary building level principals as impacting early career teacher retention. After analyzing data, I used the meanings made within this study to identify potential areas for principal professional development and to provide the participating school division in southwest Virginia with qualitative data to improve the retention rates of early career teacher at the secondary level.

### **Historical Perspective**

Teacher attrition is a significant concern in the field of education and has been a concern faced by school leaders for decades (Foster, 2023; Garcia et al., 2022; Sutchter et al., 2019). Gallant and Riley (2014), Mullen (2024), and Ryan et al. (2017) viewed attrition as a growing problem in the field of education. Zavelevsky et al. (2022) attributed early career or novice teacher attrition to both individual causes and contextual factors. It is estimated that attrition rates in the United States for teachers within their first five years in the classroom is between 20% and 50%. Zavelevsky et al. (2022) estimated that one-third of teachers leave the profession because of administrative decisions or a lack of administrative support. Similar findings were reported by Brill and McCartney (2008), Garcia et al. (2022), Mullen (2024), and Shuls and Flores (2020). Additionally, teachers are faced with growing pressure for their students to demonstrate success on high-stakes tests following the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) and Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) (Ryan et al., 2017). Student performance data is used to measure school success, is frequently used in teacher performance evaluations, and is

noted as a contributing factor of teacher stress and burnout.

Teacher attrition disproportionately impacts schools based on geographic, economic, and racial composition. Teacher attrition impacts schools with high poverty rates, high minority rates, and rural schools at more significant rates when compared to suburban schools (Engel & Finch, 2015; Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Mullen, 2024; Reitman & Karge, 2019; Soulen, 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2022; Vanderslice, 2010). This inability to retain and develop quality teachers negatively impacts student performance, especially in underserved communities (Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Zavelevsky et al., 2022). Teacher attrition plays a role in school divisions allocating resources away from academic programs supporting student achievement and fewer resources allocated toward staff professional development. This contributes to less opportunities for student growth and fewer classroom resources available to support early career teachers and veteran teachers (Garcia et al., 2022; Mullen, 2024; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Ulferts, 2015). Mullen (2024) suggested a need to evaluate teacher retention efforts and initiatives through a SACE (support, accessibility, collaboration, and equity) lens that focuses on equity to address disparities in retention and educational achievement. With a growing teacher attrition rate and fewer college students entering (and completing) teacher preparation programs, it is expected that teacher attrition will continue to impact student academic performance (Mullen, 2024).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The United States is experiencing an increase in the demand for qualified teachers with fewer teachers entering the field of education and enrolling in teacher preparation programs (Bastian et al., 2017; Mullen, 2024; Shuls & Flores, 2020; Sutcher et al., 2019). With fewer teachers entering the profession, it is increasingly important for school leaders and school divisions to address teacher retention, especially when examining the impact high teacher

attrition has on student academic performance (Kang & Berliner, 2012; Kim, 2019; Soulen, 2020). Negative school cultures and low student achievement are associated with high teacher attrition rates (Garcia et al., 2022; Zavelevsky et al., 2022). Reducing teacher attrition results in the professional growth and development of current teaching staff and more experienced teachers remaining in the classroom. Increased retention also contributes to fewer vacancies being filled by uncertified or out of field teachers or long-term substitutes, contributing to improved school culture and student academic performance (Kang & Berliner, 2012; Kim, 2019; Soulen, 2020).

Current literature addresses factors contributing to teacher retention, largely from either a leadership perspective or from a teacher perspective. Some studies exist that compare the perspectives of teachers and principals. However, few studies focus specifically on early career teachers' perspectives. A limited number of studies focus specifically on distinct levels of public education while considering both leadership perspectives and early career teacher perspectives. This study can contribute to future research by comparing perspectives of secondary principals and early career teachers employed at the secondary level, providing meaningful insight into early career retention at the middle and high school levels. Future opportunities for research can build upon this qualitative study by extending the duration of this study over multiple years. Dr. Lowery and I have considered conducting a similar study with a longitudinal focus. A longitudinal basic qualitative study using thematic analysis based on hermeneutics or a similar study conducted at the elementary level with the intention of comparing the meanings presented within this qualitative study have the potential to contribute to deeper meaning making or a greater understanding than what is presented by me in this dissertation.

### **Impact of the Study**

The significance of this research is that it investigates principal practices or behaviors

that influence early career teacher retention by comparing principals' perceptions and the perceptions of early career teachers. I wanted to investigate the impact of principals on the retention of early career teachers to determine if there is alignment between what early career teachers say or perceive about the role of the principal contributing to them remaining in positions at their current schools and how principals perceive their role and actions as contributing to early career teachers remaining in their positions. This research may assist school leaders struggling with retaining quality early career teachers by providing them with qualitative data and recommendations for changing their future practices. It may also encourage principals (and other school level administrators) to reflect on their behaviors or priorities as educational leaders. This study has value in its potential to inform school policy makers, drive future leadership practices, or influence the practice of future school leaders. Additionally, qualitative data from this study may be used to improve the retention of quality teachers in the classroom and positively contribute to student academic performance if attrition rates can be mitigated with improved school leadership behaviors or practices.

Teacher retention is a prominent issue faced by school leaders across the United States. Early career teachers are more apt to leave the classroom within five years of entering the teaching profession (Kang & Berliner, 2012; Lauk, 2022; Mullen, 2024; Mullen et al., 2022; Soulen, 2020). Annually, this accounts for a loss of roughly eight percent of the teaching workforce (Beck et al., 2020). The increase in teachers leaving the classroom contributes to a national teacher shortage (Garcia et al., 2022; Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Mullen, 2024; Shuls & Flores, 2020). Reduced retention of early career teachers is associated with less development of teachers and a cyclical problem of inexperienced or underqualified teachers entering classrooms. Funding and resources that could be directed toward programs aimed at improving student

achievement and closing existing performance gaps are directed toward mentorship programs and programs aimed at recruiting and training new teachers (Garcia et al., 2022; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Ulferts, 2015). Mullen (2024) articulated that it is unfair to expect mentor teachers to be uncompensated for their work and that more effective mentorship programs are “recognized” and receive appropriate allocation of resources. Additionally, when more funding is directed toward hiring and training new teachers, less funding is directed toward the professional development of experienced teachers that remain in the profession (Garcia et al., 2022; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Ulferts, 2015). Addressing early career teacher retention provides opportunities for school and division level leadership to allocate resources toward continued teacher professional development and student academic achievement. Addressing teacher retention, especially early career teacher retention, can contribute to a stable and high-quality teacher workforce.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence educational leadership has, specifically building level principals, on early career teacher retention decisions. The study specifically focused on the secondary level in a medium sized school division in southwest Virginia. Using the data obtained from the individual principal and classroom teacher interviews, I sought to gain a better understanding of the impact secondary principals have on early career teachers’ decisions to remain in or leave their current positions. To do this, I analyzed interview data to determine if and what differences in perceptions related to school leadership and early career teacher retention exist. Secondary school principals were interviewed and asked to identify principal behaviors or current practices in place at their schools intended to positively impact beginning teacher retention within their schools. Early career teachers were interviewed

and asked to evaluate their principal practices and behaviors as it applies to their decisions to remain employed either at their school or in the teaching profession.

In conducting this researcher study, I wanted to identify common behaviors or practices identified by secondary school principals implement to positively impact early career teacher retention and compare what was identified to the behaviors or practices identified by beginning or early career teachers that teachers perceive to impact their retention. I also intended to examine current data, specifically overall teacher retention data, and early career teacher retention data for participating secondary schools in a medium sized school division in southwest Virginia. The qualitative data collected for this study includes teacher interview data, principal interview data, and basic demographic data from principal participants and early career teacher participants.

I intend to provide secondary school principals and division-level leaders with qualitative data to improve the retention of secondary level early career teachers. Meanings presented within this study may be used to create professional development for secondary school leaders aimed at improving teacher retention, for policy adoption at the division level aimed at improving early career teacher retention, as a data source for future research studies, and to influence principal preparation curriculum at collegiate levels. By exploring the perceptions of both school principals and classroom teachers, I acquired a deeper understanding of how leadership practices and behaviors impact early career teachers' decisions to remain in or leave their positions. This research provides insights into how leadership strategies, behaviors, and practices can help improve teacher retention.

### **Justification of the Study**

Increasing early career teacher attrition rates and a growing demand for qualified teacher

candidates places a greater need for school and division level leaders to address the retention of early career teachers (Ryan et al., 2017; Zavelevsky et al., 2022). School leaders are identified as playing a significant role in the retention of teachers and their behavior and decisions are cited in current literature as playing a contributing role in early career teacher attrition (Castro, 2023; Kim, 2019; Ryan et al., 2017; Zavelevsky et al., 2022). In conducting this study, I analyzed early career teachers' perceptions and principals' perceptions of principal behaviors or practices that positively contribute to early career teacher retention. I intended to identify common principal behaviors or practices identified by early career teachers and secondary school principals that positively contribute to teacher retention. Retaining teachers at the middle and high school levels will contribute to improved instructional practices and student academic performance that is hindered when schools experience high teacher attrition.

### **Research Questions**

My goal associated with completing this qualitative study was to understand how principals at the secondary level positively contribute to the retention of early career teachers within their schools. The research questions that follow will serve as the basis for conducting the qualitative study.

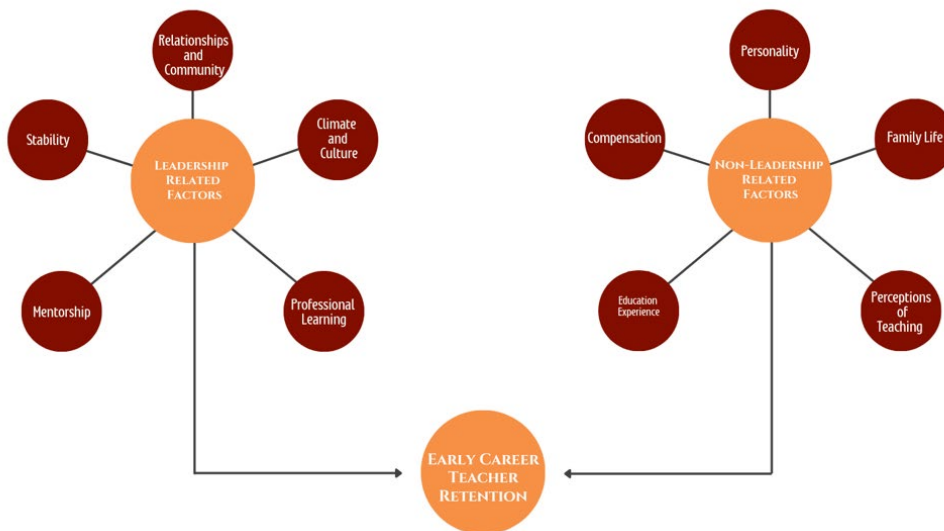
- 1) How do school principals perceive their role in fostering a work environment that contributes to the retention of early career teachers?
- 2) What are the lived experiences of early career classroom educators regarding the influence of leadership practices on their decisions to remain in the classroom or leave their current teaching positions?
- 3) In what ways do the interactions between school principals and secondary early career teachers contribute to early career teacher retention efforts within schools?

## Conceptual Framework

I sought to examine early career teachers' and building level principals' perceptions of principal practices or behaviors that positively contribute to the retention of early career teachers in a medium sized school division in southwest Virginia. Prior research identified leadership and non-leadership related factors that contribute to teacher retention. Non-leadership factors include personality, compensation, family life, educational experience, and perceptions of the teaching profession. Leadership related factors include professional learning, climate and culture of the school, relationships and community, stability, and mentorship practices. This study focused on early career teachers' perceptions and secondary school principal perceptions of principal behaviors (leadership factors) that impact early career teacher retention. The conceptual framework utilized for this study is outlined in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework – The Connection Between School Leadership and Early Career Teacher Retention*



## **Definition of Key Terms Relevant to the Proposed Research Study**

The following terms are used regularly throughout what will be a qualitative dissertation. They are defined to create common understanding of terms frequently used in current literature that are also integrated and referenced throughout the introduction, literature review, and methodology chapters.

**Administrative support** refers to the guidance and extent to which school leaders change behaviors, implement policies, make decisions, and assist in improving teacher effectiveness (Erdogan & Clement, 2023; Shuls & Flores, 2020).

**Difficult to staff positions** refers to positions that often go unfilled or are filled with underqualified teachers or teachers with provisional licensures due to their location, school setting, or certification requirements (Sutcher et al., 2019).

**Early career teacher or novice teachers or new teacher** refer to teacher employed within their first five years of entering the teaching profession (Zavelevsky, 2022).

**Principal** refers to head principal or head building level leaders (Frahm & Cianca, 2021).

**Teacher attrition** refers to the phenomenon of teachers resigning or leaving their position or exiting education before retirement (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Vanderslice, 2010).

**Teacher retention** refers to teachers' continued employment in their current educational setting or school (Gunther, 2019).

**Teacher turnover** refers to teachers leaving their school to transition to another school or leaving the teaching profession (DeMatthews et al., 2022).

**Teacher mentorship** programs aimed at training or developing early career teachers and improving their professional performance (Carr et al., 2017).

**Stayers** refers to teachers who remain in the current school as classroom teachers

(Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017).

**Movers** refers to teachers who leave their current school but remain in the teaching profession (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017).

**Leavers** refers to teachers who leave the teaching profession (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017).

### **Limitations**

I intended to study the impact that educational leadership has on the retention of early career teachers at the secondary level. I compared secondary school principals' perceptions and early career teachers' perceptions of school leadership on early career teacher retention in a medium sized school division in southwest Virginia. Potential bias could exist in the fact that teacher retention is an important topic of study to me, and I am currently employed as an assistant principal in the school division where the research was conducted. The qualitative research methodology selected (and described in Chapter 3 of this dissertation) allowed me as the researcher to generate meanings from qualitative data. In my analysis, I attempted to generate meanings from the shared perceptions of early career teachers and building principals. My interpretation of data could be different from others that do not share the same background or experiences in education or educational leadership. The potential for bias served as another reason for selecting a qualitative research methodology that allowed me to continue to explore an area of research that is of personal interest to me and important to the field of education.

Limitations of qualitative research are factors for which I could not control. Limitations of this qualitative research study include:

1. I could not control teacher or principal prior exposure to literature surrounding teacher retention.
2. I could not control teacher or principal exposure to division efforts, trainings, or

- initiatives to improve teacher retention.
3. The interviews were conducted outside of school hours which may have limited participant availability.
  4. One principal participant had only one early career teacher participate in an interview due the established criteria, limiting the possible early career teacher participant size to nine.
  5. A lack of response from potential early career teacher participants and corresponding alternate participants from one school further limited the early career teacher participant size to eight.
  6. The staff members (early career teachers and the building principal) employed in the school in which I am currently serving as an administrator were excluded from participation.
  7. There is a possibility that participants within this study practiced self-censorship in their responses to individual semi-structured interview questions. This is particularly true for early career teacher participants who might not have been forthcoming in their responses if they felt there was a power imbalance due to my position as an administrator in the participating school division.

### *Perceived Power Dynamics and Considerations Related to Self-Censorship*

Bar-Tal (2017) defined self-censorship in as the “voluntary withholding of information.” Self-censorship of research participants, particularly teachers or other public professions, has been described by qualitative researchers (Brear, 2020; Dávila & Barnes, 2020). Educators may not be willing to share information that is political in nature or their perspective if the information or views that are shared could be considered controversial (Dávila & Barnes, 2020).

Additionally, participants might not share perspectives if they feel unprepared or were unable to provide a prepared response. This could be especially true if participants perceived there to be risk associated with the response they share or the audience (researcher) receiving the information. Brear discussed that participants might not share information with a researcher if the participant feared providing information that was incorrect or inaccurate.

Furthermore, Bar-Tal (2017) articulated that self-censorship has the potential to cause research findings (or meanings) to lack integrity. This is because individuals do not feel comfortable enough with the researcher to share information even without formal barriers preventing the sharing of information. Research participants that do not share information with a researcher make the choice to withhold due to a cost-benefit analysis or their perception of an imbalance of power (Brear, 2020; Bar-Tal, 2017). This may also include an unwillingness to share opinions, feelings, or thoughts. If the cost of sharing information outweighs the benefits, information may be withheld by participants even if it has societal or practical benefits when shared. Information that is more factual or readily available may be shared more freely by some research participants that practice or engage in self-censorship (Bar-Tal, 2017). Additionally, research participants may not share information freely if they feel the information shared may cause harm; they want to avoid information that may cause damage to their reputation or the reputation of others discussed; and/or because they do not want to be perceived as speaking negatively about others.

As a researcher, I am aware that I hold a supervisory role in my school division. As an assistant principal, I do not have, nor do I perceive myself to have, authority of individuals outside of my school setting. It is my perception that I communicated my intention to maintain confidentiality of my research participants and their responses within this dissertation. It is also

my perception that all my participants were voluntary participants that chose to answer questions honestly and freely. I do recognize that my perception may not be shared by all participants within this qualitative study.

All participants within this study were employed in school settings outside of the school where I serve as an administrator. However, I do recognize that there is name awareness within the participating school division. Participants may have been aware of my role as an assistant principal. Although I encouraged people to be open and ensured all participants that I would maintain the confidentiality of their responses, there is still a possibility that either principal or early career teacher participants might have still viewed me as a colleague or a boss and practiced self-censorship in some of or all of their responses. This could be because of my “perceived” role as a boss; because my awareness of the people they were answering questions about or because they were concerned about the experiences they were choosing to share. Some participants could have also practiced self-censorship because they didn’t want to share incorrect information or because they did not want to slander others or speak negatively of others. This could especially be true for early career teacher participants, many of whom know that I have associated with their principals or assistant principals on professional or personal levels. They might not have trusted that I would maintain complete confidentiality of their responses.

While I am confident that I ensured confidentiality in the meanings generated within this study and that my participants willingly shared information with me that was both critical and complementary, there is a possibility that self-censorship impacted this study. I tried to address self-censoring preemptively by not conducting research in my own building and establishing a limitation that all participants within my building were not eligible to participate in this study. This may not have been a large enough limitation.

Additionally, all participants within this qualitative study were voluntary participants. Participants were provided the opportunity to review their transcripts and remove any information they did not want to be included in this study. Participants were also informed verbally and in writing that they could withdraw consent for this study at any time and that they would have the opportunity to review their individual transcript. All potential participants were excluded if they did not reply to a recruitment email within three attempts of contact. I did not want any potential participant to feel pressured into participating in my study. Future researchers might minimize potential for participant self-censorship if they opted to conduct research outside of their employing school division.

### **Delimitations**

The following are delimitations or aspects of the study that could be controlled by me through specific and well-established participation criteria.

1. Only one school division was selected to identify participants for this study.
2. Only middle and high school building level principals were selected for principal participants in individual interviews.
3. Only early career teachers with more than one year but less than five years of classroom experience in the teaching profession were selected to participate in interviews.
4. Early career teacher participants were required to be employed at the middle or high school level to participate in the study.
5. Principal participants were required to be employed as building principals at the high school or middle school level to participate in the study.

## **Introduction to Methodology**

I conducted a qualitative study utilizing data obtained from early career teachers and principals employed in secondary schools within one medium sized school division in southwest Virginia. The study included interviews with principals and early career teachers to allow for a comparison of principals' and early career teachers' perceptions and experiences. The school division was selected in part because it is where I am currently employed and in part because I wanted to conduct a study that would allow me to gain understanding of how to better support early career teachers within this building. Additionally, I wanted to share the meanings made and recommendations that can be implemented to improve current principal behaviors or practices within this school division to address early career teacher retention. I also selected the participating school division for data collection because of the intentional efforts made within the division to address teacher retention.

My familiarity with the district's culture, policies, and operational structures allows for nuanced insights that might be more challenging for an external researcher to capture. Every school district has distinct demographics, challenges, and strengths, so a study conducted within the district can contribute to place-based knowledge that enhances existing literature by providing insights into unique educational settings, especially if the district is rural, urban, or faces particular socio-economic challenges (Anderson, 2007; Leggett & Newman, 2019).

Principal participants were originally invited to participate in the study based on the teacher retention rate associated with their school. Alternate principal participants were invited if an originally invited principal declined to participate in my qualitative study. The teachers were selected from secondary schools of principals that participated in individual interviews. Semi-structured open-ended questions were asked of principals and teachers in relation to their

perception of principal behaviors or practices that contribute to early career teacher retention. Eligibility for teacher participation was also confirmed by building principals or through data obtained by the participating school division's human resources departments.

### **Organization of the Study**

Early career teacher retention is a challenge facing public school leaders. The retention of teachers impacts academic performance and quality of education received by student populations. Literature indicates that principal behaviors or principal support impacts teacher retention. This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 includes an overview of the proposed study; a historical overview of teacher retention as an educational issue; the statement of the problem; the significance, purpose and justification of the proposed study; research questions; a conceptual framework; the definition of terms; limitations and delimitations; and an introduction to the methodology. Chapter 2 provides a review of current literature related to early career teacher retention and includes search procedures as well as search criteria. The review of literature specifically focuses on teacher retention as a global and national issue, teacher retention in Virginia, monetary and nonmonetary costs of teacher attrition, leadership and non-leadership factors impacting teacher retention, the role of school leadership in teacher mentorship, and leadership hiring practices and teacher retention. Chapter 3 is comprised of descriptions of the qualitative research methods I used in this basic qualitative study. This chapter includes the purpose of the study, research questions, the research design, research design justification, paradigms, assumptions, methodology selected, an explanation of hermeneutic research, and site and sample selection. Also included in Chapter 3 are instrument design, instrument validation, data collection procedures, research trustworthiness, and a summary. Chapter 4 presents an analysis of qualitative data and the meanings generated from

individual interviews conducted in the qualitative study through thematic analysis based on hermeneutics. Chapter 5 includes an introduction, a review of research questions, a review of the conceptual framework, a review of the meanings generated within this qualitative study, a discussion of meanings made as applied to each of the research questions, practitioner implications, policy implications, and proposed areas of future research.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

Teacher retention is a prominent issue faced by school leaders across the United States. Early career teachers are more apt to leave the classroom within five years of entering the teaching profession (Kang & Berliner, 2012; Lauk, 2022; Mullen, 2024; Mullen et al., 2022; Soulen, 2020). Between 30 and 50 percent of early career teachers leave the classroom within five years of entering the teaching profession (Garcia et al., 2022; Mullen, 2024; Shuls & Flores, 2020). Annually, this accounts for a loss of roughly eight percent of the teaching workforce (Beck et al., 2020). The increase in teachers leaving the classroom contributes to a national teacher shortage (Garcia et al., 2022; Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Mullen, 2024; Shuls & Flores, 2020). Flanagan and Mullen (2024) defined this as the “Great Resignation” and articulated the valuable role school leaders play in limiting attrition (Mullen, 2024). Qualified teacher candidates are teachers licensed in a state upon graduating from a collegiate teaching program (Bastian et al., 2017; Shuls & Flores, 2020; Sutchter et al., 2019). With less qualified teachers available to fill vacant K-12 public school teaching positions, school leaders hire teachers without experience, provisionally licensed or emergency licensed teachers, or out of field teachers (Engel & Finch, 2015; Mullen, 2024; Sutchter et al., 2019). Notable reasons teachers provide for leaving the classroom include, but are not limited to, burnout, lack of autonomy, lack of school leadership support, student behavior, lack of professional development, and salary (Darling-Hammond et al., 2018; Gallant & Riley, 2014; Garcia et al., 2022; Kang & Berliner, 2012; See et al., 2020; Sutchter et al., 2016; Vanderslice, 2010; Young, 2018).

Teacher retention rates differ for early career and veteran teachers, however based on this preliminary review of literature, generalizations are sometimes made without consideration for

duration of time in the classroom regarding factors impacting teacher attrition. In this limited review of literature, few researchers specifically studied the impact school leadership behaviors have on the retention of qualified beginning teachers at the secondary level. The focus of this review of literature is to identify and analyze current research on the connection between school leaders and their influence on teacher retention. Much of the existing research is focused on factors impacting teacher retention (or attrition) and leadership styles. Identification of factors positively and negatively impacting teacher retention is present in the literature. Few research articles distinguish the difference between elementary teacher retention and secondary teacher retention factors impacted by school leadership practices.

Within this literature review, I identified and synthesized current research related to teacher retention, factors impacting teacher retention, new teacher retention, and literature that connected school leadership and new teacher retention. Specific areas of interest include the identification of teacher retention and new teacher retention as an issue facing educational leaders today. Monetary and non-monetary factors impacting teacher attrition and the impact of school leadership on new teacher retention were also examined. Throughout this dissertation the terms new teacher, novice teachers, beginning teachers, and early career teacher are used interchangeably (Mullen, 2024). School leadership is utilized to describe principals or assistant principals.

### **Search Process and Criteria**

Current literature was reviewed based on the results of utilizing the following keywords as search terms: *teacher attrition, teacher retention, teacher shortage, teacher hold factors, teacher retention rates, teacher retention decisions, teacher migration, new teacher retention, beginning teacher retention, early career teacher retention, global teacher shortage, national*

*teacher shortage, influences of teacher retention, factors influencing teacher retention, teacher hold factors.* The Virginia Tech remote library's Education Research Complete from EBSCO host, ERIC from EBSCOhost, Educators Reference Complete from Gale, and Teacher Reference Center from EBSCOhost were utilized by the researcher from November 2022-December 2024. Search parameters for all research articles were peer-reviewed and published between 2010 and 2024. Virginia Tech's remote library was utilized with the following keywords as search terms: *teacher attrition, teacher retention, teacher shortage, teacher hold factors, teacher retention rates, teacher retention decisions, teacher migration, new teacher retention, beginning teacher retention, early career teacher retention, global teacher shortage, national teacher shortage, influences of teacher retention, factors influencing teacher retention, teacher hold factors.* Before establishing search criteria, over 13,000 articles published between 1881 and 2024 resulted from the research process. Results were narrowed using additional terms including *school leaders, principals, educational leaders, influence of educational leaders, and influence of school principals.* Articles published before 2010 were excluded from the literature search.

In total, 178 titles and abstracts were scanned to determine relevance to the literature review. Additionally, I read and analyzed 63 articles to determine applicability to the topic of study and the focus of the literature review. Of these 59 articles, 44 are included in this literature review. I also read supplemental sources from the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), RAND Corporation, UNESCO, and the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission. Virginia Tech professors were consulted and guided the researcher (me) regarding the literature search process. Dr. Charles Lowery, dissertation committee chair, and Dr. Carol Mullen, dissertation committee member, provided the researcher (me) with references for multiple articles and books related to my topic of study. Articles not related to teacher retention practices,

teacher attrition, and leadership impacts on teacher attrition were excluded from the literature review. Abstracts were scanned to determine relevance to teacher attrition or leadership influences on teacher retention.

While conducting searches using the databases referenced, “teacher attrition” or “teacher retention” or “teacher shortage” or “teacher turnover” was used as a search term for initial identification of articles related to teacher retention. Search results were narrowed by limiting articles to only peer reviewed articles and articles published after 2012. With the exception of search results generated from the Gale database, results from database searchers were further narrowed using “school leader” or “educational leader” or “school principal.” To draw a connection between leadership practices and early career teacher retention, search results were narrowed again using “new teacher” or “beginning teacher” or “novice teacher” or “early career teacher” as additional search criteria. Using these search criteria together produced over 170 abstracts after duplicates were removed to be skimmed. Articles that related to new teacher retention and school leadership or that identified factors impacting teacher retention were read for relevance.

During the research process, abstracts from peer-reviewed articles published after 2012 were reviewed to determine if the articles contained information relevant to teacher retention factors or the impact school leaders have on teacher retention. The year 2012 was selected to maintain a review of current literature and literature that incorporated information about teacher retention following the 2008 recession that impacted teacher layoffs and created a surplus of teachers in the labor market. If articles contained information connecting school leadership to teacher retention; described teacher retention factors; or included information on global, national, or state trends related to attrition or retention rates, I read and analyzed the article to determine if

it was an impactful source, a complementary source, or an informative source. In addition to the searches previously described, I (the researcher) examined the references of sources the researcher deemed salient to find additional sources connected to teacher retention, teacher attrition, or new teacher retention. Several articles referenced in this literature review were referred to me by Virginia Tech faculty.

*Search Results Utilizing Search Criteria*

	ERIC	EBSCO Host	GALE
Teacher Attrition or Teacher retention or teacher shortage or teacher turnover	5,750	7,016	444
Peer Reviewed	2,838	3,548	359
2012-2023	1,754	1,937	200
School leader or educational leader or school principal	262	171	N/A
New teacher or beginning teacher or novice teacher or early career teacher	70	58	31

*Teacher Retention as a Global and National Issue*

Teacher attrition and the need to improve teacher retention is a global issue also viewed as a national issue in the United States (Allen et al., 2017; du Plessis et al., 2019; Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Ingersoll et al., 2018; Mitchell et al., 2022; Mullen, 2024; Rice, 2014; See et al., 2020; Shuls & Flores, 2020; Williams et al., 2022). American school systems have faced teacher retention issues for decades (Foster, 2023; Mullen, 2024). Shuls and Flores (2020) estimate that 40% to 50% of teachers in the United States leave the classroom within five years of starting

their teaching career. Even with some natural attrition in the employment cycle, attrition rates are higher among teachers during the early years of their career (Kang & Berliner, 2012; Mullen, 2024; Mullen et al., 2022; Soulen, 2020). Forty-four percent of teachers considered leaving their teaching position and within that 44%, 20% expressing sincerity in their intention of searching for and obtaining a career outside the field of education (Foster, 2023).

Individual reasons for teacher attrition can be influenced by working conditions or school leadership behavior. Additionally, teacher attrition resulting from retirement or leaving the classroom because of family circumstances is unavoidable (Kang & Berliner, 2012).

Employment trends in the United States indicate more teachers eligible for retirement are leaving the classroom contributing to the overall number of vacant teaching positions (Allen et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2022). This increasing trend in teacher retirements is prevalent in European nations, African nations, and Australia (Allen et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2022). Retirements, higher birth rates contributing to an increase in public school enrollment, an increase in traditional vacancies from teacher movement, and voluntary attrition contribute to growing staffing issues (Mitchell et al., 2022, Sutchter et al., 2019; UNESCO, 2022). School leaders in the United States and other nations experiencing teacher shortages are faced with the responsibility of filling the increasing number of vacant positions with qualified teachers.

Geography plays a role in teacher retention and recruitment (Garcia et al., 2022; Mitchell et al., 2022). Mitchell et al. (2022) conducted an educational policy analysis of three English-speaking nations in different regions of the world. English-speaking nations facing teacher retention issues were selected for policy analysis by the researcher to reduce language barriers, to focus on policy analysis, eliminating the need to translate documents, and to avoid cultural misunderstandings in the study. Mitchell et al. (2022) selected an educational policy analysis of

the three nations to identify the barriers faced by the United States, Australia, and Zambia to rural teacher recruitment and retention, as well as potential interventions to improve teacher retention in those nations. Recommendations were made by Mitchell et al. (2022) that could be utilized by political and educational leaders in nations struggling to recruit and retain teachers in rural schools.

The educational policy analysis found commonalities related to rural education retention and recruitment (Mitchell et al., 2022). Varying definitions of rural education existed for the United States, Australia, and Zambia, however, all three nations faced difficulties staffing vacant positions in rural areas. A review of the educational policy analysis identified several financial incentives and benefits such as bonuses, higher salaries, additional vacation time, housing stipends, and supplements utilized by all three nations in various ways to increase teacher retention in rural areas (Mitchell et al., 2022; See et al., 2020). College preparation programs rarely expose teacher candidates to rural areas or non-traditional academic settings because they focus on preparing educators to work in urban and suburban areas (Ingersoll et al., 2018; Mitchell et al., 2022) The researchers identified a need for governments to recognize rural retention and recruitment as pressing issues facing educators. Mitchell et al. (2022) recommended that governments struggling to fill vacant rural teaching positions create mandates or incentives for educator preparation programs to implement rural student-teaching or immersion experiences in their programs for education candidates.

Current literature reflects trends in specific content or specializations for global teacher shortages (du Plessis et al., 2019; Frahm & Cianca, 2021; Ulferts, 2015). In 2022, the Transforming Education Summit was convened to promote improvements needed in the field of education (UNESCO, 2022). The subsequent report confirmed a global focus on educational

improvements, including addressing global teacher shortages impacted by growing teacher attrition rates. Professionalism, professional development and administrative support were identified as areas of focus to build the capacity of the teacher candidate pool. Mitchel et al. (2022) and Ulferts (2015) discussed the importance of studying global rural education trends and explained that trends in rural education foreshadow trends in urban and suburban education. Public education vacancies are increasing and projected to continue rising in North America, Europe, Asia, and Africa (UNESCO, 2022). This is especially true for difficult to staff positions that include positions in rural public schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 2018; Frahm & Cianca, 2021; Mullen, 2024; Ulferts, 2015), science (Mitchell et al., 2022; Reitman & Karge, 2019), math (Mitchell et al., 2022; Reitman & Karge, 2019), and special education (Reitman & Karge, 2019; Sutcher et al., 2019). Educational requirements for teachers in difficult to staff positions can receive competitive compensation for career opportunities outside of the field of education where skills are easily transferable (Garcia et al., 2022; Mitchell et al., 2022; Reitman & Karge, 2019). Furthermore, schools that cannot afford to offer competitive salaries often experience higher teacher turnover rates (Garcia et al., 2022; Mitchell et al., 2022).

Teacher attrition is not a new concern in the field of education. School leaders have grappled with ways to address teacher retention for decades (du Plessis et al., 2019; Foster, 2023; Garcia et al., 2022; Sutcher et al., 2019). Sutcher et al. (2019) conducted a study using multiple quantitative data sets, including the School and Staffing Survey and the Teacher Follow-up Surveys conducted between the years 2003 and 2019, the Common Core of Data (2009-2013), Title II of the Higher Education Act, and the Baccalaureate and Beyond longitudinal data (2008-2012). Sutcher et al. (2019) aimed to determine trends in teacher retention across the United States and signs of teacher shortages to identify factors impacting teacher retention. Similar to

recommendations from Sulit (2020), Sutchter et al. (2019) used findings from their study to provide insight into teacher retention to make recommendations to state and local policymakers to support efforts to increase the supply of qualified teacher candidate.

Economic conditions influence the quality and quantity of candidates available to enter the teaching profession. The Great Recession negatively impacted the qualified teacher candidate pool (Darling Hammond et al., 2018; Sutchter et al., 2016; Sutchter et al., 2019). Following the 2008 economic downturn and the subsequent reduction of public school budgets, student-to-teacher ratios increased (Garcia et al., 2022; Sutchter et al., 2019). The number of overall teaching positions were lowered to meet budget constraints in many districts (or divisions) across the United States, raising the overall student-to-teacher ratio (Sutchter et al., 2016; Sutchter et al., 2019). When economic conditions and school budgets improved, school divisions desires to rehire or reestablish previous positions were met with a lack of qualified teacher candidates (Darling-Hammond et al., 2018). A desire of states to reinstate previous course offerings and return to pre-Great Recession student-to-teacher ratios contributes to the increased demand for qualified educators to fill current vacancies (Sutchter et al., 2016; Sutchter et al., 2019).

Sutchter et al. (2016) and Sutchter et al. (2019) also attributed the rise in teacher demand to increases in retirement and teachers exiting the teaching profession before retirement age. Although one-third of teacher attrition is attributed to teacher retirements, when paired with voluntary attrition, retirements contribute to an increase in the already high demand for qualified teachers to fill the growing number of vacancies. Teacher attrition resulting from retirement impacted the overall teacher supply and contributed to teacher shortages because teachers retire at an earlier age compared to other non-teaching professions (Ni et al., 2022). Results from a 2022 National Education Association (NEA) survey identified the impactful role the Coronavirus

(Covid-19) pandemic played on teacher retention. Teachers nearing retirement age indicated that they are likely to retire earlier from the teaching profession than they originally planned prior to the Covid-19 pandemic (Will, 2022). Ni et al. (2022) suggested school divisions provide substantial teacher retention bonuses that are specifically targeted toward experienced teachers nearing retirement to incentivize delaying retirement and reduce the quantity of vacant positions.

Voluntary leavers account for the largest portion of teacher attrition in the United States (Sutcher et al., 2016; Sutcher et al., 2019). Roughly two-thirds of teachers leaving the field of education cited staffing decisions, dissatisfaction with the teaching profession (or their building), and life changes (Kang & Berliner, 2019; Sutcher et al., 2016; Sutcher et al., 2019). Reducing voluntary teacher attrition or targeting the retention of qualified teachers by even small percentages would considerably influence the supply of qualified teacher candidates and reduce the current demand for teacher candidates (Sutcher et al., 2016; Sutcher et al., 2019; Vanderslice, 2010). Sutcher et al. (2019) recommended that states experiencing higher demands for teachers develop additional teacher preparation programs within their states. Furthermore, Sutcher et al. (2019) recommended that state and local governments increase teacher salaries to compete with jobs outside the field of public education. Mullen (2024) and Sutcher et al. (2016) suggested that changes in school policies directed at improving teaching conditions and providing teacher support could reduce voluntary teacher attrition.

At the beginning of the 2022-2023 academic year, four percent of public school teaching positions still needed to be filled, and 27% of public schools were facing multiple vacancies (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Current literature indicates that public schools with high poverty rates and high minority student population struggle to fill open teaching positions (Engel & Finch, 2015; Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Reitman & Karge, 2019; Soulen, 2020; U.S. Department

of Education, 2022; Vanderslice, 2010). Sutchter et al. (2016) concluded “high-poverty schools” and schools with “high minority” demographics lack adequate resources and staff report poor working conditions. Schools with significant poverty levels, such as Title I schools, suffer from even higher rates of attrition (Foster, 2023; Mullen, 2024; Sutchter et al., 2016). Garcia and Weiss (2020) also noted that teacher shortages are more pronounced in high-poverty schools. Racial composition and poverty rates have a lower impact on teacher attrition when school divisions invest in policies aimed at providing resources to support teaching and student learning (Mullen, 2024). Whether in rural, urban, or suburban areas, current teaching vacancies produced from high attrition can pose difficulties for school leaders to fill vacancies with qualified candidates (Bastian et al., 2017; Garcia, 2022; Shuls & Flores, 2020; Sutchter et al., 2016; Sutchter et al., 2019). The number of qualified teachers available to enter the workforce is impacted by a reduction in enrollment and completion of teacher preparation programs (Bastian et al., 2017; Shuls & Flores, 2020; Sutchter et al., 2019). Sutchter et al. (2019) indicated that universities across the United States enroll 35% fewer students in teacher preparation programs, with only 77% of students completing a degree program leading to teaching credentials (Sutchter et al., 2019; Vanderslice, 2010). Potential teaching candidates are less willing to enter the teacher preparation programs when they incur more student debt to work in a historically low paying career field (Sutchter et al., 2016). Reduced enrollment in teacher preparation programs across the United States indicates fewer individuals are qualified, prepared, and available to fill the increased quantity of vacant teaching positions.

Additional signs of teacher shortages across the United States are school divisions hiring teachers without educational licenses or relevant experience (Darling-Hammond, 2018; Engel & Finch, 2015; Sutchter et al., 2016; Sutchter et al., 2019). When faced with fewer qualified

candidates with teaching experiences or candidates that meet traditional education licensure requirements, school divisions are moving toward the practice of hiring out-of-field teachers, teachers categorized as “underprepared,” or teachers entering the education profession under provisional or emergency licensure (Engel & Finch, 2015; Sutchter et al., 2019). Out-of-field teachers or teachers receiving provisional licensure are more likely to be hired in fields or content areas categorized as difficult to staff (Darling-Hammond, 2018; Garcia, 2022; Sutchter et al., 2016; Sutchter et al., 2019). School leaders of difficult to staff schools often hire more provisionally licensed or out-of-field teachers (Garcia, 2022; Sutchter et al., 2016).

### *Teacher Retention in Virginia*

Like other states nationwide facing educational challenges related to teacher retention, Virginia’s teacher supply shortage is exacerbated following the Covid-19 Pandemic (Foster, 2023; Virginia Board of Education, 2021). The Virginia Department of Education’s publication of critical shortage areas in Virginia indicated that elementary education, special education, CTE, mathematics, and middle education are consistently identified as the five most critical shortage positions (Virginia Department of Education, 2023). With the intention of addressing teacher shortages in Virginia intensified by the Covid-19 Pandemic, Governor Glenn Youngkin’s Executive Directive Number Three (2022) removed barriers to teacher certification to fill open vacancies. The executive directive also addressed teacher certification renewal and provided clear pathways for retirees and teachers transferring a license from another state to continue working as educators in Virginia (Commonwealth of Virginia, 2022). The Virginia Secretary of Education was directed to work with bureaucratic agencies to remove barriers associated with teacher licensure to provide an avenue for the increased recruitment of teachers from out-of-state, career switchers, and military veterans to increase the pool of potential candidates. The

student-to-teacher ratio increased from 13.2:1 in the fall of 2000 to 14.9:1 in the fall of 2019 (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). In Virginia, teacher shortages may be larger than reported open vacancies based on rising student-to-teacher ratios, teachers with provisional licenses, and teachers currently teaching outside their field (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

The impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on the teacher shortage in Virginia is expected to play a large role in the education workforce in the coming years, especially as teacher retirements in Virginia are projected to increase (Virginia Board of Education, 2021). The Annual Report on the Conditions of Needs of Public Schools in Virginia indicated the number of vacant positions more than doubled from 1,063 during the 2019-2020 school year to 2,594 at the beginning of the 2022-2023 academic year (Virginia Department of Education, 2022).

Recognizing the impact of increased vacancies, the Virginia Department of Education's Department of Teacher Education and Licensure developed the Recruitment and Retention Advisory Committee to address the current teaching shortage facing Virginia's public education system. The committee developed a three-year plan in response to the teacher shortage in Virginia that aligned to guidelines set forth by Governor Youngkin's Executive Directive (Virginia Department of Education, 2022). Financial incentives included in Executive Directive Number Three (2022) were directed toward positions categorized as "difficult to staff," such as special education and mathematics. Other financial incentives, including competitive raises and bonuses, were recommended to attract potential teachers to the profession (Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, 2022; Sutcher et al., 2019). On average, Virginia teachers make 62% of non-teacher wages for similar levels of education (Sutcher et al., 2019). The shortage in Virginia is shaping legislative and executive policy aimed at increasing teacher retention and recruitment of teachers to the profession (Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, 2022;

Virginia Department of Education, 2022).

School division leaders throughout Virginia identify teacher shortages as a factor impacting staffing. With 98% of school divisions identifying teacher shortages and a lack of fully qualified teaching candidates applying for vacant positions, efforts to improve the retention of teachers in Virginia are needed (Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, 2022). The Virginia General Assembly allocated resources for the 2022-2023 school year to address teacher shortages throughout the state. Specific funding was created to address recruitment and retention in shortage areas, establish mentorship programs, and create social media campaigns to encourage entrance into the teaching profession (Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, 2022). Recognizing the connection between teacher dissatisfaction with salary levels, the state budget included funding for the state's share of a five percent salary increase for the 2023 and 2024 fiscal years (Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, 2022). School districts received financial support for signing bonuses to recruit teachers to open positions in the fall of 2022.

Literature supports the need to develop programs to support and encourage entrance into the teaching profession (Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, 2022; Sutchter et al., 2016). Student debt and low-income projections discourage potential candidates from enrolling in teacher preparation programs (Sutchter et al., 2016). Policy and programs aimed at early efforts to attract college bound students to the field of education have potential to increase the teaching supply and better prepare candidates for the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2018; Sutchter et al., 2016). Loan forgiveness, student scholarships and local teacher candidate residency models served as methods implemented to increase the number of qualified teacher candidates into the teaching workforce while providing a means of obtaining a return on investment (Darling-

Hammond, 2018; Sutchter et al., 2016). These programs required a teaching commitment in a high needs school or content area. Similar efforts to increase the teaching supply before the Covid-19 Pandemic are demonstrated through the Teach for Tomorrow program in which high school students were recruited to attend college and later enter the teaching workforce (Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, 2022).

### **Cost of Teacher Attrition: The Impact on Education**

There are monetary and non-monetary costs associated with teacher attrition (Castro, 2023; Garcia, 2022; Goldhaber, 2022; Gunther, 2019; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Olsen & Huang, 2019; Ulferts, 2015; UNESCO, 2022; Vanderslice, 2010). Researchers frequently identify teacher attrition as an educational issue that creates a financial burden for school divisions and negatively impacts student performance (Carr et al., 2017; Garcia, 2022; Shuls & Flores, 2020; Soulen, 2020; Olsen & Huang, 2019; UNESCO, 2022; Vanderslice, 2010). Roughly \$7.2 billion of school district budgets across the United States are devoted to recruitment, hiring, and training teachers following teacher turnover (Garcia, 2022; Olsen & Huang, 2019; Vanderslice, 2010). Sutchter et al. (2019) estimated the cost of teacher attrition, when calculating inflation, to be \$8 billion. The financial investment of school divisions for recruiting and training new teachers does not produce results for increased student achievement in schools when teachers leave the profession or transfer to a different school division (Sutchter et al., 2019; Vanderslice, 2010). The cost of replacing a teacher as a result of voluntary attrition or movement to another school diverts school divisions' financial resources away from student achievement and teacher development (Garcia, 2022).

Carr et al. (2019) highlighted the cost-effectiveness of teacher mentorship programs by comparing the \$5,000 price tag of mentoring a new teacher to the \$17,000 price tag of early

career teacher attrition. While smaller than the cost estimated by Carr et al. (2019), Shuls and Flores (2020) estimate the cost of attrition for one teacher to be \$14,585. The price tag of teacher attrition in both comparisons is more than the average \$12,638 the Commonwealth of Virginia spends per pupil on education and the average national per pupil spending of \$13,701 in 2021 (Hanson, 2022). Carr et al. (2019), Hanson (2022), and Shuls and Flores (2020) all identify the financial burden teacher attrition placed on school divisions. When a teacher exits the teaching profession, retires, or transfers to a new school division or state, the estimated cost to the teacher's employing school division in Virginia is more than the estimated amount spent per pupil on public education in Virginia. Investing in well-designed and purposeful teacher mentorship programs provides an alternative means of utilizing school resources to support teacher development, student learning and increasing teacher retention (Darling-Hammond et al., 2018; Mullen, 2024; Mullen et al., 2022; Sutchter et al., 2016). Mullen (2024), Mullen et al., (2024), Sutchter et al. (2016), and Sutchter et al. (2019) recommended that school divisions invest in well-designed retention programs to reduce teacher attrition and the cost associated with teacher attrition. Purposeful mentorship to reduce teacher attrition is supported by Soulen (2020) and Sparks et al. (2017).

Aside from a budgeting impact on school divisions, there are non-monetary costs associated with teacher attrition. Increased teacher attrition impacts school organizations, student performance, and teachers remaining in the building (Garcia et al., 2022; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Soulen, 2020; Ulferts, 2015; UNESCO, 2022). Teacher attrition contributes to school divisions allocating resources away from academic programs supporting student achievement; fewer resources allocated toward staff professional development resulting in less opportunities for student growth; and fewer classroom resources available to teaching staff (Garcia et al., 2022;

Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Ulferts, 2015). Student achievement is negatively impacted because of a continuous cycle of new teachers lacking professional experience and expertise entering the classroom (Garcia et al., 2022; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Sutchter et al., 2016; Sutchter et al., 2019). Unqualified or emergency certified teachers needing more expertise impact the quality of education students receive when schools suffer from high attrition (Frahm & Cianca, 2021; Garcia et al., 2022; Ulferts, 2015). Negative school cultures and low student achievement are associated with high teacher attrition (Garcia et al., 2022). When schools experience high attrition rates, inexperienced teachers or substitutes fill vacancies and often contribute to low academic performance of students. Additionally, school culture is negatively impacted when substitutes or new teachers fill vacancies and are unfamiliar with school practices, policies, procedures, and staff members (Zavelevsky et al., 2022). Reducing teacher attrition results in more experienced teachers remaining in the classroom, contributing to improved school culture and student academic performance (Kang & Berliner, 2012; Kim, 2019; Soulen, 2020).

### **School Leaders and Non-Monetary Impacts of Teacher Shortage**

Teacher shortages influence school leadership behaviors (Castro, 2023; Goldhaber et al., 2022; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017). Castro (2023) conducted a study to identify how teacher shortages alter school leadership behaviors. Within the 2023 study conducted by Castro, 23 school level leaders serving in urban or suburban settings from four school districts agreed to serve as participants in semi-structured interviews. Results indicated teacher shortages impact instructional, organizational management, and relationship behaviors of school leaders. Leaders serving in schools with higher rates of poverty and larger minority populations faced larger impacts on their roles than leaders serving in suburban areas with lower rates of poverty and fewer minority students (Castro, 2023; Goldhaber et al., 2022; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Shell

et al., 2023).

School leaders indicated they made trade-offs resulting from increased turnover or to reduce attrition (Castro, 2023). In organizational practices, school leaders facing year-round hiring decisions to fill mid-year vacancies either distribute the workload to teachers remaining in the classroom or hire long-term substitutes while waiting to find qualified candidates (Castro, 2023; Engel & Finch, 2015). Castro (2023) indicated administrators facing teacher shortages and increased attrition spend more time managing the concerns of new teachers and emergency credentialed teachers (Kang & Berliner, 2012; Shell et al., 2023). School leaders spend more time acclimating new teachers to buildings and routines rather than working toward school growth and delivering professional development targeted at the whole school or veteran teachers (Castro, 2023; Vanderslice, 2010). School leaders facing shortages and increased turnover also reflect spending more time on mentorship and morale building (Castro, 2023).

School leaders spend more time supporting new teachers and addressing concerns from their classrooms. Increases in turnover result in fewer teachers with instructional expertise or classroom management experience remaining in the classroom. School leaders in the study conducted by Castro (2023) reported increased classroom management issues for inexperienced teachers resulting in more leadership time directed at handling school discipline issues. A hesitancy to provide critical feedback to teachers for overall improvement in their instruction or classroom management practices was identified as an impact of teacher shortages by school leaders. This indicates that school leaders conduct a cost-benefit analysis of providing authentic feedback to teachers versus unauthentic feedback or solutions to address concerns with new teachers to reduce teacher turnover.

Teacher shortages present a challenge for school leaders to adequately hire for course

demands or meet their building needs. Sutchter et al. (2019) identified staffing changes impacted by teacher shortages. School leaders respond to teacher shortages by hiring out-of-field or uncertified educators that would likely not be considered if school leaders were not tasked with making hiring decisions during a teacher shortage. Creative solutions for staffing are used by school leaders such as hiring long-term substitutes to fill vacancies when hiring uncertified or out-of-field teachers is not feasible. Some school leaders canceled requested courses or increased class sizes. Canceling courses and increasing class sizes place a larger burden on the teachers remaining in the classroom. When working to retain qualified teachers, evidence indicates that administrators selectively assigned teachers at risk of leaving the school their favored or preferred classes with higher achieving students demonstrating reduced behavioral issues (Rice, 2014; Sparks et al., 2017). This often leaves less experienced teachers with more challenging job responsibilities (Rice, 2014; Shell et al., 2023; Sparks et al., 2017). Such decisions resulted in less qualified or less experienced teachers working with lower academically performing students or students with problem behaviors.

### **Non-Leadership Factors Impacting Teacher Supply and Retention**

Teacher supply is partially influenced by factors not attributed to school-based leadership. Garcia and Weiss (2020) recommended an increase in the overall investment of public education to increase teacher salaries. Another recommendation was to provide more funding for high poverty schools to address inadequate distribution of resources and inadequate teaching salaries. More investment in high poverty areas could promote the attractiveness of teaching in high-poverty schools and subsequently improve student achievement.

Research indicates prospective and current teachers weigh opportunity costs associated with working in the teaching profession or seeking employment in other fields which impacts

teacher retention (Kim, 2019; Sutchter et al., 2016). Attrition rates are higher for teachers with subject-specific degrees when compared to pre-service teachers majoring in education (Garcia et al., 2022; Goldhaber et al., 2022; Shell et al., 2023; Sutchter et al., 2016). Goldhaber et al. (2022) attributed this trend to better compensating job opportunities matching teacher candidate skills outside the field of education. Additionally, findings from Kim (2019) found that teacher attrition was lower among teachers receiving higher salaries. Garcia et al. (2022), Gunther (2019), See et al. (2020), and Sutchter et al. (2016) suggested that teachers could be persuaded to remain in difficult or hard-to-staff positions if additional compensation were provided for teaching outside their preferences. Retention can also be improved if other monetary incentives such as mortgage assistance or child-care support were provided to compete with non-teaching professions (Sutchter et al., 2016).

Perception of the teaching profession impacts the number of teacher candidates willing to enter the field (Castro, 2023; Garcia et al., 2022; Shell et al., 2023; Shibiti, 2020; Williams et al., 2022). Sutchter et al. (2016), Sutchter et al. (2019) and Williams et al. (2022) identified teaching attractiveness as negatively impacting teacher supply. Fewer college students are entering the field of education because of how it is perceived by the public. Williams et al. (2022) identified the success and strategies used by other nations, such as Finland, in raising the prestige of the teaching profession. Increasing the required coursework to be completed by teaching candidates aimed to provide a better understanding of teaching practices to teacher candidates and subsequently increase the effectiveness of teaching candidates. When increasing the requirements for the teaching profession, adjustments in the form of starting salary occurred, which in turn altered the prestige or attractiveness of teaching in Finland. Weiss and Garcia (2020) also identified the need to improve the perception of the teaching profession to improve

retention and recruitment. Recommendations from Garcia and Weiss (2020) included elevating the teaching profession, listening to the professional expertise of the teachers, and increasing teaching salaries to improve the attractiveness and perception of working in the education profession.

### **Non-Monetary Factors Impacting Teacher Retention**

Factors outside of teaching salary impact teacher retention. Gunther (2019) conducted a mixed-methods study surveying secondary teachers of record during the 2016-2017 academic year in Utah. The purpose of the study conducted by Gunther (2019) was to determine the importance teachers place on monetary and non-monetary factors related to teacher retention. Using the results from the survey, Gunther (2019) aimed to make recommendations to “administrators and policymakers to improve” teacher retention and teacher recruitment. The mixed methods study used an Adaptive Choice-Based Conjoint analysis to determine the value teachers placed on fourteen monetary and non-monetary employment factors. Unlike previous studies, Gunther (2019) required participants to select between competing job factors rather than relying on ranking employment factors. Open-ended questions were embedded to allow respondents to reflect on their decision. Of the 13,769 emails sent to publicly listed candidates on Utah public school websites, 2,167 responses that included complete demographic information were obtained. Results for Gunther (2019) were analyzed using a Hierarchical Bayesian Analysis. “Teaching assignment,” “class size,” “curricular autonomy,” “school achievement,” and “principal support” were identified by Gunther (2019) as the five highest non-monetary factors teachers value when considering employment opportunities (Gallant & Riley, 2014; Garcia et al., 2022; Kang & Berliner, 2012; See et al., 2020; Shell et al., 2023; Vanderslice, 2010). Furthermore, Mullen (2024) summarized reasons for early career teacher attrition to

include frustration with administration for a lack of support, increased accountability and testing requirements, a lack of autonomy, subpar induction programs, and a lack of equity in mentorship policy, programs, professional development, and initiatives. Addressing these issues, according to Mullen (2024), are actionable steps school leaders can take to address novice teacher retention.

Autonomy and personal lifestyle needs were also identified as influencing teacher decisions to remain in the classroom or remain at their current place of employment (Engel & Finch, 2015; Garcia et al., 2022; Mullen, 2024; Ulferts, 2015). Teacher independence or autonomy also influences teacher job satisfaction and retention. Teachers with more autonomy expressed a feeling of trust in their ability to use their professional knowledge and judgement to make decisions for students in the classroom (Garcia et al., 2022; Mullen, 2024). Garcia et al. (2022) attributed teacher autonomy to teachers having a voice in their classroom and school and identified teachers without a voice as being more likely to attrit. Garcia et al. (2022), Sutchter et al. (2016), and Sutchter et al. (2019) identified teacher autonomy as a factor connected to improving retention. Outside of autonomy, Ulferts (2015) identified teachers selecting job opportunities that match their lifestyle needs or positions close to home as influencing recruitment and retention (Engel & Finch, 2015).

Personal attributes of teachers contribute to a teacher's likelihood to remain in the classroom. Grit, personality, and resiliency are described as influences of teacher retention (Bastian et al., 2017; Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014; Soulen, 2020). Robertson-Kraft and Duckworth (2014) identified teacher grit scores as positively influencing teacher retention. The researchers conducted two longitudinal studies using samples of first and second-year teachers employed in low-income school districts. To predict teacher effectiveness and teacher retention,

grit scores were utilized in independent samples t-tests with binary regression (Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014). For study one, participants were employed in low-income school districts and enrolled in alternative teacher certification programs during the 2006-2007 academic year. Study two participants were employed in the 2008-2009 academic year and were also enrolled in alternative certification programs. Study two participants were derived from six rural and urban low-income districts.

Findings from Roberston-Kraft and Duckworth (2014) concluded that there is a difference in grit scores for highly effective and less effective teachers. Teachers who were retained had higher grit ratings than non-retained teachers and effective teachers had higher grit scores than less effective teachers. Retention was not analyzed in study two because retention was at 99% compared to study one where retention was at 79%. Grit scores were higher for study two participants with higher effective scores than less effective teachers. Roberston-Kraft and Duckworth (2014) suggested that personality and resilience are non-monetary factors that influence the retention of new and effective teachers (Bastian et al., 2017; Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014; Shell et al., 2023; Soulen, 2020).

### **Experienced and Early Career Teacher Retention Considerations**

The value placed on compensation differs with teaching experience. With value placed on non-monetary factors, Gunther (2019) suggested in the results of the study that administrators and school divisions should consider compensating teachers working in less desirable schools or schools that are typically low performing. As teacher salaries and teacher years of experience increase, results also indicated that teachers place more value on salary. Teachers making less money with fewer years of experience placed a lower value on salary (Gunther, 2019; Vanderslice, 2010). Less experienced teachers may value opportunities for collaboration and

increased professional development (Gunther, 2019; Mullen, 2024). Smaller class sizes and administrative support influence early career teacher retention (Gunther, 2019; Mullen, 2024; Reitman & Karge, 2019; Shell et al., 2023; Sutcher et al., 2019; Ulferts, 2015; Vanderslice, 2010). Strong vision and mission statements and providing teachers with curricular autonomy are notable factors contributing to new teacher retention and recruitment (Gunther, 2019). Given the difference in the value of monetary and non-monetary employment factors, Gunther (2019) recommended that administrators and school districts save monetary incentives for more experienced teachers that value salary to target experienced teacher retention. Another recommendation by Gunther (2019) is that school leaders use non-monetary support factors to recruit and retain newer and less experienced teachers. Alexander et al. (2015) provided an alternative view that teachers with less experience value salary more than experienced teachers. Experienced teachers are more likely to value an “agreeable teaching atmosphere” and quality working conditions compared to early career teachers.

### **The Role of School Leadership in New Teacher Mentorship**

Mentorship plays an impactful role in teacher retention (Carr et al., 2017; Frahm & Cianca, 2021; Mullen et al., 2022; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; See et al., 2020; Shell et al., 2023; Soulen, 2020; Sparks et al., 2017; Sutcher et al., 2016; Sutcher et al., 2019). Mullen et al. (2022) identified deliberative and formal mentorship as positively impacting teacher retention. More induction supports, including mentorship, provided to new teachers reduced novice teacher movement to other schools and reduced the quantity of novice teachers exiting the teaching profession (Kang & Berliner, 2012; Mullen, 2024; Reitman & Kang, 2019; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Soulen, 2020). Kang and Berliner (2012), Reitman and Kang (2019), Shell et al., 2023; Shuls and Flores (2020), and Sparks et al. (2017) identified new teacher induction

programs and mentorships as influencing teacher preparation and boosting the confidence of novice teachers while allowing them to experience success and higher job satisfaction.

When conducting a qualitative research study, Mullen et al. (2022) aimed to identify if there was a connection between deliberate teacher mentorships and teacher retention rates. The researchers conducted interviews with the Orange Township Public Schools superintendent. Transcripts, interview notes, email exchanges, and district files were analyzed and coded thematically. Mullen et al. (2022) identified the developmental relationships based on the phases identified in Kram's model that served as a successful implementation of a mentorship program in Orange Township Public Schools. Partnerships between mentor and mentee were developed to support new teachers' learning, development, and well-being (Mullen, 2024; Mullen et al., 2022; Sparks et al., 2017). Similar to findings from Mullen et al. (2022), Sparks et al. (2017) identified positive relationships, teacher support and belonging as benefits of well-developed teacher mentorship programs.

Forty-nine pairs of novice-veteran teachers were strategically partnered across schools and programs in Orange Township Public Schools. Novice mentees selected for the program were within their first three years of teaching experience, and veteran teachers serving as mentors volunteering for participation had at least five years of experience, with evaluations identifying them as effective or highly effective (Mullen et al., 2022). Personality was also considered when coordinating mentor-mentee relationships. Division and school-level leadership teams coordinated to arrange effective mentor-mentee pairs. The division developed professional development opportunities to facilitate mentors and mentees in developing interpersonal relationships, coaching practices, and mentor-mentee growth (Mullen et al., 2022; Sparks et al., 2017). Although the program was new, initial results of the mentorship program using KRAM's

model demonstrated promise in that only two novice teachers resigned for familial reasons. In March of 2021, retention rates within the division using KRAM's model improved (Mullen et al., 2022). Mullen (2024) expanded upon the Mullen et al. (2022) study in which she asserted that the disposition of the mentor teacher impacts the mentor's ability to develop trust and build a relationship with the mentee that will contribute to professional growth. Additionally, Mullen (2024) described an expectation for mentees to be hard workers with strong instructional practices and effective communication skills.

Carr et al. (2017) identified a need for structured mentorship programs to support novice teachers. The purpose of the literature review conducted by Carr et al. (2017) was to identify tools available to school leaders and school divisions to mentor and support new teachers and to identify self-mentoring as an option for improving beginning teacher retention. Supporting findings from Mullen (2024), Mullen and Fallen (2022), and Mullen et al. (2022), Carr et al. (2017) recognized the importance of establishing effective mentor-mentee pairs to avoid consequences of poorly designed mentor-mentee relationships. Poorly designed mentor-mentee relationships were defined as a pairing in which mentors were unqualified, mentors lacked adequate time to devoted to mentorship, personality conflicts were present, and/or the mentor exhibited manipulative behavior (Carr et al., 2017).

Traditional mentoring benefits early career teachers when designed for specific purposes and when the program has a formal structure. Coaching allows for the training and development of beginning teachers as an alternative or additional support of mentorship and is designed to support the development of teacher weaknesses. Self-mentoring can be utilized as an extra form of mentorship for mentees pursuing ownership of learning and working toward self-improvement. Self-mentoring can impact beginning teachers as an additional support layer when

paired with coaching or mentorship. When financial barriers, lack of school resources, or the lack of a developed formal mentorship program exist, Carr et al. (2017) identified self-mentoring as a viable option to improve teacher retention. When districts are not facing financial barriers to implementing teacher mentorship programs, financial compensation for veteran mentor teachers' time and expertise can be considered to improve fidelity and equity in mentorship programs (Mullen, 2024; Mullen & Fallen, 2022).

Frahm and Cianca (2021) conducted a qualitative study with three focus groups consisting of seven superintendents, eight building-level principals, and seven aspiring administrators from a shared New York service area. Participation was limited to individuals from 21 of the 25 public schools in a shared service. Participants in the study served (or worked) in urban or suburban school districts with student populations ranging from 400 students to 4,500 students. Schools categorized as rural were excluded from the study. Each focus group was asked a set of open-ended questions, and their recorded responses were transcribed and coded.

Results of the study conducted by Frahm and Cianca (2021) identified the principal as playing an instrumental role in the coaching and mentorship of new teachers. Either through oversight or the allocation of resources, principal support of mentorship and coaching programs demonstrates to new teachers that principals support the development of novice teachers. Frahm and Cianca (2021) also identified the school leader as the individual responsible for facilitating relationship building with new teachers, seeking to connect novice teachers with veteran employees, and promoting authentic relationship development with new teachers and faculty members to create a sense of belonging for new teachers. Sparks et al. (2017) identified positive relationships within the building between new teachers and mentors and providing new teachers with a sense of belonging as actions to reduce teacher attrition. The school leader appropriately

selecting the correct mentors for novice teachers can contribute to bonding with staff and feeling welcome and supported within the school (Frahm & Cianca, 2021).

Stewart and Jansky (2022) conducted a study through year-long professional development workshops consisting of seven teacher participants and 10 sessions. Participants in the study were high school teachers with fewer than three years of classroom experience. Participants in the study taught either “math, chorus, history, art” or “special education.” Sessions were recorded and transcribed using thematic analysis. Two levels of codes were developed to identify the “nuances” of “the teachers’ professional lives” and “common sources of tension” experienced by participants. New teachers were asked to identify challenges they encountered to provide a means of addressing the challenges. During the professional development sessions, the Oral Inquiry Process (OIP) was used. A disconnect between expectations and reality of teaching in the classroom negatively impacting their confidence and difficult relationship development with veteran (or mentor) teachers were identified as challenges by participants in Stewart and Jansky’s (2022) study. Stewart and Jansky identified sustained professional development with a focus on problems encountered by early career teachers to reduce attrition. The researchers recommended that professional development provide opportunities for new teachers to engage in collaborative dialogue related to their challenges with the use of a modified OIP process and use the dialogue to “learn and grow” through reflection as a professional in their field. Stewart and Jansky (2022) encouraged the use of OIP in teacher induction programs as a form of support to novice teachers.

Mullen and Klimaitis (2021) further defined mentorship and advocated for the use of alternative modes of mentorship such as informal mentorship, diverse mentorship, electronic mentorship, collaborative mentorship, group mentorship, peer mentorship, multilevel

mentorship, and cultural mentorship. They identified the traditional model of mentorship where an experienced teacher is paired with an inexperienced teacher as outdated. Fostering psychosocial development and career development were identified as benefits of mentorship models by Mullen and Klimaitis (2021). This is also supported by Mullen (2024).

Other benefits of non-traditional models of mentorship include the facilitation of relationship development, the establishment of a sense of belonging, collaboration, and the facilitation of authentic conversations for new teachers (Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021). Additionally, Mullen and Klimaitis (2021) recommended the consideration of diversity in gender, age, and racial demographics when establishing mentor-mentee relationships. Mullen (2024) expanded upon the concept of diversity through an equity lens (SACE) to appropriately address the needs of early career teachers with well-designed and reflective mentorship programs.

Engvik and Emstad (2017) concluded that the socialization of early career teachers impacts the retention of newly qualified teachers. Professional development and mentorship at the start of employment are beneficial to teacher retention rather than school leadership implementing mentorship or professional development opportunities following the identification of new teachers struggling with instructional requirements. When school leadership is disconnected with the culture of already established teams or the needs of newly qualified teachers, social integration challenges with new teachers can be exacerbated and negatively impact the retention of teachers and school culture. To correct issues of negative team development or poor collegial relationships, Engvik and Emstad (2017) recommended that school leaders rearrange team composition and intentionally develop structured methods for welcoming and integrating teachers into their building.

Mullen (2024) further articulated the needs of principals or educational leaders to be cognizant of the professional development needs of early career teachers. Principals need to be knowledgeable about their mentorship programs and how they offer novice teachers support, accessibility, collaboration, and equity. Furthermore, principals need to be well versed in current issues in public education and best practices to support their involvement in delivering professional development and to maximize their role as effective instructional leaders. Mullen (2024) highlighted several recommendations for school leadership to implement in their mentorship capacity including facilitating professional and psychosocial professional development opportunities, providing opportunities for dialogue with early career teachers related to relationship building and their retention, assessing and maintaining equity or fairness in practices, and establishing routine and valuable opportunities for feedback.

Mullen (2024) presented an analysis of three case studies related to SACE and mentorship. Case study participants were from rural, urban, and suburban settings. Additionally, all participants were full time employees with doctoral degrees in educational leadership. Each case study analyzed support for early career teachers in the form of mentorship while presenting equity as an addition to the SAC (support, accessibility, and collaboration) model to form the SACE model. Furthermore, her findings are relevant in that the schools in which she interviewed participants were from low-income areas serving difficult to staff schools. In all case studies, Mullen (2024) presented recommendations or consideration to address the needs of early career teachers and improve retention.

In Case #1, Mullen (2024) highlighted the benefits of KRAM's model to implement a system-wide mentorship program that is adjustable and encourages the "grow your own" future educational leader model. This was recommended for school divisions noticing high attrition of

novice teachers that are seeking higher-paying positions. Additional considerations of mentorship programs include school leaders focusing on quantity and duration of the program, how close the mentee will work with the mentor and the expectations that this work is “intensive.” Further considerations of Case #1 included that mentorship program should be supported by school administration, encourage the development of relationships with school administrators, and that mentees will continue to be exposed to other professional learning opportunities.

Furthermore, in Case #2, Mullen (2024) articulated the importance of consistency, fidelity, and a positive school culture in successful mentorship programs. Dedicated meeting times that are in-person contribute to successful mentorship programs. Even with support, accessibility, and collaboration embedded in mentorship programs, inequity was found in programs that placed additional work on mentor teachers. This was because mentors did not receive adequate compensation for their time associated with mentorship.

Formal and informal mentorship were present in Case #3 (Mullen, 2024). In comparing informal mentorship to formal mentorship, more direct contact and supervision was seen at the elementary level compared to the secondary level where mentor teachers were provided more autonomy to supporting mentees. The use of data to support mentees, delegation of decision making and responsibility, and selecting “high quality” mentors for novice teachers are notable elements of successful mentorship. Further considerations from principals included reflecting on current practices to better support early career teachers. Mullen (2024) provided an example of this when a principal reflected on her decision to monitor students assigned to new teachers’ classrooms more closely in the future. This reflection occurred because the principal wanted to provide early career teachers with time to develop classroom management prior to being

assigned behaviorally challenging students. Another takeaway is the use of small, more productive meetings as opposed to full staff meetings, to instructionally develop novice teachers.

### **Leadership Hiring Practices on Retention**

Researchers indicated that school leaders should consider hiring teachers with retention of qualified and effective candidates in mind (Bastian et al., 2017; Goldhaber et al., 2022; Shell et al., 2023). Goldhaber et al. (2022) conducted a quantitative research study using longitudinal data sets from Washington State that included information from 15 university teacher education programs to identify if there is a connection between student teaching placements and the retention of early career teachers. Researchers also sought to determine if there are pre-teaching characteristics of student teachers that predict participation in the teaching workforce upon graduation. Findings from the study indicated that teachers are more likely to remain in the teaching profession and the school they find employment in when pre-service student teaching assignments match the school where teachers first obtain employment. Goldhaber et al. (2022) identified demographic matches as well as grade-level matches as positively influencing new teacher retention (Engel & Finch, 2015). Researchers indicated that there is a connection between hiring practices, student teaching, and retention (Engel & Finch, 2015; Goldhaber et al., 2022). Researchers recommended that principals seeking to improve teacher retention consider interviewing and hiring teachers that completed student teaching in similar educational levels (elementary, middle, or high school) and demographically similar school settings (Engel & Finch, 2015; Gallant & Riley, 2014; Goldhaber et al., 2022). Gallant and Riley (2014) suggested that matching teaching candidates' expectations to the reality of the school setting they are likely to teach in positively influences teacher retention.

In addition to student teaching and demographic considerations to address teacher

retention, principal behavior during and immediately following the initial interview influences teachers' decisions to accept a vacant position. Principals and schools that communicate with candidates clearly or engage in recruitment campaigns that advertise a welcoming environment and the benefits of working in a particular school or division have had success with hiring and retaining candidates (Heubeck, 2022). Principals, according to Heubeck (2022), need to engage in follow up conversations after interviews for candidates they are invested in hiring, especially when districts are competing to fill similar vacancies. Like Huebeck (2022), Prothero (2024) articulated the importance of advertising and sharing the “story” associated with a school to recruit candidates. Teachers want to know the community and culture they are going to be working in (Huebeck, 2022; Prothero, 2024).

### **New Teacher Retention and the Role of the School Leader**

Providing induction as support for novice teachers reduces teacher attrition (Kim, 2018; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Soulen, 2020). Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017) conducted a quantitative research study to identify induction supports for first-year teachers that reduce teacher attrition and teacher migration. The secondary analysis of three sets of Schools and Staffing Surveys (2003-2004, 2007-2008, and 2011-2012) and the respective Teacher Follow-up Surveys (TFS) were analyzed. Of the 13,000 respondents for the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and TFS, 2,350 first-year teacher results were included in the analysis by Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017). Survey questions from the SASS identify the distinct types of support first-year teachers receive (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017). Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017) also analyzed data from the Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Study (2007-2008 to 2011-2012). Only 1,630 of the 1,990 full-time teachers had complete data sets for the Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Survey (BTLS) and were included in the study.

Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017) compared extensive supports (four to six types) to non-extensive supports (zero to three types). The researchers also classified participants as stayers, movers, or leavers based on if they stayed in their current school, moved to another school, or left the teaching profession. Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017) used multilevel regression models to determine if demographic or school factors determined who received additional support and if those supports influenced teachers to leave the teaching profession or move to another school. Results of the study indicated that positive administrative communication, mentorship programs, and common planning time were the most frequently reported teacher supports in addition to induction programs. Fewer teachers reported receiving additional classroom assistance and fewer preps as types of new teachers support (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Shell et al., 2023; Vanderslice, 2010). Each of these supports was negatively associated with teacher migration or movement to another school setting (Kang & Berliner, 2012; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017; Vanderslice, 2010). Overall data from the SASS and BTLS indicated that teachers receiving extensive support are less likely to migrate to another school (SASS) or attrit (BTLS) (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017). Because data was analyzed from nationally representative surveys, results from the data analysis conducted by Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017) may be generalized to larger populations. Furthermore, Sparks et al. (2017) identified positive relationships, collaborative or common planning, and administrative support as common themes associated with successful mentorship programs aimed to reduce teacher attrition.

Kim (2019) analyzed the Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Survey data to identify leadership practices impacting early career teacher retention over five academic years from 2007-2008 to 2011-2012. Participant responses in the 1,990 complete data sets were used to identify specific leadership behaviors including instructional leadership, leader management of

student behavior, and leadership actions impacting school culture that contributed to teachers becoming movers, stayers, or leavers. Kim (2019) indicated that increased teacher perception of principal leadership negatively influenced teacher movement and attrition. Findings from Kim (2019) also noted that positive teacher perceptions of principals and their ability to manage student behaviors reduced the odds of teacher movement by 20% and teacher attrition by 18%. Gallant and Riley (2014) also supported teacher perception of the principal as impacting teacher retention.

Shuls and Flores (2020) conducted a qualitative study of three school district-level personnel from three school districts in Missouri to identify practices and policies used by school divisions and school leaders with high teacher retention rates. Participants included an Assistant Superintendent, an Interim Director of Human Resources, and a Chief Human Resources Officer. Each of the participants completed a 30-minute semi-structured interview. Districts were only considered for participation if they employed one-hundred full-time teachers with an average teaching experience of 14.5 years. Districts also needed student populations of 4,000 pupils. Only three school districts met all criteria, and a representative from each district was interviewed. Results from Shuls and Flores (2020) indicate that supportive administrators in buildings promote teacher retention by encouraging teacher voice, allowing for teacher autonomy, and promoting teacher leadership opportunities (Mullen, 2024; Sulit, 2020; Vanderslice, 2010; Youngs et al., 2021).

Zavelevsky et al. (2022) conducted a qualitative study to identify various ways principals perceive their behavior as impacting the retention of novice teachers. Eight middle school principals and eight high school level principals were interviewed from public secondary schools in Israel. The researcher secured participation after guaranteeing anonymity. After transcribing

and coding the semi-structured interviews, the following themes were identified as areas principals perceived their behavior as having an impact on teacher retention: organizational practices, policies and working conditions, personality characteristics of the principal, and the school community. Zavelevsky et al. (2022) did note that the findings of the study may include bias due to the self-reporting nature of the interviews.

Supporting findings from Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017), Shuls and Flores (2020) identified frequent positive communication and feedback as essential support school-based leadership should provide to novice teachers to improve teacher retention. Clear communication was also noted by Shell et al. (2023), specifically regarding school vision, school operating procedures, and principal expectations of teachers. Shuls and Flores (2020) identified a need for school leaders to understand the pressures faced by novice teachers to improve retention. Shuls and Flores (2020) also identified supportive principles as principals who take time to address the concerns of new teachers surrounding workload, teacher evaluation systems, grading, and teacher autonomy. Similar suggestions were made by Sulit (2020). Prioritizing and protecting teacher collaboration time and establishing opportunities for new teachers to participate in leadership roles also contribute to new teacher retention (Mullen, 2024; Shuls & Flores, 2020; Sparks et al., 2017).

Becker and Grob (2019) asserted that principals serve as the human resources leader within their buildings. With the growing number of teaching vacancies, they addressed a numerous way that school leaders can provide “administrative support” to improve teacher retention. They outlined five “focus areas” that they asserted should shape principal priorities. These focus areas include creating a shared vision that includes a clarity of expectations; developing relationships based on trust that are formed through collaborative efforts; establishing

a system of shared instructional leadership; creating an environment that teachers feel physically and emotionally safe working in; and leaders serving as a “bureaucratic shield” that limits the amount of paperwork and external constraints placed on teachers. Becker and Grobb (2019) asserted that the role of the principal as a provider of safety or security is a new role or expectation placed on instructional leaders. They also explained that these roles can overlap, are complex and require “strong” social skills from the school leader. Furthermore, Mullen (2024) described the role of the educational leader or building principal in creating welcoming school cultures or climates where school leaders prioritize support, accessibility, collaboration, and equity.

DeMatthews et al. (2022) conducted a quantitative analysis of a statewide longitudinal data set from Texas to identify the impact of principal turnover on teacher attrition. The multi-year data set included data from the 1999-2000 school year through the 2016-2017 school year. Other data obtained in the study by DeMatthews et al. (2022) included principal, teacher, and student observation data in public schools in Texas from 2004-2005 through the 2016-2017 academic years. DeMatthews et al. (2022) controlled for fixed school effects and utilized indicator variables to identify years of principal turnover. The researchers also controlled for student achievement and poverty rates to address concerns with teacher attrition leading to principal attrition. Data for schools existing for less than five years were excluded from the study.

Findings suggested that principal turnover negatively impacts teacher attrition (DeMatthews et al., 2022; Gallant & Riley, 2014). Teacher turnover following the transition of school leadership increased. This trend was more prominent in schools with higher poverty rates, rural schools, and schools where the new principal lacks administrative experience (DeMatthews

et al., 2022). When enough notice was provided to teachers about principal turnover, teacher attrition increased during the principal's final year at the school, and when notice was not sufficient, teacher attrition increased the first year after principal turnover (DeMatthews et al., 2022; Gallant & Riley, 2014). The findings from studies conducted by DeMatthews et al. (2022) and Gallant and Riley (2014) indicate a connection between teacher and principal retention and the need for stable leadership in schools with high attrition rates to improve teacher retention.

Grissom and Bartanen (2018) identified a connection between teacher effectiveness and principal effectiveness and the desire of principals to retain highly qualified or higher performing teachers. School leaders that are effective improve teaching quality and teacher retention in their schools by retaining teachers when they improve school climates, provide support to teachers, and provide opportunities for professional development. A longitudinal analysis of data obtained from schools using the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAMS) evaluations systems in Tennessee over six years, starting with the 2011-2012 academic year, was used to determine if effective principals implement strategic retention. Tennessee was selected for analysis because of legislation passed that makes it easier for school leaders to dismiss or non-renew low performing or ineffective teachers. Effective teachers were more likely to maintain in their current positions while less effective teachers became movers or leavers. Rather than focusing on retention of all teachers, Grissom and Bartanen (2018) identified effective school leaders strategically focusing on improving retention for high quality or higher performing teachers and allowing higher turnover for "low performing" teachers. This pattern is more prevalent in more economically advantageous schools and in schools where principal turnover is low. Mullen (2024) also noted higher early career teacher attrition in lower performing schools, rural schools, and schools serving large populations of minority or non-white students.

## **Future Areas of Research**

Additional research on the role of secondary school principals and beginning teacher perceptions of leadership practices that positively impact beginning teacher retention at the secondary level is warranted. Further research that focuses on similarities and differences of school leaders' perspectives and new teachers' perspectives on factors impacting retention of early career teachers has the potential to contribute to the current literature surrounding teacher retention. Studies that identify similarities and differences of leadership practices or behaviors to improve new teacher retention have the potential to inform current and future educational leadership practices on mentorship of early career teachers and retention efforts aimed at retaining early career teachers at the secondary level. Studies that focus on early career teacher retention at the elementary level have the potential to expand upon the meanings presented within this qualitative study that focused on the secondary level. Future researchers might consider identifying or generating meanings related to how leadership practices influence retention differently across grade levels.

## **Summary**

Teacher retention is identified as an issue school leaders face globally and nationally. I identified legislative policy in Virginia implemented to improve teacher retention and increase the number of teacher candidates in the teacher supply pool. I also outlined teacher retention as a global and national issue, places an emphasis on teacher retention efforts in Virginia to address the current teacher shortage, identifies and describes monetary and non-monetary factors impacting teacher retention. Furthermore, I identified and described the costs of teacher attrition to education, the role of the school leader on teacher mentorship and teacher retention. Emphasis was placed on analysis of factors or strategies to improve new teacher retention. In the review of

literature, I also integrated literature to connect the role of school leadership and the practices or behaviors that positively and negatively impact beginning teacher retention. Learning about current factors impacting early career teacher retention and adapting or modifying leadership practices to better support and address the needs of early career teachers could improve early career teacher retention and subsequently student achievement.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

This chapter describes the methodology and procedures that were used to complete a qualitative study on the impact of school leadership on the retention of early career teachers in a medium sized school division in southwest Virginia. Qualitative methodologies were utilized to produce descriptive data about individual experiences of new teachers and school level leaders currently serving in their respective roles at the secondary level. I describe the selected qualitative design method, including the process for collecting data from school leaders and beginning or early career teachers in a medium sized school division in southwest Virginia. Included in this methodology chapter are the purpose of the study, the research questions, a discussion of paradigms and assumptions, a discussion on qualitative methods and hermeneutics. I also discuss the design of the qualitative study, a justification for the design, the site and sample selection, instrument design and validation, data collection procedures for early career teacher participants and principal participants, data management and data analysis. Included in this chapter is also a discussion of limitations and delimitations. Furthermore, I provide a description of “meaningful wholeness” as it applies to hermeneutic research. This chapter concludes with an examination of researcher trustworthiness and a summary.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence educational leadership has, specifically building level principals, on early career teacher retention decisions. The qualitative study specifically focused on the secondary level in a medium sized school division in southwest Virginia. Using the data obtained from the individual principal and classroom teacher interviews, I intended to gain a better understanding of the impact secondary principals have on early career

teachers' decisions to retain or leave their current positions. I analyzed interview data to determine if and what differences in perceptions related to school leadership and retention exist. Secondary school principals were interviewed and asked to identify principal behaviors or current practices in place at their schools intended to positively impact beginning teacher retention within their schools. Early career teachers were interviewed and asked to evaluate their principal practices and behaviors as it applies to their decisions to remain employed either at their school or in the teaching profession. I sought to identify common behaviors or practices secondary school principals implement to positively impact early career teacher retention to compare to the behaviors or practices identified by beginning or early career teachers that contribute to retention. I also examined current data, specifically overall teacher retention data and early career teacher retention data for participating secondary schools in a medium sized school division in southwest Virginia. The qualitative data collected for this study included teacher interview data from individual semi-structured interviews, principal interview data from individual semi-structured interviews, and basic demographic data obtained from demographic surveys.

I intend to provide secondary school principals and division-level leaders with qualitative data to improve the retention of secondary level early career teachers. Meanings from the study may be used to create professional development for secondary school leaders aimed at improving teacher retention, for policy adoption at the division level aimed at improving early career teacher retention, as a data source for future research studies, and to influence principal preparation curriculum at collegiate levels. By exploring the perceptions of both school principals and classroom teachers, I gained a better understanding of how leadership practices and behaviors impact teachers' decisions to remain in or leave their positions. This research

provides insights into how leadership strategies, behaviors, and practices can contribute to improving teacher retention.

### **Research Questions**

Information from this qualitative research study can provide context and a deeper description of the behaviors or practices implemented by secondary school principals to improve early career teacher retention that are identified by both secondary school principals and early career teachers at the secondary level. Throughout my time writing this dissertation, I wanted to better understand how principals at the secondary level positively contribute to the retention of early career teachers within their schools. I wanted to make meaning of teacher and principal perceptions of leadership behaviors based on my interpretation of individual and shared experiences. To better understand the role of the principal on early career teacher retention, the following research questions were developed to guide the development of interview questions and the overall presentation of meanings “made” or generated.

- 1) How do school principals perceive their role in fostering a work environment that contributes to the retention of early career teachers?
- 2) What are the lived experiences of early career classroom educators regarding the influence of leadership practices on their decisions to remain in the classroom or leave their current teaching positions?
- 3) In what ways do the interactions between school principals and secondary early career teachers contribute to early career teacher retention efforts within schools?

### **Pragmatist Paradigm**

Paradigms are the beliefs held by the researcher that guide decisions and research as it is conducted (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). They are not a “hard and fast set of rules” but act as

guidelines that can be developed or are already held by the researcher (Makombe, 2017). In this research, I adopted a pragmatist paradigm. By analyzing early career teachers' and principals' perceptions of leadership practices or behaviors, I used the paradigm of pragmatism to both “define the social phenomenon” or “experiences” of leadership behaviors and practices that impact early career teacher retention and establish a shared understanding or meaning of the phenomenon or experiences (Erciyas, 2020). This paradigm guided me in selecting the methods and procedures that were more likely to assist in the identification of common themes in relation to principal practices or behaviors that best promote or contribute to early career teacher retention—qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods. Under this perspective, I was able to identify factors outside of principal practices or behaviors that drive beginning teacher retention without minimizing the impact of principal practices or behaviors (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). Pragmatism as a paradigm allows researchers to operate under the assumption that reality can change for research participants (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Additionally, I held the pragmatic philosophy that human actions and thoughts are linked and that participants can hold individual or shared realities. Knowledge is formed from the unique experiences of people (research participants) and that knowledge is acquired on a continuum rather than in a single moment in time. These are key beliefs associated with pragmatism as a paradigm.

There are multiple perspectives that can be used to view or address the problem of early career teacher retention (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, the pragmatist lens best aligned with my approach to move past abstractions and generalizations to make more direct connections between the “knowledge and actions” (Kelly & Cordiero, 2020). Essentially, a researcher embracing pragmatic views intends to use the knowledge obtained from their research to implement change or make improvements to current practices. Kelly and Cordiero (2020)

emphasized three principles relevant to pragmatism as a research paradigm—research should be conducted with the intent to produce “actionable knowledge” to solve real-world problems; there is a connection or “interconnectedness of experience, knowing and acting;” and inquiry results in altered behaviors to address a problem. Current research indicates teacher retention, especially for beginning teachers, is a growing issue in public education. Using the pragmatist paradigm, I was able to focus on “the problem being studied, and the questions asked” about the problem of study (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). My goal in conducting this research was to gain “concrete understanding” of the perceptions of leadership behaviors or practices and their influence on early career teacher retention, to make recommendations for leadership professional development, and to present qualitative data to division and school level leaders related to school principals’ practices or behaviors that positively impact the retention of early career teachers (Kelly & Cordiero, 2020). My goal in sharing qualitative data with school and division level leaders was to improve behavior or practices in a way that might impact teacher retention in a positive way.

Conducting research under the pragmatism paradigm does not minimize or negate other theories or paradigms (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Pragmatic paradigms are often utilized in mixed methods research when researcher holds the belief that a single method is not best suited to obtain data pertaining to research questions (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Pragmatism as a paradigm allows researchers to recognize factors that are not the research focus and acknowledge that a problem can be addressed from multiple perspectives. Researchers that adopt a pragmatic set of beliefs and acknowledge that participants can hold shared and individual realities and that realities can continuously change can conduct research under the paradigm of pragmatism. Pragmatism and hermeneutics connect in that the study of multiple perceptions and life worlds

can be analyzed for comparison with both sets of truths existing simultaneously (Eberle, 2014; Moules, 2002). Moules (2002) asserted that a pragmatic paradigm is an approach used in hermeneutic research. The lived experiences of early career teachers do not negate the lived experiences of secondary principals. Rather the paradigm of pragmatism allowed me to compare the interlinking of interconnectedness of two sets of perceptions to create a shared meaning. This paradigm supports that other theories or beliefs can be applied to the acquisition of knowledge to address similar topics or problems of study when conducting research. This applies to early career teacher retention and the leadership and non-leadership factors that are outlined in the conceptual framework. I was able to focus on leadership related factors without negating or minimizing the impact of the non-leadership factors that are not the primary focus of this proposed qualitative study.

### **Assumptions**

Teacher retention and growing teacher attrition are issues facing public school leadership tasked with appropriately staffing schools with high quality teachers. Current literature reflects numerous factors that impact teacher retention or attrition within a school. According to Cresswell and Poth, qualitative studies, such as this study, can report “multiple realities” according to themes identified by the researcher(s) (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). This research compared the different perspectives of beginning teachers and school level leaders on the factors important to improving beginning teacher retention to make meaning from their experiences.

Cresswell and Poth (2018) discussed the importance of conducting qualitative research in the field where the participants live and work. At the time this dissertation was written, I was employed within a medium sized school division in southwest Virginia as a school level-administrator. I also had five years of experience as a public-school teacher at the secondary

level. As part of the interview, I took a moment to emphasize the study's purpose to the participants prior to obtaining verbal permission to record the interview. Participants were informed about the topic of study (beginning teacher retention) and that my intention was to present the themes or meanings identified to improve teacher retention within the school division where they are also employed.

Although some researchers might argue that hermeneutics isn't pragmatic in nature, Manca (2022) outlines the interaction between hermeneutics as a research method and pragmatism as research paradigm. Similarly, Rosenthal and Bourgeois (1977) described that hermeneutics and pragmatism have origins in traditional empiricism. Gallagher (2022) emphasized early origins of pragmatic thought in the work of Husserl, the founder of phenomenology or hermeneutic research, Charles Sanders Peirce, and William James. Both pragmatism and hermeneutics place a reliance on language and the connection to the mind (Manca, 2022). Pragmatism focuses on the origin of thought and the way thoughts (the mind) is interpreted whereas hermeneutics focuses on the consciousness of thought based on the lived experience. Pragmatism and hermeneutics, according to Rosenthal and Bourgeois (1977) attempt to understand lived experiences. Two sets of lived experiences can co-exist to establish a new understanding or approach to problem-solving (Eberle, 2014). Manca (2022) claimed that Husserl also valued language as the source of expressing thoughts. Gallagher (2022) articulated multiple schools of thought regarding pragmatic elements being embedded in cognitive sciences. One connection in literature emphasized was the "pragmatic turn" in hermeneutics research which Gallagher (2022) attributed to an emphasis of "practical" rather than "theoretical" application of hermeneutics methods. Another was the notion that hermeneutics already had a pragmatic slant, especially with the emphasis on intentionality. A qualitative research method

was selected to investigate the research questions associated with this study—questions that focus on the perceptions of school leaders and early career teachers at the secondary level.

### **Research Design**

This qualitative study of secondary school early career teachers and principals in a medium sized school division in southwest Virginia used open-ended interview questions in individual interviews for all participants. The questions that were utilized in individual principal interviews and individual early career teacher interviews were developed by me (the researcher) to align with the research questions. Focus groups, according to Erciyas (2020), create a unique experience where interaction and discussion among members about shared experiences can contribute to the research. Although I originally considered interviewing teachers through focus groups, teachers were interviewed using the same format as principals to better maintain confidentiality of responses and provide the same level of attention to the data obtained from all participants. This also prevented one or two participants from dominating a conversation. All teacher participants were provided an equal opportunity to share their experiences and perceptions during their interview time. In this qualitative study, I interviewed secondary principal participants individually prior to conducting individual teacher interviews due to the procedure of asking participating principals to identify two to three potential teacher research participants.

I requested early career teacher retention data from the participating school division for the 2021-2022, 2022-2023, and 2023-2024 academic years. The data from the school division was utilized to confirm participant eligibility and the overall teacher retention rates at each school where the principals are employed. The participating school division is divided into five districts with each district having one high school and one middle school. I intended to invite

five of the 10 middle and high school principals within the division to participate in an individual interview using researcher designed questions designed for principals. I used school division retention data to determine which middle or high school within each district had the higher teacher retention rate. The principal of the middle or high school with the highest teacher retention rate within each district was invited to participate in this qualitative study (see Appendix F). The principal of the school with the lower retention rate was considered an alternate if the principal that was originally invited declined to participate. Two principals declined to participate, and two alternates were invited. When an originally selected principal declined to participate, an email inviting the alternate principal to participate was sent to request participation in the study. If the other principal representing that district declined to participate, one district within the division would not be represented in the meanings obtained from the data. This did not happen as one principal from each district within the participating school division agreed to participate. Two of the principal participants within this qualitative study were alternate principal participants. One secondary principal was excluded from participation due to their supervisory role.

Participating principals were asked to complete an information sheet for demographic data and to identify an interview time and date outside of their school contract hours using Doodle Poll. A separate Doodle Poll link was created for each principal participant to maintain confidentiality amongst participants. Principal participants were asked to identify teachers within their building for consideration as teacher interview participants. Two teachers identified by four principals and one teacher identified by one principal were originally invited by email (see appendix G) to participate in an individual interview. If a teacher declined participation, an alternate participant was invited. There were multiple recruitment emails sent to participants that

did not respond to initial emails prior to excluding them from the study. If a teacher did not respond to three requests for participation, an alternate participant was invited to participate in their place. Two participating principal each only had one teacher that met criteria participate in the study either due to the established participation criteria or lack of response to interview invitations. After I conducted individual teacher and individual principal interviews through Zoom after school hours, the responses were transcribed using the audio recordings obtained through Zoom. Transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis based on hermeneutics to identify factors or behaviors that teachers and principals identified as contributing to early career teacher retention.

### **Research Design Justification**

I selected a qualitative study to gather information from principals and early career teachers at the secondary level about the impact of school leadership on the retention of early career teachers. A basic qualitative inquiry using an inductive thematic analysis based on hermeneutics was used to provide more insight into the subjects' lived experiences and perceptions. Questions were open-ended to allow participants to contribute additional information about their experiences related to early career teacher retention. Information obtained through individual interviews was analyzed to identify themes of similarities and differences in teacher and principal responses. This research design allowed for the inclusion of teacher perspectives and principal perspectives from each district within the school division to be represented in the meanings obtained from data. Because principal behavior was specifically analyzed to determine practices or behaviors that positively contributed to teacher retention, individual interviews were conducted. To maintain consistency in interview procedures and allow for diverse early career teacher perspectives, individual interviews also served as the

means of obtaining information from early career teachers.

### **Site and Sample Selection**

There are not specific criteria for identifying research for hermeneutically based qualitative studies (Cresswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016). However, it is essential that the participant have a connection to the experience that is being studied –for this study the common experience was early career teacher retention. I asked each participant that indicated they were willing to participate in individual interviews if they were participating with understanding and consent to use data for publications or inclusion in a dissertation. After a careful review of the intent and methodology selected, I made the decision to use purposeful sampling to select research participants. Participants in this qualitative study were early career teachers and secondary principals within one medium sized school division in southwest Virginia. I intended to identify the behaviors or practices of school principals early career teachers and secondary school principals perceived to impact early career teacher retention and compared the perceptions. I sought to gain a better understanding of the shared experiences of early career teacher retention at the secondary level. When selecting a qualitative research study, I selected a basic qualitative inquiry using an inductive thematic analysis based on hermeneutics because of the emphasis placed on the understanding of lived experiences and because hermeneutics is flexible regarding participants. Hermeneutics does not restrict the inclusion of participants that hold different roles within a study and allows for a comparison of participants and their experiences.

I originally invited five principals at the secondary level within one medium sized school division in southwest Virginia to participate in the basic qualitative inquiry using an inductive thematic analysis based on hermeneutics through email. Two principals declined to participate in

an individual interview. As a result of this, two alternate participants were invited and agreed to participate. After obtaining participant consent, principals were invited to participate in the study through an individual virtual individual with a time agreed upon through Doodle Poll.

Additionally, I scheduled individual teacher interviews with randomly selected early career teachers employed at the secondary school level using information provided to me upon request by the participating building level principals. Individual teacher participants were invited to participate in a manner that allowed for participation from employees at a variety of secondary schools throughout the school division. I invited principals and teachers to participate in the study with equal representation of the participating school division in mind. I invited a secondary principal and teachers within the same school as the participating principals from each district within the participating school division to participate in the study.

Participation in the study was voluntary. All secondary school principals within the medium sized school district in southwest Virginia were invited to participate in individual interviews. Purposeful sampling of principals was beneficial to this study because it allowed a large enough sample of participants with access to similar resources and impacted by the same policies. Also, by limiting principal participation to secondary school principals, I was able to select early career teachers with more than one but less than five years of classroom experience as participants in early career teacher interviews from the same locations as principal participants. Principal participants were required to be currently working at a middle school in the head principal role or high school in the head principal role at the time of their interview. Assistant principals and deans of students were not selected to participate in this study. Teacher participant names were first provided to me by participating building level principals. Eligibility requirements were verified through data requested from the building principals that participated

in individual interviews. Although Patton (2015) articulated that “there are no rules for sample size” in qualitative research, the five middle schools and five high schools within the medium sized school division in southwest Virginia provided a large enough sample size for purposeful sampling of secondary principals and early career teachers to obtain quality data sources and identify themes and codes from participants even after some principals and teachers declined to participate in an interview.

The district was selected because of their high teacher retention rate compared to the Commonwealth of Virginia. The division in southwest Virginia had a teacher retention rate of roughly 91% in 2023 according to a division level central office administrator. Representatives from the school division also participated in a panel sponsored by the Virginia Department of Education and the University of Virginia K-12 Advisory Council because of their efforts to fill teacher vacancies and retain current teaching staff. Also, the school division serves an increasingly diverse group of students at each location where middle school and high school principal participants and early career teacher participants are employed. Multiple middle and high schools in the division had growing student enrollment participation in free and reduced lunch programs at the time interviews were conducted. Although the results of this study are not generalizable to a larger population, the diversity within the sample site could contribute to the relevance of the meanings and application of recommendations within the division and divisions of similar sizes and demographic composition.

I used the division website or information on the individual school websites to obtain the contact information for all secondary principals from the division. Information was requested for this research from the participating division’s Human Resources Director on teachers with more than one but less than five years in the classroom at each of the schools of principal participants.

I obtained contact information using directory information on individual school websites. The information provided was used to confirm participant eligibility and to identify individual teacher interview participants with more than one, but less than five years of teaching experience in the event that all the teachers identified by a building principal declined participation or did not respond to invitations to participate in the study. Provisionally licensed teachers and career switchers that did not attend a traditional education preparation program were not excluded from the study based on their licensure status. Early career teacher participation was originally limited to 10 total with no more than two participants representing the same school or district within the participating school division. Two schools each had only had one teacher participate in an interview. The total number of early career teacher participants within this qualitative study was eight.

Prior to conducting the interview with teachers and principals, I requested that all participants complete a brief survey requesting general demographic information. The information requested on the demographic survey included their race/ethnicity, gender, years of experience in their professional role, educational attainment, and years of service their current school. I intended to use this information to help verify that all participants not only met the criteria but presented demographic data along with the study's results. Inclusion of demographic data also contributed to the meanings or implications sections of this dissertation and the recommended areas of future study.

### **Instrument Design**

The interview questions were developed for the purpose of collecting data from secondary level early career teachers and secondary building principals on their perceptions of leadership behaviors or practices that impact early career teacher retention. Principals were asked

a set of initial (individual) interview questions (see Appendix C). Moustakas (1994) recommended developing questions prior to the interview process. The questions were designed to better understand what experiences are like and include “based on your experience” phrases rather than factual responses that might encourage surface level responses rather than examples (Williams, 2021). Teachers were asked to respond in individual interviews to early career teacher interview questions pertinent to the qualitative study. Teacher interview questions are included in an Appendix C. Interview questions were developed with the intent to answer all research questions. The data collected from individual principal interviews and individual teacher interviews were transcribed and analyzed to identify common themes or patterns associated with principal behavior or practices that impact early career teacher retention. Interview questions were not provided to principal or early career teachers participants prior to the interview.

Figure 2, Early career Teacher (Individual) Interview Questions Pertinent to Research Questions, include the questions that were utilized to interview early career teachers at the secondary level. Figure 3, Principal (Individual) Interview Questions Pertinent to Research Questions, include the questions that were used to interview secondary principals. Principal (individual) interview questions are similar to questions that were asked in teacher (individual) interviews.

## Figure 2

### *Early Career Teacher (Individual) Interview Questions Pertinent to Research Questions*

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#### **Interview Questions**

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1. Based on your experiences, in what ways does the principal influence your decision to stay at your current school?
2. What is your perception of your principal's effectiveness related to teacher retention initiatives?
3. Based on your current experiences, what does your principal do that made you consider moving to another school or leaving the teaching profession?
4. Based on your previous years in the classroom, what about your principal contributed to your decision to stay at your current school for this academic year?
5. In what ways do you think your principal contributes to your job satisfaction?
6. What other comments or ideas would you like to share that have not already been addressed related to your principal and your decision to remain at your current school or your decision to remain in the teaching profession?

### **Figure 3**

#### *Principal (Individual) Interview Questions Pertinent to Research Questions*

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##### **Interview Questions**

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1. Based on your experiences, how do you believe your behaviors or practices contribute to early career teachers' decision to remain at your school?
  2. What are some of the changes you made to your previous practices or behaviors to improve early career teacher retention?
  3. How effective do you perceive your early career teacher retention efforts to be?
  4. Based on your experiences, how do you believe you as the principal contribute to your early career teachers' job satisfaction?
  5. Based on your experiences, what role did the Covid-19 pandemic play in your efforts to retain early career teachers?
  6. What other comments or ideas would you like to share related to early teacher retention at your school?
- 

##### **Instrument Validation**

I examined principals' and early career teachers' perceptions of leadership behaviors or practices that impacted teacher retention at the secondary level. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) identified the researcher as "the primary instrument for data collection and analysis" (p. 15). When collecting qualitative data, to make sense of a phenomenon, researchers ask questions to obtain data relevant to participants and their experiences. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested that in addition to "asking good...open-ended questions that can be followed up with probes" to obtain additional information or data, that the researcher also carefully observe behavior (pp. 18-19).

To establish the validity of the instruments that were used for individual principal interviews and teacher interviews, I solicited feedback from educational leaders at the

elementary school level that were not eligible to participate in this study. These individuals were selected based on their experience with research, current enrollment in doctoral programs, or their experience leading initiatives related to teacher retention within the participating school division. I piloted the study with three elementary principals in the participating school division to check the understanding and clarity of the questions and practice the use of probing questions. The purpose of piloting the questions and practicing interviewing techniques allowed me to practice using the interview protocol along with probes to make sure the questions and probes would produce qualitative data in a way that would contribute to the research and allow me to sufficiently answer the proposed research question and associated sub questions. To gain feedback before starting pilot interviews, I emailed the questions to school and division level leaders outside the sampling site to gain additional feedback on clarity. The educational leaders tasked with reviewing the principal interview questions were asked to identify issues with clarity and determine if the interview questions were relevant to the overall researcher questions.

A similar process was used to edit teacher interview questions for clarity and relevancy. I sent the teacher interview questions to two teachers within and one teacher outside of the participating school division who were not eligible for participation in the qualitative study to review the questions for clarity, general understanding, and relevancy to the research questions. I practiced the interviewing technique and protocol for the teacher interview questions by piloting the questions with two teachers within the participating school division that did not meet participation criteria. Feedback did not adjust the proposed questions but did assist in the development of probing questions and my ability to ask for examples or further explanation.

### **Qualitative Data Collection Procedures**

Qualitative data for this study was obtained through individual interviews with building-

level principals at the secondary level and individual interviews with early career teachers within a medium sized school division in southwest Virginia. Interviewing is the most common method for data collection in hermeneutic studies (Smith et al., 2008). Interviews allow the researcher to acquire knowledge through conversation between the researcher conducting the interview and the research participant (Erciyes, 2020). Semi-structured interviews are used to generate “rich” descriptions for research analysis. Erciyes (2020) described semi-structured interviews as interviews with fixed questions that provide the researcher with flexibility by allowing the researcher to explore different topics based on the direction of the conversation or interview. Purposeful sampling was used to obtain principal and early career teacher participants. According to Cresswell and Poth (2018), purposeful sampling provides a means for the research to “find people...to study,” gain access to those individuals, and build rapport to obtain high quality data (p. 148).

I developed an original semi-structured interview protocol that included questions and issues related to the problem of study. The semi-structured interview protocol included prompts or probing questions. My intention was to obtain information or data from participants in relation to leadership practices that improve or contribute to early career teacher retention at the secondary level. All interviews that I conducted were recorded to preserve the data for analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Zoom was selected because of the ability to have “verbatim transcription” of interviews which according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), is optimal for data analysis. Although Zoom generates a video recording, the video recording was deleted and only the audio recording was saved to allow me to verify accuracy of the transcript. Although all video recordings were deleted, one participant completed the interview without a video being captured because the participant intentionally kept the camera off. I compared the audio

recordings to the transcripts and made corrections for accuracy. Additionally, I transcribed written notes taken during the individual interviews to preserve information on what I viewed as important at the time of the interview. I only referenced these when reviewing transcripts to identify themes, sub-themes, and meanings significant to the study.

To create data comparable between principal and teacher participants, I used similar questions about principal behavior that contributed to teacher retention for both types of interviews. Teachers and principal participants were also asked for demographic data that includes information on educational attainment, years of experience in education, and length of service in their current role. The transcriptions from individual principal interviews and individual teacher interviews were shared with participants for review within one week of each individual interview. The purpose of sharing the transcriptions was to check for accuracy of the data collected and to allow for corrections prior to my analysis of data for themes related to the topic of study. Only two participants asked for corrections. I corrected the transcripts or data based on feedback received from the principal and early career teacher participants to remove the name of the school and the name of a colleague that was mentioned during interviews.

At the time this dissertation was written, I served as an administrator in the school division as the principal participants and early career teacher participants. I obtained consent from the division superintendent and director of secondary education to conduct the study. I used a Virginia Tech email account to send participant recruitment emails to potential principal and potential early career teacher participants from the same division. Teacher participant emails were not sent until a principal interview was conducted and the participating principal identified potential teacher participants. All recruitment information and emails were sent after I received the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University *IRB Application Approval Letter*. The *IRB*

*Application Approval Letter* and recruitment documents are listed in the appendices (see Appendix H).

### ***Principal Individual Interview Data Collection***

Principal participants were employed in a medium sized school division in southwest Virginia at the time of their individual interview. After receiving the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University *IRB Application Approval Letter* and the division approval to conduct research, I sent a participant recruitment email to secondary level principals with the higher teacher retention rate in each of their respected districts within the division at the inviting them to participate in the study. For clarification, each district has one middle school and one high school. If the high school had a higher teacher retention rate compared to the middle school, the high school principal was invited to participate in the study first with the middle school principal being reserved as an alternate participant. Assistant principals and deans of students serving at the building level were not invited to participate in this study. The participation recruitment email contained information about the purpose of the study, details about how the interview would take place, information about informed consent and voluntary participation. When principals agreed to participate in the proposed qualitative study, I individually emailed a brief demographic survey for the principal to complete prior to scheduling of the interview.

Additionally, I sent an individual Doodle Poll to each principal participant to schedule the interview and maintain confidentiality. I intended for principal interviews to be between 45 and 60 minutes in duration. In practice, principal interviews were between 30 and 40 minutes in duration. I informed the participants that the interview was recorded and obtained verbal permission to record the interview prior to starting the interview. Principal interviews were transcribed and sent to the participants within one week of the date of the interview for member

checking. Upon return of any edits and a review of the audio recording, I made corrections to the transcript. Each principal participant was asked to share the names of two or three teachers that met teacher participation criteria.

### *Teacher Individual Interview Data Collection*

Teacher interview participants were currently working in the medium sized school division in southwest Virginia at the time of their individual interviews. To be eligible for participation, the principal of the school where the teacher was employed needed to provide their information to me and the teacher must have had between one and five years of classroom teaching experience or be identified by the human resource department as meeting the criteria for years of experience and employment at a participating school. Teachers without one year of classroom experience were excluded from the study. I randomly selected two of the three names identified by each building principal that participated in this qualitative study to send recruitment emails to. If a teacher declined to participate in the study or did not respond to three attempts or requests for an interview, a recruitment email was sent to the third teacher identified by the participating principal. If all teachers identified by the participating principal declined participation, I used data obtained from the participating division's human resource department to identify alternate participants. This occurred with one school where an alternate participant was identified by the list provided by human resources. The participation recruitment email contained information about the purpose of the study, details about how the interview would take place, information about informed consent and voluntary participation. Additionally, I sent an individual Doodle Poll to each participant to schedule the individual interviews and maintain confidentiality. I intended for individual teacher interviews to be between 45 and 60 minutes in duration. Within this study, individual teacher interviews were on average 30 to 35 minutes in

duration apart from one interview that was 22 minutes in duration.

### **Data Management**

After the dissertation committee, the Virginia Tech IRB, and the participating medium sized school division in southwest Virginia approved of this qualitative study, I utilized the school division's website to obtain contact information for all principals that met participation criteria based on teacher retention data obtained by the participating school division's human resources department. All principal interviews and teacher interviews were conducted outside of the school division's operating hours. Middle and high school level principals were invited to participate in a virtual interview by email. At the conclusion of the principal's interview, the participant was asked to identify teachers eligible to participate in teacher interviews.

Participants were asked prior to the interview for permission to record, transcribe, and quote data obtained while I maintained confidentiality. All participants were informed by email of the type of study being conducted, the purpose of the study, and anonymity of responses, that participation was not required by the school division, that any involvement in interviews was voluntary, and that they could withdraw consent to participate throughout the duration of the study. Data obtained through interviews or emails was secured on a password protected computer. Participant information was stored in a separate location from recordings and transcriptions on my password protected computer. All recordings, transcriptions, and participant information will be permanently deleted according to the timeline established by the Virginia Tech IRB at the time this study was approved.

### **A Hermeneutic Approach to Analysis**

As a qualitative inquiry, I use an inductive thematic analysis based on hermeneutics (Byrne, 2001; Clarke, 1999; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Rieter, 2006). A hermeneutic approach to

analysis was selected to investigate the impact of educational leadership on early career teacher retention and to explore the perceptions of both school principals and classroom educators. As Thirsk and Clark (2017) stated, “Hermeneutics is the philosophy and practice of interpretation (Moules, 2002; Palmer, 1969)—a ‘process of “bringing to understanding”’ (Palmer, 1969, p. 13)” (pp. 2-3). As a means of bringing the experiences of participants to understanding, hermeneutics can include the study of participants’ thoughts, feelings, and perceptions (Eberle, 2014; Regan, 2012). According to Chenail (2009), hermeneutics has been a *viable* approach to qualitative research for over two decades. Cresswell and Poth (2018) identified phenomenological studies as an ideal methodology when the researcher seeks to identify themes of “lived experiences” for “several individuals.” There is a close relationship between phenomenology and hermeneutics in the literature (Gillo, 2021; Guillen, 2018; Smith et al., 2009, van Manen, 2016). In both there is a primary concern about interpreting participants’ lived experiences and perceptions (Gillo, 2021; Guillen, 2018; Laverty, 2003; Smith et al., 2009, van Manen, 2016).

Although often associated with phenomenology, hermeneutics is not only a phenomenological concern. Moules (2002) asserted that Husserl established the foundation of hermeneutics. Fundamentally, it is about interpreting and understanding (Crotty, 1998). Denzin and Lincoln (2018) listed hermeneutics as just one of the multiple interpretive practices that qualitative researchers can use. In this research study, I analyzed the shared experiences of several early career teachers and secondary level principals. These individuals employed in the same school division shared their perceptions of early teacher retention during semi-structured individual interviews. Patton (2015) emphasized in-depth interviews as a means of gathering impactful data about a phenomenon or experience from those that lived the experience. Patton (2015) also clarified that “a job” can be a phenomenon or experience. Likewise, Gillo (2021)

clarified that hermeneutics allows researchers to find common meaning from the shared or lived experiences of participants. Authentic communication serves as the means or “tool” for the researchers to gain true understanding or meaning of the lived experiences of participants (Gillo, 2021; Guillen, 2018; Laverty, 2003; Regan, 2012; Smith et al., 2009; van Manen, 2016).

Hermeneutic analysis does not intend to understand the facts of situation or experience. Instead, qualitative researchers interested in conducting a hermeneutic analysis are interested in understanding “the essence” of the experience. To understand the “the essence,” a study of the words used allows the researcher to understand the phenomenon or experiences (Regan, 2012). Primarily in this study, I was concerned with the experience and interpretation of experiences (Gillo, 2021; Guillen, 2018). A hermeneutic study matched the problem of teacher retention in that factual inquiry is not the goal of the research, rather understanding is the focus of a researcher using hermeneutic research. Current literature supports that early career teacher retention is not only an issue that school leaders are facing, but that it is a growing problem faced by educational leaders following the Covid-19 pandemic. This study aimed to understand the perspectives of those who are close to the issue of early career teachers—early career teachers themselves and secondary school principals directly supervising early career teachers. Hermeneutics, as a qualitative research method of analyzing data, allows the researcher to study human behavior or experiences and interpret common practices, meanings, or themes based on the stories or experiences shared by participants (Gillo, 2021; Regan, 2012).

Like phenomenology, a hermeneutic method is popular in social science studies and studies that seek to understand the perceptions and experience of those that are studied (Cresswell & Poth, 2018; Crotty, 1998; Regan, 2012). Williams (2021) described criticisms of different types of hermeneutics but asserted that most forms of what is now identified as

hermeneutic research can find origin in the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer. It is not necessary that hermeneutic research maintain or follow the work of Gadamer or Husserl for research to be hermeneutic. Patton (2015) identified hermeneutic research approaches as a research methodology that allows subjects to “transform experiences into consciousness.” Regan explained that hermeneutics research is used when wanting to understand and interpret the research participants’ story and can be applied to the written word. This qualitative methodology is based on literature from Edmund Husserl and Hans-Georg Gadamer. Phenomenological or hermeneutic studies are in their basis studies of experiences and a desire to interpret those experiences (Gillo, 2021; Guillen, 2018; Laverty, 2003; Regan, 2012; Williams, 2021). Like phenomenology, hermeneutic research is interpretive in nature (Cresswell & Poth, 2018; Regan, 2012).

Descriptive hermeneutics describes experiences of participants while interpretive hermeneutic studies go further by attempting to evaluate or understand hidden meanings of the lived experiences (Barrow, 2019; Gillo, 2021; Regan, 2012). Rather than being satisfied with snapshots or surface level information, hermeneutics, like phenomenology, encourages further exploration to truly understand meaning (Zahavi, 2018). When the researcher participates in communication or reads about it, there is a sense of a shared experience (Regan, 2012). Researchers using a hermeneutic research methodology based on phenomenology are tasked with describing the structures of experiences to include consciousness, the imagination, relationships with other individuals, and situations (Armstrong, 2005). The “commonality of language” contributes to the researcher making meaning from a written or verbal account of events that include the “internalized thoughts” of the researcher (Regan, 2012). The purpose of this exploration is to understand not just a thing or an event as it is seen, but as it is experienced.

Zahavi (2018) described that individual perception can be described on a deeper and more meaningful level than basic descriptions than statements of fact. The goal of hermeneutics is to analyze described differences and identify connections within data.

To do a hermeneutic analysis, the researcher does not attempt to bracket their own experiences in the same way as in phenomenology (Butler, 2016; Gillo, 2021). Gadamer, according to Regan (2012), believed that the researcher's thoughts are internalized unconsciously through communication and impact interpretation. In other words, there is a bias in spoken or written language and that bias can impact interpretation when something "rings true" or activates the understanding of a researcher (Moules, 2002; Regan, 2012). This relates to what Maxwell et al. (2020) referred to as the pre-understanding of the researcher engaged in the reflexive journey of hermeneutic research. Likewise, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) also emphasized the notion that hermeneutics focuses the researcher on the "conscious experiences" of participants. By embracing their preunderstanding of language, the researcher analyzes words intuitively for meanings to reveal something beyond the exact words spoken to gain a deeper and more valuable interpretation (Moules, 2002; Regan, 2012; Thirsk & Clark, 2017).

While there are connections between hermeneutics and phenomenology in terms of foundation and intent, there are differences regarding the researcher's background and experiences utilized in interpretation. For phenomenology, Butler (2016) and Gillo (2021) argued that correct use of bracketing and reduction could allow the researcher to focus on the participants experiences to the point that the prior knowledge and assumptions can be "refuted." While bracketing is common in phenomenology, hermeneutics does not require bracketing or isolating the perceptions and experiences of the researcher. In this study, Gadamer's focus of embracing bias allows the researcher (me) to analyze participant's words without excluding

background knowledge or personal experiences. Hermeneutic research is the process of searching for meaning of life experiences through the lens of the interpreter (Maxwell et al., 2020; Thirsk & Clark, 2017). In this research study, the principal and teacher participants had lived experiences of working in their perspective roles throughout a teacher shortage and an emphasis at the state and local levels to improve teacher retention.

Therefore, a hermeneutic approach to data analysis allows the researcher to gather data based on the lived experiences of participants that hold or share common experiences or truths (Gillo, 2021; Regan, 2012; Williams, 2021). First person experiences, according to Williams (2021), serve as a “qualifying trait” of both phenomenological and hermeneutic research. These experiences are analyzed in relation to their uniqueness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Smith, 2013). By selecting participants in small numbers and through purposive sampling methods, researchers can transcribe interviews and gather data to thoroughly analyze transcripts of participants. After reviewing the transcripts of participants that shared their experiences related to the topic of study, I identified themes or meanings that emerge among participants to identify the “essence” of the impact a school principal’s practices or behaviors impact early career teacher retention (Maxwell et al., 2022; Moules, 2002; Patton, 2015). I valued data in terms of authenticity so that salient data was produced during interviews (Williams, 2021). In hermeneutic research, authentically looking at data obtained allows the researcher to focus on the experiences, examples, stories, or events shared by research participants, what was explicitly or implicitly shared, and underlying meanings of these experiences (Desautels, 2021; Laverly, 2003; Love, 1994; Maxwell et al., 2022; Moules, 2002; Vagle et al., 2019).

## **Data Analysis Procedures**

Analysis of qualitative data is expected to accomplish three tasks—confirm what is known about a particular topic of study, correct misconceptions, and illuminate new meanings that were previously unknown or overlooked (Patton, 2015). According to Cresswell and Poth (2018), qualitative researcher is conducted using deductive and inductive analysis from people close or “sensitive” to the study. A basic qualitative inquiry using an inductive thematic analysis based on hermeneutics allows for versatile methods of working with data (Smith et al., 2009). To understand the perspective of participants and “make sense of their experiences,” I analyzed data in multiple ways. Analysis in this proposed qualitative research study included a review of initial memos taken by me during the individual principal interviews and individual teacher interviews in addition to their corresponding transcripts to identify patterns and themes from principal and teacher accounts of their lived experiences. Thematic analysis of the transcripts and notes is in alignment with descriptive hermeneutics. When using thematic analysis based on hermeneutics, the researcher attempts to analyze data in a way that allows understanding of the spoken words and “unspoken meanings” associated with the lived experiences (Sundler et al., 2018).

**Table 1**

*Procedures for Basic Hermeneutic Analysis*

<b>Procedure</b>	<b>Hermeneutic Analysis Process</b>	<b>Key References</b>
<p><b>Step 1:</b>  <b>Familiarization</b>            (Reading and Re-reading)</p>	<p>The iterative process of immersing oneself in the data to fully understand the context, intentions, and meanings behind participants' expressions. The goal is to gain an open-minded familiarity with the material, reading "beyond the text" (here referring to the transcripts) to interpret underlying meanings.</p>	<p>Paterson &amp; Higgs (2005); Sundler et al. (2018)</p>
<p><b>Step 2:</b>  <b>Initial Interpretation and Notetaking</b>            (Exploratory Commenting &amp; Memoing)</p>	<p>Reflective interpretation at an exploratory level to capture nuances in language, metaphors, and meanings. This involves noting down preliminary observations and impressions, and analytic memoing as a foundation for deeper analysis.</p>	<p>Creswell &amp; Poth (2017); Miles et al. (2013); Love (1995); Reiter (2006)</p>
<p><b>Step 3:</b>  <b>Initial Coding</b>            (Open Coding)</p>	<p>Organizing segments of the text into codes that reflect interpretative insights. Hermeneutic coding emphasizes divergence and convergence, exploring both commonality and individual nuance within participants' perspectives.</p>	<p>Lincoln &amp; Guba (1985); Saldaña (2013); Smith et al. (2009)</p>
<p><b>Step 4:</b>  <b>Cross-Participant or Cross-Case Analysis</b>            (Looking for Patterns Across Transcripts, or Axial Coding)</p>	<p>Engaging with preunderstandings to synthesize meanings across different cases or participants to uncover overarching themes. This comparative process respects each participant's unique context while searching for universal interpretations within the data.</p>	<p>Maxwell et al. (2020); Reiter (2006); Thirsk &amp; Clark (2017)</p>
<p><b>Step 5: Developing Essential Themes</b>            (Identifying and Refining Units of Data)</p>	<p>Using patterns and codes to identify essential themes that reveal deeper interpretive insights. These themes are selected to represent layers of meaning that begin to answer the research question from an interpretative standpoint.</p>	<p>Laverty (2003); Moules (2002); Van Manen (2016)</p>
<p><b>Final Reflection</b>            (Reflexive Self-Analysis)</p>	<p>Developing a meaningful, cohesive narrative that synthesizes themes into a holistic interpretation. Themes are contextualized, refined, and named in ways that resonate with the research question. This step may involve writing and rewriting to ensure that the analysis reflects a deep interpretative understanding through description.</p>	<p>Dahlberg &amp; Dahlberg (2020); Freeman (2014); Laverty (2003); Van Manen (2016)</p>

Thematic analysis as a descriptive approach to hermeneutics is similar to various forms of analysis described by Moustakas (1994), Saldaña (2021), Smith et al. (2022), and Sundler et al. (2018). For this study, I outlined a process for thematic analysis based in the literature on hermeneutic and hermeneutic phenomenological analysis (see Table 1). The multi-step process includes achieving familiarity with data, analysis for meaning and themes, and categorizing essential themes into a meaningful narrative (Byrne, 2001; Laverly, 2003; Paterson & Higgs, 2005; Sundler et al., 2018). This process allows for a data driven analysis in a hermeneutic qualitative study.

### *Achieving Familiarity with Data Through Open Minded Reading*

The familiarization process began after I completed transcription and member checks. Sundler et al. (2018) emphasize that a foundational step in hermeneutic analysis involves immersing oneself in the data through repeated, open-minded reading. This initial reading was essential to grasping the meanings and intentions behind participants' words. I read and re-read both the interview transcripts and personal notes to gain a comprehensive understanding of each participant's experiences, reading "beyond the text" to interpret underlying meanings (Love, 1995; Maxwell et al., 2022; Paterson & Higgs, 2005). This iterative reading helped to interpret the underlying context and structure of the participants' individual responses, allowing me to identify significant events and examples.

### *Initial Interpretation and Notetaking*

Next, I conducted initial note taking to begin exploration of the lived experiences of participants. Qualitative methodologists emphasize importance of initial note taking or pre-coding using an open mind to identify what "rings true" (Moules, 2002) and preliminary impressions and reflections from each transcript to produce a set of meaningful comments and

notes representing participant lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Thirsk & Clark, 2017). In the note taking process, I made descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments and work to identify shared experiences, “echoes, amplifications and contradictions” of participants (Love, 1995). The final objective under this step is the search of data for unique data rather than known data. Saldaña (2021) and Smith et al. (2009) made similar recommendations when conducting early data analysis. After initial reading of transcripts and identification of “anything of interest,” I identified new data and supporting data that deserves additional attention or analysis. These objectives are similar to descriptive coding discussed by Saldaña (2021). Although this analysis does not include traditional coding methods, the initial familiarization process is similar to descriptive coding that allows me to summarize topics or parts of transcript using single words or phrases and gain a basic understanding of the data obtained from the study.

### **Initial Coding**

After my initial notetaking and recording my impressions, I proceeded with open coding, labeling words and text segments with codes that reflected my interpretative insights. Hermeneutic coding, as an interpretative process, is focused on both convergence and divergence, acknowledging the commonalities as well as the unique nuances in participants' perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Saldaña, 2021). Here, I identified and labeled significant elements, ensuring that I captured diverse aspects of participants' lived experiences without imposing pre-existing categories.

### **Cross-Participant Analysis**

After initial coding, I conducted cross-participant analysis, or axial coding, to identify patterns and overarching ideas across cases. This comparative step allowed me to synthesize meanings across participants while respecting the individuality of each perspective and

experience (Thirsk & Clark, 2017). I reviewed coded data from each transcript, comparing responses to find both universal and context-specific interpretations that enriched my understanding of the collective narrative. This implied engaging my preunderstandings to find meanings across the transcripts as texts (Maxwell et al., 2020).

### *Search for Meanings and Themes*

After initial familiarization of data, a deeper analysis of data was conducted by me in the process of searching for meaning of the participants' lived experiences and identifying themes relevant to the research question and sub-questions. (Sundler et al., 2018). I analyzed the completed transcripts to look for meaning and mark identified meanings on the text. Moustakas (1994) described reflective interpretation as a necessity for meaningful understanding of lived experiences. Moustakas (1994) referred to this as developing "textural descriptions" from themes (p. 97). Although I did not use coding, the process of marking meanings and notes is referenced by Saldaña (2021) and Smith et al. (2009) as descriptive coding. I also identified direct quotes when noting or describing the meaning of participants. The presentation of direct quotes from participants to support thematic meanings is often referred to as *in vivo* coding in qualitative research (Saldaña, 2013). Saldaña (2021) identified *in vivo coding* as an appropriate method of coding for "virtually all qualitative studies." The use of direct quotes allowed me to thematically identify "the essence" of participants' words and analyze meanings from their perspectives. According to Sundler et al. (2018), understanding of the meaning of lived experiences of themes should be credible, thorough, and transparent. This can be supported using direct quotes to provide content in finding and consistency in meaning and language use. Using direct quotes, described in some research as *in vivo* coding can provide researchers with better awareness of their participants' circumstance or life events which is aligned with hermeneutic research

methodology (Saldaña, 2021). Additionally, focusing on the words participants used in a semi-structured qualitative interview with a hermeneutic approach can better allow me to bracket my experiences and develop my understanding of the essence of the lived experience (Chenail, 2009).

After finding meanings, I began making comparisons by identifying similarities and differences of lived experiences (Sundler et al., 2018). Moustakas (1994) also emphasized the importance of comparing multiple data sources when attempting to develop themes and present findings (or meanings). I organized meaning, looked for patterns, and identified themes. Smith et al. (2009) described a similar process with descriptive coding and in identifying in vivo codes to allow me to identify themes from data sets or transcripts. According to Smith et al. (2009), the themes identified are a combination of participants' words and experiences and the researcher's (my) interpretation of these words and experiences.

### *Organizing Themes into a Meaningful Wholeness*

Organization serves as a means of presenting meanings or identified themes about the proposed qualitative study (Sundler et al., 2018). Smith et al. (2009) discussed the evolution of initial themes into final themes. Sundler et al. (2018) presented a similar idea when discussing the need to write and rewrite meanings in the process of organizing explicitly identified themes and presenting the meaning of lived experiences. I made connections between themes and structured the order in which relevant themes would be presented in the meanings section of this dissertation. I supported the reporting of themes by identifying a theme, providing a description of the theme, and then providing examples and comparisons through direct quotes of principal participants and early career teacher participants.

### *Considerations of the Hermeneutic Circle*

As part of the inductive process to hermeneutic research, the researcher is responsible for analyzing, reviewing and revising their understanding of the lived experiences of the participants within their study. The researcher is part of the hermeneutic circle (Lavery, 2003; Moules, 2002; Vagle et al., 2019). To better allow researchers to understand what “takes place between...the subject-subject,” hermeneutics is used as method of inquiry (Vagle et al., 2019). To gain knowledge, researchers interpret not just the spoken words, but the “between” or unspoken words. The researcher is responsible for finding meaning in explicit statements, implicit statements, miniscule details that can often be overlooked (Lavery, 2003). Moules (2002) described this as making implicit language explicit and using interpretation to add language to the spoken word. This aligns with my data analysis procedure of reading and rereading with an open mind to achieve familiarity with data, identify what was communicated through the unspoken word, and identifying what was left unspoken or where underlying meaning is present in the spoken statements.

Hermeneutics embraces the researcher’s role of self-reflection (Desautels, 2021; Vagle et al., 2019). This interpretive analysis does not prevent the researcher from using prior knowledge and the reflecting on that knowledge to “reimagine and recreate” their overall understanding or knowledge. Hermeneutics functions with the idea that researchers being a study with pre-understanding and move in the direction of understanding (Lavery, 2003; Maxwell et al., 2020; Moules, 2002). As the researcher learns and alters their preunderstanding through reflection, understanding is gained or expanded upon. Lavery (2003) and Moules (2002) articulated that the researcher’s culture, gender, experiences, and other characteristics impact understanding and interpretation. Through familiarization, the reader is intended to understand participants

experiences on a deeper level than what is stated in text or transcripts (Love, 1995; Paterson & Higgs, 2005). Researchers conducting hermeneutic analysis pay attention to what sounds true, the small details, what resonates, and familiarity while attempting to reveal hidden meanings of written or spoken statements (Laverty, 2003; Moules, 2002). At the same time, it is important for researchers completing hermeneutic research to analyze what is “unspoken” or left out of shared experiences (Moules, 2002; Vagle et al., 2019).

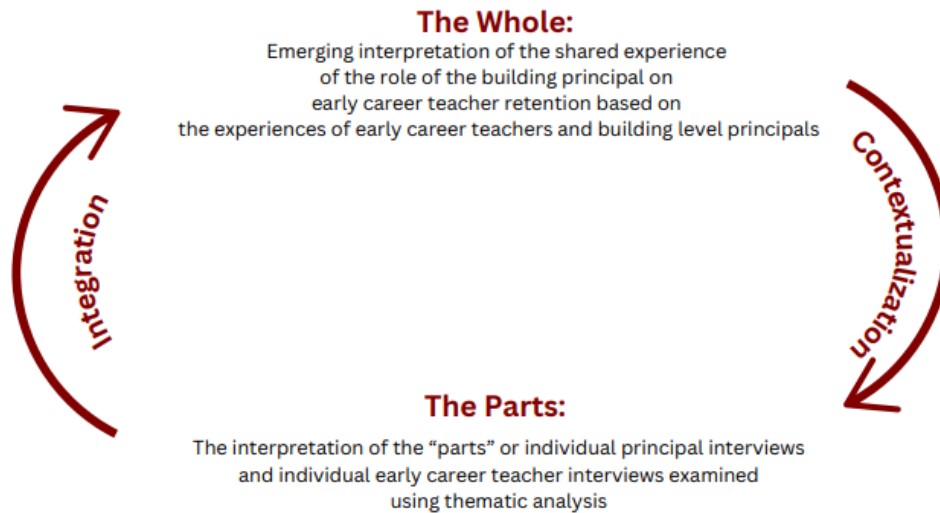
When using the hermeneutic circle, the researcher utilizes conversations, texts, transcripts, prior knowledge of literature to interpret their understanding of what is said in part and in whole to answer research questions (Desautels, 2021; Laverty, 2003; Love, 1994; Maxwell et al., 2022; Moules, 2002; Vagle et al., 2019). This is described as interpreting other individuals’ thoughts, words, or experiences through the experiences and thoughts of the researcher. In other words, understanding of the whole is context dependent and achieved through interpretation of experience and understanding (Desautels, 2021; Hovey et al., 2022; Laverty, 2003; Maxwell et al., 2022; Moules, 2002). There is a certain amount of understanding of participants’ words that is shaped by the personal experiences of the researcher. Through this analysis and interpretation of experiences, the researcher recognizes themes and common experiences while acknowledging that this recognition can be shaped in part by the researcher’s bias (Laverty, 2003; Maxwell et al., 2022; Moules, 2002). In other words, the view or lens through which understanding is achieved is based on the researcher’s understanding of that view or lens (Desautels, 2021; Hovey et al., 2022; Love, 1994). Because I understand education through the role of administration, my understanding is shaped through administrative experience. This aligns with my data analysis procedures of initial note taking, initial coding, cross participant analysis and searching for meanings and themes.

The hermeneutic circle is the process where the researcher interprets a phenomenon or experience through the shared stories of participants. To do this, the researcher starts by acknowledging potential areas of bias (Maxwell et al., 2022; Moules, 2002; Paterson & Higgs, 2005). In this basic qualitative inquiry with thematic analysis based on hermeneutics, I (the researcher) looked at transcripts in a search for interpretation with reading, rereading and note taking followed by cross participant analysis. I identified themes with repetition within an individual interview and through cross participant analysis in which two or more participants shared similar or common experiences. I analyzed the spoken words, hidden meanings, underlying messages of what participants were sharing in their stories, as well as what was unspoken or not shared with me during semi-structured interviews.

The researcher (in this case, the author of this dissertation) is part of the circle of analysis by analyzing the parts and whole independently and determining how the various parts contribute to the understanding of the whole (Moules, 2002; Patterson & Higgs, 2005). When the researcher does this successfully, there is a better understanding of the phenomenon or experience being studied (Desautels, 2021; Moules, 2002; Patterson & Higgs, 2005). The circle starts with acknowledging bias and potential influence on the researcher's perception or beliefs about experiences. Once this is acknowledged, the researcher analyzes the "whole" or the overall themes or relevant pieces of information obtained from transcripts (Lavery, 2003; Maxwell et al., 2022). The researcher is then tasked with conceptualizing the "whole" or the issue or topic being studied (Lavery, 2003; Maxwell et al., 2022; Moules, 2002; Desautels, 2021). The researcher then is tasked with focusing on individual interviews or parts of interviews to determine how they contribute to the "whole" understanding of the experience or research question.

**Figure 4**

*Hermeneutic Circle as Applied to the Principal’s Role on Early Career Teacher Retention*



Note. Adapted from Argus, 2023; Bontekoe, 1996; Perrelli, 2019.

In this qualitative study, I read and reread all the participants’ individual transcripts and groups of transcripts based on participants occupation (early career teacher or principal) to identify themes or relevant information (Desautels, 2021; Love, 1994; Moules, 2002; Vagle et al., 2019). That information was then integrated to create a better understanding of the principal’s role in early career teacher retention (whole), and then this information was contextualized to understand the smaller parts again. I entered my study with pre-understanding, but the process of reading, re-reading, and identifying themes shaped and expanded my understanding and the generation of meanings (Laverly, 2003; Maxwell et al., 2022; Moules, 2002). In hermeneutics, this cycle repeats until the researcher understands relevant themes and meanings that can be presented. It is important to note that this is called a “circle” because the process is continuous (Moules, 2002; Vagle et al., 2019). Laverly (2003) asserted that the circle

continues until meaning is obtained and can be presented without substantial contradictions. This aligns with my data analysis procedure of searching for meaning and themes.

During the thematic analysis based on hermeneutics, I acknowledge that there are biases associated with my experiences as a secondary level administrator and the past experiences as a classroom teacher. I also acknowledge the fascination and curiosity surrounding teacher retention as a potential bias due to the exposure to current literature (Desautels, 2021; Maxwell et al., 2022; Vagle et al., 2019). There are principals that I have interacted with on a personal and or professional level that could have influenced their responses or my interpretation of the responses or experiences they decided to share. Additionally, working in the same school division as both early career teacher participants and principal participants might have biased what I asked for further clarification on or where I decided to use probing questions. While analyzing transcripts and listening to principal and early career teacher participants experiences and their perception of the role of the principal, I felt like I gained a better understanding of principal behaviors that were considered important to both principals and early career teachers (Laverty, 2003; Maxwell et al., 2022; Moules, 2002; Vagle et al., 2019).

Prior to conducting interviews, I felt that there was a chance participants might be selective in the experiences or practices they shared with me. To address this, I asked probing questions that encouraged participants to share an example or share another example to go beyond prepared answers (Maxwell et al., 2022). During thematic analysis based on hermeneutics, I also recognized that there was a tendency of principal participants and early career teachers to respond with positive examples and that they were not overly critical of the role of the principal (Moules, 2002; Vagle et al., 2019). While I was not surprised with this, it limits my ability to critique negative practices of the principal.

During the interpretive thematic analysis, I read and reread individual interviews multiple times (Hovey et al., 2022; Maxwell et al., 2022). This is associated with providing hermeneutic researchers with exposure to diverse perspectives and contributing to understanding (Hovey et al., 2022). I took notes and highlighted specific experiences or quotes used by participants (Desautels, 2021; Laverly, 2003; Love, 1994; Maxwell et al., 2022; Moules, 2002; Vagle et al., 2019). While interpreting each participants response to semi-structured interview experiences, I attempted to reflect on my own experiences with the associated question related to early career teacher retention, my own experiences as an early career teacher, and my experiences as an administrator in the division where the research was conducted (Desautels, 2021; Laverly, 2003; Moules, 2002). Although I attempted to find themes that were supported by direct quotes and were not related to my experiences, my experiences and knowledge of early career teacher retention shape the presentation of themes and my understanding of experiences of principals and early career teachers (Laverly et al., 2003; Maxwell et al., 2022).

### **Trustworthiness**

Information that is related to my understanding of current research as well as information that is personal, related to my background, and/or my experience in education that may be relevant to the meanings generated from my qualitative study are presented for transparency and trustworthiness. I conducted the study after reviewing current literature on teacher attrition and teacher retention in the public education setting. I served as a classroom teacher at the secondary level in multiple states within the United States in both urban and suburban settings. Of my seven years of experience in public education at the secondary level, five of those years spent as a classroom teacher. For the last two years, I have served as an assistant principal at the secondary level in the participating school division. At the time the literature review was written

and while I was conducting research for this qualitative study, I was not employed as a head principal. I am not a participant in my own study. One member of my dissertation committee is also employed in the same division as I am. Shenton (2004) outlines credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as the four criteria for consideration in determining the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Additionally, I authored a reflexivity to contribute to trustworthiness.

### *Credibility*

Credibility in qualitative research addresses whether the study measures what the researcher intended to measure and can be supported through correct methodology selection, voluntary research participation, and researcher experience and qualification. Hermeneutics is a well-established qualitative research methodology utilized by researchers when the researcher intends to understand lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009). I adopted the basic qualitative inquiry using an inductive thematic analysis based on hermeneutics to better understand the experiences of the participants, secondary principals and secondary early career teachers, as they relate to early career teacher retention. All principal and early career teacher participants meeting participation criteria in the proposed qualitative study were provided the opportunity to decline participation so that only those voluntarily participating in the proposed study will be more likely to deliver honest responses to the questions. I built probes into individual principal interviews and individual teacher interviews as part of iterative questioning when falsehood is suspected to deter deliberate inclusion of inaccurate data in the meanings. I also conducted member checks on individual principal interviews and individual teacher interviews to support the study's credibility.

## *Transferability*

Transferability of qualitative research describes the extent that the findings (or meanings) of one study are generalizable to other scenarios or situations. Although not all qualitative research can be generalized to larger populations, I have communicated the limitations and delimitations of the study as well as the “boundaries of the study.” As a qualitative study, it is not my intention for this qualitative study to be replicated, but the meanings from the study could be used to “expand understanding” of the phenomenon or experiences, research topic, or problem of study (Stahl & King, 2020).

Future attempts at transference should consider the following information:

1. This qualitative study took place in a medium sized school division in Southwest Virginia.
2. Early career teacher participants were required to have more than one year but less than five years of teaching experience and were required to be currently employed by the school division where the research is conducted at the time of their individual interview.
3. Principal participants are not limited based on years of experience, but they were required to have a valid VDOE administration license and currently serve as in a “head principal” position at the secondary level at the time of their individual interviews.
4. Principal participation size was limited to five total participants with a maximum of one secondary principal from each district within the school division participating in the study.

5. Teacher participation size was originally limited to 10 due to the size of the school division and participant eligibility criteria. No more than two teachers from a participating school or district within the school division will be interviewed. Total teacher participation in this qualitative study was eight. Two schools each had one teacher participant in the study either due to participant criteria or a lack of response to requests for interviews contributing to an early career teacher participant size of eight.
6. Individual principal interviews and individual teacher interviews were conducted using the Zoom platform.
7. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using the Zoom platform.
8. All interviews were intended to be between 45 and 60 minutes in duration. Apart from one interview that was 22 minutes in duration, actual interviews were between 30 and 40 minutes in duration.
9. Data was collected during the summer 2024 academic term and fall 2024 academic term.

### *Dependability*

Dependability is another consideration researchers should consider when evaluating the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Dependability refers to the extent that similar results would be obtained by a researcher if the study were conducted a second time under similar conditions. I strategically described the process for participant recruitment, instrument validation, and data collection. I followed participation criteria, participant recruitment and research implementation as described in the instrument design and qualitative data collection procedures. I reflected on the effectiveness of the design and make recommendations for future

research considerations that might contribute to future studies, or the expansion of the meanings presented in Chapter 5 of this dissertation following data collection and analysis.

### *Confirmability*

Confirmability when applied to qualitative research references the researcher's objectivity when conducting the research and presenting findings (or meanings). A basic qualitative inquiry using an inductive thematic analysis based on hermeneutics was selected to understand the lived experiences of research participants. I acknowledged potential areas of bias including the site selection, relationship to participants, and experience in public education. I selected thematic analysis based on hermeneutics that allows for the use of in vivo coding to maintain "the essence" of participants' lived experiences when identifying themes and presenting meanings or findings (Saldaña, 2013).

When conducting qualitative research via internet platforms, researchers still hold an ethical duty to protect participants' identity and maintain confidentiality of the data obtained through electronic communications to include recorded interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Each participant was asked to sign a statement indicating informed consent (see Appendix E). A copy of this statement was maintained by me and is included in an appendix to this dissertation. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to humanize participants and their statements and maintain confidentiality. Principal and teacher participants were informed in writing prior to the interviews of the purpose of the study and that participation is voluntary. Principal and teacher participants were informed that I intended to use information obtained from interviews to author a dissertation and other potential publications. Also, participants were reminded that interviews were recorded before I begin interviewing. I obtained verbal permission to record the interviews. I refrained from including any identifying information of either teacher or principal participants

or the school in which they work in the presentation of meanings made from the semi structured qualitative interviews. I also removed the names of any individual mentioned during interviews from transcripts. For example, I did not associate a teacher participant in this study with any principal participant or vice versa. I did not want the responses of early career teachers to be easily identifiable to a building principal, especially if they were to read this dissertation and recognize their own responses or compare statements or quotes in this dissertation to the transcript provided for the purpose of conducting a member check. I transcribed the interviews and assigned pseudonyms after implementing member checks but prior to reviewing transcripts for coding and analysis. To allow for member checking, principal participants and teacher participants were allowed to review their transcribed responses within one week of the interview date. If feedback was obtained from a principal participant or early career teacher group participant, I made the corrections to the corresponding transcript. When corrections were made through the member checking process, used the corrected transcripts for data analysis. All participant information and responses were kept in a digital file on a computer that only I could access and was secured with a password that was not shared with anyone. After all interviews were transcribed and I completed my draft versions of Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 of this dissertation, I permanently deleted the audio recordings of interviews.

### *Reflexivity*

Bright et al. (2024) and Smith and Luke (2024) articulated that reflexivity is commonplace in qualitative literature. Smith and Luke (2024) discussed the need for qualitative researchers to include a developed reflexivity section in manuscripts. Reflexivity can contribute to an understanding of the researcher's position, opinion, and experiences that may shape or contribute to the understandings or meanings identified by the researcher. It is important to note

that reflexivity is not just about the researcher but allows the researcher to focus on themselves in relation to the participants of their study. Bright et al. (2024) suggested that reflexivity allows the researcher to shape their personal identity as an academic while presenting ethically relevant information to their audience. Through the act of exploring personal experiences and how those interact with participants and the research being conducted, the researcher can write about themselves and integrate his or her personal experiences into the literature (Bright et al., 2024; Smith & Luke; 2024).

Throughout my academic experience in the Virginia Tech doctoral program of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, I have been employed as an assistant principal. My research was conducted within the same school division in which I was employed at the time I completed this dissertation study. The principal and early career teachers working in the school in which I served as an assistant principal at the time of my research study was conducted were not participants within this study. As an assistant principal, I did not view myself as having power over my principal, but I wanted to ensure that I could provide a fair critique of practices of building principals without fear of reprisal. Additionally, I do hold the role of a primary evaluator for early career teachers within my building. I did not want early career teachers within my building to feel coerced into participating into my study because of my role or their role as being “new” to my building. I also wanted all early career teachers to share relevant information, even criticism, of their principals in interviews. I did not feel it was appropriate to ask teachers within my building to criticize our shared principal or other members of the administrative team.

As an assistant principal in the school division, I do not hold the role of an evaluator or supervisor for teachers or principals outside of my division. It is possible that early career teacher participants might have viewed my role as being that of a “supervisor” and might have practiced

self-censorship or been less forthcoming or critical of their principal. This could have been because they perceived my role to be that of a supervisor or through their knowledge of my personal friendships or relationships with their principal or assistant principals.

Throughout my two years as an assistant principal in the participating school division, I have engaged in numerous professional phone calls, professional development opportunities, or meetings with participating principals. Principals might have felt obligated to participate in my study due to previous interactions or their perceived role as a mentor to assistant principals and aspiring principals. Principals might have felt more comfortable sharing their stories with me due to our professional relationship and prior experiences and interactions. There is also the possibility that principals might not have felt comfortable sharing their shortcomings or sharing experiences that could be perceived as critical of the participating school division.

### **Summary**

This qualitative study was designed to identify similarities and differences in secondary principals' perceptions and early career teachers' perceptions of leadership practices or behaviors that impact teacher retention. A purposeful sample of middle and high school building level principals and early career teachers were identified and requested to participate in the study. Teacher participation in interviews was limited to schools where principals participated in individual interviews. Additionally, teachers recommended for participation were limited to individuals with more than one year but less than five years of teaching experience since entering the teaching profession. Teachers without at least one year of experience in the secondary public school were excluded from participation. Individual semi-structured interviews were utilized for building principals and early career teachers. The data collected through virtual interviews was audio recorded and transcribed using the Zoom platform to identify common themes.

Verification of transcripts was conducted for all individual semi-structured interviews. All participants were provided the opportunity to member check the verified transcript of their interview within one week of the study. All participants were employed in a medium sized school division in Southwest Virginia at the time of their interview. I conducted a thematic analysis based on hermeneutics of individual transcripts and cross participant transcripts. Chapter 4 of this dissertation presents the analysis of data and the meaning generations within this qualitative research study.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Analysis of Data and Presentation of Meaning Generation**

This chapter includes a presentation of the data collected during an approved research study of early career teacher retention and the impact of school leadership. Some qualitative dissertations produce qualitative data as “findings.” Rather than presenting findings, I am presenting meanings that were made from my understanding of participant responses and identified themes. This chapter also introduces the meanings and themes that I identified after conducting individual semi-structured principal and early career teacher interviews. Meanings were derived from questions asked during individual semi-structured interviews and are presented with responses from participants to support claims. The analysis and data is organized according to the identified themes that include principal perceived responsibilities; principal responsiveness to early career teacher retention; measuring effectiveness through stay decisions; principal connections to job satisfaction of early career teachers; principal post-pandemic altered practices; administrative capacity for growth and support of early career teachers; early career teachers value bond building; measuring success through mentorship, community, and resources; early career teachers navigate stay decisions; early career teachers and the value of personal connection; satisfaction through stability and support; and adapting to the application shortage. A brief presentation and discussion of outlier meanings, or responses not shared by two or more participants, is also included in the meanings section.

#### **Principal Participant and Interview Data**

Secondary principals within a medium sized school division in southwest Virginia were interviewed virtually using the Zoom platform for this study. I verified their responses using transcripts produced from the closed caption feature on Zoom and the audio recording. Principal

participants were also provided the opportunity to member check their verified transcripts within one week of the interview. Results of the study cannot be generalized to larger populations, but may be used for professional development, training, hiring practices, and the development of policy within the participating medium sized school division in southwest Virginia. Those who wish to generate additional meanings from this study may also find the analysis of meanings section valuable.

Potential participants within the participating school division were identified based on teacher retention rate data obtained from the participating school division's human resources department. I requested early career teacher retention data from the participating school division for the 2021-2022, 2022-2023, and 2023-2024 academic years. The data from the school division was used to confirm participant eligibility. The participating school division is divided into five districts with each district having one high school and one middle school (a total of 10 secondary principals). In each district within the participating school division, the principal of the school with the highest teacher retention rate was invited to participate in the proposed qualitative study and the principal of the school with the lower retention rate was invited to participate in an interview if the principal with the school with the higher teacher retention rate declined an interview. Two principals declined participation resulting in two alternative principal participants being invited to participate in an interview. Seven of the 10 middle and high school principals within the division were invited to participate in an individual interview using researcher designed questions designed for principals. One principal was excluded from participation due to their supervisory role in the school division to avoid a conflict of interest. Research was not conducted in the school where I am currently serving as an assistant principal.

Potential principal participants were sent a recruitment email based on teacher retention data for each secondary school obtained from the human resources department of the participating school division. After the principal confirmed he or she would participate in an individual interview, I provided an individualized link to a Doodle Poll to identify a common time that both me and participant were available for an interview. I also emailed the informed consent document and principal demographic survey. Prior to beginning each principal interview, the principal digitally returned the principal demographic survey and informed consent document. Prior to asking each principal interview questions, I also obtained verbal permission to record the interview using the Zoom platform and summarized the research protocol. I reminded principal participants that their interview transcript would be provided to them by email within one week for them to check for accuracy.

Of the five participating secondary principals, two participants served as high school principals and three served as middle school principals. The participating principals had between zero and 15 years of experience in secondary administration and between six and <21 years of experience in public education. I selected pseudonyms used for each principal and they are Heath, Sarah, Andrew, Chloe, and Briana. Table 2 summarizes data obtained from principal participants' demographic surveys.

**Table 2***Secondary Principal Participant Demographic Data*

Participants		Description			
Pseudonym	Gender	Race	Highest Level of Education	Years of Experience in Public Education	Years of Experience in Public School Principal
Heath	Male	White	Master's Degree	< 21 years	6-10 years
Sarah	Female	White	Master's Degree	< 21 years	11-15 years
Andrew	Male	White	Education Specialist	11-15 years	0-5 years
Chloe	Female	White	Master's Degree	<21 years	6-10 years
Briana	Female	White	Master's Degree	6-10 years	6-10 years

Two of the five participating principals were male and three were female. All principal participants were white. Four of the five principals held master's degrees and one held an Education Specialist Degree. Three of the five participating principals had more than 21 years of experience in public education, one had between 11 and 15 years of experience in public education, and one had between six and 10 years of experience in public education. Three of the principal participants had between six and 10 years of experience as a public school principal, one had between zero and five years as a public school principal and one had between 11 and 15 years as a public school principal. Principal participant data was obtained from a principal demographic survey and the individual virtual semi-structured interviews conducted by me. The meanings presented in this study were described or used as examples by multiple principals during their individual interviews. The exception to this is the outlier meanings that were discussed by individual participants.

## **Early Career Teacher Participant and Interview Data**

Eight secondary early career teachers within a medium sized school division in southwest Virginia were interviewed virtually using the Zoom platform for this study. Their responses were transcribed using the closed caption feature and verified by me. Early career teacher participants were also provided the opportunity to member check their verified transcripts within one week of the interview. Results of the study cannot be generalized to larger populations, but may be used for professional development, training, hiring practices, and the development of policy within the participating medium sized school division in southwest Virginia.

Potential participants within the participating school division were identified by participating principal participants. Each principal participant was asked to identify two to three early career teachers as potential early career teacher participants. Principals were asked only to provide the names of early career teachers with more than one but less than five years of teaching experience. All principal participants identified at least two potential early career teacher participants apart from one principal who only had one teacher within their building who met the established early career teacher participant criteria. Except for the principal with one eligible participant, two participants were randomly selected for invitations to the study. If a potential early career teacher participant declined participation in the study, the third participant identified by the participating principal was invited to study. Throughout the study, three early career teachers declined participation. Additionally, two potential participants did not respond to email invitations to participate. A total of five alternates were invited to participate in semi structured interviews. Two principal participants only had one teacher within their building participate in the study either due to the participant criteria that I established or lack of response to recruitment emails.

Potential early career teacher participants were emailed a recruitment email. After the early career teacher confirmed he or she would participate in an individual interview, I provided an individualized link to a Doodle Poll to identify a common time both me and the participant were available for an interview. I also emailed the informed consent document and early career teacher demographic survey. Prior to beginning each early career teacher interview, the early career teacher digitally returned the early career teacher demographic survey and informed consent document. Prior to asking each early career teacher interview questions, I also obtained verbal permission to record the interview using the Zoom platform and summarized the research protocol. I reminded early career teacher participants that their interview transcript would be provided to them by email within one week for them to check for accuracy.

Of the eight participating secondary early career teacher participants, five participants served as high school teachers and three served as middle school teachers. The participating early career teachers had between one and three years of experience in as a secondary education teacher in public education. I selected pseudonyms used for each early career teacher participant and they are Carter, June, Faith, Shannon, Luke, Emma, Jay, and Harper. Table 2 summarizes data obtained from secondary early career teachers' demographic surveys.

**Table 3***Secondary Early career Teacher Participant Demographic Data*

Participants		Description			
Pseudonym	Gender	Race	Highest Level of Education	Years of Experience in Public Education	Years of Experience in Current School
Carter	Male	White	Bachelor's Degree	2	2
June	Female	White	Master's Degree	2	2
Faith	Female	White	Master's Degree	3	3
Shannon	Female	White	Master's Degree	2	2
Luke	Male	White	Bachelor's Degree	1	1
Emma	Female	White	Bachelor's Degree	2	2
Jay	Male	White	Master's Degree	2	2
Harper	Female	White	Master's Degree	3	2

Three of the eight participating early career teachers were male and five were female. All early career teacher participants were white. Three of the eight early career teacher participants held bachelor's degrees and five obtained master's degrees. All early career teacher participants had between one and three years of experience in their building. All early career teacher participants had between one and three years of experience in public education. Early career teacher participant data was obtained from an early career teacher demographic survey and the individual virtual semi-structured interviews I conducted. The meanings presented in this study were described or used as examples by multiple teachers during their individual interviews. The exception to this is the outlier meanings that were discussed by individual participants.

## **Meanings**

Early Career Teacher Interview Questions, Principal Interview Questions and participant responses were used to develop meanings for this qualitative research study. Meanings were obtained after I conducted individual interviews and completed an interpretive thematic analysis of participant transcripts based on hermeneutics. This included my initial interpretation and notetaking followed by initial coding. I also conducted a cross participant analysis to identify themes and search for meaning among participant responses. I organized my meanings to present a meaningful wholeness.

### ***Principal Perceived Responsibilities***

Principals have numerous responsibilities tasked to them based on their role as building leader, instructional leader, disciplinarian, or mentor. Principals were able to identify common areas of responsibility associated with the role of the building principal and the retention of early career teachers. Building level principals cited their behaviors as playing a crucial role in impacting the retention of early career teachers. Principals viewed it as their responsibility to foster a sense of belonging, provide non-evaluative instructional support and facilitate mentorship opportunities for early career teachers to have a positive impact on the retention of their early career teachers.

**Fostering a sense of belonging.** All principals that participated in a semi-structured interview reflected on their responsibility to create a sense of belonging for early career teachers by shaping a positive school culture and community as a behavior or practice that positively contributes to early career teachers' decisions to remain at their schools. Principals shared some of their common practices that are in place at the beginning of the year and throughout the year to contribute to a sense of belonging for new teachers. The theme of "sense of belonging" was

present in all principal interviews. Heath described the need for principals to create a sense of “collegiality.” He described his desire to create a “sense of community and sort of collegiality beyond what was already in place, meaning your typical meetings, department or faculty...And there was this missed opportunity to get those new faculty staff members together,” which he was concerned was going to negatively impact retention rates. He emphasized these thoughts drove his effort to make time for “faculty meals and celebrations” to create a sense of belonging within his building. Sarah described her efforts to create a sense of belonging for early career teacher retention prior to the return of all staff members at the beginning of the year. After early career teachers are welcomed by division representatives and receive some required training, she sets aside an afternoon dedicated to bringing them into her school community. She described her efforts to host a nice welcome lunch where they “eat lunch” and “build those connections.” She also described her efforts with individual tours of the building, strategic pairings of mentors with a positive attitude about the profession and her school, as well as her practice of handwriting personalized “notes for every first-year teacher” on school stationary that they find “in their rooms on the first day.” Andrew described multiple efforts to create a sense of “team” for early career teachers within his building. In addition to recognizing the importance that mentorship programs have in building relationships between new and veteran staff members, Andrew described his efforts to host afterschool events including “multiple staff events, student events, community events...” and “several events throughout the year where not only staff members are allowed to come but also their families are allowed to come.” He described the importance these events have in helping new teachers feel like they are a part of the team.

Chloe also commented that she works to “build a strong community” for her new teachers. She described how she attempts “to do fun things to get the staff to work together,”

especially around the holidays. Overall, all principal participants commented that these events or small acts do not just contribute to a sense of belonging but provide an opportunity for early career teachers to build relationships with other staff members and for principals to build relationships with early career teachers. Briana articulated the need to make her new teachers feel welcome and part of the team immediately. Briana stated,

We always remember our first year of teaching. We remember the high points of the first year, we remember the low points, and it has been my goal since becoming an administrator to ensure that every teacher who comes to this building is welcome. I wanted their experience to be incredible, feel welcomed, feel part of the team, part of the decision making, and very, very proud. So, I feel here we try to go above and beyond to make sure our teachers really feel that way when they come into the building.

Principals should take time to prioritize development and scheduling of events or activities that make teachers feel like they are more than employees and that they are part of the school team. These events create a positive impact and positive memories for teachers in the early years of their career. In schools where principals do not prioritize team development, community building, or relationship development, there is not a sense of connection to the building, students, teachers or other staff. It is easier for teachers to move from one school to another if principals don't invest in the cultivation of the team or community and they feel their role is strictly contractual. Community building helps the principal-teacher relationship move beyond contractual obligations and more in the direction of team or family bond. In the professional contracts and obligations of principals, professionalism, school culture, community and other roles may be within their responsibility, but written obligations to establish personal relationships or a "familial relationship" does not exist. This suggest that there is a pattern that

principals are or an expectation that principal will work outside of their contractual obligations just as many teachers are expected to grade and lesson plan outside of their contractual hours. There may be a need to reevaluate the role of the principal or to establish ways for early career teachers and principals to set professional boundaries.

**Providing non-evaluative support.** All participating principals shared their role in providing non-evaluative support to early career teachers as a behavior or practice they perceive to contribute to early career teachers' decisions to remain at their school. Heath discussed an increased frequency of classroom walkthroughs. He described his non-evaluative practice by explaining how he increased the

frequency of drop-in visits to check in and see how you're doing. Not an observation. Not an evaluation. Not a classroom walk-through, but just taking the English Department today and the Social Studies Department tomorrow. Just stopping by for a few moments to see how you're doing again and build a stronger connection between myself, our administrative team, and our new teachers.

Heath also shared that he intends for these classroom "drop in visits" to be non-threatening" by removing the evaluative aspect. He uses very low-level questioning to address the overall needs of his staff and let them know he is available to support them. For him, low level questions are not intended to put teachers "on the spot," but are intended to "check the pulse and make sure things are going okay" for the new teachers in his building.

Sarah shared a similar concept to letting early career teachers know that she supports them by stating, "We go by and check on them every day. I'll go door-to-door to check on them." Sarah also discussed the importance of her presence for daily classroom check-ins in that they provided her the ability to assess classroom instructional or furniture needs to support new

teacher. Andrew discussed the importance of a non-evaluative presence in the classroom to support teachers professionally. Andrew stated, “Frequent walkthroughs and quality observation conferences are necessary just to” let new teachers “know that we do support them in any way they need, whether that’s calling a parent alongside them, whether that’s...I’m trying this new lesson” and providing the teacher honest feedback. Being a presence in the classroom with the intention of providing honest feedback in a non-evaluative way, according to Andrew, provides a means for principals to show support for “them as professionals” and allows the principal to “push them to be better in those early years” and contributes to them feeling “comfortable as a professional.” Chloe articulated that being in the classroom, even for “five minutes” when she doesn’t have a lot of free time encourages her to find opportunities to conduct “follow up conversations...and find the positives.” She described her presence in the classroom with new teachers as a “means of supporting them and” letting them know “we know what they’re doing” in a positive way. Briana described her efforts to provide professional resources ranging from supplies to a copy of the AMLE *The Successful Middle School: This We Believe* book for her teacher to participate in an informal book study that grows their professional capacity.

Nonevaluative support creates a sense of growth for the sake of growth rather than a punitive relationship or a relationship that only exists in a formal setting. When principals visit the classroom for formal observations only, the relationship that exists between the teacher and principal feels contractual. When principals visit classrooms to check in on the teacher to make informal suggestions and comment on growth, principals focus on teacher development. They can provide targeted resources, targeted feedback in a way that feels non-punitive, and directed to build both the skill level and confidence of the new teacher. By focusing on the positives of a teacher’s instruction and providing feedback to develop, the principal has the capacity to grow or

develop early career teachers frequently from informal visits and encounters rather than the small number of formalities established by state or division policy.

**Facilitating mentorship programs.** All principals described mentorship as a practice they implemented that contributes to early career teachers' decisions to remain at their school, however the degree to which the program was established or structured was different for each principal. During his second year as principal of his current school, Heath started meeting with new teachers "on a monthly basis for the first semester" and viewed it as a means of building connections and giving early career teachers a "kind of voice." Although he did not have numbers to describe the impact of planning these meetings, he noted that his overall retention of new teachers improved and that he has "no intention of going back to what [he] used to do, which was nothing." Sarah described her plans to facilitate a new teacher orientation to her school with her administrative team. Additionally, she briefly discussed that all new teachers in her building are assigned mentors. Andrew described a more structured approach to mentorship. He described a "need to outline kind of a game plan for their entire first year" in the building prior to "ensuring that they have colleagues that they can go to through mentorship programs."

Chloe articulated that she is "very strategic in [her] placement of new teachers in terms of the mentor. You've just got to make sure you have the right personalities." She continued to share her efforts to support new teachers through mentorship by describing what she looks for expects from mentors.

I'm looking at what the subject area is. I'm looking at personality. I want [the mentor] to be somebody who I know has some patience, but you want somebody who's going to be nurturing. I guess in a way you've got to find the right people who are able to handle the new teachers.

While the development of each program and the amount of planning in each program differed, the need for meetings and formal mentors were commonly established practices or behaviors. Like Chloe, Briana articulated her selective approach to picking mentors for early career teachers. Briana stated,

I want the mentor to be someone that I know is very supportive, is very conscientious, and incredibly professional. I want that mentor to be someone that the teacher can confide in, can ask questions, but also if they know that the mentee is getting out of his or her depth and is going to need additional support, that mentor will come to me and let me know in a professional and discreet manner.

The importance of establishing mentorship programs within the school to support teacher retention should be balanced with matching mentors and mentees appropriately. Mentorship programs are about more than teaching new teachers the daily ins and outs of the school or classroom or reminding teachers of expectations or due dates. Principals should consider the needs of new teachers and the capacity of the mentor to support an early career teacher. Selection should be based more than just on convenience of common planning times, paired grade levels or content areas. Mentors should be compatible in terms of personality and availability or capacity to support. For the mentorship experience to be successful, principals need to pair early career teachers with veteran teachers that the new teacher will be comfortable approaching when needed. At the same time the principal needs to select mentors that will approach the principal when the new teacher needs more support or resources than the mentor can provide.

### *Principal Responsiveness to Early Career Teacher Retention*

Teacher retention is a focus of principals in public education within the participating school division where I conducted research. Principals described planned actions or behaviors

they implemented to respond to teacher attrition trends with the intent to improve early career teacher retention in their buildings. Forming or fostering personal connections and making changes to professional development are leadership responses to enhance early career teacher retention.

**Personal connection.** Personal connection was identified as a change of behavior or practice to positively impact early career teacher retention by three of five principal participants during their individual interviews. Heath reiterated his desire to meet with teachers and be a “better presence in a very non-threatening, meaning evaluative sense.” He indicated that he wanted his presence to communicate support for new teachers. Sarah described the value she places sitting and eating with her new staff to improve early career teacher retention. She shared her practice of feeding new teachers and how she eats with her new teachers. This practice of sharing a meal with staff is, to her, a “fellowship time in a way.” Andrew shared common practices that were not in place at his school when he entered that he values and implemented to improve early career teacher retention. He shared that “simple acts of walking in the halls daily and speaking to people outside of their profession prior to their contractual hours” allows him to get “to know [new teachers] personally” and facilitates an avenue for him to offer encouragement. Andrew stated,

We try to do multiple staff events, student events, and community events. We have several events throughout the year where not only staff members are allowed to come but also their families are allowed to come. So, we meet spouses, we meet children, which kind of helps that overall team vibe.

Andrew provided examples of other events used to build connections with new staff members including staff celebrations, staff cookouts, and cooking challenges. Briana described her efforts

to build personal connections with her staff members through teaming, mentor assignments, pairing new teachers with mentors, and assigning new teachers to classrooms “right next door to [another] teacher [that] is incredible as well.”

Principals recognized the importance of their need to take an active role in building personal relationships with early career teachers. Mullen (2024) described this as the principal’s role in the psycho-social development or mentoring of teachers. By committing acts of kindness and engaging in personal dialogue with teachers, principals further establish personal connection. Principals understand that their small acts of kindness, their check-ins, their asking questions about teachers’ family or personal life all contribute to early career teachers feeling more comfortable approaching them as the building principal. The same is true if teachers feel comfortable approaching their colleagues. Personal connection further contributes to the development of the instructional team.

**Professional development.** All principal participants at different points in their interviews discussed professional development. However, when asked about behaviors or practices that were changed to improve early career teacher retention, three of the five principal participants discussed the changes they made to the professional development their early career teacher receive. Heath discussed the need to provide new teachers the time to address the professional development demands of the profession. Heath articulated that new teachers are expected to

read policy and sign off that [they] read policy. But a lot of it, was just kind of the nuts and bolts of the job. As far as technology, all of those things still exist and then some. I would venture to say our policy manual in 2024 is more robust than it was in 1996. Usually, you don’t have many things taken off the plate. I would venture to say that

today's teachers have a whole lot more to figure out where, to use the Marzano phrase, 'the art and science of teaching' is concerned.

Rather than expecting new teachers to figure this out, he described a need to not only assist new teachers in learning about "the art and science of teaching" but the "nuts and bolts" of policies they are expected to comply with.

Andrew discussed implementation of "individualized" professional development "based on grade level and based on department." Andrew used teacher input to create professional development offering based on what teachers identified as areas of interest. Additionally, Andrew formalized departmental professional learning communities within his school. Chloe also discussed professional development in terms of teachers and their capacity to teach. She indicated a need to return to teaching new teachers "the basics" including classroom management but offering new staff members the opportunity to participate in book studies "on a voluntary basis."

In the mind of building principals, quality professional development is associated with the growth of quality educators. Principals recognized the importance of professional development to both inform and grow early career teachers. There is a need to balance growth aligned with modern and scholarly recognized practices with teacher identified areas of focus. At the same time, principals should not over schedule or continuously add new initiatives or professional development that does not align with school or division goals without reserving adequate time to devote to successful implementation or time to complete mandatory activities.

### *Measuring Effectiveness Through Stay Decisions*

Principals measure their effectiveness for numerous initiatives. For early career teachers, the decision to stay or leave their current school is related to principal effectiveness of retention

efforts. Staying is defined as the teacher decision to remain in current school as classroom teachers (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017). Principals associate the effectiveness of their retention practices with early career teachers' decisions to remain in their current positions. When numerous early career teachers leave a school or the profession, principals would consider their retention efforts to be less than successful.

**Staying.** All principal participants associated early career teachers staying in their buildings in their current positions with success in their early career retention efforts. Heath attributed early career teacher retention effectiveness, or teachers staying, to his formation of personal connections, conducting check-ins with teachers on an informal basis and his non-punitive approach to classroom walkthroughs. Sarah defined staying or early career teacher retention in terms of who she hired. When Sarah became principal and focused on early career teacher retention efforts, she stated, "Everyone that I've hired" as an early career teacher and "wanted to come back, they're still with me." For her, this defined her success with early career teacher retention. At the same time, Chloe finds ways to grow and inspire early career teachers to move in the direction of school leadership and provides them opportunities for growth, including those aspiring to enter school administration. Andrew entered the principalship with a significant number of teaching vacancies and multiple provisionally licensed teachers. At the end of his first year as a building principal, Andrew "maintained all...new teachers. As far as first year teachers," all returned to the building for a second year of teaching.

Like Heath, Andrew attributed early career teacher retention and success of retention efforts to building professional capacity and confidence of early career teachers and frequent visits to the classroom with non-punitive feedback. Chloe stressed the importance of hiring individuals with positive outlooks and her intentional efforts to retain early career teachers. In

the most recent academic year (2023-2024), only one teacher, a veteran teacher with 27 years of classroom experience, left for financial opportunities related to retirement and she retained all her early career teachers. Briana articulated that “those teachers remaining” at her building is how she measures her success with early career teacher mentorship. The teachers that are leaving the profession, according to the account of Briana, are leaving for monetary incentives that are more lucrative than teacher salaries. Overall, she viewed that early career teachers who are committed to the profession, who completed teacher preparation programs with formal training and student teaching experience, and who “are in it for the right reasons” are staying in her building and that she is successful at retaining them.

Principals articulated that making the correct hiring decisions influenced the retention of early career teachers. Although mentorship and retention efforts are important, aside from the role of the principal, early career teachers leave the profession for personal reasons or monetary incentives. There is a certain need to hire hardworking individuals that want to do well and are in the profession because they want to teach and work with students. Hiring teachers that are positive and a right fit for the culture of the school also influence principal efforts to retain early career teachers. When principals make good hiring decisions, they are better able to build the capacity of their early career teachers.

### *Principal Connections to Job Satisfaction of Early Career Teachers*

Teacher job satisfaction is a concern of principals who participated in this qualitative study. They were aware of their role and the connection to job satisfaction and the retention of early career teachers. Participating principals directly identified themselves as impacting early career job satisfaction. Principals believe they contribute to early career teachers’ job satisfaction by providing clear expectations, administrative support and establishing a positive school

community.

**Clear expectations.** Three of the five principal participants discussed clear expectations as a way they contribute to early career teachers' job satisfaction. Heath articulated a need to set clear expectations so staff are aware of what they can and cannot do and what can and cannot be supported by the building principal. In his early years as a building principal, Heath did not speak to expectations beyond topics mandated by central office or board policies. He indicated that not doing so "was a big mistake." Providing training on procedures and setting expectations allows the principal an avenue to better support the early career teacher because they are aware that their actions or behaviors are supportable. Heath stated,

I think it's important for teachers to know that you've got their back for sure, but at the same time the caveat that comes with that in my mind is making sure that you've outlined your expectations very clearly. Just as a hypothetical, if you let someone know, 'I've got your back' and they misinterpret that to mean 'I've got your back no matter what,' that could be problematic on down the road when they've done something that's not defensible. So, my intentions these days are more along the lines of, I've got your back, let's make sure that whatever it is, it's something that can be defended. Let's not put ourselves in a position where, as an example, where you have basically trampled the Controversial Issues policy and gone and had a conversation in the classroom that you should have never had about a topic that you're not qualified to speak on. That's not something that I'm going to be able to defend you on. So, I've got your back as long as you are professionally on point.

Sarah discussed expectations in terms of modeling expectations with teachers in classrooms. She stated, "I'm modeling what I want, but I'm also making it pretty clear this is the expectation" and

cited examples about keeping the campus clean, addressing cell phones in class, and discussing “social media, professionalism, and personal use” at new teacher orientation. Chloe stated, “People want to know what the expectation is.” When she tours the building with new teachers, she doesn’t just give them a room number, but shows them what and where their duties are and discusses routines with them.

Brianna shared that PBIS (Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports) can be used to support early career teachers with professional expectations in a similar way that students are taught expectations. Principals need to provide behavior-specific praise and engage them in fun activities to support their knowledge base of the building. She described her practice of a yearly BINGO game that encourages veteran staff to interact with early career teachers to support their acclimation to the building and completing tasks they are already required to do. She creates a list of tasks her teachers are required to do and some optional activities as well. When teachers achieved a BINGO, they were entered into a drawing for fifty dollars of classroom supplies. Not only is this a resource for early career teachers, but the BINGO game related to task-specific expectations for early career teachers that was intended to prepare them for their first days in the building while helping them facilitate familiarization with the building. Briana also intended for the BINGO game to build collegiality with early career teachers and their more veteran colleagues. By recognizing staff, building in rewards, and creating specific praise, Briana also contributed to establishing a welcoming environment for her early career teachers.

Clarity of expectations from principals is a means of support for early career teacher. When principals provide early career teachers with expectations, a review of professional obligations or necessities, or policy related mandates they signal to teachers what behavior or actions they will and will not defend. They also signal to early career teachers that they value

expectations and prioritize teachers in their building meeting expectations. Without review of policy, routines, or expectations, principals cannot assume that teachers are aware of what is expected of them or what behaviors they can or cannot do. Principals provide clarity in numerous formats, but a review of policy and expectations and the modeling of the minimum responsibilities by the building principal contribute to the retention and support of early career teachers.

**Administrative support.** Of the five principals that participated in the semi-structured interviews, all five discussed administrative support as a way they contribute to early career teachers' job satisfaction. Heath discussed the need to communicate with early career teachers that he has "their back" if they are meeting expectations and making their decisions "defendable." For him, support is not easy to provide to early career teachers, if they blatantly violate policy, which is why he intentionally teaches staff policy and expectations so he can genuinely support early career teachers "that are professionally on point." Heath articulated that "being an active listener as opposed to an active responder" demonstrates support for the teacher outside of "fixing" problems is a means of providing early career teachers with administrative support. Sarah also discussed administrative support. She articulated support can look like her "covering a class...if a teacher is upset or needs to make a phone call," observing material and furniture needs and finding a way to meet those needs within her budgetary constraints or supporting teachers through student discipline problems.

Andrew described administrative support as his responsibility and that of his assistant principals when discussing the principal relationship to early career teachers' job satisfaction. He described support as assisting early career teachers through personal obstacles and providing professional development to early career teachers to help improve "instructional practices."

Chloe discussed administrative support in terms of early career teachers' job satisfaction in terms of the onboarding process and making the introduction to the building, including tours "personalized" and working to "ease" new teachers into the transition of the start to a school year. Briana explained that it is her goal to "provide every possible level of support that I can" for new teachers. Briana continued to describe her support by stating, "I am going to do everything possible, within my power to help a new teacher. If they come to me, if they ask for something, if I think it's a valid request, I'm going to make it happen." She articulated that she wants her new teachers to know the support available to them including mentors, the ability to participate in a new-teacher leadership academy, and her desire to support new teachers that might have student behavioral or academic concerns.

Administrative support is not something that is defined in absolutes. It can include a review of expectations, the principal communication that he or she is available to provide support emotionally, the principal is willing to cover a class, and that the principal will go above and beyond the contractual obligations of supervision. There are expectations held by early career teachers that principals will do "whatever is needed" to support them. This "whatever" does not look the same in every school, but is the notion that principals will go the "extra mile" to support and demonstrate care. It is the extra things, the small acts of kindness, the personal interactions that are not required, but over time become expected and set principals (and their schools) apart from their peers (and other schools). Principals work to make their teachers feel valued as professionals and on a personal level. Administrative support is also demonstrating a level of care and modeling that the principal will go above and beyond and does not ask others to handle situations that they are not willing to deal with. Ultimately it is these acts, and many others that the principal is willing to do and does without question or second thought, that

contribute to early career teachers' job satisfaction.

**Sense of Community.** A sense of community was identified by four of the five principal participants as a way principals contribute to early career teachers' job satisfaction. As Sarah stated, "We're a family here. And for a school this big to be able to say that is something special." She articulated that she models the sense of family with how staff view her as a head-of-family figure and she stated, "They see me genuinely love what I do." Andrew discussed his intentional decisions to plan events for his staff and their families during his first year as principal to build a sense of community. He stated, "We have multiple school dances where staff members in charge could bring their kids. We had a spring fling...with food stands...and rescue vehicles" for kids to explore.

Andrew further described his involvement with family cookouts prior to Friday night football games, in addition to the other staff events, where families are allowed to attend as contributing to a "school culture" where when "a situation happens with a staff member, you've got five, six, seven, eight staff members willing to assist and help them out right away." Briana articulated her role in facilitating a new teacher academy within her own school that provides a regular opportunity to meet and support new teachers. Additionally, she described a culture of support for new teachers with the staff members that are willing to "help" support new teachers "in their classes" as well as her willingness to bring other professionals that hold non-evaluative roles into the building to support early career teachers.

Opportunities to gather in both formal and informal settings contribute to the establishment of a school community that early career teachers want to be a part of. Principals are responsible for coordinating such events and finding ways to include and welcome early career teachers to these events and activities. While it is important for early career teachers to

attend, it is also important for veteran teachers to attend such events. Not only do veteran teachers serve as mentors, but they have general interactions with early career teachers and share a responsibility to welcome, include, and assist early career teachers. Even though events may seem simple or fun, they serve a large role in the establishment of an inclusive school community.

### *Principal Post-Pandemic Altered Practices*

The Covid-19 pandemic impacted the field of public education both during and following the pandemic. Like teaching changed, principals noted that their behaviors and actions changed during the pandemic. In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, principals altered their behaviors to maintaining consistency in their schools and establish (or maintain) in-person connections to their early career teachers.

**Predictable and transparent practices.** During their individual interviews, two of the five participating principals discussed the need for consistency in practices to retain-early career teachers following the Covid-19 pandemic. Andrew said, “I think that the entire process taught us to streamline practices. Consistency impacts people’s state. If they don’t feel the environment is consistent, they’re more likely to leave.” Andrew articulated that he attempts to provide teachers with consistency in his school. Chloe noted the impact that inconsistency, and “mixed messages” had on “newer teachers” during the Covid-19 pandemic. When recounting her experiences in education during the Covid-19 pandemic, she described the inconsistencies as “daily constant change.” She articulated that the inconsistency in practices during the Covid-19 pandemic influences decisions she makes now (post pandemic) to maintain stable, transparent, and consistent practices within her school to support early career teachers.

Being transparent and maintaining consistent practices contributes to stability and

attractiveness of the education profession. When describing inconsistent practices during the Covid-19 pandemic, the experience and constant changes were traumatic and emotionally draining to both principals and early career teachers. The impact of the decisions made during the pandemic contributed to a focus on consistency for early career teachers for principals who continued to serve as head principals post-pandemic. Part of consistency requires stability and transparency in practices, policies, initiatives, and principal actions.

**Personal interactions.** Three of the five principal participants described their value of in-person connections to retain early career teachers following the Covid-19 pandemic. Heath indicated his intention to “regularly visit classrooms” and his plans to bring back a tradition of “leaving notes and a snack...to be a bright spot in someone’s day.” Sarah discussed her value for in-person work following the Covid-19 pandemic. She stated, “There’s something to be said for collaboration.” When conducting professional development or holding staff meetings, she indicated that she has no intention to host those events “through a Zoom meeting.” Briana described her practice of stopping by each classroom. She goes “door to door” with a “breakfast coffee cart.” She implemented this practice during Covid-19 pandemic and has continued because teachers “need that little something extra to feel kind of supported.” Her response articulated the need to maintain personal interactions with her teaching staff, particularly early career teachers.

Personal interactions between the principal and the early career teacher can be planned, spontaneous, formal or informal. The goal is that principals find ways to interact with early career teachers in meaningful ways. These means of connecting should occur in person. Acts of kindness also contribute to personal connections through in person interactions. These do not need to be expensive or related to giving of gifts. Small notes, a cup of coffee, simply stopping

by a classroom to say “hello” to a staff member all have the potential to brighten the day for a teacher and create memories of positive interactions between the principal and early career teacher. Principals recognized that early career teachers need to have memories of positive interactions with their principals.

### *Administrative Capacity for Growth and Support of Early Career Teachers*

Principal participants associated their role with the growth and development of early career teachers within their building. They described the resources and actions they implemented to contribute to growth and overall early career teacher retention. Feedback for early career teachers and the administrative team were identified as additional factors of importance by principal participants related to early career teacher retention.

**Administrative team.** The administrative team was identified as a factor impacting early career teacher retention by two of the five principal participants. Heath discussed the need for sufficient administrative staff to retain early career teachers. He highlighted changes in the “complexity” of the job including additional demands from discipline and negative interactions with parents. He went on to state that his current administrative staff “is going to allow [him] to do a better job of focusing on all the things, but specifically...teacher retention.” Andrew stressed the importance of strong assistant principals to support early career teachers. He stated, “I’m very fortunate to have two assistant principals who are very good” and can assist with walkthroughs, observations, and “candid conversations.”

The principal is the face associated with retention efforts, but the role of the administrative team is also valuable for early career teacher retention. When principals are inundated with meetings, trainings, and implementing division level initiatives, there is a reliance on other administrators, including assistant principals and deans of students, to navigate

discipline issues or day-to-day issues to support the early career teacher. Additionally, by having an adequate number of administrators to handle the day-to-day discipline or issues that arise, principals are available to devote more time to support early career teachers through mentorship, feedback, or other acts of support including classroom visits. However, principals do not need to be the primary individual tasked with supporting early career teachers. Diverse perspectives from other administrators conducting classroom visits or interacting with early career teachers on a regular basis contributes to the capacity of the administrative team to have candid conversations with early career teachers that can lead to reflection and growth.

**Feedback.** The type of feedback early career teachers receive from administration was identified by three of the five principal participants as a principal behavior impacting early career teacher retention. Heath discussed a need to provide or share with early career teachers that the demands of the job and that what they “are doing is an incredibly tall order...particularly for new teachers.” Sarah discussed feedback in terms of “conversations.” She stated, “It’s the conversations. It’s the personal conversations, giving them the feedback.” Andrew discussed feedback in terms of “assisting them through walkthroughs and observations” in addition to “candid conversations,” Andrew asserted that honest feedback toward early career teachers and their performance is impactful. He stated,

One thing I’ve learned in our position is that people want to have feedback. They want to hear it. They want to know because they’re trying to do a good job. And they get to the point where they truly care about the students they have in their classrooms.

For this reason, he expressed that it is important that administrators are willing to have conversations centered on feedback and that they prioritize time in the classroom so that they can provide quality feedback.

Principals view feedback as an essential component or action related to the retention of early career teachers. Feedback can be specific and actionable through candid conversations, or it can be generalized to multiple early career teachers regarding difficulties of the job. The purpose of feedback is to contribute to growth, to inform, and to build a sense of confidence through a shared experience. For example, if a principal, such as Heath, is sharing that teaching is a “tall order” and that there is a lot demanded of early career teachers, this might contribute to early career teachers feeling like they have a shared experience, that they are doing well, and that their feelings are valid and normal.

### *Early Career Teachers Value Building Bonds*

Early career teachers have a desire to form relationships or bonds within the buildings they work. These bonds or relationships are both personal and professional. The role of the principal is to establish or facilitate the development of relationships for the building of professional and personal bonds within the school setting. Secondary early career teacher identified personal connection, communication, and trust as ways the building principal directly influences their decisions to remain at their current schools.

**Personal connection.** Out of the eight early career teacher participants, three discussed personal connection as a reason they remained in their current teaching position. Carter identified how his principal connected with him through a mutual interest in football and how football and his experience coaching drove feedback and conversations. Luke discussed personal connections in terms of the relationships the principal works to build. He expressed that the principals “care about you. You’re not just there to do the job. They really want to be a part of your life and help you grow as a person and as an educator.” He continued to explain the role of the principal in establishing personal connection by describing conversations that are “about our lives outside of

the school” and by articulating “the way he interacts with us makes us feel like they understand” what new teachers are going through and “that we are important. That’s where the value comes from.”

Emma shared a similar sentiment about her principal establishing personal connections with teachers outside of the school. She stated,

He knows that family is important and so when it comes to family matters, it’s always your family first and then your relationships with your students next....Like whenever my son is sick, he’s always making sure, like he’ll check, ‘hey how is [your son] doing better? Is he doing okay? What do you need from me?’

These personal connections of not only remembering the name of his son but following up with the teacher to see how his son was recovering made the teacher feel valued and cared for as a person rather than an employee. Jay described the principal’s reaction to a personal need or situation that made him feel valued. His mother was in hospice care. When the teacher communicated with the principal that he “didn’t think it was going to be much longer,” the principal covered the class, and informed the teacher “don’t worry about it here. We’ll take care of it.” When the teacher returned to work, the principal made multiple drop-ins to the classroom to check on the teacher. To the teacher, this personal connection and understanding made him feel like he was more than a spot to be filled.

Early career teachers want to build relationships with their principals. They have a desire to feel like they are more than just an employee. When principals take a personal interest in the interests of their early career teachers, their family members, or what is going on in their personal life, early career teachers feel like principals are working to build a relationship beyond a contractual relationship. Small conversations and interactions that are not about a student, the

content taught, or whatever is going on in the classroom contributes to relationship building.

**Communication.** Communication practices from the principal were identified by five of the eight early career teacher participants as influencing their decision to remain in their current teaching position. Luke described principal communication as “constant.” Harper described communication in terms of “personalized advice” on “how to handle situation” specific to her role in the building. Carter provided more examples of principal communication including principal availability to answer questions, provide resources, or offer feedback. Carter discussed that he is “feedback driven.” When describing how he uses feedback from his principal, Carter stated,

tell me what I’m doing wrong, or what needs improvement, or what I’m doing right, so I can continue doing it right. That goes a really long way, and the specific feedback throughout the last few years have been really helpful in identifying what I’m doing well, what could be better, and what I’m improving on.

Shannon described communication in terms of the principal “having clear expectations” and how helpful that is. Shannon also described the role of the principal in providing constructive feedback. Shannon stated, “They give really great feedback and advice on how to handle a situation maybe differently next time. They never say, ‘you’re doing it wrong,’ they just say, ‘Hey, maybe this might be a better approach.’” Like Shannon, Jay describes how his principal provided support through communication practices. He discussed that the principal “is willing to sit there and explain something...if you don’t know how to do it or if you don’t understand it....There’s a lot of things you just don’t understand or don’t know.” Jay continued to describe how he felt comfortable and willing to ask his principal questions because he knew that his questions would be answered and prioritized.

Communication from principals to the early career teachers needs to not just be constant or consistent, but actionable. Early career teachers value when principals provide positive commentary or advice, but also challenge them on ways they can improve with specific recommendations about next steps. When early career teachers feel that their principals will build their confidence by telling them what they are doing well and pair their feedback with actionable steps to that lead to better performance or the ability to make different decisions in the future, early career teachers are more likely to engage in conversations with their principals. Additionally, early career teachers are more willing to ask for help when they need it.

**Trust.** Of the eight early career-teacher participants, four discussed professional trust as a way principals influence their decision to retain their current teaching positions. June described professional trust in terms of her principal's response to issues that she brings to his attention. "If I go there with a major concern or something really exciting...I just want him to like, just listen and hear me out and make sure that they know my reasons and concerns are justified." She described her experience with former managers being closed minded and saying "no" on instinct. June valued her principal's open mindedness and willingness to listen. She described how his practices of listening showed her that he trusts her professionally. June also described trust in terms of "the open-door policy. She stated, "There's nothing I can't go to him. He's approachable." Like June, Harper discussed trust in terms of the trust she placed in her principal to hear her concerns and address them. Harper stated, "I'm not going to make a safety recommendation if it's not something that has legitimate documentation with it. But I want to know that if I do, it's taken seriously." Harper articulated that her principal hears her concerns, addresses them, and engages her in conversations related to her recommendations.

Faith and Shannon discussed trust in terms of the principal trusting their professional

decisions within the classroom setting. Faith discussed trust by stating, “You want to be in an environment where you’re trusted, and you know that people actually value the work that you do.” Her principal paying compliments and supporting her decisions to deal with student issues within the classroom demonstrated her principal’s trust in her. Shannon shared a similar sentiment that she valued when her principal told her that she has “control over [her] classroom” when she described her principal’s response to a student discipline event that resulted in removing a student from the classroom for disruptive behavior. By telling her that she had control over her classroom, her principal articulated trust in her professional decisions.

Early career teachers associate principal actions and decisions with trust in them as professionals. Small acts of discipline support to listening to questions or concerns builds trust between the principal and early career teachers. Principal actions and verbal expressions of support for decisions made by the early career teacher serve as symbols of trust for early career teachers. The “open door policy” contributes to feelings of trust or trust building because principals are approachable and available for early career teachers to ask their questions, express concerns, or ask advice. The continued act of teachers feeling comfortable reporting concerns to their principals and asking for advice that is actionable from their principals serves as a model of reciprocal trust. Principals trust teachers to approach them with concerns or issues and when advice is needed and early career teachers trust principals to provide them with actions and advice that will ultimately support them and contribute to their growth in a professional capacity.

### *Measuring Success through Mentorship, Community and Resources*

Principals and early career teacher participants within this qualitative study identified numerous initiatives or practices implemented with the intention of improving or addressing the retention of early career teachers. They were able to not just identify the behavior or practice but

provided examples of these initiatives based on their experiences. All early career teacher participants articulated that they viewed their principals as successful with early career teacher retention initiatives implemented in the building where they were currently working. Early career teachers measure the effectiveness of their principals' early career teacher retention initiatives by their experiences with their mentor/mentorship program, their sense of belonging to their school community, and the availability of resources.

**Mentorship.** Mentorship was discussed by six of the eight early career teacher participants during their individual semi-structured interviews in relation to success of early career teacher retention efforts implemented by the building principal. June explained that she was “offered a lot of trainings... We have the teacher trainings at the beginning of the year. And then we were assigned a mentor which is super helpful.” In June’s words, this was beneficial in applying new information or getting assistance “with the housekeeping things that every teacher kind of needs to know but we don’t always come in with that intuitive knowledge.” June also articulated that her mentor helped with classroom management and got her involved in clubs and coaching, contributing to her sense of belonging within the school community and instilling a feeling that she was in an “atmosphere where you feel involved.”

Faith also described that she was assigned a mentor which she found helpful but articulated that she wished she would have gone “through all the new teacher processes” that she missed at the beginning of the year because she was hired late. Similarly, Luke and Emma both articulated that they were assigned a mentor during their first year in the classroom. Luke also articulated that she was aware this practice was an embedded practice at her school by stating, “I know all new teachers get a mentor teacher to help support them for the first year and they can go to that mentor for anything whether it’s help with content or a question about procedures.”

Jay was provided a mentor that also served as a resource for classroom management and content. Jay also described informal mentors through department chair that shared all content resources through a digital folder with him. Jay also articulated how supported he felt not having to “start from scratch.” Harper described how her mentor was changed during her second year in the building which was a better personality fit and contributed to better professional collaboration.

Early career teachers articulated the personal and professional relationship needs of the mentor-mentee relationships. Principals need to select teachers that have the capacity to support early career teachers with the professional requirements or needs within the building, but also have the capacity to support early career teachers on a personal level. Personality is important in that when mentors and mentees are compatible in personality, the mentee is likely to ask the mentor teacher questions. Additionally, mentors need to use their role to find meaningful ways to integrate early career teachers into involvement in the school outside of their individual classrooms.

**Community.** Of the eight early career teacher participants, two discussed the importance of feeling like they belong to their school community in relation to the success of their principals’ early career teacher retention efforts. Shannon described her induction to teaching as supportive and making her feel as though she belonged to her school community. Shannon stated,

Here at my school, they had a lunch for the new teachers. So, you got to sit down with the principal and get a tour of the building. She showed me my classroom and made a point to pop in the first couple of days. I really enjoyed that. I also got a handwritten note from the principal on my first day of school that I still have. It was just really meaningful to have that acknowledgement on my first day.

She continued to describe this process as demonstrating “how happy they were to have me here.”

Like Shannon, Luke described her principal’s efforts to “do more staff things” that build a sense of community. Luke stated, “We’ve done a lot more staff stuff. Not just [professional development], but more like fun thing. Like lunches and activities.” Luke described these activities as being intentionally designed by the principal. Luke stated,

I’ve seen our calendar this year. They want to include more of that stuff so that we’re getting together as a whole staff and interacting with other teachers that we may not see during the day or during the school year.

The integration of early career teachers into the school community starts early and begins with the actions of the building principal. Early career teachers value the opportunity to talk and interact with the principal in informal ways such as shared meals. Additionally, planning fun activities for all staff to participate in contributes to early career teachers interacting with veteran teachers and teachers outside of their immediate classroom area or department when they otherwise would not have had the opportunity. Not everything that is planned for staff members needs to be academic related or support instruction. Meals, events, and activities also provide opportunities for early career teachers to bond with other teachers that can be added to their system of support.

**Resources.** Of the eight early career teacher participants, six discussed their appreciation for resources either directly or indirectly resulting from principal actions. June, Shannon, and Luke discussed their appreciation for resources provided by the principal during new teacher orientation or beginning of the year trainings. June, Faith, Luke, Emma, and Jay articulated their appreciation for content, procedural or classroom management resources provided to them by their mentors. If mentorship programs were not available to the early career teachers, these

resources or assistance from experienced teachers might not have been provided. Harper discussed her appreciation of resources directly from the principal by stating,

She has the ability to give me the resources or help that I need. And I don't think that [they view] me as an exception. I think that she makes that a priority for all staff in the building. We know if we need something, typically, she's able to figure out how to make it happen...whether that's through teacher grant stuff, or PTO or community opportunities...or talking to people at Central.

Early career teachers expect their principals to acquire the resources that they need to be successful in the classroom. These resources can be equipment, personnel, trainings, or materials. They recognize that the principal is the primary individual tasked with allocating or acquiring resources. When principals can provide early career teachers with resources that address their needs, early career teachers view their retention efforts as more successful.

### *Early Career Teachers Navigate Stay Decisions*

Early career teachers' decisions to stay or leave their current school or the teaching profession are influenced by the administrative team and external factors. All eight early career teacher participants articulated that they did not have an intention of leaving the teaching profession. They articulated that their principals have not done anything for them to consider leaving the teaching profession or moving to other schools. However, participants did describe external factors that could influence their decision to remain in the profession. They also articulated the role the administrative team, including assistant principals, has on their decisions to stay.

**Administrative team.** Six early career teacher participants described the role of the administrative team in their decision to remain at or leave their current school. Carter described

the value he feels when his voice is heard by administration. June articulated that she values her administrative team being visible and available to talk. She stated, “They’re never too busy to just talk to us or give us advise or help us navigate through something that we’re not sure how to do.” Faith discussed the value she placed on her relationships with her administrative team and how they contributed to her decision to stay. She stated, “If I didn’t have the team that I have, I probably would not have been here.” Shannon discussed the support she felt with her administrative team during her first year by stating, “My first year was incredibly challenging, but I never felt alone. And I felt like if I went and talked to one of the principals that they were listening to me, and that it felt good to be heard.” Like Faith, Emma stated, “Having the administration that we’ve had has supported me enough to stay in it.”

Unlike Carter, June, Faith, Shannon, and Emma, Harper described how her “assistant principals” were “incredibly ineffective at handling issues with...repeat offender kids” when asked about the role of the principal in her decision to leave her current school. She specifically mentioned that her principal is effective, but noted ineffectiveness of assistant principals as a contributing factor for her wanting to leave the classroom even though she intends to stay in public education profession.

Early career teachers expressed a need to be able to approach multiple administrators in their building. When the principal is busy or unavailable, early career teachers recognized the role of the assistant principals (or other administrators) in supporting their needs or addressing immediate issues. Their approachability and availability are just as important as that of the principal. They also serve in a capacity that allows them to grow, encourage, or support the needs of early career teachers and at the same time build their confidence.

**External factors.** External factors discussed by early career teacher participants

impacting their decision to remain in the profession or at their current schools include time, proximity of their school to their home, and demands of the profession. Four of the early career teacher participants (June, Shannon, Luke, and Emma) identified themselves as career switchers during their individual semi-structured interviews. These four participants explained that they have not and were not considering leaving the teaching profession or their current school. Carter indicated time as a factor influencing his decision to stay in the teaching profession. He stated, “I’m going into my third year, and I told myself I would always, no matter what, give it at least five to 10 years before I began to reevaluate.” Jay articulated that being closer to home could influence his decision to move to another school but clarified that he does not have an intention of leaving the profession or the school division. He enjoys being on the same schedule as his young children but does have a desire to “work closer to home” if he could “stay in the county.” Harper described the additional demands placed on teachers including mandates resulting from the Virginia Literacy Act and the increase in the “small day-to-day things or programs to incorporate or check boxes that seem to be exponentially growing” as influencing her decision to leave the classroom as a teacher and find another position in a supervisory role or support role in public education.

Early career teachers acknowledged that there are factors outside of the role of the principal that could contribute to their decisions to move to another school or move to exit the teaching profession. The growing demands of the job make the field of education seem less attractive to early careers than it was in previous decades. They recognized that more demands are being added to their plate without the removal of past initiatives. Additionally, there are those that could be motivated to relocate to schools closer to home. If their salary would be the same or similar removing commute time, even though they value their principals and feel valued by their

principals, early career teachers could be persuaded to leave their school. There is also the notion that some early career teachers are “testing” or “trying out” the profession. If they are not having a satisfactory experience at the end of their predetermined time they committed to “try” the profession, early career teachers might leave the profession; move to another school; or take a position in a different school division.

### *Early Career Teachers and the Value of Personal Connection*

Early career teachers’ decisions to remain at their current school are influenced by their principals’ approachability, visibility, and availability to cultivate personal relationships. Approachability, visibility, and availability are principal actions or practices that contribute to early career teachers developing personal connections to their principal. It is important that early career teachers are not just available, approachable, or visible for early career teachers, but that early career teachers see this behavior or these actions as established norms for all staff members and students.

**Approachability.** Three of the eight participating early career teachers cited their principal’s approachability as a way their principals influenced their decision to stay in their current school. June discussed her feeling comfortable approaching her principal with instructional and material needs. Faith discussed her easiness with approaching her principal with student situations. Her principal built her confidence through complements about her handling of past discipline situations so when she needs to discuss something she feels comfortable doing so because “she’s always had my back in situations.” Luke articulated his ability to approach his principal in conversation at the start of the school day or in the hallway.

It is important that early career teachers see their principals as approachable. This approachability should be modeled in their interactions with other staff members and students

within the building. If early career teachers notice that others are likely to go to the principal with questions, concerns, or needs, they are more likely to feel comfortable approaching the principal with their own questions, concerns or needs. This approachability can be in informal settings such as hallways or behind closed doors through office visits.

**Visibility.** Five of the eight participating early career teachers cited their principal's visibility influenced their decision to remain in their current school. June discussed principal visibility in terms of responsiveness. She stated, "They're always very, very fast to respond to all of my messages, and let me know that I'm supportive. They also just stop in and say, 'Hey, great job!' or 'I really like what you did here.'" Faith described principal visibility as her principal "saying, 'Hey' in the hallway and doing funny things with the teachers and just kind of building that school community." Luke shared a similar sentiment about the building principal and stated, "He just checks in and makes sure I'm doing alright." Emma described the principal's frequent five-minute walkthroughs in the classroom. Emma appreciated walkthroughs and stated, "I like how they walk in the classroom periodically to make sure everyone's doing okay." Harper also articulated her appreciation for her principal's visibility. She said,

I frequently see her in the hallways checking in on kids, checking in on teachers in the classroom, talking with everyone in the building. So, I mean, first visibility is huge because I feel like that's not super common for head principals to be as visible...But she frequently checks in. She's present at all staff meetings and data meeting.

Visibility of the principal is important to early career teachers developing personal connections with their principals. Principal visibility in the hallways or classrooms where there is nonevaluative conversations taking place contributes to early career teachers feeling valued and connected to their principal. Like approachability, early career teachers value when the principal

is visible to them, but also to other students and staff. If the principal is saying that being in the hallway or attendance at faculty or data meetings is important, when the principal is visible at those meetings or is regularly in the hallway to support teachers and students, early career teachers place value on those meetings or actions.

**Relationship cultivation.** Six of the eight participating early career teachers cited their principal's ability to cultivate relationships influenced their decision to stay in their current school. Carter and Luke both articulated the importance they placed on the principal developing a relationship with him outside of a staff member. Carter shared that his principal is an effective listener. Carter stated, "He listens to me as a person and talks about my interests as a person, not just work. For example...I do railroad photography and I made a calendar. He bought one of the calendars for his office." This act demonstrated the principal's effort to make a personal connection to his staff member. Faith discussed the impact of principal actions and participating in fun events contributes to making her "feel like family." She continued to describe her relationship desires for a principal as a "leader who actually listens and cares for people, like that makes a huge difference." Shannon discussed the value she places on her principal's relationship development with students. She explained that her principal "cares about the students and you see that, and you feel that, and the students see that and feel that."

Like Shannon, Emma described the principal's relationships with students as influencing their decision to remain in their current position. Emma described her principal's regular interactions with students and the personal connection he develops with students. "He says their names in the hallway. Says, 'How are you?' He always has some personal question for a student." Harper expressed her admiration for her principal's ability to cultivate relationships with students and staff. She described her principal as having

an amazing memory. So, I started working for her like a year ago and on the first day of school, I mentioned I had moved because she asked how my summer was and I was like, oh yeah, you know, I bought a house. And then months later, she said, ‘Oh, how was your Thanksgiving break?’ And I was like, oh, it was great. I actually hosted. And she said, ‘In your new house.’ I’m like you have one hundred staff in the building. I don’t know how you remember all of that.

Harper articulated a similar sentiment when her principal remembered that she got married. She articulated that her principal remembers personal details about all staff members and that contributes to her feeling like she is a part of the team. Harper also described that her principal makes similar connections to all the students within the building.

Early career teachers expressed the need to feel valued as a person beyond their status as a new teacher. Simple acts including the principal asking questions about the goings on of their early career teachers’ personal lives and remembering those conversations are considered acts of relationship cultivation. The same is true when principals remember the interests or hobbies of their early career teachers. Early career teachers need to see that their principals can build relationships with them, other teachers in the building, and their students. When early career teachers notice that the principal takes in interest in the lives of their students and other staff members, they share information about themselves that contributes to relationship cultivation. When principals engage in dialogue with early career teachers that demonstrates care and personal connection, early career teachers notice and remember that conversation as a positive interaction.

### *Satisfaction through Stability and Support*

Early career teacher participants were able to articulate principal actions or behaviors that

contribute to their job satisfaction. They used their experiences within their current buildings to provide examples of their current principals' behaviors or practices. All teacher participants associated the role of the building principal with their job satisfaction. Consistency in expectations set by the principal and availability of the building principal influence early career teachers' job satisfaction.

**Consistency.** Of the eight participating early career teachers, three discussed the value of consistency in relation to job satisfaction. Carter shared that he values consistency in terms of the administrative team. He stated, "You can tell that [the principal] communicated with them and that they are extensions of him in a way. It's clear cut what the rules are, clear cut what consequences are for students." Shannon discussed consistency in terms of principal actions. She explained that her principal was visible in the hallway, high-fiving students, and encouraging them. She valued this daily routine and the consistent modeling of expectations from her principal. Harper also discussed consistency in terms of the organization and professionalism. Harper articulated that the principal

created this culture of professionalism and just very organized operations. It means that nothing ever really falls through the cracks. It is always very clear to me what is expected. There's no gray area where I don't really know what the principal wants from me.

When dealing with a lot of variety in the classroom, organization and professionalism provided a consistent environment and expectations for Harper that she valued.

Early career teachers expressed that they want to know what their principal expects of them in the classroom, what the rules are, and how they will be enforced. When early career teachers know what is expected of them, they can act in accordance with expectations.

Additionally, while consistency needs to be expressed to early career teachers verbally or in writing, expectations need to be modeled by the principal. If principals express that they value professionalism, organization, or a presence in the hallway by staff members, principals need to find ways to model and demonstrate these values to early career teachers, staff members and students.

**Availability:** Of the eight participating early career teachers, five discussed principal availability in relation to job satisfaction. Carter articulated that she valued her principal's responsiveness and open-door policy. I don't think everybody always understands just how important that is in your overall job satisfaction, to know that your boss essentially is always there to listen, to help guide you, to help you manage through all the paperwork that you need help with, or just to follow up on something that you've had an issue with. Faith also discussed the need for availability to discuss personal concerns with the principal and know that she will be encouraged. Faith discussed the principal as a member of her "support system." Luke also discussed availability in terms of his principal's availability to meet with him regarding discussions being made about schedules for the following year. He appreciated not just the availability, but that his principal taking time to help him feel like he was a part of the decision making. Emma shared that the principal is regularly available to talk to her. Emma stated, "I don't feel like a burden...I don't feel like it's an inconvenience when I need to talk to him."

Although principals within this qualitative study assigned early career teachers mentors to support them professionally, early career teachers view their principals as mentors and associate their availability with their job satisfaction. There were scenarios shared by early career teachers about issues that were brought to their principals that could have been addressed by the

mentor. An example of this is related to paperwork questions. There is an element of the principal being available to help and willing to help, even when those questions could be addressed at a lower level that early career teachers valued. This could be related to face-to-face time or wanting the principals' willingness to have a positive interaction with the early career teacher that was initiated by the early career teacher.

### *Adapting to the Applicant Shortage*

Hiring and retaining early career teachers is a responsibility of the building principal. Principal participants within the participating school division described their current hiring practices. They noted that there are fewer applicants applying to teaching vacancies and that they work to recruit quality teachers into their buildings. Principals indicated that experiencing an increase in vacant teaching positions with fewer applicants influences their hiring practices and onboarding of early career teachers within their buildings.

**Selling behaviors.** Three of the five principals discussed hiring practices for early career teachers during their individual semi-structured interviews. Andrew discussed hiring in terms of an increase in the number of vacancies within his building and fewer candidates applying to positions. He noted that he works with his administrative team to hire the most qualified candidate that is also a "good fit" for the school. Heath and Chloe discussed hiring practices in terms of their efforts to recruit early career teachers. Heath described the difficulty he experienced in the hiring practice and stated,

I think it is more difficult for quality candidates to be available. Fewer folks are interested in being in this professional field per my experiences. I'm speaking based on my experiences with the hiring process. I'm having to sell [my school] as opposed to the candidate having to sell him or herself.

Andrew then discussed the need to find mentors that can appropriately support early career teachers. Like Andrew, Chloe discussed her perception of an increase in the number of vacancies within her building and difficulty finding qualified candidates. Chloe articulated her desire to hire candidates that are quality. She stated,

We have to do more than ever before, because there are not going to be candidates out there to replace people. So, we have to work hard to get teachers. Not only get them but keep them. I feel like this year, and again I had more open positions than what I normally have had. But again, I have spent time selling [my school].

Chloe further described her efforts at selling her school by recounting the culture, the positivity, as well as the geographic location. She also articulated that “you’ve got to put your money where your mouth is once they get here and that’s exhausting at times.”

The act of “selling” a school versus candidates persuading principals to hire them is important to pay attention to. It demonstrates that schools are finding it more difficult to find quality staff that are the right “fit” for the position. Attracting potential teachers to working in a school setting is about more than just the school. It is about the culture that the principal establishes, the practices in place, and the personal connections that are formed. Principals need to be able to sell or discuss these elements with potential early career teachers during the interview process to attract candidates to the school they are “selling.” By finding or identifying the ways they are selling or marketing their school, principals are more aware of what they need to focus on to retain early career teachers once they have onboarded them.

### *Outlier Experiences of Participants*

My thematic analysis based on hermeneutics focused on shared experiences of participants in order for a theme to be discussed in this dissertation. However, individual voices

that shared unique experiences that were not shared or discussed explicitly or implicitly by other participants are not less valuable. To demonstrate a value for unique experiences, topics of discussion relevant to early career teacher retention that were shared by individual participants are outlined below.

**Branding contributes to early career teacher identity.** Briana discussed her efforts to provide her staff with a goody bag at the beginning of the year with extra care and attention being paid to early career teacher good bags. Everything her staff get is “school” oriented. They receive t-shirts, swag, classroom supplies, decals, and a professional development book to assist them in building their professional development libraries. She wanted her early career teachers to feel welcome and that they were part of the team. From the first time an early career teacher steps foot into her building, branding contributes to their identity as a [specific school] teacher.

**Flexibility.** Flexibility regarding policy and typical practice may be needed to support and retain early career teachers. Chloe shared a story related to an early career teacher in her building that was driving thirty minutes to the building each day as a single parent, and she was struggling to afford after school care. The child attended a nearby daycare, so this principal agreed to a creative solution where another teacher used part of her planning period to go retrieve the child from daycare (as well as her own child from the elementary school) and watched both children until the end of the school day. This was something that could facilitate the early career teachers’ (or multiple teachers’) childcare needs during the “in between time” from elementary dismissal to secondary dismissal. At the same time, the principal was able to retain a quality teacher that would have quit to find other childcare solutions.

My perception of Chloe’s experience with flexibility indicates an awareness of the need to implement creative solutions to support early career teachers regarding issues with work

hours. Childcare, especially for single parents, can be financially burdensome. Chloe recognized that allowing her teachers to use planning time to arrange childcare supervision was the decision that would allow her to retain a quality teacher in her building and alleviate a financial burden. While Chloe may not have needed to implement these solutions during previous years as a building principal, the current trends related to vacancies and fewer job applications made her think creatively to support early career teacher retention.

**Involvement in decisions.** Luke shared an example about how the building principal made him feel involved in a decision that impacted his daily schedule. At the end of the previous school year, the administrative team was looking to determine how to assign teachers to classes based on their experience and qualifications. Rather than assigning him to a class, the principal approached Luke with the idea prior to assigning any role. The principal then invited Luke to his office to have a conversation about it. He stated, “We talked about the move. We talked about how I can use my intelligence and the curriculum to help prepare kids” to get into college. Luke articulated that his principal “involved” him “in the decision. He didn’t just force a grade level move.”

My perception of Luke’s experience with decision making indicates that his voice has value. When his principal involved him in the decision and conversations prior to a decision being made, Luke felt heard and that his principal truly wanted to know his thoughts related to potential teaching assignments. When Luke experienced this dialogue and involvement in decision making with his principal, he may have felt like his principal would engage him in other conversations or future conversations related to decision making for his teaching assignments or events or decisions that might be important or impactful for his students.

**Reputation of the principal.** Harper discussed the importance of her principal’s

reputation. When she accepted employment at her current school, Harper articulated that she did so because of her principal's positive reputation. She specifically stated, "It's because I interviewed with her, and I knew I wanted to work with that woman." She discussed that she valued the opinion of her colleagues and the way her colleagues perceive her principal's reputation. When describing the opinion of her colleagues, she stated, "So many people that have worked with my principal have said they don't want to work with any other principal. They stay in the building because of her." Prior to working in her school, she valued the way people discussed her principal and continued to place a value on the way her colleagues discuss her principal indicating that reputation is important to her.

My perception of Harper's value of her principal's reputation is that she wants to work for someone who is widely respected and held in esteem by others. She also shared that this was not her experience with a former principal from another school division that did not have a positive reputation and was not widely respected by peers. She had a negative experience with reputation to compare with her current principal's reputation. When Harper described how others viewed her current principal, she respected those peers' and colleagues' opinions. This positive perception of the principal as a person and a professional may be a contributing factor to the retention of early career teachers.

### **The Meaning of It All**

There is a highly personal component to early career teacher retention and the role of the building principal. Principals need to have a strong understanding of the needs of early career teachers and the capacity of their staff to support early career teachers, especially due to the individualized nature and interrelatedness of factors impacting early career teacher retention (du Plessis et al., 2019). The daily interactions between early career teachers and principals provide

not only opportunities for growth and confidence building but also opportunities to cement solid relationship based on trust, personal connection and respect. For early career teacher retention efforts and initiatives to be successful in terms of early career teachers deciding to remain in their current positions, principals need to make intentional decisions to model behavior, plan opportunities for interactions, and communicate expectations and feedback to early career teachers in a way that builds confidence and contributes to growth.

My interpretation of this is that the principal is the touchstone for teacher job satisfaction, structure, and relationship development. By understanding the needs of early career teachers transitioning into the profession, their personal leadership strengths, and the mentorship capacity of veteran staff members within their buildings, principals can facilitate relationship development and personal growth. When principals are aware of teachers needing additional in person support or resources, they can adjust resource allocations, personal interactions, and be selective of formal and informal mentors available to the early career teacher. Principals are also responsible for being intentional in their interactions with early career teachers that include feedback directed toward growth. Commentary and critical conversations need to occur in a manner that is positive, contributes to increased confidence, and contributes toward professional growth and the acquisition of new skills. For the intentionality of interactions to be successful, principals need to find ways to engage with teachers in their formal role as a building leader while still providing informal opportunities for building trust and personal connections. Principals need to develop consistent practices where they communicate and model expectations and incorporate feedback for early career teachers on their progress or current level of meeting expectations. Principals also need to develop and intentionally plan opportunities for early career teachers to interact with other early career teachers, students, colleagues, staff, parents, and other

stakeholders to build profession knowledge and professional relationships. Opportunities for professional interaction build professional understanding, resources, and strengthen the early career teachers' connection to the school community.

Principals might also consider opportunities for self-assessment or self-reflection on their ability to build trust amongst their staff and trust between themselves and their early career teachers. It is my interpretation that principals who prioritize trust in their professional relationships and who trust their teachers, including early career teachers, to make professional decisions are more likely to retain quality teachers within their building. Consistent actions by the principal paired with personal relationship development can contribute to early career teachers developing connections to the school leader and the school community in which they work. Consistent actions by the principals also contribute to early career teachers developing trust in school leadership to them, other employees, and students within their school setting.

While the role of the principal is associated by principals and early career teachers with creating a culture where teachers feel accepted and belong, their behaviors model the ways to do that with their staff and serve as a visual signal of what is important to early career teachers, students, and other staff. Early career teachers also need to feel comfortable around their principal and with going to their principal with concerns. This is developed through principals' intentional actions to form relationships with their teachers that go beyond the professional requirements that include verbalizing and modeling approachability, visibility, and availability to navigate and respond to teacher concerns.

My interpretation of this is that principals form the infrastructure for an inclusive and welcoming school culture that values early career teachers. Principals need to have a strong understanding of their current school culture as well as the direction that they are wanting to take

their school culture to support early career teachers. School culture is not established overnight but is the summation of multiple actions and consistent practices. The principal modeling behavior is a signal of principal priorities. These signals can be in the acts that make the principal appear approachable to early career teachers, students, and veteran staff members. These signals can be in the form of principal visibility at meetings, initiatives, times or interactions that he or she prioritizes. These signals can take shape in the various ways the principal makes himself or herself available for support throughout the day. When the principal finds ways to interact with, engage, and include early career teachers in the building, the principal is contributing to a sense of belonging for the early career teacher and a signal to staff members that acceptance and inclusion are important. Therefore, when the staff “as a whole” contribute and find ways to include early career teachers within the building, the principal is successful at establishing a welcoming school culture based on acceptance and inclusion. It is my interpretation that early career teachers are more likely to remain in schools where they feel supported, welcomed, and accepted by the principal and school staff.

Principals provide multiple layers or forms of support to early career teachers that contribute to their decision to retain their current teaching positions. There is the allocation of resources, both personnel and material, that demonstrate support. Verbalizing trust in the decisions made by early career teachers is a principal support. Principals are also available and ready to address teacher concerns and provide solutions to problems in a nonpunitive way. Furthermore, principals provide feedback in a positive way through critical conversations and informal settings that contributes to the professional growth of their early career teachers.

My interpretation of this is that resource and support provided by the principal sets the groundwork for a relationship based on respect, teacher job satisfaction, and a positive

perception of the role of the building principal. Early career teachers want to feel supported by the principal in terms of him or her addressing concerns and needs. This can be done with allocation of resources, providing needed materials, or adding additional staff to a classroom to support behavioral or academic needs. Support can also be the principal providing guidance and direction when early career teachers present the principal with questions, concerns, or are seeking specific improvement or growth related to their individual goals. When principals address the needs of teachers, fulfill their material requests, provide support where they identify a need, listen to their concerns, and advocate for the needs of their early career teachers whether they are successful or not, early career teachers feel valued, respected, and trusted in their professional capacity.

Additionally, when principal take time to provide meaningful feedback that is constructive and growth oriented, early career teachers recognize that principals want them to experience success in their roles. Feedback can occur in a variety of manners including informal conversations in the hallway, the sharing of resources, professional guidance or advice, or specific and actionable feedback from observations. The principal plays a critical role in balancing this feedback in that he or she must contribute to the professional growth of early career teachers by identifying areas of improvement in a manner that is not overly critical and focuses on next steps. When providing this feedback that principal also needs to maintain a positive approach so that the feedback provided does not hurt the confidence of a teacher that is still in the foundational years of shaping their professional knowledge.

Early career teachers and principals both value the leadership as essential to supporting early career teacher retention. Principals can devote more time to supporting early career teachers when they have the correct quantity and quality administrators. Additionally, early

career teachers view other administrators in the building as a resource and extension of the building principal. They are aware that they can approach assistant principals for questions, concerns, and support when the principal is not available or in place of the building principal. Furthermore, the individuals serving in this role also serve in capacity that promotes their contribution to mentorship and support of teachers.

I interpreted the statements made about the administrative team to mean that principals and early career teachers view other administrators in the building as essential to teacher support and relationship building. When principals are not available or when there is a need to delegate, assistant principals or deans of students can provide early career teachers with similar feedback that can build confidence or contribute to professional growth. Principals trust the other administrators with whom they work to provide feedback and develop positive and professional relationships with early career teachers. It is my interpretation that principals were discussing quality or skill level of assistant principals. At the same time the correct quantity of administrators within a building opens the principal (and other administrators in the building) to being more visible, approachable, and available to support early career teachers. When administrative staffing is appropriate, the division of work-related responsibilities is distributed in a way that the administrative team can better address the needs or concerns of early career teachers. Principals need to include and develop the skillsets of the administrators with whom they work to support early career teachers in the same way they provide support to early career teachers.

There are experiences that early career teachers and building principals perceived to impact early career teacher retention that were unique or not shared with another participant during this qualitative study. Individual participants perceived other principal behaviors that

include principal flexibility, the principal's ability to establish a brand, the principal's involvement of the early career teacher in decision making and the reputation of the principal as impacting early career teacher retention. Each of these outlier experiences were not shared with other participants in this study. However, it is important to consider that they may be shared by other early career teachers or principals within the participating school division who did not participate in this qualitative study.

I interpret the statements related to outlier experiences related to early career teacher retention shared by principals or early career teachers to highlight their unique experiences. Either teachers or principals, working in a school setting are exposed to different educational philosophies, leadership styles, or school cultures. They also enter a school setting with unique values and experiences related to their personal life and experience with the field of education. Staff at one school may also have different needs that can be addressed through varying levels of support. What works for one school principal to retain early career teachers, may not be what another principal needs to direct time and attention to in order to improve early career teacher retention. Teacher retention is personal, and the experiences of all educators vary and may be shaped by their own understandings and beliefs around education. These experiences and perceptions are not less valuable because they were not articulated by other principals or early career teachers who participated in this study.

## **Summary**

The responses from principal and early career teacher participants contributed to the identification of meanings related to the role of the principal in early career teacher retention. All principal participants viewed their role as contributing to early career teacher retention. All early career teacher participants articulated the role their principals played in their decision to remain

in their current positions and/or the teaching profession. Chapter 4 presented the research questions, the participant demographic and interview data including direct quotes, and meanings supported by examples and direct statements made by participants. Chapter 5 will focus on the meanings shared in Chapter 4, a discussion of those meanings, a presentation of practitioner and policy implications and recommendations for future research

## Chapter 5

### Discussion of the Major Meanings and Implications

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence educational leadership, specifically building level principals, have on early career teacher retention decisions. The study specifically focused on the secondary level in a medium sized school division in southwest Virginia. Using data obtained from the individual principal and early career teacher interviews, I sought to gain a better understanding of the impact secondary principals have on early career teachers' decisions to remain at or leave their current positions by making meaning from their interviews and identifying themes or shared experiences. Secondary school principals were interviewed and asked to identify their behaviors or practices currently in place within their schools intended to positively impact early career teacher retention. Early career teachers were interviewed and asked to evaluate practices or behaviors of their principals that impact or influence their decisions to remain employed at their school or remain in the teaching profession. The intended outcome of this study was to identify common behaviors or practices secondary school principals implemented to positively impact early career teacher retention and to compare the behaviors or practices identified by both principals and early career teachers.

Retaining teachers at the middle and high school levels will contribute to improved instructional practices and student academic performance that is mitigated when schools experience high teacher attrition. I plan to provide secondary school principals and division-level leaders within the participating school division with qualitative data to improve the retention of secondary level early career teachers. Meanings from the study may be used to create professional development for secondary school leaders aimed at improving teacher retention, for

policy adoption at the division level aimed at improving early career teacher retention, as a data source for future research studies, and to influence principal preparation curriculum at collegiate levels. The district where the research was conducted was selected because of their high teacher retention rate compared to the state of Virginia. The division in southwest Virginia had a teacher retention rate “around 91 percent” in 2023 according to the division superintendent.

Additionally, the school division serves an increasingly diverse group of students at each location where middle school and high school principal participants and early career teacher participants are employed. Multiple middle and high schools in the division have growing student enrollment participation in free and reduced lunch programs. Although the results of this study are not generalizable to a larger population, the diversity within the sample site could contribute to the relevance of the meanings and application of recommendations within the participating school division and divisions of similar sizes and demographic composition.

### **Research Questions**

Information from this qualitative research study can provide context and a deeper description of the behaviors or practices implemented by secondary school principals to improve early career teacher retention that are identified by both secondary school principals and early career teachers at the secondary level. I wanted to gain a better understanding of how principals at the secondary level positively contribute to the retention of early career teachers within their schools. To better answer this, the following research questions were developed to guide the development of semi-structured interview questions for principal participants, early career teacher participants, and the overall presentation of meanings.

- 1) How do school principals perceive their role in fostering a work environment that contributes to the retention of early career teachers?

- 2) What are the lived experiences of early career classroom educators regarding the influence of leadership practices on their decisions to remain in the classroom or leave their current teaching positions?
- 3) In what ways do the interactions between school principals and secondary early career teachers contribute to early career teacher retention efforts within schools?

This research addressed a gap in current literature as it reports both principal and early career teachers' perceptions with a focus on the secondary level. There are similar studies in Title I elementary schools that included focus groups. This qualitative study relied on data obtained through individual semi-structured interviews. Chapter 5 includes a review and a discussion of the major meanings from Chapter 4, implications for policy and practitioners (school leaders), and recommendations for further research on the role of the building principal on early career teacher retention.

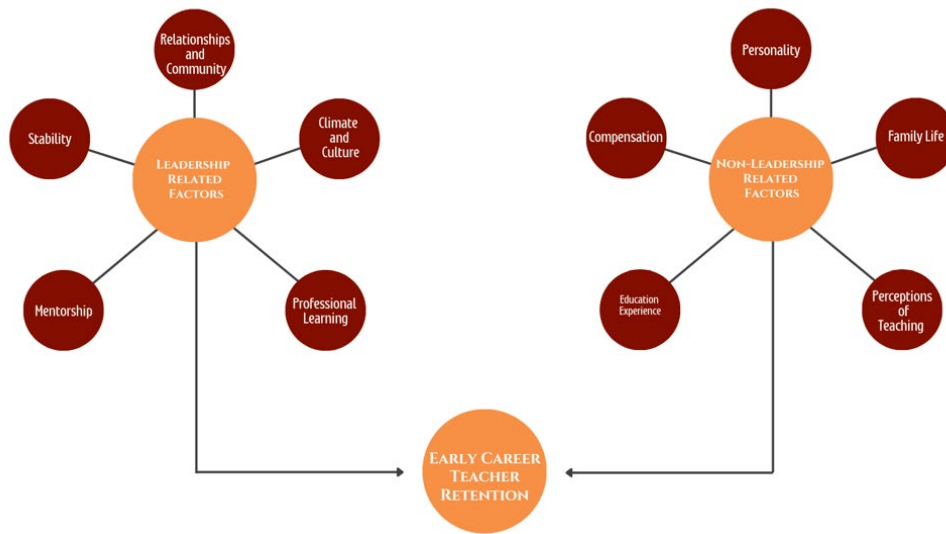
### **Review of Conceptual Framework and Connection to Meanings**

I sought to examine early career teachers' and building level principals' perceptions of principal practices or behaviors that positively contribute to the retention of early career teachers in a medium sized school division in southwest Virginia. Prior research identified leadership and non-leadership related factors that contribute to teacher retention. Non-leadership factors identified in the literature included personality, compensation, family life, educational experience, and perceptions of the teaching profession. Leadership related factors identified in the literature included professional learning, climate and culture of the school, relationships and community, stability, and mentorship practices. This qualitative study focused on early career teachers' perceptions and secondary school principals' perceptions of principal behaviors that impact early career teacher retention. The conceptual framework utilized for this study is

outlined in Figure 1. When analyzing the semi-structured interview transcripts for principals and early career teachers, I analyzed leadership related factors, however I did discuss non-leadership related factors if they were present and discussed by multiple participants.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework – The Connection Between School Leadership and Early Career Teacher Retention*



**Review of Meanings Generated**

Meanings in this study were derived from qualitative interview data. A meaning was included in this dissertation if a theme was discussed by two or more principal participants or two or more early career teacher participants during their individual semi-structured interviews. Meanings one through six are major meanings that resulted from thematic analysis of individual principal interviews. Meanings six through 11 are meanings that resulted from thematic analysis of individual early career teacher interviews. Meaning 12 is related to principal behaviors following the Covid-19 pandemic. Meaning 13 addresses outlier responses of participants or

responses that were not shared by more than one participant. Meanings within this study are supported by literature identified in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

1. Building level principals cited their behaviors as playing a crucial role in impacting the retention of early career teachers. Principals viewed it as their responsibility to foster a sense of belonging, provide non-evaluative instructional support and facilitate mentorship opportunities for early career teachers to positively impact the retention of their early career teachers. The role of the principal in fostering a sense of belonging for early career teachers is supported by Frahm and Cianca (2021), Sparks et al. (2017), and Zavelevsky et al. (2022). Findings from Kim (2019), Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017), and Shuls and Flores (2020) discuss the importance of feedback from the principal in the retention of early career teachers. The role of the principal in the development of mentorship opportunities was articulated by Carr et al. (2017), Frahm and Cianca (2021), Mullen (2024), Mullen et al. (2022), Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017), See et al. (2020), Soulen (2020), Sparks et al. (2017), Sutchter et al. (2016), and Sutchter et al. (2019).
2. Forming or fostering personal connections and making changes to professional development are leadership responses to enhance early career teacher retention. Frahm and Cianca (2021), Mullen (2024), and Sparks et al. (2018) identified and discussed the school leader's role in facilitating relationship building with new teachers and connecting new teachers to mentors and other teachers within the building. Engvik and Emstad (2017), Fraham and Cianca (2021), Mullen (2024), and Stewart and Jansky (2022) referenced the importance of professional development and mentorship played in supporting early career teachers.

3. Principals associate the effectiveness of their retention practices with early career teachers' decisions to remain in their current positions. Similar sentiments were articulated by Kim (2019) in relationship to teacher perceptions. Kim (2019) articulated that increased teacher perception of principal leadership practices negatively influenced teacher movement and attrition.
4. Principals believe they contribute to early career teachers' job satisfaction by providing clear expectations, administrative support and establishing a positive school community. This meaning is supported by Gunther (2019), Mullen (2024), Reitman and Karge (2019), Sparks et al. (2017), Sutchter et al. (2019), Ulferts (2015), and Vanderslice (2010). Zavelevsky et al. (2022) also noted the importance of the role of the building principal in establishing a sense of community.
5. In the aftermath of the Covid-19 Pandemic, principals altered their behaviors to maintaining consistency in their schools and establish (or maintain) in-person connections to their early career teachers. Castro (2023), Goldhaber et al. (2022), and Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017) articulated the tendency of principals to alter their behaviors to improve early career teacher retention.
6. Feedback for early career teachers and the administrative team were identified as additional factors of importance by principal participants related to early career teacher retention. Mullen (2024), Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017), and Shuls and Flores (2020) identified frequent positive communication and feedback as essential support school-based leadership should provide to novice teachers to improve teacher retention.
7. Secondary early career teacher identified personal connection, communication and

- trust as ways the building principal directly influences their decisions to remain at their current schools. Supporting findings from Mullen (2024), Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017) and Shuls and Flores (2020) identified frequent positive communication and feedback as essential support school-based leadership should provide to novice teachers to improve teacher retention.
8. Early career teachers measure the effectiveness of their principals' early career teacher retention initiatives by their experiences with their mentor/mentorship program, their sense of belonging to their school community, and the availability of resources. Sutchter et al. (2016), Sutchter et al. (2019), Mullen (2024), and Mullen et al. (2022) recommended that school districts invest in well-designed retention programs to reduce teacher attrition. Purposeful or intentional mentorship to reduce teacher attrition is supported by Mullen (2024), Mullen and Klimaitis (2021), Soulen (2020), and Sparks et al. (2017). Zavelevsky et al. (2022) also noted the importance a sense of community is to the retention of early career teachers. Mullen et al. (2022) and Sparks et al. (2017) identified positive relationships, teacher support, and belonging as benefits of well-developed teacher mentorship programs. Carr et al. (2017), Frahm and Cianca (2021), and Mullen (2024) also discussed the impact resources, or a lack of resources, can have on teacher retention.
  9. Early career teachers' decisions to stay or leave their current schools or the teaching profession are influenced by the administrative team and external factors. External factors that do not include the principal impacting early teacher retention were also noted by Castro (2023), Darling-Hammond et al. (2018), Frahm and Cianca (2021), Garcia et al. (2022), Kim (2019), Mullen (2024), Mullen et al. (2022), Sutchter et al.

- (2016), Ulfert (2015), and Young (2018).
10. Early career teachers' decisions to remain at their current school are influenced by their principals' approachability, visibility, and ability to cultivate personal relationships. This meaning is supported in literature by Mullen (2024). Mullen et al. (2022) and Sparks et al. (2017) also discussed the importance of positive relationship cultivation in relation to early career teacher retention.
  11. Consistency in expectations set by the principal and availability of the building principal influence early career teachers' job satisfaction. This is supported in the literature by Mullen (2024) and Mullen and Fallen (2022).
  12. Principals indicated that experiencing an increase in vacant teaching positions with fewer applicants influences their hiring practices and the onboarding of early career teachers within their building. This is supported in literature by Huebeck (2022), Mullen (2024), and Prothero (2024).
  13. There are unique experiences, values, and circumstances of early career teachers that should be considered by principals to improve early career teacher retention. This is supported in literature by du Plessis et al. (2019), Kaushik and Walsh (2019), Kim (2019), and Mullen (2024).

### **Discussion of Meanings Made**

The secondary principals and early career teacher participants were all employed in accredited schools within one school division in southwest Virginia. The responses to the semi-structured interview questions shaped my interpretation and development of meanings. The meanings in this qualitative study offer secondary principals valuable insight into effective practices, supports deemed effective, or behaviors identified as important by early career

teachers. Elementary level principals might also find similar practices or supports valuable to support elementary early career teachers. The meanings can also serve as beginning of the year, mid-year, or end of year discussion points for administrative teams regarding administrative behaviors or practices that might need reviewed, evaluated, or self-assessed to better support early career (and where applicable veteran) teachers within their respective buildings.

### *Research Question 1*

Meanings from individual semi-structured interviews indicate that building principals perceive their role as contributing to the retention of early career teachers. While secondary early career principals prioritized fostering a sense of belonging, providing non-evaluative instructional support, and facilitating mentorship opportunities to improve early career teacher retention within their buildings, early career teachers identified their principals' ability to form personal connections, effective communication, and trust as the ways the principal influences their decision to retain their current teaching positions. Principal participants described the importance of fostering personal connections and providing professional development as leadership responses implemented to enhance early career teacher retention. Principals viewed their behavior as contributing to the establishment of a school community that welcomes and includes early career teachers.

To successfully establish a school community that is inclusive to new teachers, principals need to understand the needs of early career teachers within their building, their personal time constraints, their commitment to mentorship of early career teachers, and the capacity of their staff (including other administrators and mentor teachers) to welcome, develop and support early career teachers. Principals articulated that they create a sense of belonging for their new teachers and that events and activities need to be intentionally planned to do this. They were also able to

describe the importance of walking into classrooms or meeting with teachers in the hallways or behind closed doors to provide non-evaluative support. Principals also recognized the impact successful mentors and mentorship programs within their schools had on early career teacher retention. This demonstrates that principals were aware of the need to form relationships with early career teachers, facilitate relationship development between mentors and early career teachers, and take a personal interest in their early career teachers.

### *Research Question 2*

Early career teachers articulated that they wanted to feel like they are more than employees and that they valued personal connection and conversation. While principals valued mentorship programs and non-evaluative feedback, early career teachers articulated their positive experiences with principals and their leadership not just in terms of mentorship programs, but their principal's ability to establish personal connections. They also noted appreciation for principal communication this is frequent, clear, and effective. Early career teachers also valued professional trust from administration.

Early career teachers emphasized that mentorship programs, access to resources, and a strong sense of belonging within the school community were reflective of effective initiatives implemented by their principals to support their retention. Clear expectations, the impact of the administrative team, personal connection, and feedback were identified as important factors related to the retention of early career teachers by early career teacher participants. These practices or behaviors were also described or used as examples of ways that principals provide support to early career teachers during early career teachers' semi-structured interviews.

### *Research Question 3*

Regularly occurring interactions between principals and early career teachers contribute to the retention of early career teachers. Early career teachers valued principals that were visible. This was noted with small actions such as open office doors or a happy and energetic presence in the hallway. Visibility and approachability allowed early career teachers to discuss questions, concerns, or just engage in relationship-building conversations with their principals. These interactions contributed to a sense of belonging and teacher job satisfaction. Principals also need to model and live these expectations on a regular basis for early career teachers to feel supported and consider staying in their current teaching positions.

### **Implications of the Study**

As with most qualitative research studies, my study produced several practitioner or policy implications for consideration. Practitioner implications are considerations that school-based principals and division level leaders may want to consider in relation to current practices, evaluation and updating of school or division policies, and hiring practices. There is a component of both division and school-based reflection that may need to occur for successful implementation of the recommendations I outline below. Policy implications outline recommendations or concerns that could be addressed at either the state or division level to better support early career teacher retention.

### *Practitioner Implications*

Secondary principals could consider the meanings presented within this study when selecting supports or programs; designing their staff expectations; and identifying their communication practices for an academic year. Additionally, principals might consider the needs of early career teachers when selecting other administrative staff within their building.

School division level leaders might consider the meanings from this qualitative study when designing principal professional development and establishing minimum building level early career teacher retention supports and requirements. Educational leadership or principal preparation programs might consider incorporating student self-reflection practices for aspiring school leaders into the internship experiences. Self-reflection may enhance aspiring leaders' capacity to develop, mentor, and support early career teachers within their current building and in future leadership roles. Secondary principals should consider:

1. Establishing a pool of mentor teachers within their building to support early career teachers by ensuring that pairings do not have personality conflicts and that mentors can support early career teacher mentees with resources, content, and instruction. Having a pool of mentors that are available prior to selecting one when needs arise builds the capacity of veteran teachers to support early career teachers alongside the principal. This is supported by Mullen (2024).
2. Evaluating current instructional leadership practices and determine if there are non-evaluative feedback instruments or practices in place to help support instructional growth of early career teachers in a non-punitive and informal manner. Mullen (2024) articulated that feedback from teacher mentors and/or principals should be nonjudgmental.
3. Conducting a self-reflection regarding their approachability, visibility, and availability to support early career teachers that address or approach them with concerns. For further consideration, principals could reflect on how their policies align with the SACE framework developed by Mullen (2024).
4. Evaluating their communication practices for clarity, consistency, and frequency.

5. Evaluating how they use communicate availability of resources specific to their school that could be beneficial for early career teachers to review.
6. Reviewing community building activities and events in their school and the methods used to inform early career teachers of these activities and events.
7. Reflecting on the availability of professional development opportunities and school initiative membership available to early career teachers.
8. Identifying current informal communication practices in place to support the development of the principal-early career teacher relationship.
9. Providing opportunities for other members of the administrative team to support early career teachers.

### *Policy Implications*

State, division and local colleges and universities might consider adopting policies that support the retention of early career teachers. The Virginia Department of Education might consider implementing formal mentorship program requirements for school divisions and providing school divisions with funding to support the development and training of a diverse and highly qualified teacher mentor pool (Mullen, 2024). Mentorship programs implemented at the school level feature mentors who are hand-selected by the principal that often do not have formal mentor training. State educational agencies can mandate requirements for principal preparation programs to implement specific instruction on supporting early career teachers that focus on principal self-reflection practices, development and continual reflection on mentorship programs within the school setting, and instructional coaching. School divisions can implement policies that encourage regular anonymized feedback from early career teachers that identify their needs during the school year rather than waiting for end of year reflection after staffing and

resignations occur. School divisions can evaluate aspiring principals record of success with the development of early career teacher supports.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

For those interested in exploring the relationship between early career teachers and principals, there are numerous opportunities for further. This study can be extended by interviewing more secondary principal and early career teachers within the participating school division on the role of the building principal on early career teacher retention. Additional interviews could provide more data and contribute to the identification of additional themes or meanings not presented in this qualitative dissertation. Further researcher might be conducted at the elementary level within the participating school division to compare meanings generated about secondary early career teacher retention to elementary early career teacher retention. This has the potential to generate greater understanding of the role the building principal plays in the retention of early career teachers. This study could also be adapted to present understandings or “meanings” related to middle level early career teacher retention and high school level early career teacher retention.

This research could be expanded to surrounding school divisions to determine if the meanings related to the role of the building principal on early career teacher retention at the secondary level is consistent across the geographic region. Future research could be implemented in the form of gathering additional data at five-year increments to determine if the meanings are consistent or if the meanings change over time. Future studies could also focus on early career teachers in fields or endorsement areas with “high need” including math, English or special education. Future studies could also focus on early career teachers that are also career switchers to expand upon the meanings presented within this qualitative study. Future studies could also

include interviews of central office administrators to compare their perceptions to those of building principals related to the impact of school leadership on early career teacher retention. This study also lacked racial diversity in participants. Further studies might expand the quantity of participants to determine if racial diversity alters or further supports meanings.

If someone were interested in conducting research from outside of a school division in a non-administrative or non-evaluative role, it might be interesting to see the meanings presented within this study expanded upon if additional data could be gathered through focus groups of administrators (including assistant principals and deans of students) and early career teachers. I am still interested in the concept of focus groups and what that could present through the interaction of participants that might share similar stories to each other or echo a shared experience. Studies like this are not intended to be replicated, however, a similar number of participants could be interviewed through focus groups of participants each representing different school divisions to expand upon the meanings presented within this qualitative research study. This would allow future researchers to gain a glimpse into shared experiences across a broader geographic area or specific geographic area.

## **Conclusion**

The role the building principal plays in the retention of early career teacher retention is well established in the literature (Castro, 2023; Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Mullen, 2024; Zavelevsky et al., 2022). The principal participants and early career teacher participants within this qualitative study both provided examples or referenced principal practices they perceived to impact the retention of early career teachers. Many of these meanings are supported by current peer reviewed literature referenced in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. This research provides current school leaders (practitioners), aspiring school leaders, and policy makers with qualitative

data and recommendations to improve early career teacher retention. Due to current teacher retention rates within the Commonwealth of Virginia, alternative methods to obtain teacher licensure, and the growing number of vacant or unfilled teaching positions within Virginia public schools, this research is timely. Whether utilized by division leaders, educational policy makers, or school-level leaders, the meanings presented within this study might serve to support future early career teachers.

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## Appendix A

### Impactful Literature Review Table

Author(s) and Year	Purpose of Study/Research Questions	Methodology	Findings and Implications	Themes/Connections to Topic
Castro 2023	The purpose of this study was to identify the impact teacher shortages have in altering school leadership behaviors.	<p>Castro (2023) completed a qualitative study based in Oklahoma. 4 out of 9 districts meeting criteria based on teacher supply indicators agreed to allow participation. 23 school level leaders (principals and assistant principals) from the four districts participated in semi-structured 45-60 minute interviews.</p> <p>Participation included elementary, middle and high school level leaders working in urban and suburban schools. The aim of the study was to determine the impact teacher shortages had on the role of school administration.</p>	<p>Interview results indicate teacher shortages largely impact on instructional practices, organizational management, and relationship behaviors of school leaders.</p> <p>Leaders serving in schools with high rates of poverty and minority student enrollment find their leadership roles impacted more compared to leaders serving in suburban areas with lower rates of minority students and lower rates of poverty.</p> <p>Administrators making more “tradeoffs” resulting from non-monetary impact of teacher attrition.</p> <p>Making organizational decisions including hiring long-term subs or increasing teacher workloads by distributing more students into classrooms.</p> <p>Principals are dedicating more time to managing new teacher concerns and the concerns of emergency credentialed teachers.</p> <p>Budgeting is placing additional burdens on school leaders. Less teachers in the building but also leading with less instructional support and non-instructional staff.</p> <p>Cautions about feedback related to teacher instructional performance. Administrators reflected they did not want to provide critical feedback that might increase teacher attrition.</p> <p>Increase in turnover creates a lack of experience in classroom management and results in an uptick in school discipline.</p>	<p>Principal Turnover</p> <p>Mentorship and new teacher mentorship</p> <p>Non-monetary costs of teacher attrition.</p>
Frahm and Cianca 2021	The purpose of the study was to identify factors impacting the retention of new teachers, to identify behaviors of school leaders, supports, and programs that positively impact teacher retention in rural schools.	<p>Qualitative Study</p> <p>Three focus groups consisting of superintendents, building-level principals, and aspiring administrators from a shared service area in New York.</p> <p>25 public schools in the shared service area; only 21 considered with 4 non-rural public schools eliminated.</p> <p>Leadership participating served in districts with student populations that ranged from 400 students to 4,500 students.</p> <p>Potential participants invited included 21 superintendents, 77 building administrators, and 30 aspiring administrators (who participated in a specific leadership</p>	<p>In addition to geographic limitations, lack of resources, and non-competitive salaries, rural school administrators need to build authentic relationships with new teachers to prevent feelings of isolation. School leaders need to facilitate relationship building with new teachers, seek ways to connect with employees, and facilitate authentic relationship development with new teachers and other faculty members. In building authentic relationships, new teachers need to feel noticed, engaged, appreciated, and supported to create a “sense of belonging.” Interactions with new teachers and administrators should be purposeful.</p> <p>Support for new teachers needs to involve the whole school including veteran teachers.</p>	<p>Admin Support</p> <p>Mentorship</p> <p>Relationships</p> <p>Culture</p> <p>Teacher Involvement</p> <p>Job Satisfaction</p>

		<p>program in the service area). Individuals selected to participate based on geographic diversity, association with elementary and secondary schools.</p> <p>Focus Group 1: Seven Superintendents with 20 years of experience in public education but different levels of experience in current positions ranging from 0 years to 14 years experience.</p> <p>Focus Group 2: Eight participants Principals: Elementary, middle and high schools. 10 years of experience in public education.</p> <p>Focus Group 3: Aspiring administrators in two cohorts of a leadership program; all but one (with 0-9 years of experience) had 10-19 years of experience in public education.</p> <p>Focus group questions created (open-ended)</p> <p>Open Coding to categorize transcripts from recorded sessions. 84 codes emerged from transcripts.</p> <p>11 Themes identified with 13 total sub themes across focus groups.</p>	<p>Special emphasis on mentorship and selecting the right mentors for new teachers that will allow them to bond with staff and feel welcomed and nurtured in the school.</p> <p>School leaders need to find ways to improve job satisfaction by allowing for mentorship, and involving new teachers in school initiatives, providing teachers with a voice in decision making (i.e. committee membership, PD opportunities, leading PD, etc.)</p> <p>Supports: Find ways to boost confidence and empower new teachers. Affirmations and positive feedback encourage new employees. If at all possible, give new teachers something to feel proud of and excited (scheduling at least one class that a teacher is passionate about).</p> <p>Superintendent: With high levels of school leader turnover, division level leadership (superintendents) need to teach school leaders how to communicate support and positively encourage new staff. Divisions need to create plans to address teacher retention.</p>	
<p>Gunther 2019</p>	<p>The purpose of this research study was to determine the importance teachers placed on monetary and nonmonetary factors of teacher retention. The researchers wanted to make recommendations based on the results of the study to administrators and policymakers aimed at improving teacher retention and recruitment.</p>	<p>The study conducted by Gunther (2019) utilized mixed methods. An Adaptive Choice-Based Conjoint Analysis was used to determine the value and importance teachers placed on 14 monetary and non-monetary employment factors. Unlike previous studies, the ACBC methodology required participants to select between competing job factors or scenarios rather than utilizing a ranking system. Demographic data was also collected. In addition to selecting from scenarios or rating factors, qualitative questions were embedded to allow respondents to answer open-ended questions to defend or reflect on their decision making.</p> <p>Teachers in Utah Secondary Level Teacher of Record in 2016-2017</p> <p>13,769 emails were generated to publicly listed participants on school websites. 2,228 responded. Total population was 2,167 based on completed demographic data and excluding respondents that did not meet research criteria.</p>	<p>Results of the study indicate that salary is a key factor in teacher retention but also acknowledged the importance of non-monetary recruitment and retention factors.</p> <p>Teaching assignment, class size, curricular autonomy, school achievement, and principal support were identified as the five highest non-monetary factors valued by teachers when considering employment.</p> <p>Results also suggested that administrators and districts should consider compensating teachers working in less desirable schools or schools that are typically low performing.</p> <p>As teachers' salaries and years of experience increase, the value teachers place on salary increases. Teachers making less money with less year of experience place a lower value on salary. Less experienced teachers may value opportunities for collaboration, increased professional development and administrative support compared to salary. Less experienced teachers might also value non-monetary factors such as smaller class size.</p> <p>Researchers recommended that administrators and school districts save monetary incentives for more experienced teachers that value salary to target experienced teacher retention and recruitment. At the same time, administrators and divisions should recruit newer, less-experienced teachers with non-monetary support factors.</p>	<p>Teacher recruitment and retention</p> <p>New teacher retention v. experienced teacher retention</p> <p>Monetary and non-monetary factors related to teacher retention</p>

		Results were analyzed using software that utilized Hierarchical Bayesian Analysis.	Other factors that were notable in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers are a strong vision and mission statement and providing teachers with curricular autonomy. These factors might contribute to the recruitment and retention of teachers that place a lower value on salary even if salary is still a valued factor for teacher employment.	
Mullen (2024)	The purpose of this literature is to address the benefits and impact of equity on school mentorship and teacher induction.	<p>This literature was created with the collection of data from a three-year period of time through collaboration with school leaders/practitioners from a variety of schools.</p> <p>Research includes three case studies of school leaders.</p>	<p>Mentoring in a prominent topic in public education research.</p> <p>Equity through school leadership can address causes of teacher attrition.</p> <p>SAC/SACE addresses mentoring and induction. By prioritizing leadership development and mentorship with equity as a mindset.</p> <p>Addresses characteristics of positive mentorship and productive mentorship.</p> <p>Addresses the role of the principal for psychosocial support.</p> <p>Review of different types of mentorships. And mentorship mandates including systemwide mentorship.</p> <p>Teacher attrition as a global and national issues is addressed as well as the impact specifically in Virginia.</p> <p>Principals need to be knowledgeable about teacher attrition and this article contributes to the idea of education of principals related to SACE.</p> <p>Feedback as an area or scope of principal responsibility to address teacher retention.</p>	<p>Equity</p> <p>Support, Collaboration, Accessibility</p> <p>Principals, school leaders, Instructional leaders</p> <p>Impact on early career teacher retention.</p>
Ronfeldt and McQueen 2017	The purpose of this study was to identify different induction supports for first year teachers that reduce teacher attrition and teacher migration.	<p>Quantitative Research Study</p> <p>Secondary analysis of three years of the Schools and Staffing Survey, SASS, (2003-2004, 2007-2008, and 2011-2012) and the respective Teacher Follow-up Surveys (TFS).</p> <p>SASS participants that responded to both the SASS and TFS totaled 13,000. Of these, 2,350 were first year teachers in public schools whose results were included in the analysis conducted by Ronfeldt and McQueen.</p> <p>A five year longitudinal study, Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Study (2007-2008 school year to the 2011-2012 school year.</p> <p>The study focused on First Year teachers only because SASS questions about support only relate to first year teachers.</p>	<p>SASS: 79% of participants practiced in induction programs. Of these participants, positive communication with administration being assigned a mentor, participating in new teacher seminars and common planning were identified as supports. Only 27% of participants that indicated they participated in induction programs reported receiving extra help in the classroom and less than 10% reported a reduced number of preps assigned to them.</p> <p>Black teachers and teachers of ELL students were more likely to receive extensive induction support (between 80% and 100%).</p> <p>Demographics of school and student population did not impact the likelihood teachers in those schools would receive extensive induction support.</p> <p>SASS results were negatively associated with teacher migration.</p> <p>Extensive support overall reduced the odds of moving to another school</p>	<p>Communication</p> <p>Mentorship</p> <p>Attrition</p> <p>Moving Schools</p> <p>Retention Factors</p>

		<p>Survey questions included in SASS identify the kinds of induction support first year teachers experienced.</p> <p>1,990 teachers employed full time or part time participated in the 5-year BTLS. Only 1,630 First Year Teachers had completed data across five years. Data included in this study is from the 1,630 first year teachers with a total of 5,280 observations.</p> <p>Researchers compared extensive supports (four to six) to non-extensive supports (zero to three). Extensiveness was set to keep sample sizes equivalent. Classified participants as stayers, movers or leavers based on if they stayed in their current school, moved to another school or left the profession.</p> <p>Multilevel regression models were used to analyze if demographic or school factors determined who received more support and if teachers who received induction support were more likely to migrate to another school or leave the profession.</p>	<p>Induction supports negatively predict teacher attrition</p> <p>Because data was analyzed from nationally representative surveys, data is generalizable to large populations.</p>	
Shuls and Flores 2020	The purpose of this study was to identify practices and policies used by school divisions and school leaders with high teacher retention rates.	<p>Qualitative Study</p> <p>Interviews of 3 school district level personnel (Assistant Superintendent, Chief Human Resources Officer) from 3 school districts in Missouri.</p> <p>Semi-structured interview questions conducted through 30 minute interviews.</p> <p>Criteria for participation: One hundred full-time teachers employed in the district with an average teaching experience of 14.5 years. Districts also needed to have a student population greater than 4,000 pupils. Only three divisions met this criterion.</p> <p>Vertical (main ideas from the interview) and Horizontal analysis (identify trends across divisions) for each division level interview.</p> <p>Interviews took place at the administrative building of the</p>	<p>Supportive Administration in buildings that encourage teacher voice, allow for teacher autonomy, and promote teacher-leaders.</p> <p>School leaders must recognize and support new teachers.</p> <p>School leaders need to understand the pressures first-year teachers face to better support and retain new teachers. Supportive principals take time to address the concerns of new teachers surrounding relationship building, workload, evaluation system, grading, and providing teachers with autonomy.</p> <p>New teachers expect and need frequent positive communication and feedback.</p> <p>Building time for new teachers to collaborate with other teachers that are more experienced. Build time /prioritize protected time to collaborate.</p> <p>Teacher autonomy for early career educators.</p> <p>New teacher induction programs and mentorships to better prepare new teachers.</p>	<p>Teacher retention factors</p> <p>Mentorship</p> <p>Teacher-Leaders</p>

		divisions that agreed to participate in the study.	Boosts confidence of new teachers, experience success and higher job satisfaction.	
Sutcher et al. 2019	<p>The purpose of this study was to determine trends in teacher retention across the United States and signs of teachers shortages to identify factors impacting teacher shortages.</p> <p>The researchers sought to provide insight into policy changes state and local governments could implement to support an increase in the supply of qualified teacher candidates.</p>	<p>The researchers used quantitative data from multiple Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and the Teacher Follow up surveys from 2003 to 2013. The researchers also utilized the Common Core of Data survey from 1999-2013 to obtain accurate counts on student and teacher data. Multiple data sets from the Title II of the Higher Education and the Baccalaureate and Beyond longitudinal data from 2008-2012 was used to track enrollment in teacher preparation programs, completion of teacher preparation programs and employment information to determine if recently qualified teachers were working in schools four years after graduation.</p>	<p>Teacher demand increases when student enrollment increases. Increases in birth rates and immigration rates indicate a continued increase in student enrollment will place a large demand on the need for qualified teacher candidates.</p> <p>Following the 2008 economic downturn and a reduction of public school budgets, student-to-teacher ratios increased. A desire to return to pre-recession teacher-to-student ratios is another indicator of the increase in the demand for qualified educators to fill current vacancies.</p> <p>Current models project a need to hire 300,000 across the United States annually. Attrition resulting from retirement and teachers leaving the classroom also serves as a significant reason for an increase in teacher demand. Retirements account for roughly 1/3 of teachers leaving the field, the remaining 2/3 of teachers leave the profession due to staffing decisions, dissatisfaction with the profession or their building, and life changes. Reducing teacher attrition or targeting retention of qualified teachers, even by small percentages, would have a significant impact on the supply of qualified teachers.</p> <p>Qualified candidate pool is made up of transfers (movers), newly qualified teachers, and teachers that previously left the classroom and are returning (re-entrants). Current teacher preparation programs face a 35% reduction in enrollment for teacher preparation programs. Currently, only 77% of students enrolled in teacher preparation programs complete the degree and earn credentials for teaching resulting in fewer teachers entering the workforce.</p> <p>Factors impacting entering the workforce include the public perception of the teaching profession following teacher-layoffs during the 2008 economic downturn. Other factors impacting the supply of teachers and teacher retention include salaries, working conditions, class sizes, instructional support, and administrative support.</p> <p>Recommendations to increase the number of teacher preparation programs, especially in states with an increase in the demand for qualified teachers, increasing teacher salaries to compete with the non-teaching fields, especially in subjects or areas where there is a large demand. Find ways to reduce class sizes, hire and focus on supportive administrators, provide teachers with autonomy in the classroom setting even with high stakes testing.</p>	<p>Attrition</p> <p>Shortages</p> <p>Factors impacting attrition</p>

## **Appendix B**

### **Early Career Teacher Interview Questions**

#### *Early Career Teacher Interview Questions Pertinent to Research Questions*

1. Based on your experiences, in what ways does the principal influence your decision to stay at your current school?
2. What is your perception of your principal's effectiveness related to teacher retention initiatives?
3. Based on your current experiences, what does your principal do that made you consider moving to another school or leaving the teaching profession?
4. Based on your previous years in the classroom, what about your principal contributed to your decision to stay at your current school for this academic year?
5. In what ways do you think your principal contributes to your job satisfaction?
6. What other comments or ideas would you like to share that have not already been addressed related to your principal and your decision to remain at your current school or your decision to remain in the teaching profession?

## Appendix C

### Principal Interview Questions

#### Principal (Individual) Interview Questions Pertinent to Research Questions

1. Based on your experiences, how do you believe your behaviors or practices contribute to early career teachers' decision to remain at your school?
2. What are some of the changes you made to your previous practices or behaviors to improve early career teacher retention?
3. How effective do you perceive your early career teacher retention efforts to be?
4. Based on your experiences, how do you believe you as the principal contribute to your early career teachers' job satisfaction?
5. Based on your experiences, what role did the Covid-19 pandemic play in your efforts to retain early career teachers?
6. What other comments or ideas would you like to share related to early teacher retention at your school?

## Appendix D

### Early Career Teacher Demographic Questions

Question	Response
How many years have you been a classroom teacher?	1 year 2 years 3 years 4 years 5 years
How many years have you worked in your current school?	1 year 2 years 3 years 4 years 5 years
What is your race/ethnicity?	White Black Hispanic Multi-racial Asian/Pacific Islander Other: _____
What is your gender?	Male Female Other: _____
What is your level of educational attainment?	Bachelor's degree Master's degree Education specialist Doctoral degree

## Appendix E

### Principal Demographic Questions

Question	Response
How many years have you worked in public education?	0-5 years 6-10 years 11-15 years 16-20 years 21 or more years
How many years have you served as a principal?	0-5 years 6-10 years 11-15 years 16-20 years 21 or more years
How many years have you served as a principal in your current school?	0-5 years 6-10 years 11-15 years 16-20 years 21 or more years
What is your race/ethnicity?	White Black Hispanic Multi-racial Asian/Pacific Islander Other: _____
What is your gender?	Male Female Other: _____
What is your level of educational attainment?	Bachelor's degree Master's degree Education specialist Doctoral degree

## Appendix F

### Principal Recruitment Email

RE: Secondary Level Principals: Dissertation Research Study Call for Participants

Dear [educational leader],

I am writing to invite you to participate in a study on early career teacher retention and the role of school leadership. I hope to understand how your perception of leadership influences your actions, behaviors, and decisions regarding the retention of early career teachers in your building. I intend to gain a better understanding of the impact secondary principals have on early career teachers' decisions to remain at or leave their current positions.

The study [IRB-24-693] is titled "Educational Leadership Impact on Early Career Teacher Retention: Making Meaning of School Principal and Classroom Educator Perceptions." As indicated, the study particularly is interested in exploring the lived experiences of building principals and early career teachers. Criteria for principal participation includes that the educational leader currently serves as the head building principal at the middle or high school level. If you do not fit this description, please disregard this email.

However, if you are willing to volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an individual interview. The interview is intended to last 45-60 minutes. I ask that you identify three early career teachers within your building to participate in the study in which I may randomly invite 1 or 2 to participate. I do not anticipate the need for a follow-up interview, however, I will ask that you complete a brief demographic survey prior to being interviewed.

Within one week of the conclusion of our interview, should you agree to participate, I will request that you review the verified transcript of the interview to verify the responses provided. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. I do not expect you to address questions or share information or stories with which you are uncomfortable. If at any time you feel uncomfortable answering questions, you may decline to answer the question or discontinue participation. If you are interested in learning more about this study, I will provide you with additional details and a copy of the informed consent form. If you are interested, please contact me by replying to this message.

Sincerely,

Heather Riganti

## Appendix G

### Early Career Teacher Recruitment Email

RE: Teacher: Secondary Level Early Career Teachers - Dissertation Research Study Call for Participants

Dear [early career teacher],

I am writing to invite you to participate in a study on early career teacher retention and the role of school leadership. I hope to understand how your perception of leadership influences the retention of early career teachers. I intend to gain a better understanding of the impact secondary principals have on early career teachers' decisions to remain at or leave their current positions.

The study [IRB-24-693] is titled "Educational Leadership Impact on Early Career Teacher Retention: Making Meaning of School Principal and Classroom Educator Perceptions." As indicated, the study particularly is interested in exploring the lived experiences of building principals and early career teachers. Criteria for early career teacher participation includes the teacher currently being employed at the middle or high school level and have between 1 and 5 years of classroom experience. If you do not fit this description, please disregard this email.

However, if you are willing to volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an individual interview. The interview is intended to last 45-60 minutes. I do not anticipate the need for a follow-up interview, however, I will ask that you complete a brief demographic survey prior to being interviewed.

Within one week of the conclusion of our interview, should you agree to participate, I will request that you review the verified transcript of the interview to verify the responses provided. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. I do not expect you to address questions or share information or stories with which you are uncomfortable. If at any time you feel uncomfortable answering questions, you may decline to answer the question or discontinue participation.

If you are interested in learning more about this study, I will provide you with additional details and a copy of the informed consent form. If you are interested, please contact me by replying to this message.

Sincerely,

Heather Riganti



Appendix I

School Division Research Approval Letter

[Redacted]  
Department of Instruction  
[Redacted]

[Redacted] [Redacted] [Redacted]

10/13/24

To: University of Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board

Re: IRB Protocol Title – Educational Leadership Impact on Early Career Teacher Retention: Making  
Meaning of School Principal and Classroom Educator Perceptions  
IRB Approval No. – 24-693  
Investigator – Heather Riganti  
Site – [Redacted]

I understand that you will be studying the role of school leadership and its role in teacher retention. Your study will include interviews with building principals and teachers new to the profession to collect information on their perceptions and experiences. Informed consent will be obtained before the research is conducted. I have read and understand the research project proposed to be done at [Redacted] Public Schools. I approve of the project.

Sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

[Redacted]  
Executive Director of Secondary Instruction  
[Redacted] Public Schools

## Appendix J

### Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Training



Completion Date 26-Mar-2024  
Expiration Date 26-Mar-2027  
Record ID 61967875

This is to certify that:

**Heather Riganti**

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)**



101 NE 3rd Avenue, Suite 320  
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301 US  
[www.citiprogram.org](http://www.citiprogram.org)

Generated on 30-Oct-2024. Verify at [www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w349f67d7-e32a-4c37-af52-3b38c4a08cfb-61967875](http://www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w349f67d7-e32a-4c37-af52-3b38c4a08cfb-61967875)

## Appendix K

### Coding Dictionary Associated with Qualitative Study

Term/Code	Criteria Statements or Description
Administrative Support/ Administrative Team (AS/AT)	Participants shared examples of support, discussed positive actions, discussed needs/wants, modeling, extra, requests, behavior support, questions and answers, principal as a resource, principal as a coach, assistant principals, deans of students
Connections (CON)	Participants discussed dialogue, non-work-related dialogue, fellowship, meals, community events, school community events, celebrations, involvement, family, children, marriage, home, hobbies, or health.
Expectations (EXP)	Participants shared or discussed training, informing, resources, mandates, policies, examples, day-to-day, challenges, familiarity, lack of familiarity, resources, modeling. Participants discussed “knowing,” “not-knowing,” “to do,” and/or “do not do.”
Sense of Belonging (SB)	Participants describe feeling welcome or actions that contributed to them feeling in their belonging. Language used includes but is not limited to belonging, welcome, collegiality, community, connections, team, relationships.
Staying or Leaving (SML)	Participants shared or discussed staying, moving, leaving the classroom or school setting. Participants shared examples of what would or would make them stay, move, or leave.
Support- Feedback (SF)	Participants discussed professional conversations, professional answers, questions, confidence building, growth, positive feedback, communicating strengths and areas of improvement
Support-Mentorship (SM)	Participants discussed mentors, mentees, mentorship, described mentorship programs, described actions to facilitate mentorship, first years, first year, pairing of teachers, coaching, personality
Support Non-Evaluative (SNE)	Participants discussed or describe conversations, check-ins, check-ups, drop-ins, visits, stopping by, conversations, sitting, presence, actions, attitude, availability, visibility, modeling
Professional Development (PD/PLC)	Participants discussed meetings, group collaboration, collaboration with educators, collaboration with mentors, coaching, academic coach, classroom resources, instructional books, lesson planning,
Professionalism (PRO)	Participants discussed trusts, value, feeling valued, receptive to feedback