

Factors That Influence Effective Teacher Longevity in Urban Elementary Schools

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the factors that motivate effective teachers to continue working in urban elementary schools. Urban schools typically have lower student achievement rates than that of their suburban or rural counterparts. Coupled with the fact that teacher turnover in urban schools continues to grow each year, urban schools are facing a major challenge. In order to increase student achievement, schools are prioritizing the retention of effective teachers, given that effective teachers are proven to have a positive impact on student academic achievement. This study utilized a qualitative, phenomenological design. The researcher interviewed 13 effective urban elementary school teachers to explore the factors that have motivated them to continue teaching in an urban school. Data analysis revealed the effective teachers were motivated to remain in their positions due to factors including administrator support, positive relationships, financial benefit, professional growth opportunities, school climate, and shared demographics with the students they serve. The results of the study were closely aligned with previous research on the topic of teacher retention. Implications for action and suggestions for further research on the topic are included.

Dedication

At one point completing this dissertation seemed nearly impossible. Thank you to my husband, Jake, for challenging me to complete this work and supporting me along the way- I finally did it! This dissertation is dedicated to my two children, Sadie and Hank. However cliché it may sound, I hope you always dream big and remember that anything is possible. I can't wait to watch you both meet and exceed your goals in the future. This dissertation would also not have been possible without the support of both of my parents who have always encouraged and supported me throughout every personal and professional endeavor.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In the year 2000, the United States Department of Education compared the teaching profession to a “revolving door”, referring to the high teacher turnover rates in many schools across the country (p. 27). Teacher turnover refers to the change of teachers from one year to the next in a particular school setting (Ladd & Sorenson, 2018). According to Wong (2002), estimates show that between 40% and 50% of new teachers will leave the teaching profession during the first seven years of their career. School districts across the United States invest time, money, and energy into the recruitment and retention of teachers every year only to struggle with a teacher shortage (Scherer, 2003). While this information is alarming for public school districts nationwide, what is even more concerning is the retention rates of teachers in our nation’s urban school systems.

Nearly 50 million students attend a public school in America, and about 15 million of those students attend an urban school (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2013a). According to Cochran-Smith (2004) “the problem of teacher retention is most severe in hard-to-staff schools” (p. 387). Research conducted by The New Teacher Project (2012, p. 13-14) indicates that nearly 50% of effective teachers in urban schools leave teaching within their first five years. Urban school districts already have historically low rates of highly qualified teachers (Quartz, 2003), and teacher shortages leave their students with low quality instruction, and in many cases, low achievement rates. Ingersoll’s (2004) research found that high-poverty schools in urban communities can lose, on average, a fifth of their faculty each year. The likelihood of urban school success is negatively impacted by both the number of ineffective teachers who remain in

their positions and the effective urban school teachers who leave the profession year after year, ultimately locking the schools into a cycle of failure (The New Teacher Project, 2012).

In the United States Department of Education's 2013 report, "Access to Effective Teaching for Disadvantaged Students" (Gleason et al.), teacher effectiveness was studied in 29 school districts across four regions in the United States. The research indicated that on average, disadvantaged students did not have the same access to effective teachers that their more advantaged peers had (Gleason et al., 2013). Wright, Horn, and Sanders (1997) multi-year research focused on what happens to the students who do not have access to effective teachers. Their study compared state assessment data of students who were placed with an effective teacher for three years in a row to students who were placed with a low-performing teacher for three years. Students who were placed with three low-performing teachers in a row scored nearly 52% lower on state math assessments than their peers placed with effective teachers. This research documented that the most important factor affecting student learning is the student's teacher (Wright et al., 1997). Teacher quality is critical to a student's academic success. Similarly, Haberman (1995) described the need for effective teachers in urban schools as a matter of "life or death" (p. 1). A shortage of effective teachers has serious consequences and harms not only students, but teachers, schools, districts and communities as a whole (Garcia & Weiss, 2019a).

The National Center for Education Statistics reports that nearly 50 million students attend public schools in America today. These public schools employ about three million teachers, with 1.8 million of these teachers teaching in elementary schools

(NCES, 2021). Students in America come from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds. Data from 2021 show 47% of public school students are White, 27% are Hispanic, 15% are Black, and 5% are Asian (NCES, 2021). The population of teachers in the United States is less diverse, with 79% White teachers, 7% Black teachers, and 9% Hispanic teachers serving in public schools (NCES, 2021). Of the 50 million students that attend public schools, about 15 million attend urban schools (NCES, 2013a). The student population of urban schools in America is more widely diverse than that of suburban or rural schools. About 30% of urban school students are White, 35% are Hispanic, 24% are Black, and 7% are Asian (NCES, 2013b). Suburban schools have a student population that is approximately 52% White, 25% Hispanic, 14% Black, and 5% Asian (NCES, 2013b). Rural schools serve a population of students that are 72% White, 12% Hispanic, 9% Black, and 1% Asian (NCES, 2013b).

Nationally, teacher turnover rates average about 16% per year (NCES, 2016). Only about 30% of this teacher turnover is caused by retirement (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017), meaning that 70% of teachers leave the teaching profession or move to a different school building year after year do so for reasons other than retirement. Urban schools, that often serve a greater population of students of color, face even larger turnover rates. According to Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017), turnover rates for schools that serve a large population of students of color are 70% higher than turnover rates in schools that have the fewest students of color.

This study was conducted in a large metropolitan area in the Midwest, home to many urban schools that serve a high population of students who do not identify as White. The area spans many metropolitan cities across bordering states. Participants in

the study worked in one of two metropolitan school districts in these urban cities, or in a charter school within the city boundaries. One of the cities, referred to in the study as City X, has 18 public neighborhood elementary schools within the school district and 15 public charter elementary schools that are unaffiliated with the school district. School District M is located in City Y and has 29 public elementary schools. School District N is located in City Z and has 12 public elementary schools.

School District M serves a diverse population of nearly 24,000 students in Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12 (NCES, 2021c). Of the students enrolled in School District M, 51% are Hispanic, 27% are Black, 11% are White, and 7% are Asian (NCES, 2021c). The median household income for families who reside within the boundaries of School District M is \$38,867 (NCES, 2021c). School District M employs about 1,600 full-time classroom teachers (NCES, 2021c). School District N educates about 8,000 students in Pre-Kindergarten through grade 12 (NCES, 2021d). Thirty-four percent of the students enrolled in School District N are Black, 8% are Hispanic, and 53% are White (NCES, 2021d). The median household income for families who reside within the boundaries of School District N is \$50,819 (NCES, 2021d). School District N has nearly 650 fulltime classroom teachers (NCES, 2021d). Some teachers who participated in the study worked in a charter school in one of the Midwestern, metropolitan cities. Any student residing in the boundaries of the large public school district located in City X may choose to attend a charter school. About 12,000 students attend charter schools in City X (Missouri Charter Public School Association [MCPSA], n.d.). Of these 12,000 charter school students, 55% are Black, 28% are Hispanic, and 12% are White (MCPSA,

n.d.). Charter schools in City X employ close to 1,500 classroom educators (Haessig, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

Teachers who work in low-income schools, as determined by the proportion of students receiving free and reduced-price lunch, are much more likely to leave their school or the teaching profession than teachers who work in wealthier schools (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014). Similarly, MetLife's 2005 study, "The Survey of the American Teacher", found that teachers most at-risk of leaving the profession are more likely to teach in low-income schools. Many of those who choose to leave the urban school teaching profession are those who are effective teachers (Scherer, 2003). In a study conducted in the Midwest, Hare and Heap (2001) interviewed urban school district superintendents and found that 75-100% of urban school teachers that are leaving the profession are those who are considered highly effective or effective, as determined by the school leader.

Research shows that narrowing the achievement gap can be achieved by placing students with effective teachers (Crawford & Haycock, 2008), but urban school districts face shortages of effective teachers in their classrooms year after year (The New Teacher Project, 2012). In order to make academic gains and close the achievement gap, urban schools are frequently looking to retain effective educators in their classrooms. Researchers over the past several decades have determined many reasons why effective teachers choose to leave urban school classrooms (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; The New Teacher Project 2012; Ingersoll, 2001), but few studies have explored why effective urban school teachers choose to stay in their positions.

While education literature is clear that teacher effectiveness makes a significant impact on student achievement (Sanders & Horn, 1998; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1998; Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004;), little research has been conducted specific to urban elementary school effective teacher retention. Elementary education builds a student's foundation for a successful future in junior high, high school, and adulthood. While students and schools may benefit greatly from the retention of effective teachers K-12, the impact of an effective teacher at the elementary level helps to ensure that a student is able to read on grade level (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010), increasing the likelihood for positive educational outcomes in a student's future.

Ronfeldt, Loeb and Wyckoff (2012) researched the impact of teacher turnover on over one million elementary school students in New York City over the course of a decade. Their analysis of student English Language Arts and Math test scores concluded that teacher turnover negatively impacts student achievement (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2012). Further research concludes retaining effective teachers makes a significant impact on student achievement (Young, 2018). Urban school leaders need to understand the factors that are influencing effective elementary school teachers to stay in their urban schools in order to sustain their commitment and increase student achievement. The challenge in education today is not the placement of teachers in classrooms, but rather the retention of strong teachers who make a positive impact on student achievement (Murnane & Steele, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to utilize teacher interviews to explore the various factors that influence effective teachers to continue teaching in urban elementary schools.

Significance of the Study

Current research provides some information about teacher turnover and effective teacher turnover in urban schools. The findings from this study expand upon the current body of research by exploring another component of this issue, the motivating factors for effective teacher retention in urban schools. The study attempts to identify the factors that influence effective teachers to continue teaching in urban classrooms. The results of this study may provide urban school district administrators and policymakers with valuable information on effective teacher retention in elementary schools. The findings of this study could potentially benefit urban elementary school leaders striving to retain the effective teachers in their schools in order to increase or sustain student achievement.

Delimitations

Lunenburg and Irby (2008) stated, “Delimitations are self-imposed boundaries set by the researcher on the purpose and scope of the study” (p. 134). There are three delimitations in this qualitative study:

1. The location of the study was limited to four urban school district areas located in two Midwestern states.
2. The sample of those interviewed was limited to 13 effective teachers, as defined by Goe, Bell, and Little (2008), in four urban school districts/charters in the Midwest.

3. Only effective elementary school teachers were included in the study.

Assumptions

Lunenburg and Irby (2008) stated that assumptions are the “postulates, premises, and propositions that are accepted as operational for purposes of the research” (p. 135).

Accordingly, there are two assumptions made in this qualitative study:

1. All teachers who were interviewed were truthful when responding to open-ended interview questions.
2. The administrators who were asked to provide contact information for the effective teachers in their building used the teacher effectiveness criteria that was provided by the researcher to the best of their professional ability in order to select teachers who met the qualifications.

Research Question

The study was conducted in order to explore motivating factors for effective teacher longevity in urban elementary schools. Lunenburg and Irby (2008) state that research questions provide a clear structure for a study. The following grand tour research question was used in order to gain understanding of the study participants’ lived experiences as effective teachers in urban elementary schools:

RQ1. What factors influence effective teachers to continue teaching in urban elementary schools?

Definition of Terms

Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) state that making terms explicit can provide clarity of understanding to the reader of the study. Several key terms used throughout the study have been defined.

Achievement Gap. According to Ladson-Billings (2006) the achievement gap refers to the “disparities in standardized test scores between Black and White, Latino and White, and recent-immigrant and White students” (p.3).

Effective Teacher. A research synthesis for The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality [NCCTQ] (Goe, Bell, & Little, 2008) breaks down teacher effectiveness into five points:

- Effective teachers have high expectations for all students and help them learn, as demonstrated on value-added, test-based, or alternative measures.
- Effective teachers contribute to positive academic, attitudinal, and social outcomes for students such as regular attendance, on-time promotion to the next grade and graduation, self-efficacy, and cooperative behavior.
- Effective teachers use diverse resources to plan and structure engaging learning opportunities; monitor student progress formatively, adapting instruction as needed; and evaluate learning using multiple sources of evidence.
- Effective teachers contribute to the development of classrooms and schools that value diversity and civic-mindedness.
- Effective teachers collaborate with other teachers, administrators, parents, and education professionals to ensure students' success, particularly the success of students with special needs and those at high risk of failure.

Highly Qualified Teacher. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 defined highly qualified as having a bachelor's degree, being certified to teach in the state and

able to demonstrate a high level of competency in the subject area they teach (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Teacher Turnover. Teacher turnover refers to the change in the number of teachers in a school from one year to the next (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Urban School. The National Center for Education Statistics classifies schools into four major categories- city, suburban, rural, and town. Urban schools are schools with territory inside an urbanized area that are located inside a principal city (NCES, 2006). Urban schools refer to schools that serve students from poverty-stricken communities (Kraft et al. 2015). For the purpose of this study, urban schools are schools whose student population is mostly minority students who come from low-income areas.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter provided an introduction to the study, including background information, a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, assumptions and delimitations of the study, the research question used in the study, and defined the study's key terminology. Chapter 2 provides the reader with a review of the literature pertinent to the study topic, including a brief history of schooling and urban schools in America, information about teacher retention and effective teacher longevity in urban schools, and urban school teacher preparation programs. Chapter 2 also focuses on defining an effective teacher and details research surrounding factors for effective teacher longevity. Chapter 3 provides the research design, sampling procedures, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and limitations for the study. In chapter 3 a detailed summary of the data analysis is also presented. In

chapter 4 the results of the qualitative study are reported. Chapter 5 presents the major findings of the study and their implications, as well as recommendations for further research on the topic.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

The issue of teacher shortages is widespread across the nation, and urban schools in low-income areas typically face the worst shortages (Howard, 2003). Students in urban schools are historically under-achieving, and the teacher shortage in their schools creates concern for many. Given that effective teachers are the most important factor contributing to student achievement (Wright, Horn & Sanders, 1997), urban school leaders are seeking to effectively address this issue and retain their most effective teachers.

Included in this chapter is a review of the existing literature pertaining to the study of factors influencing effective teacher longevity in urban schools. The literature review begins by addressing the history of schools in the United States, including the history of effective teaching in urban schools. The issue of teacher retention in urban schools is reviewed in depth. In order to better understand teacher retention, the literature review includes information regarding educator preparation for urban school settings. Finally, motivating factors for teacher longevity are reviewed and the benefits and drawbacks of teacher longevity in urban schools are examined.

History of Education in the United States

To fully grasp the importance of urban education, one must understand the educational landscape of America over the past several centuries. Students have been attending schools in America for nearly four hundred years. The first known school in America, The Boston Latin School, was created in 1635 by the Town of Boston (“Boston Latin School History”, n.d.). The school was modeled after the Free Grammar School of

Boston, England (“Boston Latin School History”, n.d.). Throughout the history of the United States, several events took place that have impacted education today.

Starting in the 1600’s and continuing through the mid-19th century, public schools placed their focus on teaching virtues, community, and religion. Reading, math, and other academia were not a focus until later. In the 1790’s Pennsylvania’s state constitution called for poor children to receive free public education (Race Forward, n.d.). In 1805, the New York Free School Society was formed by wealthy businessmen to provide an education for poor white children (Andrews, 1830). These schools emphasized discipline and obedience, in order to make poor children into good workers (Andrews, 1830). African-American children in New York were not allowed to attend these schools, and instead attended the African Free School, created in 1787, a school established for slaves and the children of slaves (Andrews, 1830). Shortly after, in the early 1800’s, Massachusetts created a law forbidding teaching slaves to read (Race Forward, n.d.). During this time, public schooling in the southern states was not prevalent. Several decades later, during the decade known as the Reconstruction Era (1867-1877), African Americans mobilized together in order to bring public education to the South (Race Forward, n.d.).

Race and socio-economic status continued to play a part in the history of education through the late 1800’s. In 1896, in the court case of Plessy vs. Ferguson, the United States Supreme Court recognized “separate but equal” railway cars for Blacks and Whites in Louisiana (Plessy v. Ferguson, 1896). It was at this time that the federal government officially recognized segregation based upon race as legal. Following the Plessy vs. Ferguson ruling, many southern states passed laws to continue the segregation

of their schools (“History of Public Education in the U.S.”, n.d.). Schools continued to be segregated through much of the 19th and 20th centuries nationwide and only some states required children to attend school. It was not until 1918 that all 50 states had laws in place requiring children of all races to attend school.

In 1954, the government ruled in *Brown vs. Board of Education in Topeka, Kansas* that separate is not equal and segregation in schools must be abolished (*Brown vs. Board of Education*, 1954). Many Americans were opposed to integration which led to social unjust and violence (*Learning for Justice*, 2004). The *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision also led many white families to relocate from cities to more suburban areas in resistance to the desegregation taking place (Lytle, 2007). This, coupled with the movement of African-Americans from the south to cities in the north, and the influx of immigrants from Central America and the Caribbean, increased suburbanization in the 1960’s and 1970’s (Peck, 2017). It was during the 1960’s and 1970’s that socio-economic and demographic change in urban areas begins to have an impact on urban education (Cuban, 2010).

In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act which provided guidance and federal funding to schools in order to support America’s poor children (*Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, 1965). According to James Coleman’s “Equality of Educational Opportunity Report” (1966), American public education across most parts of the country remained largely unequal at this time, even a decade after the 1954 Supreme Court ruling against segregation in schools. In 1968, the Supreme Court ruled that school districts must adopt more effective

plans to achieve integration in their schools (Green v. County School Board of New Kent County, 1968).

Education reform efforts continued through the 19th century. In 1993, Minnesota became the first state to operate a charter school (Cohodes, 2018). According to Cohodes (2018), “charter schools are public schools that operate with autonomy from traditional school districts” (p. 1). Charter schools are held accountable by their authorizers, often colleges or state education organizations, in exchange for flexibility in regards to their budget, curriculum, and school structure (Cohodes, 2018). After Minnesota’s creation of the charter school, many other states followed. Forty-three states currently have laws in place allowing charter schools, and more than five percent of students in the United States attend a charter school. The charter school movement became a factor in education policy in the 1990’s and continues to be today. Charter schools were originally created as a way to test educational practices, but today serve as “an outlet for students and families who are dissatisfied with traditional public schools” (Cohodes, 2018, p. 2).

Amid nationwide reform efforts for student academic achievement, President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002, calling for greater accountability of student performance and statewide academic results (No Child Left Behind, 2002). The No Child Left Behind Act exposed achievement gaps amongst underserved students in the United States and started conversations regarding the need for a quality education for all children (“Every Student Succeeds Act”, 2015). The No Child Left Behind Act was met with controversy on all sides as it required schools to meet rigorous standards and achieve adequate yearly progress for all students and did not allow much flexibility for the states (Fitzpatrick & Knowlton, 2007). In 2015, the Every

Student Succeeds Act was signed into law by President Barack Obama, replacing the previous version of the law, the No Child Left Behind Act (“Every Student Succeeds Act”, 2015). While the No Child Left Behind Act focused solely on student academic achievement, the Every Student Succeeds Act considers more than just test scores when evaluating a school. The Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) guides the practices of today’s public schools in the United States by holding schools accountable for many measures, including the student achievement and growth of disadvantaged and high needs students, such as many of those who attend urban schools.

History of urban schools. The National Center for Education Statistics classifies schools into four major categories including city, suburban, rural, and town. Urban schools are schools with territory inside an urbanized area that are located inside a principal city (NCES, 2006). Urban schools refer to schools that serve students from poverty-stricken communities (Kraft et al. 2015). These schools have faced a variety of challenges historically and are often characterized for having negative associations such as “underperformance..., racism, and deficit perspectives” (Massey, Warrington, & Holmes, 2014).

Beginning in the 1960’s, residential movement caused by American’s reactions to civil rights laws changed the economic and racial undercurrents of urban schools in America. Schools needed to address the challenges that came with serving a population of largely minority and poor students with a significant reduction in their budget due to deindustrialization of urban areas (Massey, Warrington, & Holmes, 2014). The Civil Rights Act of 1964 mandated that the government produce a report describing the inequality of educational opportunities in elementary and secondary education in the

United States. In his government commissioned report, “Equality of Educational Opportunity” (1966), James Coleman collected data from 4,000 schools, 66,000 teachers and nearly 650,000 students. The report revealed a large discrepancy between the academic achievement of Black and White students (Coleman, 1966), a concept that would later become known as an achievement gap. The landmark research also addressed the many disparities that schools that serve minority students encounter and found that school funding did not primarily impact school effectiveness, while student demographics and family background did (Coleman, 1966). The research also indicated that students perform better when they are in school with a diverse population of peers (Coleman, 1966). Coleman’s report sparked decades of further evidence-based education research, particularly in regard to urban schools.

Urban schools in America continued to be known for their inequities through the late 20th century. Many researchers sought to disprove Coleman’s 1966 findings that low student achievement was caused by categorization of poor students (Edmonds, 1979). Weber’s 1971 report, “Inner-City Children Can Be Taught to Read: Four Successful Schools”, indicated that student achievement was a result of poor schools, not the students themselves (Weber, 1971). The State of New York’s Office of Education presented a similar study in 1974 that confirmed Weber’s findings (Edmonds, 1979). Their performance review, “School Factors Influencing Reading Achievement: A Case Study of Two Inner City Schools” showed that differences in student performance could be attributed to factors within a school’s control (1974). Ronald Edmonds was a pioneer for effective school research in the 1970’s. Edmond’s 1978 project, “Search for Effective Schools: The Identification and Analysis of City Schools That Are Instructionally

Effective For Poor Children” demonstrated that all students are capable of learning. Edmonds (1979) states: “While recognizing the importance of family background in developing a child’s character, personality, and intelligence, I cannot overemphasize my rejection of the notion that a school is relieved of its instructional obligations when teaching the children of the poor” (p. 21). Edmonds researched qualities that made schools that served poor children effective, research that continued to be prevalent for years in the future as many sought to understand how to improve an urban school.

Over the past fifty years, national and state policymakers have created numerous systems of educational accountability in an attempt to increase equity and achievement for all students. These reform efforts, such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) or President Obama’s Race to the Top (2009) have ultimately continued to exacerbate negative perceptions of urban education (Massey, Warrington, & Holmes, 2014). The National Center for Education Statistics reports that many Americans feel that urban schools are failing to serve the students they serve, and that urban school students “achieve less in school, achieve less in life, and encounter less success in the labor market later in life” (NCES, 1996, p. 5). These perceptions can be attributed to beliefs about the families of urban school students not fostering educational and economic success (NCES, 1996).

Urban schools today. Today over 15 million students in America attend an urban school (NCES, 2013a). Urban schools continue to serve a diverse population, as nearly 60 percent of the 15 million students identify as Hispanic or Black (NCES, 2013b). Challenges facing these urban schools continue to be multifaceted and set in social, political and cultural contexts (Roden & Truscott, 2006). Closing the achievement gap

between students in urban schools and their more advantaged suburban, middle-class peers who attend predominantly white schools is frequently identified as the most pressing problem education faces (Peterson & Tamor, 2003). According to a 2002 survey administered to over 500 school leaders of America's urban schools, academic achievement ranked as the highest need of urban schools (Lewis, Ceperich, & Jepson, 2002).

Every few years, samples of the student population across the country are administered the National Assessment of Educational Progress, intended to objectively assess the public school students in America on a variety of math and reading skills (NCES, n.d.). 2009 data indicates that on average, white students outperform black students in both reading and math nationwide (Vanneman et al., 2009). The achievement gap between minority students and White students has narrowed over the past several years in some states, including District of Columbia, New York, West Virginia, Louisiana, Arkansas, New Jersey, and Michigan, as evidenced by comparative data from 2003 to 2013 (The Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis, n.d.). Other states, such as those in the Midwest including Kansas and Missouri, have seen no significant change in the achievement gap (The Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis, n.d.).

Addressing the persistent achievement gaps that urban schools face requires several strategies (National Education Association [NEA], 2016). One such strategy is ensuring that students have access to quality staff, or effective teachers (NEA, 2016).

Qualities of an Effective Teacher

Effective teachers are one of the strongest factors for student achievement (Wright, Horn & Sanders, 1997), therefore it is important to understand the qualities that

identify a teacher as effective. The process for evaluating what makes a teacher effective has changed through the past several decades as the government began to hold states more accountable for student learning. No Child Left Behind (2001) defined a highly qualified teacher as one who possesses a bachelor's degree, full state certification or licensure, and can prove that they know their content area. Effective teacher criteria have since changed, becoming less qualification focused and more related to a teacher's ability to meet student needs effectively. While exact definitions of teacher effectiveness have varied (Campbell, Kyriakides, Muijs, & Robinson, 2003; Cheng & Tsui, 1999; Cruickshank & Haefele, 1990; Muijs, 2006), there is one consistency across all definitions: the teacher's ability to increase student achievement.

A research synthesis for The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (Goe, Bell, & Little, 2008) breaks down teacher effectiveness into five key points:

- Effective teachers have high expectations for all students and help them learn, as demonstrated on value-added, test-based, or alternative measures.
- Effective teachers contribute to positive academic, attitudinal, and social outcomes for students such as regular attendance, on-time promotion to the next grade and graduation, self-efficacy, and cooperative behavior.
- Effective teachers use diverse resources to plan and structure engaging learning opportunities; monitor student progress formatively, adapting instruction as needed; and evaluate learning using multiple sources of evidence.
- Effective teachers contribute to the development of classrooms and schools that value diversity and civic-mindedness.

- Effective teachers collaborate with other teachers, administrators, parents, and education professionals to ensure students' success, particularly the success of students with special needs and those at high risk of failure.

Teachers in urban school settings, where the students and schools typically have fewer resources than suburban middle-class schools, face a challenge much different from other school environments (Gehrke, 2005). Haberman (1995) states that “having effective teachers is a matter of life and death” for students in urban schools (p. 1). In addition to making a positive impact on student academic and social-emotional achievement, effective teachers in urban schools must navigate through challenges that may include overcrowding, staff turnover, limited resources, and a large number of students at academic risk. Gehrke (2005) found that three characteristics of teachers in urban schools most directly relate to teacher effectiveness: teacher’s “knowing themselves, knowing the environment in which they teach, and maintaining high expectations” (p. 15). Haberman (1995) identified fifteen characteristics of effective urban school teachers in “Star Teachers of Poverty”. Haberman (1995) reports that the effective teacher’s ideologies are what sets them apart from ineffective teachers. Star teachers frequently seek out ways to improve through strategies, activities, and techniques, in order to meet the needs of every student, despite their background (Haberman, 1995). Although it can be difficult to measure the effectiveness of a teacher, scholars agree that an effective teacher makes a lasting positive impact on the life of student (Stronge, 2018).

Urban Schools and Teacher Retention

Teacher retention in urban school systems that serve minority and low-income students across the United States is a constant challenge. Teacher turnover is the highest

in low-income schools (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future [NCTAF], 2003). The turnover rate for teachers in high poverty schools is almost a third higher than the rate for all teachers in all schools (Garcia & Weiss, 2019b). Recent graduates of college teaching programs and experienced educators often view working in an urban school system as unattractive (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005), and students who attend urban schools are more likely to be taught by novice teachers due to the inequitable distribution of more experienced teachers to schools with a less disadvantaged student population (Podgursky & Springer, 2011). Podgursky and Springer (2011) state that the lack of experienced and effective teachers working with disadvantaged students helps to explain the achievement gap many urban school systems are currently facing. Research demonstrates that effective teachers are more likely to increase student achievement and close the achievement gap (Amrin-Beardsley, 2012). Unfortunately, teachers who produce high student achievement in urban schools are highly likely to leave within their first five years in a school (The New Teacher Project, 2012). To raise academic achievement and student outcomes, urban school systems strive to employ and retain effective teachers (The New Teacher Project, 2012).

The problem with teacher retention in urban schools is complex and concerning to many. Urban schools need to not only hire and recruit effective teachers for their classrooms, but also employ research-based strategies to retain them (Wronowski, 2018). The retention of effective teachers in urban school classrooms is critical to the success of urban school students if they are to succeed in their future (Hill & Gollette, 2005).

Urban School Educator Preparation. Research from the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future found when new teachers were well prepared, their

attrition was cut in half (NCTAF, 2003). Many teachers report that they are not adequately prepared for teaching students of different cultural, ethnic, or linguistic backgrounds (Ray and Bowman, 2003). In 1999, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that as many as 80% of teachers who teach ethnically diverse students feel unprepared to fulfill their role (NCES, 1999). Therefore, teacher preparation is a concern of leaders striving to retain their teachers. Teachers are typically trained for a teaching position by one of three ways: university-based traditional education preparation program, alternative certification program, or through an urban teacher residency (Papay, West, Fullerton, and Kane, 2011). Teacher education programs can help prepare teachers for careers in an urban school system by being realistic in how they prepare teachers (Howard, 2003). According to Howard (2003), “new teachers in urban schools must be explicitly informed about the social context of education” (p. 149). Zumwalt and Craig (2005) state that teachers who are underprepared for their roles leave at a much higher rate than those that are not. Hence, providing teachers with the skills they need to teach in these schools may increase teacher retention (Howard, 2003).

Many colleges and universities have begun to offer teacher preparation programs specific to urban settings in an effort to decrease the teacher turnover rates in urban schools and provide effective training for teachers prior to entering the classroom. According to the Director of an urban educator preparation program at a Midwestern University, these programs are designed to provide teacher candidates with opportunities to cross cultural borders and gain a deeper understanding of urban students (Waddell, 2011, p. 24). Additionally, coursework in these programs is focused on immersing

teacher candidates in purposeful experiences, and providing reflection for teacher candidates to recognize their own identity as a teacher (Waddell, 2001).

Alternative certification programs have assisted nearly one in five teachers nationwide in teacher certification (Walsh and Jacobs, 2007). Unlike traditional university-based teacher preparation programs, alternative certification programs provide alternative routes to certification, but still hold candidates to many of the same standards and requirements as a traditional route to certification (National Center for Teacher Residencies [NCTR], n.d.). Most teachers seeking alternative certification are employed full-time in a school system while pursuing program requirements for their teacher certification (Ilmer, Elliot, Snyder, Nahan, and Columbo, 2005).

Other institutions have created teacher-residency programs to provide year-long, apprenticeship style training to incoming urban school teachers (NCTR, n.d.). Recently, the United States Department of Education (2014) has supported grants creating teacher-residency programs in several urban school districts nationwide. According to the NCTR, urban teacher residency programs have had success in addressing the issue of urban teacher attrition, with about 85% of their graduates remaining in the classroom after their initial commitment of service (NCTR, n.d.). Teacher residents in these programs have already earned a degree in another subject area, and programs are typically able to cater their coursework requirements to the needs of the school and district where the resident is placed (Woods, 2016). Many teacher-residency programs require resident teachers to commit to the school or district they are assigned to for multiple years (Woods, 2016).

Motivating Factors for Teacher Longevity

Research has found numerous factors that impact teacher longevity in urban school systems. These factors include administrator support, school climate, compensation and benefits, and stakeholder relationships.

Administrator Support. School principals play a critical role in teacher retention and longevity, as they provide support and leadership to teachers in all aspects of a teacher's career. Nearly eighty percent of teacher turnover is caused from teachers moving schools or leaving the profession (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014). One of the many reasons that teachers choose to leave a school is lack of support and leadership from administration. Research from The New Teacher Project (2012) states that only 53 percent of effective, "irreplaceable", teachers remain in their school teaching position after five years. Amrein-Beardsley (2012) indicates these teachers' reasons for leaving are influenced greatly by poor school leadership. Hughes, Matt, and O'Reilly's 2015 study on the retention of teachers in "hard-to-staff schools" concluded that principal support of teachers has a strong correlation to teacher retention (2015). Principals can create and maintain a positive school culture and climate that will reduce teacher attrition in "hard-to-staff schools" (Hughes, Matt, and O'Reilly, 2015, p. 133). In an urban school system, a principal's ability to create and sustain change is a key factor in a school's success. Ndoeye, Imig, and Parker's (2010) findings indicate teachers report having a principal with a high self-efficacy as the most important factor when deciding to stay at a school. Self-efficacy is defined as one's ability to believe in his or her ability to succeed. Principal self-efficacy, when measured by administrator support of teachers, can help solve the problem of teacher retention (Brown and Wynn, 2009). In addition to self-efficacy, a school administrator's ability to involve their teachers in decision-making

impacts teacher retention. Research has suggested that in schools where teachers reported that they had a strong level of influence over school-based decision making and instructional programming that stability rates were higher (Allensworth, et.al., 2009). Schools that have administrators who collaborate with teachers to coordinate and sustain instruction are more likely to retain teachers (Simon & Johnson, 2013).

Many school districts in urban areas have been labeled as “hard-to-staff” in recent years. In these hard-to-staff schools, principal self-efficacy in the form of support from leaders can be a motivating factor in teacher retention and longevity. Data from Hughes, Matt, and O’Reilly’s (2015) study indicated that “emotional and environmental support from principals most greatly impacts teacher retention in hard-to-staff schools” (p. 132). Teachers are more likely to continue working in a school where they feel supported by their school administrator. This was further substantiated by Waddell (2010) in her research at the University of Missouri, “Fostering Relationships to Increase Teacher Retention in Urban Schools”, where she determined that one of the key external components of teacher retention was a teacher’s relationship with their principal. Existing research largely supports the claim that teachers stay in schools with inclusive leadership where they trust their administrator as an instructional leader (Allensworth, Ponisciak, & Mazzeo, 2009).

Financial Benefit. Compensation for teachers in America has been historically low compared to the salaries of professionals in other areas. Darling-Hammond et al. stated that “teachers are more likely to quit when they work in districts with lower wages and when their salaries are low relative to alternative wage opportunities” (2016, p. 18).

To address teacher shortages and recruit and retain effective teachers, some school districts are using compensation and benefits as a tool (Allegreto & Mishell, 2018).

Compensation, benefits, and pension is the biggest expenditure for any district, with many spending as much as 55% of their budget on compensation to teachers alone (Podgursky & Springer, 2011). In order to determine teacher pay, most school districts use an experience step and educational lane compensation structure (Education Resource Strategies, 2012). These step-and-lane compensation structures benefit teachers with more experience and further education, such as a master's degree or doctorate level degree. Entry-level teachers, despite their effectiveness, are often left with low salaries while those with more years of career service are rewarded.

The United States Department of Education states that district "compensation investments are too often based on factors unrelated to student achievement" ("Teacher Compensation", n.d.). To encourage teacher retention, many school districts are considering plans to tie teacher evaluations to teacher salaries and at least 20 states provide additional compensation for teachers who work at hard-to-staff schools (Behrstock-Sherratt & Potemski, 2013). Some school districts in urban areas have already created innovative incentive packages for teachers in the form of compensation and benefits. The Denver Public Schools system utilizes ProComp, a compensation system that replaces the classic salary schedule with incentive-based pay for specific accomplishments, such as student academic growth, working in- hard-to-staff schools or earning satisfactory teacher evaluation scores ("Teacher Compensation", n.d.). The District of Columbia Public School system has also implemented an innovative pay structure. Through their ImpactPlus performance-based compensation system, highly

effective teachers, as determined by teacher evaluations, are rewarded with yearly bonuses (District of Columbia Public Schools, n.d.). Teacher compensation, particularly teacher compensation in hard-to-staff schools, often located in urban areas, continues to be a public policy concern.

School Climate. School climate is composed of multiple factors including relationships amongst staff and students, school safety, and the school’s educational environment (Garcia & Weiss, 2019b). The Aspen Institute’s Education & Society Program and ExcelEd’s 2021 report “Creating Conditions for Student Success: A Policymakers’ School Climate Playbook” defines school climate:

School climate describes the quality and character of school life and the experiences of students, teachers, and other staff within a physical school or online learning environment. A positive and healthy school climate enables learning by providing students with healthy adult-student relationships, rigorous expectations for learning, and conditions of mental and emotional safety and belonging among students and staff, all of which are essential to student success.

(p. 2)

Teachers spend most of their time at work with students, and their work environment has a major impact on desire to want to stay working in a job (Garcia & Weiss, 2019b). Garcia and Weiss (2019b) note that many of the factors that contribute to a school’s climate are shaped by larger societal forces such as rising poverty, racial and economic segregation of schools, and school funding. A teacher’s decision to stay or leave their school can be supported by a positive school climate, while a poor school

climate has a negative impact on teacher satisfaction, motivation, and teacher plans to stay in their position (Garcia & Weiss, 2019b; Ndoye, Imig, & Parker, 2010).

Collaboration and cooperation amongst school staff members is a major factor in school climate. Similar to any job field, the relationships teachers have with their coworkers play a role in their job satisfaction. According to Ouyand and Paprock (2006), these relationships can create a positive impact on teacher longevity. Additionally, research demonstrates that collaboration amongst teachers and school staff increases teacher job satisfaction and is of significant importance to teacher retention (Perie & Baker, 1997; Barth, 2006; Farber, 1982). Collaboration amongst staff members is often linked to a positive educational environment. The educational environment encompasses what happens in classrooms and the school in regards to student learning.

In addition to the social and educational environment of a school, the physical environment and physical safety a school provides is often a factor in teacher retention (Barry, Bastian, Darling-Hammond & Kini, 2019). A physical environment conducive for teaching and learning, one where the school “is clean, is well-maintained, and has the appropriate space/resources” impacts teacher retention even greater in high-poverty schools (Barry, et al., 2019, p. 6). Similarly, Vandiver (2011) found that poor school facilities influenced teachers to have negative feelings about staying in their current school. The challenging environments that teachers face creates what most would consider unattractive working conditions (Garcia & Weiss, 2019b). When a school’s climate and working conditions are seen positively by teachers, teacher longevity improves.

School Stakeholder Relationships. Interpersonal relationships are important to who we are as human beings. Relationships are important to both teacher and student sense of belonging at school (Boston & Warren, 2017). Taxer, Becker-Kurz, and Frenzel (2019) studied the impact of student/teacher relationships on teachers and found that these relationships can reduce the effects of teacher burnout. Waddell (2010) researched the components that cause urban school teachers to remain in their teaching positions after five or more years. She found that relationships amongst coworkers, principals, and students were all external factors impacting teaching retention (Waddell, 2010). Close relationships and collaboration with coworkers was a large influence on teacher satisfaction, and therefore, teacher retention (Waddell, 2010). Forming strong relationships with colleagues can help teachers' feelings of belonging and ownership, even when encountering the many challenges of an urban school environment (Waddell, 2010). Waddell reports that one way schools can encourage teacher retention is for teachers to develop professional relationships with other teachers that "convey value, support, and empowerment" (2010, p. 79).

Many educators become teachers to make an impact on the lives of students through relationships. According to Allen et al. (2021), "good relationships arise when students feel cared for, respected, and respected by their teacher" (p. 533). Strong relationships between students and their teachers sets the foundation for successful learning to take place. Borba (1989) states, "The importance of interpersonal relationships in our lives cannot be overstated. We all need to feel a sense of connectedness to another human being—particularly to those whom we consider to be important and significant" (p. 163). The impact of positive teacher relationships with

students has been repeatedly found as one of the strongest factors in student sense of belonging at school (Allen et al., 2021). Similarly, Hattie (2009) studied the effective size of 252 influences on student achievement. He found that teacher-student relationships had a highly significant impact on student academic outcomes (Hattie, 2009).

Teacher–student relationships are often mentioned by teachers as one of the main reasons for staying in the teaching profession (Hargreaves 1998; O’Connor 2008). When teachers form strong relationships with students, students are more engaged in learning, ultimately impacting teacher satisfaction at work (Spilt, Koomen & Thijs, 2011).

Hargreaves (2000) research, based upon interviews with 60 teachers, concluded that relationships with students were the most important source of motivation for teachers. Shann (1998) used data from a 3-year project of school effectiveness in four large urban middle schools to examine teacher satisfaction. Both interview and questionnaire data revealed that teachers ranked teacher–student relationships as most important among 14 key variables including school curriculum, job security, relationships, and teacher autonomy (Shann, 1998). Despite the challenges of teaching, the relationships between teachers and students are a driving factor for teacher retention (Webb, 2018).

Summary

The relevant literature relating to the study was reviewed in this chapter. The history of urban schools, teacher retention in urban schools, what constitutes as an effective teacher, and motivating factors for teacher longevity including administrator support, relationships, financial benefit, and school climate were discussed. The methodology for the study is included in chapter 3. Additionally, chapter 3 will present

the research design for the study, sampling procedures, data collection procedures, data analysis, and limitations of the study.

Chapter 3

Methods

The purpose of this study is to explore the factors which influence effective teachers to continue working in urban elementary schools. Chapter 3 will describe the methodology used to collect and analyze data for the study. This chapter includes the research design, sampling procedures, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and limitations for the study. A detailed summary of the data analysis is also presented.

Research Design

Qualitative phenomenological research was chosen for the study for the purpose of obtaining an in-depth understanding of the viewpoints of selected participants (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2016), qualitative research promotes a deeper understanding of a social concept from the perspective of research participants. The research in this study is grounded in the experiences of thirteen specific participants. The mission of this research is to gain insight regarding effective teacher retention in urban elementary schools.

Setting

The research study was conducted in three cities (City X, City Y, and City Z) in a metropolitan area in the Midwest that includes two bordering states. Together, City X, City Y and City Z have approximately 680,000 residents and serve approximately 60,000 students in public K-12 schools. All three cities are considered urban areas and contain many urban public schools, both in the district and charter setting and at the elementary, middle, and high school level. Together, the three cities have about 120 K-12 schools. The study participants were teachers in School District M, School District N, Charter School A, and Charter School B. School District M is located in City Y and participants

in the study from School District M worked at School A and School B. School District N is located in City Z and participants in the study from School District N worked at School C, School D, and School E. Charter School A and Charter School B are located in City X. About half of the student population in City X attends a public charter school. The majority population of students in all three cities do not identify as White and are largely economically disadvantaged.

Understanding the demographics of the student population of the participant's schools within the study was a vital piece to the research. Table 1 represents the demographic statistics of each district and charter school. The students eligible for the Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Program under the National School Lunch Act of 1946 are identified as economically disadvantaged.

Table 1

Demographics of School A, School B, School C, School D, School E, Charter School A, and Charter School B

	W	B	H	A	NA	PI	MR	FRL
<i>School A</i>	14%	23%	53%	3%	<1%	<1%	6%	83%
<i>School B</i>	9%	18%	68%	3%	<1%	<1%	2%	93%
<i>School C</i>	11%	59%	19%	<1%	<1%	<1%	11%	78%
<i>School D</i>	17%	58%	15%	4%	<1%	<1%	9%	75%
<i>School E</i>	25%	54%	9%	1%	<1%	1%	9%	61%
<i>Charter A</i>	2%	86%	6%	<1%	<1%	<1%	6%	99%
<i>Charter B</i>	2%	96%	1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	55%

Note. W = White; B = Black; H = Hispanic; A = Asian; MR = Multi-Racial; PI = Pacific

Islander; NA = Native American; FRL = Eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch Program

Adapted from *Common Core of Data* by the National Center for Education Statistics,

2020. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/>

Sampling Procedures

The population for the study was effective elementary school teachers who teach in urban elementary schools in metropolitan areas. The researcher used purposive sampling method to select the research setting. Purposive sampling is the selection of "a sample based on the researcher's experience or knowledge of the group to be sampled" (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008, p. 175). The researcher selected the elementary school principals to contact based upon her knowledge of and relationships with working

principals in School District M, School District N, Charter School A, and Charter School B.

The study then utilized criterion sampling method to select participants from the seven elementary schools. Criterion sampling method is used when the researcher selects participants based upon specific criteria (Lunenburg and Irby, 2008). Each principal was contacted via email with formal information regarding the study and an invitation to provide the names and contact information of effective teachers in their elementary school (Appendix B). Principals used the effective teacher definition and criteria (NCCTQ, 2008) (Appendix A) to determine the qualifications for teacher effectiveness. Therefore, criterion sampling method was used to select the sample that would qualify to participate.

Once the researcher compiled a list of effective teachers from School A, School B, School C, School D, School E, Charter School A and Charter School B using the information provided by the elementary school principals, purposive random sampling was used to invite 20 teachers to participate in the study (Appendix C). Purposive random sampling was utilized as a procedure due to the fact that the possible participants exceeded the number of participants that the researcher was able to study due to the researcher's time and resources (Lunenburg and Irby, 2008). Thirteen teachers accepted the researcher's invitation to participate in the study.

Instruments

The researcher collected data through participant interviews using a series of open-ended interview questions. The open-ended interview questions were created by the researcher and reviewed by an expert panel of educators. The interview questions were

created to better understand the background of each participant and their perspective on teaching in an urban school. The study's research question: "What factors motivate effective teachers to continue teaching in urban schools?" was used as a framework when creating the interview questions. The researcher also utilized the literature review of factors that motivate teacher longevity and challenges that urban school teachers face in order to develop the interview questions.

To validate that the interview questions aligned with the research question, an expert panel of educators reviewed the interview questions and provided feedback on the face validity and content validity of the interview questions. The panel was selected based upon the role of each member as a professional educator with experience working in an urban school setting. Two of the members on the expert panel were members of the advisory committee for the Baker University Graduate School of Education and one was a principal at an urban elementary school in City X that was not included in the study. Feedback from the expert panel helped to ensure that the interview questions were purposeful for exploring the factors that have influenced effective teachers to continue teaching in an urban school setting. The researcher made revisions to the interview questions based upon feedback from the expert panel. Following the expert panel review, the researcher performed a mock interview with an urban school teacher that was not a participant in the study. The mock interview allowed the interviewer to test and refine the interview questions.

All participants were asked the same set of interview questions (see Appendix D). The interviews consisted of three main open-ended questions regarding factors that motivate effective teachers to continue working in urban schools. More specifically, the

first interview question asked the participants about whether or not they had thought about leaving the urban school teaching profession and why, and the second and third interview questions asked the participant about factors that have motivated them to continue teaching in an urban school. After the second interview question, based on the literature review pertaining to challenges that urban school teachers face and motivating factors for teacher longevity, optional follow-up questions were developed to explore further the participants' experience and perceptions. Each follow-up question explored a specific factor (e.g. administrator support, financial benefit, relationships with students) related to participants' working experience. The researcher followed the interview protocol as a guide to determine when an optional follow-up question was necessary to ask the participant. The questions allowed the researcher to better understand the perceptions and experiences of each effective teacher participating in the study.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection procedures “describe precisely the physical things you did to obtain data from your participants” (Lunenburg and Irby, 2008). In order to collect data for the study, a research proposal was submitted to the Institutional Review Board [IRB] at Baker University on December 15, 2021. The IRB approved the research study on December 17, 2021 (Appendix E). Once the IRB approved the study, the researcher began the data collection process.

The researcher used contact information found on School District M, School District N, Charter School A and Charter School B's websites for each school district to inform them of the study and its purpose. The researcher sent an introductory email to the School District M, School District N, Charter School A and Charter School B

superintendent of schools or Director of Research. Following district/charter approval to conduct the study with teachers in each school, the next step was to contact elementary school principals within School District M, School District N, Charter School A and Charter School B. The researcher obtained the contact information for the school principals from each school district's website and sent information about the study, including the background and purpose of the study, via email (Appendix B). Principals were given the opportunity to have their teachers participate in the study. Principals who accepted the invitation for their teachers to participate then used the five-point definition of teacher effectiveness (NCCTQ, 2008) (Appendix A) to provide the researcher with names and contact information of effective teachers working in their elementary school.

The researcher received a list of 20 effective teachers and their contact information from the seven principals. The 20 potential study participants were contacted via email with a formal invitation to participate in the study (Appendix C). The email invitation included the background, purpose of the study, and time commitment for participants (one, 15-30 minute virtual individual interview) and the link to an electronic consent to participate form. 13 teachers agreed to participate in the study and signed the consent form (Appendix F). Teachers who agreed to participate were contacted via email to schedule a virtual interview using the Zoom video conferencing platform. Interview times were agreed upon by the participant and the researcher.

The researcher followed an open-ended question interview protocol. All participants were asked the same set of predetermined interview questions with optional follow-up probing questions asked as needed to obtain a complete understanding of each interview question. The virtual interviews ranged from 15 to 30 minutes and were

conducted by the researcher. The interviews were video recorded in their entirety by the researcher using the Zoom computer-based application for further analysis of the data.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

Lunenburg and Irby (2008) state that “careful, systematic attention to analysis of qualitative data is required of the serious qualitative researcher”. The qualitative analysis of the phenomenological data consisted of analyzing interviews for common themes. This process was completed in order to identify patterns and communicate what the data revealed within the study (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008).

The researcher conducted 13 individual interviews. The interviews were transcribed verbatim automatically after each interview using the Zoom computer-based application tool. The researcher then reviewed the Zoom transcriptions and compared them to the video recordings to ensure accuracy. Participants were emailed a copy of their interview transcripts to complete member checks, an opportunity to provide feedback on the accuracy of their interview transcripts (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

After the member checks were complete, the researcher uploaded transcriptions from each interview to online program Quirkos to analyze the interview data. Quirkos is an internet based coding software that is used to analyze qualitative data.

The researcher followed steps outlined in *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (Saldana, 2021) when completing the data analysis process. During the initial analysis, the researcher read through the transcripts for common themes and initial understandings. The researcher wrote memos of these reflections about the data for use during more detailed analysis. Next, the researcher began the thematic analysis of the data through a three phase coding process.

During the first phase of the coding process the researcher first assigned codes to the entire set of data using provisional coding. Saldana (2021) states that codes are short words or phrases that symbolically assign an attribute for a portion of data. Provisional coding “begins with a list of researcher generated codes based upon what preparatory investigation suggests might appear in the data before they are analyzed” (Saldana, 2021, p. 213). The researcher used the literature review on motivating factors for teacher longevity and memos written during the initial analysis to develop the provisional codes. The following provisional codes were used: administrator support, school climate, financial benefits, relationships, professional development, and leadership roles. After developing the provisional codes, the researcher holistically coded each transcript using the provisional codes, and new provisional codes were added when they emerged from the data. According to Saldana (2021), holistic coding is used when the researcher wants to categorize the text into broad categories as groundwork for more detailed coding of the data. Through the holistic coding process categories began to emerge.

For the second phase of the coding process, the researcher engaged in pattern coding. Saldana (2021) states that pattern coding is a way of grouping the summarized data from the first phase of coding into smaller themes or concepts. The researcher analyzed the commonalities amongst the first phase of codes and assigned them various pattern codes (Saldana, 2021). Additional categories within each theme began to emerge. Once pattern coding was complete the researcher reviewed and reread the transcripts to ensure precision within the first two phases of coding.

In the researcher’s final phase of coding, values coding was used to code data that was previously not included due to the fact that it did not align with the provisional

codes. Values coding provides codes to data that represents participant's personal beliefs, values, and attitudes (Saldana, 2021). The researcher coded the data that emerged amongst participants regarding their experience working in urban schools as an effective teacher that did not align to the previous provisional codes. Throughout the entire coding process, the researcher kept a variety of analytic memos. The analytic memos were used to document the researcher's reflections on the emergent patterns, categories, and themes within the data.

After the three phases of coding were completed the researcher viewed the codes and organized them into themes. Throughout the entire data analysis process data were analyzed to answer the research question, "What factors motivate effective teachers to continue teaching in urban schools?". Themes from the study data were then compared to that of the literature on the topic.

Reliability and Trustworthiness

A concern in qualitative research is often the reliability and trustworthiness of the study. To ensure reliability, the researcher standardized all data collection procedures by following the interview protocol precisely with each participant. The researcher documented all steps of the research process and took detailed notes before, during, and following all interviews and throughout the data analysis. Lincoln and Guba (1985) expressed that trustworthiness of a study can be defined by its credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (as cited in Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). The researcher applied some strategies to establish the trustworthiness of the study.

To establish the credibility of the study and enhance accurateness, the researcher used member checks. Member checks involved the researcher providing each participant

with opportunity to review their interview transcript for accuracy. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) state that transferability refers to the likelihood that another researcher in the same context would produce similar research findings. The researcher established transferability by describing the setting of the study in rich detail and providing thick descriptions of data acquired within the study.

Researcher's Role

One piece of the researcher's role in qualitative research is to be reflective about one's own voice and perspective and to acknowledge how personal values and experiences may impact the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). The researcher had served as an elementary school teacher in an urban school in one of the cities in this study prior to becoming an Instructional Coach. Therefore, the researcher's own experiences with her choice to continue working in an urban elementary school may have influenced her perceptions during the study. The researcher had her own beliefs and reasoning for maintaining a career in an urban elementary school, but worked to remain neutral and maintain a sharp focus on the objective in all interviews and data analysis.

The researcher's experience and professional contacts allowed her easy access to communication with each of the principals that were selected to provide names and contact information of effective teachers. The researcher had prior experience with communicating with urban school teachers, and had an understanding of the vocabulary that many urban school teachers use when referring to education.

Limitations

Limitations of the study are the characteristics of methodology that may have influenced the interpretation of the research (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2016). The study has the following limitations:

- The sample was only taken from one metropolitan area spanning three cities across two Midwestern states and may therefore not be applicable for educators in other states or cities.
- The size of the school or district that the participants are employed in may impact participants' working experiences.
- Effective teachers in different schools or locations may have different factors that influence them to continue teaching in urban elementary schools and the results of the study may not transfer to schools in other settings.
- Only female effective teachers were included in the study.

Summary

Chapter 3 detailed the methodology for this qualitative study. The chapter included the research design, sampling methods, data collection methods, and researcher's role. An overview of the data analysis methods was also provided. The results of the study are discussed in depth in chapter 4.

Chapter 4

Results

The results of the study are described in this chapter. The purpose of the study was to determine factors that motivate effective teacher longevity in urban elementary schools. The researcher used a phenomenological design to examine the perceptions of effective elementary urban school teachers. The research question was, “What factors motivate effective teachers to continue working in urban schools?” and the researcher used a series of follow-up questions to further explore the topic. Six main themes emerged through the thirteen participant interviews including administrator support, relationships, positive school climate, financial benefit, teacher-student like demographics, and leadership/professional development opportunities. The 13 participants worked in four different districts or charter schools and the participant information is detailed in Table 2. All names reported are pseudonyms. See Table 3 for a summary of the results of the effective teacher interviews.

Table 2*Participant Reference and Information*

Participant	Experience in Years	District/Charter
Sammy	17	Charter B
Cassidy	6	District B
Jamie	7	Charter A
Leah	10	Charter A
Molly	17	District A
Lucy	12	Charter A
Tara	8	District B
Paula	9	Charter A
Zoe	8	Charter B
Paige	9	District B
Whitney	20	District A
Anne	3	Charter A
Rachel	7	District A

Table 3*Summary of Qualitative Results*

Theme 1 Positive Relationships	
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Note. N= Number of participants mentioning the category. Total sample included 13 participants.

Theme 1: Positive Relationships

All 13 teachers in the study reported that relationships with school stakeholders were a driving factor in motivating them to continue teaching in an urban school. Thirteen teachers stated that their relationships with both students and families, specifically parents and siblings of students, have kept them in their urban school

teaching position, and seven teachers said that community relationships were a motivating factor for their longevity in urban schools.

Category 1.1: Relationships with Students

There is limited research around the impact of student/teacher relationships on teachers. Taxer, Becker-Kurz, and Frenzel's (2019) study found that relationships with students reduce teacher effects of burnout. Waddell (2010) found that relationships with students were an external theme in the retention of urban school teachers. The 13 participants in the study affirmed her research. When asked if relationships with students have impacted their decision to continue working in an urban school, Rachel stated, "Absolutely. Even on my worst days the students are the reason I go." Jamie noted, "I've always considered my students as my family." All 13 effective teacher participants in the study reported similar feelings about their relationships with students. Ann described the impact of the teacher-student relationship. She said, "Students see that 'oh, they are my teacher, but also a person and they care about me and love me' so when the students can see that you care and love them, they are willing to learn from you and listen to you and respect you. So I feel like that it's very important to have the student and teacher relationship".

Whitney said, "The directives from higher-ups [administrators] in the district go up and down, but the kids stay the same. They're always sweet.... yeah, they make me happy, so they are why I stay." "The most important thing is the kids; they are what keep me motivated to be here" Rachel noted. Ann spoke about the relationship she has with students and how it extended to outside of the classroom: "I literally still have former students who call my phone even though they are older now, you know, just checking on

me. I find joy in that.... knowing we have built a connection outside of me just being their teacher”. Similarly, Tara described how relationships have impacted her decision to continue teaching at an urban school. She stated, “We have a lot that comes to our plate every day and to really work with those kids and build relationships with them, that’s what really keeps me here. A lot of times you know you get to see those kids as they get older and build those relationships with them, that keeps me here.”

Category 1.1a: Impact on Students. Within teacher relationships with students, the category of impact on students emerged. Seven of the teachers in the study spoke specifically about how the impact they make on students has impacted their decision to continue teaching in an urban school. For example, Zoe said, “The kids are why I’m still here. I really feel like I’m making an impact on their community...I just feel like I’m making more of an impact in their classroom than I would in a predominately White, suburban school district.” Tara stated, “I feel like, you know, that I could make a bigger impact here than maybe where I could somewhere else, and so that’s a really big factor for me [staying]”. The effective teachers described the impact on both the academic and social-emotional growth as important in their decision to continue teaching at an urban school. Lori stated, “I think it’s the progress and growth that I see with students over years”. Paula described her perspective, “To see them (the students) thrive and do great things and help them along the way, that’s a rewarding factor.” It was found that effective teacher participants chose to stay because they felt like they were making a bigger impact on their students than the might in another school setting.

Category 1.2: Relationships with Families

All 13 effective teacher participants reported that relationships with families who attend their school has been a factor in their urban school longevity. Teachers discussed the bond they form with families, including students, their siblings, and their parents or guardians over time. Whitney explained that she considers students' families and her as a team, "we [parents/guardians and teachers] are constantly working together as a team to help the child succeed". Tara spoke about how families really like her school, which in turn helps teachers like their job. She described how families want their children to attend the school and the positive atmosphere helps her build strong relationships with the families. Leah described how the partnership she builds with students and their families helps her and her students be successful. She said,

In order for students to be successful, the parents have to be on board, the teachers have to be on board, and the student has to be on board. So without the relationship with the parents, then it's not going to be successful, so that's why it's really important for me to make those relationships, so that way we can all be a team, and we can help the student as much as possible or give them the help they need.

Teachers reported that relationships built over time with multiple students in one family positively impact their decision to stay. For example, Sammy said, "I do enjoy that I've had several siblings come through my class, and so I do enjoy that aspect of families, and you know building relationships [with the families], you know I've seen parents year after year..." Jamie noted, "Having siblings of other students I had [in my class] and just like continuing that connection is a big reason I stay".

Category 1.3: Community Relationships

Five teachers in this study reported relationships within their school community have impacted their decision to continue teaching at their urban school. The U.S. Department of Education (n.d.) states that “when families, communities, and schools work together, students are more successful and the entire community benefits”. This study found that community relationships impact not only students, but teacher satisfaction. Molly stated simply, “The main reason I stay is the community”. A school’s community may encompass the physical location of the school building, the surrounding businesses or religious organizations, and community members. The teachers spoke directly of relationships their school has with local businesses and community members. For example, Paula said,

It’s amazing to see just how much everybody [in the community] uplifts each other and supports one another. Everyone knows about one another’s businesses, and then they [community members/families] say like, ‘I’m going to come by and support you’... that is a rewarding and a contributing factor for me [to stay].

Cassidy described the impact that community relationships has had on her daily experiences as a classroom teacher. Her personal experience is one of many that provides her students and school with resources they would not have available for them if it weren’t for the school community. She said,

We have some community partners, one of them is a bank, and another one is a big church that is just around the corner from us [the school]. They are constantly asking for ways they can help support our school and what they can donate to us.... The bank that is nearby partners with another nearby business and provides

our students with a field trip. Students learn about banking, money, savings, etc. and then they are able to learn about other hands-on careers such as plumbing and electrical work and get a tour of the business. Other community partners donate money so we are able to celebrate our students in ways that we wouldn't have otherwise been able to.

Theme 2: Administrator Support

Boe, Barkanic, and Leow (1999) reported that teachers who stay in their positions are almost four times more likely to strongly perceive their administrators' behavior as supportive and encouraging than teachers who leave. Administrator support emerged as another theme from the 13 teacher interview responses. Referring to her school administrators, Lucy explained, "knowing that they'll go to bat for you, that really means something". Rachel expressed similar thoughts, "Having an administrator that you feel like would have your back even if you do or do not make a mistake is really nice." Paige explained how support from her school principal during challenges has motivated her to continue teaching in an urban school. She said,

If there's an issue that I feel comes up, I talk with them [the administrator] and they address it and we kind of work it through, so that's something I don't keep bottled up. If I do have a concern, we definitely work through it, and so I would just say they [the administrators] are supportive and their support has been a reason for me to stay, for sure.

Teachers explained the support they have received from administration. Cassidy shared, "...they've been super supportive. Not just at my building, but even like the district administration, they're constantly finding ways to grow and improve and including staff

in that.” Leah shared how her administrators have shown a great deal of support in regards to best practice in her early childhood classroom. She said, “they have allowed us the leeway to make the classroom, especially early childhood, but even the other grades, and things like that, to be more developmentally appropriate, and I think that that helps...”. Other participants in the study discussed difficult situations in their classroom and school where they have felt supported in their decision-making by their school administrator.

During the interviews, four teachers shared stories about administrators they have had at in the past at previous urban schools that have caused them to leave their teaching positions. Lucy said, “I never want to work in a school again where I don’t have the support of my principal. I never want to be in that position, it was not fun”. Paula stated, “Administration was a contributing factor for why I left my old school. Decisions that were made or not made [by administrators] made it a more challenging work experience [for me]”. These participant statements affirmed previous research that lack of administrator support may lead to teacher turnover (Curtis, 2012).

Theme 3: Positive School Climate

Another theme that emerged through the interviews was positive school climate. Within the theme of positive school climate, three categories emerged. The categories included school social environment, school educational environment, and school physical environment.

Category 3.1: Social Environment

The social environment of a school includes the relationships and collaboration that takes place amongst staff members. Waddell (2010) researched external themes for

teacher retention and found relationships amongst co-workers to be of importance, which is similar to the findings of this study. Ten effective teachers mentioned that their school's social environment has motivated them to continue teaching at their school.

Whitney shared,

I think that paired with the fact that our building [community] is really close is a big reason why we stay... our relationships. I feel like they are a big reason why we stay here, or why I have stayed. We all get along pretty much for the most part and we all work together to make things better. We're constantly communicating with each other, talking about what works best, trying to be on the same page, being flexible with schedules and things...

Teachers spoke about the strong relationships they have with colleagues that have allowed them to get through difficult times, such as the isolating feeling of being in a classroom all day. Leah stated, "I have some staff members that are co-workers that I have definitely bonded with, which helps to make, you know, the days easier when you're having a hard day or things like that". Similarly, Tara shared, "You know, once you have those relationships with your co-workers that you can go to when you need those emotional support days and they're there, I think that that is a big factor to me."

Ann shared how the camaraderie amongst staff members in her building motivates her to stay. She said, "...it just feels like family, you know we all laugh together, we are always sharing family stories or successes and, it's just a beautiful thing."

Category 3.2: Educational Environment

The educational environment of a school is a key piece to a positive school climate. Six effective teachers reported that their school's educational environment has impacted their decision to continue teaching in an urban school. Teachers mentioned various initiatives, specifically those related to goal-setting and celebrations, that their school has put in place that have motivated them to stay. For example, Paige stated, "Generally, we all make growth so even if it's a small little growth or big growth, you know just trying to celebrate that, and so it is nice to see the celebration days and spirit days and things like that." Cassidy shared a similar anecdote related to celebrations, "...we do monthly celebrations for those [students] that haven't gone to the buddy room and we also do attendance celebrations..." Ann spoke about a school-wide leadership initiative that her school has been a part of and how it has been a motivating factor for her longevity as an urban school teacher. She said, "Just the goals that we set for ourselves...students can hold us accountable, or staff can hold us accountable, but also the goals that students have themselves and them being able to see the growth that they have made".

Category 3.3: Physical Environment

The physical environment of one's school emerged as a category within school climate. Four effective teachers indicated the physical environment of their building has motivated them to continue teaching there. Teachers mentioned both safety and resources in regards to their school's physical environment. Rachel stated, "We are in a newer building, so, there is appeal to that..." Leah explained, "I feel safe at my school. I feel like the facilities are taken care of really well; it's clean. We have the resources that we

need, the classrooms are not small, things like that... I would definitely say that it has affected me staying.” Sammy shared a similar idea, “Things are mostly working, we just got a new playground, so it is a good, clean environment to be in with few issues. Physically, it’s a place that will feel good for students to be there and for teachers and staff to walk into”.

Theme 4: Leadership and Professional Development Opportunities

Category 4.1: Opportunity for Professional Development

Career supports such as professional learning opportunities may impact teacher retention (Garcia & Weiss, 2019c). Garcia and Weiss (2019c) found that professional development opportunities in high-poverty schools are lacking and that strong teacher supports are needed. Four out of the 13 teachers in this study reported professional development opportunities within their school or district have encouraged them to continue teaching at their school. Zoe said,

I think I’m hoping that training continues...equity training, trauma smart training... BIST behavioral management system. My school does the best they can to give you a foundation on how to be a strong teacher and to work with children with higher needs, so I’m very appreciative of them for that.

Similarly, Cassidy shared, “We have tons of PD [professional development] options, like in the summer and throughout the year to just help grow and help teachers grow as teachers”. Tara explained that the professional development she has received has impacted her longevity as it helps her deal with the challenges she encounters in the classroom. She said, “I feel like we are given a lot of good tools here ... to understand

how to deal with some of the [student] backgrounds that come in here so that's been a big part for me”.

Category 4.2: Opportunity for Leadership Roles in the Future

Two teachers mentioned that they stay in their urban school teaching positions because they hope to someday use their experience to move into a leadership position within their school or district. Jamie stated, “I have hope that they will create a position in the future where I can still work with students, but do coaching related to student trauma....which I love to do...that is what has kept me there”. Another teacher talked about her future plans in school counseling, continuing her career in urban schools in a leadership role: “And so, I think the next best thing would be to become a counselor, because I still felt that, well, they’re not too removed from the classroom, I understand what teachers are going through, and I would still happen to teach lessons and so to me, it was the next best thing while still working in an urban school.”

Theme 5: Teacher and Student Similar Demographics

Previous research has suggested academic benefit for students when they share the same race or ethnicity of their teacher (Dee, 2004; Egalite, & Kisida, 2017). Findings from this study indicate that teacher-student shared demographics may also positively impact effective teacher retention. During the interviews, three teachers indicated that one motivating factor for their longevity in urban schools is related to the fact their racial or socio-economic demographics are similar to that of their students. For example, Lucy stated, “What has kept me here is I feel like these are little Lucy’s....”, referring to the fact that the students she serves are facing challenges similar to those she faced as a child and look similarly to the way she does. Leah said, “I think there is a need for teachers of

color in urban schools” when asked about what has motivated her to stay. She added that looking like her students motivates her to continue teaching, stating: “You know it’s really a passion of mine, because these students look like me and I know that sometimes they don’t get the best teachers or best education....and I want to make sure that they do.” Molly stated, “I feel closer to the students that go here because I kind of grew up in their same circumstances, I feel I just related to them and I don’t think I’d want to teach anywhere else.”

Theme 6: Financial Benefit

Research suggests that one of the reasons teachers leave schools is because they are dissatisfied with their salary (Ingersoll, 2001). Despite being recognized as a key tool in making the teaching profession more attractive to teachers, research that examines school district teacher compensation incentives in comparison to teacher retention rates has been inconclusive in recent years (Fulbeck, 2016). Many school districts have tried to implement financial incentive structures to encourage teacher retention. Research from the Denver Public Schools’ ProComp financial incentive program indicates that although it is a factor, other conditions are more important for teachers when considering other career options (Fulbeck, 2011). Seven effective teachers in this study mentioned that financial benefit has impacted their decision to continue teaching in their urban elementary school to some extent. Teachers spoke about how their salary at their current school is not comparable to what their salary would be if they were to move to a different school or district. For example, Whitney said, “If I were to try to leave and go to a different district, I’ve been teaching here for so long that they would not give me my same years of experience on their pay scale, so I would leave too much money [behind] if

I were to try to leave”. Rachel explained how she makes more working in one state in the metropolitan area than she would working in another, despite the short distance between the two. She said, “You get way more money in X Midwestern state than you do in X Midwestern state, so you know, that’s influenced things a lot for me.”

Teachers also discussed their current salary and incentives that their district provides to encourage their longevity. Sammy shared, “Charter B provides a five percent raise each year if you meet certain teacher criteria...so you have the ability to, after a few years, make a pretty decent paycheck”. Rosemary stated, “It has been rumored that... our district is one of the higher [paying] districts around”.

Additional Findings

In addition to the six themes that emerged, participants also revealed supplementary information about their longevity in urban schools through their interview responses. Twelve out of the 13 study participants indicated that they had considered leaving the teaching profession at one point in their career. Participant responses were consistent with the literature on the topic of teacher longevity. According to a 2022 survey administered to public school staff members by the National Education Association, nearly 55% of educators have considered leaving the teaching profession this year alone.

The 12 teacher participants each stated their consideration of leaving the teaching profession would have been unrelated to urban schools and directly related to the challenges of teaching itself; they would not have left for a suburban or rural teaching environment. For example, Lucy stated, “I have thought about leaving teaching. Teacher burnout is real, but I’ve never thought about leaving urban school teaching. Urban

schools are where I have always wanted to be.” Similarly, Peyton said, “No matter if your school is urban, or suburban, or rural, or wherever, I truly believe they all have challenges- it’s just a matter of what you are up for [which challenges]”. Rachel explained why she had considered exiting the profession: “It’s the kind of job where you wear a trillion hats at once, and you’re taking everything [experiences/student concerns] home with you each day, regardless of if you want to or not.” She went on to explain difficult situations she has endured as an urban school teacher such as when she taught virtually for an entire school year and helped a student through the sudden loss of his mother. It was found through the interviews that although most teacher participants had considered leaving at one point in their career, the positive factors for staying outweighed the negative.

Only one teacher in the study reported that she has never thought about leaving the urban school teaching profession, Molly, indicated that she is teaching at her dream school, a place that she had her mind set on working at even as a student:

When I first started my schooling for education, this was actually the school that I had in mind to teach at, because this was the little area where I grew up at. So when I found out that there was a position here, you know that was like the best that can happen for me and I ended up being able to teach here. That’s why I am very happy to be here and I hope I never have to leave.

Summary

Thirteen effective urban elementary school teachers were interviewed for this study in order to research the question, “What factors motivate effective teachers to continue teaching in urban schools?” Most of the effective teachers reported that

administrator support, relationships with students, positive school climate, and financial benefit have motivated them to continue teaching in their urban school. An interpretation of the findings in comparison to current literature on the topic, implications for the future, and recommendations for further research can be found in chapter 5.

Chapter 5

Interpretation and Recommendations

Urban schools in America consistently struggle to retain effective teachers (Garcia & Weiss, 2019a, Podgursky & Springer, 2011; The New Teacher Project, 2012). This study was conducted to explore the factors that motivate effective teachers to continue teaching in urban schools. Chapter 5 includes a study summary, an overview of the problem, a restatement of the purpose and research questions, and a review of the methodology and findings related to literature as aligned to the rationale behind this study. Additionally, chapter 5 provides a conclusion to the study with implications for action, recommendations for future research and concluding remarks based upon the researcher's interpretation of the data.

Study Summary

This section provides a summary of the research conducted for this study. The summary contains an overview of the problem regarding effective teacher longevity in urban schools, the purpose of study, and the grand tour research question. The summary section concludes with an overview of the methodology of the study and a description of the major findings from the study.

Overview of the Problem. Teacher turnover and student achievement in urban schools across the country continue to be a pressing problem in education. Research clearly states effective teachers make a direct impact on increasing student achievement (Amrien-Beardsley, 2012; Haberman, 1995; Rand, 2016, Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997), yet urban schools struggle to retain their teachers year after year (Hill & Gollette, 2005; The New Teacher Project, 2012; Wronowski, 2018). There is considerable

research on the topic of teacher turnover and retention in urban schools (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Garcia & Weiss, 2019a; Ingersoll, 2004; The New Teacher Project, 2012; Quartz, 2003), but little research pertaining to factors that motivate specifically the effective teachers who work in urban schools to stay.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions. The primary purpose of this qualitative study was to identify various factors that influence effective teachers to continue teaching in urban elementary schools. The following grand tour research question was used in order to gain an understanding of the study participants' lived experiences as effective teachers in urban elementary schools:

RQ1. What factors influence effective teachers to continue teaching in urban elementary schools?

Review of the Methodology. The researcher conducted a qualitative, phenomenological study to explore factors that motivate effective teachers to continue teaching in urban elementary schools. The study participants were 13 teachers who worked in four districts/charter schools in one metropolitan area spanning across two states. Participants were determined based upon meeting effective teacher criteria, as assessed by their school principal. The effective teachers each participated in an online interview using the Zoom video-conferencing platform. The interviews were video-recorded and transcribed electronically. Participants were sent their interview transcriptions and had the opportunity to conduct a member check. The interview transcripts were then uploaded to Quirkos qualitative analysis software and the researcher coded the data. The researcher completed three cycles of data coding which revealed six

common themes and several categories within some of the themes, all of which related to the grand tour research question.

Major Findings. The major findings of the study correlated to the research question. The question was: what factors motivate effective teachers to continue teaching in urban elementary schools? Six major themes were discovered in the study. Within several of the themes, categories emerged. Affirming the literature on the topic of teacher longevity, the first major theme found was relationships. All study participants reported that relationships with both students and families have impacted their decision to continue teaching in an urban school, and seven participants indicated that community relationships have been a motivating factor for their longevity. Within the category of student relationships, participants indicated that the impact they have made or continue to make on students has motivated their decision to continue teaching in an urban school. All of the study participants reported relationships with families who attend their school have impacted their decision to stay, and participants discussed the impact of having siblings or family members in their class year after year. Several study participants discussed their school community; their school's particular location and the relationships their school has formed with nearby businesses or religious organizations was found to impact effective teacher retention.

The second major theme found was administrator support. It was found that the support an urban elementary school effective teacher receives from their school-based administrator impacts their retention. Participants described experiences where they felt supported by the administration at their school building and how it has kept them motivated to stay teaching in their school, while others reported they have left schools in

the past due to poor administrator support. The third major theme found was positive school climate. Within the theme of positive school climate, it was found that a school's social environment, physical environment, and educational environment motivate effective teachers' longevity in urban schools. In regards to school social environment, participants indicated that the collaboration amongst colleagues motivates their longevity in urban schools. Participants also reported that the physical environment of their school building and the safety of their school building were motivating factors for their retention. The study also found that a school's educational environment, particularly how the school celebrates students and sets goals for students and staff, impacts effective teacher longevity in urban schools.

The fourth major theme determined through data analysis was leadership and professional development opportunities. Participants indicated that the opportunity for future leadership positions outside of the classroom motivates them to continue teaching in urban schools for the time being. It was also found that participants continued teaching in their urban school due to the opportunities for professional development and teacher training that were available within their specific school or district. The fifth theme found was teacher and student shared demographics. It was found amongst several of the participants that one motivating factor for longevity in urban schools was the fact they share similar demographics, in regards to race or socio-economic status, with the students they serve. The sixth theme was financial benefit. Participants reported their salary or incentive package has motivated them to stay teaching in their current school due to their salary being significantly higher than what it might be in another school or district or due to the fact their district offers competitive yearly incentives based upon merit.

Findings Related to the Literature

Literature on the topic of urban schools, effective teachers, and teacher retention was reviewed. The literature review found several ideas for motivating factors for teacher longevity including administrator support, relationships, school climate, and financial benefit. Research stating the impact of effective teachers on urban school students was also reviewed. However, little research has been conducted specific to the longevity and retention of only effective teachers who teach in urban schools.

Urban schools can lose as much as one fifth of their faculty each year (Ingersoll, 2004). Research conducted by The New Teacher Project (2012) indicated about 30% of effective teachers in urban schools leave teaching within their first five years. The research question sought to understand the factors that motivate effective teachers to continue teaching in urban schools. Several of the factors that emerged through participant interview responses aligned to the literature including administrator support, stakeholder relationships, school climate, and financial benefit.

There is research on both the positive and negative impact of administrator support on teacher retention. Waddell (2010) determined one of the key external components of teacher retention was a teacher's relationship with their principal. Allenworth, et al. (2009) concluded that teachers stay in schools with inclusive leadership where they trust their administrator. Data from Hughes, Matt, and O'Reilly's (2015) study indicated "emotional and environmental support from principals most greatly impacts teacher retention in hard-to-staff schools" (p. 132). All of the teachers in this study shared similar beliefs; the support or relationship they have with their school

administrator(s) has impacted their decision to continue teaching in their urban elementary school.

Participants of this study reported relationships with school stakeholders, including students, families, colleagues, and their school community have motivated them to stay in their urban school. A review of the literature indicated that teacher-student relationships are a factor, if not the most important factor, involved with teacher retention (Hargreaves, 1998, Hargreaves, 2005; O'Connor, 2008; Shann, 1998; Waddell, 2010; Webb, 2018). Every participant in the study mentioned one of the reasons they stay in their urban school is the relationships they have with students, further substantiating this research. Teacher participants in this study also mentioned the relationships they had with colleagues, and how their collaboration with co-workers has impacted their decision to stay. These findings support previous research from Waddell (2010), who found that teacher relationships with colleagues may increase their satisfaction and ultimately their retention, as these relationships help encourage a sense of belonging and ownership in their school.

School climate is composed of multiple factors including social environment and collegial relationships, school safety, and a school's educational environment (Garcia & Weiss, 2019b). Participants in this study reported that their school's social environment, physical environment, and educational environment have been motivating factors in their urban school longevity. School climate literature supports these findings (Garcia & Weiss, 2019b; Ndoeye, Imig, & Parker, 2010). The study found that within a school's social environment, the collaboration that takes place between effective teachers and their co-workers impacts teacher retention. These findings support earlier research (Barth,

2006; Farber, 1982; Kokka, 2016, Perie & Baker, 1997). The physical school building and safety of the building was found to be of importance to effective teacher longevity. This finding supports previous research that a physical environment conducive for teaching and learning, one where the school “is clean, is well-maintained, and has the appropriate space/resources” impacts teacher retention even greater in high-poverty schools (Barry, et al., 2019, p. 6).

Teacher salaries are known for being significantly lower than salaries of professionals in other industries with comparable experience and education (Allegretto, Corcoran, & Mishel, 2004). Many teacher participants in the study mentioned that finances were not a major factor in their decision to stay at their urban school, as they realized that their salary will never be as high as it might be in another industry. School districts nationwide have tried a variety of financial strategies in an effort to recruit and retain effective staff (Allegretto & Mishell, 2018). Darling-Hammond, Furger, Shields, and Sutchter stated that “teachers are more likely to quit when they work in districts with lower wages and when their salaries are low relative to alternative wage opportunities” (2016, p. 18). This study affirmed Darling-Hammond et al.’s research, as several participants stated one reason they stay in their urban school is due to their salary being comparable or higher than salaries in another school or district. According to Behrstock-Sherratt and Potemski (2013), many school districts are considering plans to tie teacher evaluations to teacher salaries. Teacher participants from one school included in the study mentioned the yearly salary incentive their school offers based upon merit.

Conclusions

This study explored factors that motivate effective teachers to continue teaching in urban schools through interviews with 13 effective teachers from four school districts or charter schools within one metropolitan area in the Midwest. Factors identified through the literature review including administrator support, relationships, financial benefit, and school climate were all present in the interview responses of the study participants. Additional factors including professional development, leadership opportunities, and the teacher sharing similar demographics with their students also emerged as factors. Understanding the factors that motivate effective teacher longevity may assist urban school leaders in policy-making and leadership decisions at the district and school level, as urban school leaders have control over many of the factors and teacher working conditions.

Implications for Action. The findings from the study should have utility for urban school leaders seeking to retain effective teachers and ultimately increase student achievement. School leaders need to prioritize providing support to their effective teachers. All participants in the study reported they have remained in their urban elementary school teaching positions due to support from their administration. Effective teachers are often given less time and energy by administrators, as they are dealing with teachers of concern or those that are least effective. The study found that when administrators are purposeful about the relationships built with effective teachers, and the support provided to effective teachers they may increase effective retention. In descriptions of the support they have received from administrators, the study participants did not describe physical resources, but instead discussed an emotional connection built

upon trust. Administrators can help ensure the retention of their effective urban school teachers by building relationships and trust, a task that can be done without external resources.

The results from the study also suggest the importance of positive relationships for effective teacher retention. School leaders should ensure teachers have the adequate time and resources to build strong relationships with students, families, colleagues, and community stakeholders. A majority of the teachers who participated in the study spoke about the impact that teaching more than one student in a family has had on their urban school longevity. School leaders should make an effort to place students with teachers if their siblings have been in the teacher's class in a previous school year as this encourages meaningful family relationships, a factor in effective teacher retention.

Teachers also indicated they remained in their urban school teaching positions due to their own race or socio-economic status being similar to that of the students they serve. When hiring, school leaders may want to take this into consideration. Research demonstrates the positive power of a relationship between students of color and teachers of color. Gershenson, Hart, Hyman, Lindsay, and Papageorge (2017) indicated that exposure to a same-race teacher in elementary school reduces the high-school dropout rate for economically-disadvantaged Black male students by nearly forty percent. Egalite and Kasida (2017) reported that in classrooms where students share similar racial characteristics with their teacher students report higher levels of happiness and motivation. Teacher demographics should be considered when making purposeful hiring and retention at the school leadership level.

Building a positive school climate impacts teacher retention in urban schools. To increase teacher retention, school leaders need to be aware of the impact that a school's physical, social, and educational environment has on effective teachers. If possible, leaders should encourage and provide the opportunity for teachers to collaborate with their peers, participate in school-wide celebrations of student success, and ensure goal-setting practices are in place for students. The study also suggests that a safe, and physically appealing school building impacts retention; many teachers indicated their building itself motivates their decision to continue teaching at their school.

The study found the ability for a school to provide professional development and leadership opportunities to its teachers positively impacts effective teacher retention. Effective teachers want to continue to grow as educators and appreciate the opportunities their schools have provided to them in terms of training, development programs, and feedback. Leaders need to consider providing their teachers with opportunities to expand their professional knowledge in a meaningful way. Finally, school leaders should consider their salary scale and incentives when seeking to retain effective teachers in their school. The study suggests that when teachers are paid a high salary, or high in comparison to other schools or districts, that teachers are motivated to stay in their position. The study also suggested that financial incentives, such as yearly bonuses or pay increases, due to teacher merit have a positive impact on effective teacher retention. Leaders and education policy-makers should take teacher salary into high consideration to improve teacher retention.

Recommendations for Future Research. Research on motivating factors for teacher longevity in urban schools could be expanded upon in a variety of ways. This study included 13 effective teacher participants from one metropolitan area in the Midwest. Future studies could include effective teachers from across the United States in a variety of urban school areas. The study included only female participants, as only female effective teacher contact information was distributed to the researcher from school leaders. Future studies could include male participants. For this study, the researcher conducted interviews via Zoom video-conferencing software. In the future, researchers should consider conducting similar interviews in a face to face format, doing so may encourage more comfortability amongst the participants and in turn more detailed interview responses. The researcher interviewed teachers who worked in both district and charter settings for this study. To enhance the data and provide further implications for action, further research could focus specifically on one type of school setting. This study indicated factors that motivate effective teachers to continue working in urban schools, but did not rank their importance to the participants. A quantitative aspect could be added to the study, by having participants use an importance-scale to rank the significance of factors that have motivated them to continue teaching in an urban school.

Concluding Remarks. Urban schools across the country face a variety of unique challenges. One such challenge is the low student achievement rates amongst students who attend urban schools. One way to increase student achievement is to prioritize the retention of effective teachers. Data compiled by the researcher from the thirteen interviews with urban elementary school effective teachers affirmed that school leaders should prioritize administrator support, relationship-building amongst teachers and their

colleagues, students, families, and community, and prioritize ensuring their school has a positive school climate in order to retain their effective teachers. Leaders should also be aware of the impact financial incentives, professional development and leadership opportunities, and teacher demographics that are similar to the student body have on effective teacher retention in urban elementary schools.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Effective Teacher Criteria

A research synthesis for The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (Goe, Bell, & Little, 2008) breaks down teacher effectiveness into five key points:

- Effective teachers have high expectations for all students and help them learn, as demonstrated on value-added, test-based, or alternative measures.
- Effective teachers contribute to positive academic, attitudinal, and social outcomes for students such as regular attendance, on-time promotion to the next grade and graduation, self-efficacy, and cooperative behavior.
- Effective teachers use diverse resources to plan and structure engaging learning opportunities; monitor student progress formatively, adapting instruction as needed; and evaluate learning using multiple sources of evidence.
- Effective teachers contribute to the development of classrooms and schools that value diversity and civic-mindedness.
- Effective teachers collaborate with other teachers, administrators, parents, and education professionals to ensure students' success, particularly the success of students with special needs and those at high risk of failure.

Appendix B. Principal Invitation to Participate

To Whom It May Concern (School Leader X):

My name is Ally Heiserman and I am an Ed.D Candidate at Baker University. I am currently serving as an Instructional Coach at [REDACTED]. For my doctoral dissertation, I am researching factors that motivate effective teacher longevity in urban schools. I am reaching out for your assistance with my research.

For my qualitative study, I plan to interview ten effective elementary teachers in the [REDACTED] metropolitan area. These teachers will be asked a set of pre-determined questions in order to better understand the factors that have motivated them to continue working in an urban school setting. All identifying information including school district names, school names, and teacher names will be kept anonymous throughout the formal dissertation and research process. Interviews with teachers will take place virtually at a date/time determined by the teacher and will last approximately thirty minutes. Interviews will be recorded and analyzed for commonalities amongst participants.

In order to determine the participants in the study, the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality's teacher effectiveness criteria (2008) is used. Do you have any elementary teachers working in your school that you believe, to the best of your professional ability, meet all five points on the criteria listed below? If so, could you please send me their names and emails? I will then reach out to them asking for their voluntary participation in my study.

Effective Teacher Criteria

1. Effective teachers have high expectations for all students and help them learn, as demonstrated on value-added, test-based, or alternative measures.
2. Effective teachers contribute to positive academic, attitudinal, and social outcomes for students such as regular attendance, on-time promotion to the next grade and graduation, self-efficacy, and cooperative behavior.
3. Effective teachers use diverse resources to plan and structure engaging learning opportunities; monitor student progress formatively, adapting instruction as needed; and evaluate learning using multiple sources of evidence.
4. Effective teachers contribute to the development of classrooms and schools that value diversity and civic-mindedness.
5. Effective teachers collaborate with other teachers, administrators, parents, and education professionals to ensure student success, particularly the success of students with special needs and those at high risk of failure.

Your time and energy is greatly appreciated. Please let me know should you have any questions or concerns.

Ally Heiserman

Appendix C. Teacher Invitation to Participate.

To Whom It May Concern (Effective Teacher X):

My name is Ally Heiserman and I am an Ed.D Candidate at Baker University. I am currently serving as an Instructional Coach [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] For my doctoral dissertation, I am researching factors that motivate effective teacher longevity in urban schools.

Your school principal has indicated that you meet the effective teacher criteria to be a part of my study. I am looking for volunteers to participate in my study. If you choose to participate, you will have a single 30-60 minute Zoom interview scheduled at your convenience. You will be asked four questions about the factors that have motivated you to continue working in an urban school. Following the interview, you will have the opportunity to review your responses. All identifying information including your school district name, school name, and your name will be kept anonymous throughout the formal dissertation and research process.

If you are interested in participating, please reply to this email. Thank you so much for your time!

Ally Heiserman

Baker University

PK-12 Leadership DED Cohort 18

Appendix D. Interview Protocol

Opening Statement

Welcome to our interview session and thank you again for your time. My name is Ally Heiserman and I am a doctoral student at Baker University. I currently serve as an Instructional Coach at [REDACTED]. I am excited to speak with you today for my research study. In this study, the main goal is to explore the factors that impact effective teacher longevity in urban schools. The interview session will take approximately 30-60 minutes. The session will be recorded for data analysis purposes, and the recording will only be available to myself and my research committee. Your participation is strictly confidential and no identifying information for you or your school will be used in the final data reporting. You will be assigned a pseudonym for use throughout the study.

The interview will consist of several questions regarding your personal experiences as a teacher in an urban school. You may decline to answer part of or all of any question at any time. Following the interview, you will be provided with a transcription of your responses and will have the opportunity to make corrections if needed. If at any point you want to end the interview or choose not to participate in the study, I will not use your information in the study. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Interview Questions

1. We will start by describing your professional experience in urban schools. How many years have you taught in an urban school? In which grades have you taught? How many schools?
2. Have you ever considered leaving the urban teaching profession?

Follow Up Question. If participant responds yes, clarify whether they thought about leaving the teaching profession as a whole or leaving teaching in an urban school. Then follow up with “Why?”. If participant responds no, then follow up with “Why not?”.

3. Since you are still teaching in an urban school, what factors have motivated you to continue teaching there?

Follow-up Question. If participant does not mention **administrative support** to Q3 then ask:

Has administrator support, as in your Principal or Assistant Principal, ever impacted your decision to continue working there? If so, how? Or if not so, why not?

Follow-up Question. If participant does not mention **salary or financial benefits** to Q3 then ask:

Has your salary or financial benefits ever impacted your decision to continue working there? If so, how? Or if not so, why not?

Follow-Up Question. If participant does not mention **student relationships** to Q3 then ask:

Have your relationships with students ever impacted your decision to continue working there? If so, how? Or if not so, why not?

Follow-Up Question. If participant does not mention **family relationships** to Q3 then ask:

Have your relationships with families whom attend the school ever impacted your decision to continue working there? If so, how? Or if not so, why not?

Follow-Up Question. If participant does not mention **community relationships** to Q3 then ask:

A school's community could include the neighborhood that the school is located in, surrounding businesses, or community members that are school stakeholders.

Has your relationship with the school's community ever impacted your decision to continue working there? If so, how? Or if not so, why not?

Follow-up Question. If participant does not mention **school climate** to Q3 then ask:

School climate typically refers to the physical, social and educational environment at a school and whether or not it creates a positive setting for student and staff member growth. For example, building safety is an example of a school's physical environment, communication amongst staff members is an example of a school's social environment, and celebrations of student academic success is an example of a school's educational environment.

Has your school's physical environment ever impacted your decision to continue working there? If so, how? Or if not so, why not?

Has your school's social environment ever impacted your decision to continue working there? If so, how? Or if not so, why not?

Has your school's educational environment ever impacted your decision to continue working there? If so, how? Or if not so, why not?

4. Are there any additional factors not previously mentioned that have motivated you to continue teaching in an urban school?

Closing Statement

That concludes our interview. The interview will be transcribed and you will receive a copy of the transcript within two weeks so that you can ensure accuracy in your responses. Please reach out to me at karenaheiserman@stu.bakeru.edu should you have any questions or concerns or if you would like to be debriefed on the results of the study following the completion of the data analysis. Thank you for your time, I know that teachers are very busy and your participation in the study is greatly appreciated.

Appendix E. Research Approval Letter for Baker University



Baker University Institutional Review Board

December 17th, 2021

Dear Ally Heiserman and Jim Robins,

The Baker University IRB has reviewed your project application and approved this project under Expedited Status Review. As described, the project complies with all the requirements and policies established by the University for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

Please be aware of the following:

1. Any significant change in the research protocol as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
2. Notify the IRB about any new investigators not named in original application.
3. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents of the research activity.
4. If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.
5. If the results of the research are used to prepare papers for publication or oral presentation at professional conferences, manuscripts or abstracts are requested for IRB as part of the project record.
6. If this project is not completed within a year, you must renew IRB approval.

If you have any questions, please contact me at npoell@bakeru.edu or 785.594.4582.

Sincerely,

Nathan Poell, MLS
Chair, Baker University IRB

Baker University IRB Committee
Sara Crump, PhD
Nick Harris, MS
Christa Hughes, PhD
Susan Rogers, PhD

Appendix F. Consent to Participate Form

Research Title: Effective Teacher Longevity in Urban Schools

Researcher: Karen “Ally” Heiserman

Advisor: Dr. James Robins
 School of Education
 Baker University
 8001 College Blvd.
 Overland Park, KS 66210
 jrobins@bakeru.edu

My name is Ally Heiserman, and I am a doctoral student at Baker University. I am conducting research on effective teacher longevity in urban elementary schools. I am interviewing effective teachers on the factors that have motivated them to continue working in an urban school.

You will be asked four open-ended questions about your perceptions and experiences regarding your work as an effective teacher in an urban school during one 30-minute Zoom video call. You may decline to answer any question at any time. You may also discontinue your participation in the study for any reason at any time. All personally identifiable information will be kept confidential. You will be given a pseudonym for the purpose of the study. Interview transcripts will be password protected and only my designated researcher advisor and analyst will have access to the raw data. You will have the opportunity to perform a member check in which you will be able to review your interview transcript to ensure your data accurately describes your perceptions.

Consent to Participate: I understand that my participation in this research study is completely voluntary. I also understand that I am able to discontinue my participation within this study at any time for any reason. I understand that the principal researcher can be contacted at KarenAHeiserman@stu.bakeru.edu should I have any questions or wish to discontinue my participation. I have read and understand the above statement. By signing, I agree to participate in the research study. The Baker University Institutional Review Board approved this study on December 17, 2021 and approval will expire on December 17, 2022 unless renewal is obtained by the review board.

Participant Signature: _____ **Date:** _____