Honoring Teacher Voice, Thoughts, and Opinions:

The Impact of Transformational Leadership on Teacher Retention

by
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Abstract

Public school education faces a critical challenge as a growing number of teachers are choosing to leave the profession every year, leaving school districts struggling to recruit and retain qualified teachers. Existing literature reveals that negative school culture is a significant contributor to teachers' job dissatisfaction, which is among the primary reasons behind teachers' decisions to leave and dissuades others from joining the profession. The role of principals in shaping and maintaining a healthy school culture is explored, with transformational leadership identified as a key factor in their effectiveness. This study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors influencing teacher attrition. Using a mixed-methods design through Q-methodology, the researcher examined the perspectives of 22 former K–12 public school teachers on their reasons for leaving the teaching profession. The participants had taught in K–12 public schools located in rural, suburban, and urban school districts. Data was collected using Q-Method Software. Results indicate that despite having positive relationships with colleagues and reasonable organizational arrangements and opportunities for learning, most participants had negative perceptions of their leadership, citing a lack of positive interactions, feeling undervalued, and a perceived absence of support from their principals. For school districts looking to foster a stable and resilient education system, the results of this research hold the potential to inform policy decisions and educational practices aimed at creating a more conducive and supportive environment for teachers.

Keywords: teacher attrition, school culture, teacher job satisfaction, transformational leadership

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Jeremiah 29:11. “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Throughout this journey, my thoughts remained focused on all I have to be grateful for…

… My husband Ricky for loving me unconditionally and being my best friend, my greatest support, and my biggest comfort.

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Chapter One

Introduction

A growing number of teachers are leaving the profession each year, and with few qualified to replace them, there is concern that the education system is in crisis (Phillips, 2022; Welles, 2022). Eight percent of teachers are estimated to leave the profession each year (Kurtz, 2022; Shuls & Flores, 2020; Sutcher et al., 2016; Will, 2017). School districts across the nation are under pressure to recruit and retain qualified teachers to reduce the negative impact on student learning, as well as motivation, student achievement, faculty collegiality, and trust (Shuls & Flores, 2020; Toropova et al., 2021; Welles, 2022).

The most common reason for teachers leaving or changing schools is dissatisfaction with their job (Will, 2017). Deal and Peterson (2016) reported that a negative climate is a leading cause of teachers being dissatisfied, which results in teachers leaving the profession and dissuading others from entering the profession. According to Shuls & Flores (2020), teacher retention rates can increase by promoting positive working conditions and creating healthy work environments. Spicer (2016) explained that the principal plays an integral role in creating and sustaining a healthy culture by improving these attributes of the school.

Principals who are transformational leaders are most effective in developing and maintaining a healthy school culture (Kovjanic et al., 2012). Through transformational leadership, the principal influences followers by being a role model: motivates and inspires followers to meet and exceed expectations, provides individualized support and consideration, and encourages followers to share leadership and decision-making

(Afshari, 2021; Anderson, 2017; Cetin & Kinik, 2015; Cherry, 2020; Page, 2021; Reza, 2019). Further research in this area could increase understanding about the relationship between school culture and teacher job satisfaction. Improving principal preparation programs by incorporating more coursework and applications of effective leadership practices focused on creating and sustaining a healthy school culture could reduce teacher attrition rates and increase recruitment of new teachers in the profession.

Statement of Problem

School principals have multiple responsibilities, including school operations management, instructional leadership, community engagement, and teacher and student support (ODE, 2018). Principals are also instrumental in the creation and maintenance of a healthy school culture (Shafer, 2018; Spicer, 2016). Characteristics of a healthy school culture, including favorable working conditions and a positive work environment, are primary indicators of teacher job satisfaction (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Shuls & Flores, 2020). According to the Merrimack College Teacher Survey (2022), the percentage of teachers who reported being "very satisfied" with their jobs was only 12 percent. With an estimated eight percent of teachers leaving the profession each year (Kurtz, 2022; Shuls & Flores, 2020; Sutcher et al., 2016; Will, 2017), it is important for the success of the education system to identify and correct issues leading to teacher dissatisfaction. A review of current literature shows that transformational leadership effectively improves outcomes (Afshari, 2021; Anderson, 2017; Cetin & Kinik, 2015; Cherry, 2020). Improving principal preparation programs, as well as providing current principals with leadership development opportunities regarding the creation and maintenance of a

healthy school culture, could increase teacher retention rates and attract more people to the profession.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of school culture on teacher job satisfaction and to explore the principal's role in creating and sustaining a healthy school culture. Understanding the relationship between school culture and teacher job satisfaction provides a basis for providing more in-depth leadership development opportunities for principals and principal preparation programs regarding the importance of establishing and maintaining a healthy school culture. This study supports the principal's success by providing necessary information to decrease teacher attrition rates and increase teacher recruitment.

Research Questions

Primary research questions:

1. Why are teachers leaving K–12 public school teaching?
    a. Which factors (i.e., job satisfaction, school culture, school administration) contributed to their decision to leave?
2. What do teachers indicate about the culture of their former K-12 public school?
    a. Were professional relationships within the school cultivated and supported?
    b. Were the organizational arrangements of the school aligned to one purpose?

c. Were learning and growth opportunities valued and prioritized for teachers and students?

3. What do teachers indicate about the role of the school principal in their decision to leave?

Research Design

The target population was former K–12 public school teachers from various school districts across the United States. The design of this study utilized a mixed-methods approach through Q-methodology. "Q-methodology combines qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate the subjective views of those directly involved in a particular topic" (Herrington & Coogan, 2011, p. 24).

Significance of Study

Investigating the viewpoints of teachers who recently left the teaching profession provides integral information to current and future administrators about effective methods of teacher retention. From May 2022 through July 2022, approximately 40 certified teachers, including some building administrators, resigned from a large urban school district in northeast Ohio. This represented nearly 14% of the teachers in the district. Some of these teachers left the profession, while others accepted teaching positions in surrounding school districts. This example shows how imperative it is to examine factors that influence teacher retention.

What are teachers' reasons for leaving K–12 public school teaching? Were they satisfied with teaching, with the school's culture, with administration? Were teachers leaving the profession because of a toxic school culture? Could a change in leadership have deterred their decision to leave? The significance of this study was to bring attention

to, and shed light on, the links between teacher attrition, school culture, and leadership. The knowledge gained from this research will hopefully help principals learn how to establish and maintain a healthy school culture so that teacher retention rates increase, and more people are influenced to enter the teaching profession.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher has experienced a toxic culture in a public school district where leadership negatively impacted the social, emotional, professional, and personal state of mind of educators. Despite the district's mission, vision, and values being posted, they were not put into practice. Micromanagement, favoritism, and fear of making mistakes were common, resulting in teachers being pushed out. The researcher left the district seeking a better work environment. The researcher aimed to investigate the impact of school culture and leadership on teachers' decisions to leave, as well as to provide insight into teacher shortages experienced by school districts across the nation.

Assumptions, **Limitations, and Delimitations**

The goal of this study was to explore teachers' reasons for leaving K–12 public education, specifically the impact of school culture and leadership on their decision to leave. An assumption in this study was that data on teachers' reasons for leaving K–12 public education could be gleaned from a mixed-methods research design using Q-methodology to avoid bias. Collecting self-reported data using a survey design could lead to unreliable responses due to participants' being influenced by social desirability (Cross, 2005). Q-methodology assumes that participants answer the questions honestly and completely.

A delimitation of this study was that the participants in the study were purposefully selected. The participants may not have fully represented all teachers who have left the teaching profession; however, Q-methodology allows participants to express their vantage points on a topic to reveal subjective structures, attitudes, and perspectives (Cross, 2005; Herrington & Coogan, 2011). Findings may not be generalizable to the larger population (Watts & Stenner, 2005). Results from this study may be utilized to enhance principal preparation programs and leadership development training, particularly concerning the establishment of a positive school culture that enhances teachers' job satisfaction.

Definition of Terms

Opportunities for learning: opportunities for adults and students to develop and grow in skills and knowledge; adult and student capacity of self-awareness and reflection (Skeet, 2019).

Organizational arrangements: the day-to-day operations, function, and purpose of the school (MacGilchrist et al., 2004); the symbols, artifacts, and logos of a school (Deal & Peterson, 2016); the strategic and tactical functions of the school (Skeet, 2019).

Professional relationships: the relationships created between teachers, students, families, administrators, and the community (MacGilchrist et al., 2004; Prokopchuk, 2016; The Education Trust, 2021; Worline & Dutton, 2019; Zeis, 2020).

School culture: the working conditions and work environment of the school (Sutcher et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2020; Will, 2017); the abstract and concrete

issues including the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that shape and influence every aspect of how a school functions, as well as the physical and emotional safety of students, the orderliness of classrooms and public spaces, or the degree to which a school embraces and celebrates racial, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural diversity (Glossary of Education Reform, 2013, para. 1).

School Leadership: the school principal's influence on, and responsibility for, managing the building, guiding effective instructional practices, creating connections within the community, advocating for teachers and students, and shaping the school culture (Bass et al., 2018; The Wallace Foundation, 2013; ODE, 2018).

Teacher attrition: teachers leaving the profession and not being able to be replaced (Gallant & Riley, 2014; Sutcher et al., 2016).

Teacher retention: teachers staying in the teaching profession and/or continuing to teach in their current school (Shuls & Flores, 2020).

Teacher job satisfaction: the feeling of fulfillment or enjoyment from teaching (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Gallant & Riley, 2014; Wang et al., 2020; Will, 2022).

Summary

In this chapter, the overview of the study included the statement of the problem, the purpose and significance of the study, and the primary research questions. The reader learned about the research design, as well as the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study. Finally, operational definitions were included to explain each of the variables in the study.

Chapter Two provides the reader with an extensive literature review on school culture, teacher job satisfaction, and school leadership through the lens of transformational leadership. School culture is described as the:

- unwritten rules and assumptions,
- combination of rituals and traditions,
- array of symbols and artifacts,
- special language and phrasing that staff and students use, and
- expectations for change and learning that saturate the school's world (Peterson & Deal, 2002, p. 18)

The culture of a school can be defined as either healthy or toxic based on the professional relationships, organizational arrangements, and opportunities for learning in the school. Research on teacher job satisfaction indicates that school culture impacts teachers' satisfaction with their job and ultimately leads to teachers staying in, or leaving, the profession (Gallant & Riley, 2014). Because the principal is identified as being the most influential source of shaping the school culture (Bass et al., 2018), the principal is also instrumental in decreasing teacher attrition rates by creating a healthy school culture. Strengthening principal leadership programs to include the creation and maintenance of a healthy school culture can lead to an increase in teacher retention rates.

The reader will learn about the methodology of the study in Chapter Three, as a description of the study is provided that also allows the reader to assess the reliability and validity of the study. Chapter Four provides the results of the research. Results, including data analysis, will be explored, interpreted, and discussed. Finally, Chapter Five includes

the summary and conclusions of the study, as well as recommendations for future research.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

School culture encompasses the beliefs, values, and assumptions of the school community (Glossary of Education Reform, 2013). The school's personality, operating methods, and environment are shaped by the school's culture (Eller & Eller, 2017). School culture can be either healthy or toxic. A healthy school culture establishes positive goals for which to aspire and prioritizes relationships by connecting people to a greater purpose (Skeet, 2019). Freeman (2020) explains that schools with healthy cultures are energetic and upbeat, as members of the school community work together to achieve common goals. Contrary to a healthy school culture, a toxic school culture does not have clearly defined goals, and members of the school community work in isolation rather than in collaboration (Shafer, 2018).

With a growing number of teachers leaving the profession each year due to dissatisfaction in their jobs, school leaders need to create and maintain healthy school cultures that value relationships, support, and opportunities for growth (Shuls & Flores, 2020). While a variety of factors contribute to teacher job satisfaction, school culture, including working conditions and work environment, is a common source for teachers' job satisfaction (Sutcher et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2020; Will, 2022). Improving school culture, and hence increasing teachers' job satisfaction, falls on principals, as they lead in providing teachers support and voice (Will, 2022).

Principals are the central source of school leadership influence (The Wallace Foundation, 2013). The school principal is responsible for managing the building, guiding effective instructional practices, creating connections within the community, and

advocating for teachers and students (ODE, 2018). They are also instrumental in shaping school culture through establishing and modeling the vision, mission, and actions of the school (Bass et al., 2018). The principal's style of leadership affects school culture.

Transformational leaders encourage, inspire, and motivate followers to exceed expectations leading to meaningful change (Freeman, 2020). Principals who are transformational leaders believe in taking responsibility for their leadership and aspire to create a unified school environment that is committed to clearly defined goals (Cetin & Kinik, 2015). As transformational leaders, principals create healthy school cultures that lead to higher job satisfaction of teachers.

Theoretical Framework

Transformational Leadership

The term transformational leadership was first introduced in 1973 by sociologist James V. Downton but did not gain credibility and worldwide acknowledgement until an American historian and political scientist, James MacGregor Burns, further developed transformational leadership in his 1978 book, *Leadership* (Reza, 2019). Transformational leadership is a process where leaders and followers work together to advance motivation and morale (Burns, 1978, as cited in Anderson, 2017). This type of leadership emphasizes the leader's ability to recognize the strengths and potential skills of the employee and engage the complete employee, not just particular traits (Allen et al., 2015). Transforming leadership has become the approach of choice for much of the research and application of leadership theory because of the effect that transformational leaders have on followers (Cetin & Kinik, 2015).

A transforming leader works with others to identify needed changes, create a vision that will guide the change process, and execute the change, alongside the other members of the group (Anderson, 2017). As a result, a mutual relationship between the leader and his or her followers is established that converts followers to leaders and leaders into moral agents (Cetin & Kinik, 2015). The leadership style proven to be most effective in improving organizational performance and employee outcomes is transformational leadership (Kovjanic et al., 2012).

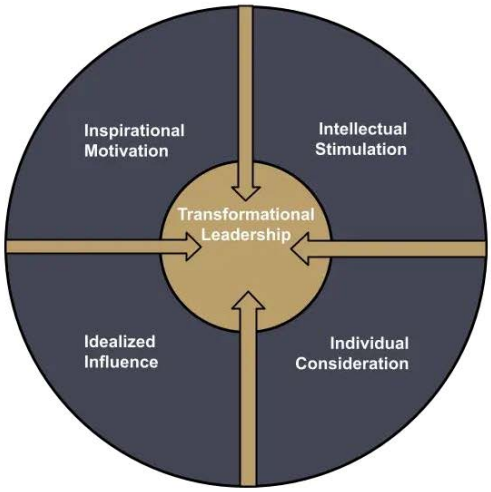
In 1985, Bernard M. Bass expanded upon Burns' research on transformational leadership. Bass's transformational leadership theory suggests that leadership can be defined by its impact on followers (Cherry, 2020). Transformational leaders take responsibility for their leadership and aspire to satisfy the needs of their followers (Cetin & Kinik, 2015). There are four components of transformational leadership exhibited by the leader in his or her daily interactions with staff (Anderson, 2017):

- idealized influence
- inspirational motivation
- individualized consideration
- intellectual stimulation (p. 4)

These components are shown in Figure 1 (Renjith et al., 2015, as cited in Page, 2021).

Figure 1

Components of Transformational Leadership



Idealized Influence

Idealized influence is the leader's ability to be seen as a role model because of his or her extraordinary capabilities and high ethical standards (Reza, 2019). As a role model, the transformational leader is respected and admired by followers (Cetin & Kinik, 2015). A transformational leader provides a vision and a sense of mission, while also demonstrating commitment to that vision and mission (Anderson, 2017). Through empowering and inspiring relationships with followers, transformational leaders influence followers to pursue the organizational vision (Afshari, 2021).

Transformational leaders exhibit charisma and are viewed as exemplifying morality, trust, integrity, honesty, and purpose (Cetin & Kinik, 2015). Followers trust and respect the leader, and therefore, they emulate the leader and internalize his or her ideals (Cherry, 2020). The key to developing interpersonal interactions that enhance a follower's commitment is the follower's perception of the leader's behavior (Afshari, 2021). Idealized influence leaders are respected, trusted, and admired by their followers

because of their ability to clearly define goals and demonstrate how to achieve those goals (Afshari, 2021). The idealized influence of a transformational leader increases followers' loyalty, dedication, and identification (Alqatawenah, 2018).

Inspirational Motivation

Inspirational motivation refers to the leader's ability to communicate high-performance expectations and motivate followers to meet those expectations (Anderson, 2017). There is a clear vision and mission that the leader has articulated to followers that is appealing and inspiring, and followers are hopeful and optimistic about working towards a shared vision (Eliophotou-Menon & Lefteri, 2021). Through repetition and enthusiasm, transformational leaders keep the vision and goals at the forefront (Page, 2021).

Inspiring and enthusiastic, transformational leaders encourage followers to work towards common goals. These goals align with a clear vision that the leader has articulated to others, and the leader is able to help followers experience the same passion and motivation to fulfill these goals (Cherry, 2020). Followers have elevated expectations and achieve more than they, or others, think they can because of the leader's ability to successfully motivate them (Cetin & Kinik, 2015).

Individualized Consideration

Individualized consideration is the ability of a leader to coach, mentor, and provide constructive feedback that aligns to the needs of each of the followers (Anderson, 2017). The support and encouragement foster supportive relationships and keep lines of communication open so that followers feel safe in sharing ideas, and leaders can offer recognition of the contributions of each follower (Cherry, 2020). Transformational

leaders demonstrate individualized consideration with genuine concern for the well-being of their team, which creates an environment of trust (Page, 2021).

Transformational leaders provide learning opportunities for followers that recognize and take into consideration the strengths and weaknesses of individuals, as well as their likes and dislikes (Reza, 2019). These leaders cultivate a supportive environment where individual differences are respected (Cetin & Kinik, 2015). Page (2021) explains that coaching and mentoring with empathy promotes growth and development while also garnering insight into possible issues occurring.

Intellectual Stimulation

Intellectual stimulation is the leader's ability to assess current values and beliefs and encourage new ways of thinking and doing (Anderson, 2017). Transformational leaders challenge existing conditions, inspire creativity, and motivate new opportunities to learn (Cherry, 2020). They behave in such a way that followers are stimulated to perform beyond the expectation through belief in, and commitment to, the mission and vision (Reza, 2019).

Instead of a telling approach to leadership, transformational leaders have a questioning one (Cetin & Kinik, 2015). Followers are encouraged to develop new ideas, solve problems in different ways, and look at all possible solutions (Cetin & Kinik, 2015). Transformational leaders foster a culture that challenges the status quo by solving problems in creative and innovative ways (Page, 2021). Intellectual stimulation is the leader's ability to promote followers to be innovative and take risks (Alqatawenah, 2018).

School Culture

School culture consists of many different, yet connected, parts. The Glossary of Education Reform (2013) defines school culture as:

> …the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that shape and influence every aspect of how a school functions, but the term also encompasses more concrete issues such as the physical and emotional safety of students, the orderliness of classrooms and public spaces, or the degree to which a school embraces and celebrates racial, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural diversity. (para. 1)

School culture is the lens through which students, parents, teachers, administrators, and other staff members view the school, and it influences their attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making. The terms school culture and school climate are often synonymous; however, school culture is the summation of multiple climate conditions, with climate being a subset or building block of the overall culture (Eller & Eller, 2017). School culture is similar to climate, as the members of the school community share core beliefs, values, and assumptions (Koppers, 2021). School culture also includes a school's personality, the way of doing business, and the overall condition at the school (Eller & Eller, 2017).

Climate is what is visible in the school, while culture refers to everything underneath the surface (Koppers, 2021). Climate is the feeling, the tone, and the mood of the school from which school culture is built (Eller & Eller, 2017). Compared to culture, climate is fluid and can change relatively quickly, while transforming culture is a long-term process that requires sustained strategies and efforts (Eller & Eller, 2017). Culture is

the integration of relationships, functions, and introspection (Skeet, 2019). Deal and Peterson (2016) share:

> Culture exists in the deeper elements of a school: the unwritten rules and assumptions, the combination of rituals and traditions, the array of symbols and artifacts, the unique language and phrasing that staff and students use, and the expectations for change and learning that saturate the school's world. (p. 18)

MacGilchrist et al. (2004) explain that there are three interrelated ways that culture is expressed in schools, and they include professional relationships, organizational arrangements, and opportunities for learning.

Professional Relationships

Professional relationships describe the relationships created amongst teachers, students, families, administrators, and the community. These relationships, or lack thereof, are essential to determining the culture of a school, as building relationships creates a safe space for learning to take place (Prokopchuk, 2016). Relationships built on trust, respect, and support provide members of the school community with a foundation of how to relate to, and work with, one another (MacGilchrist et al., 2004).

Student-Teacher Relationships. Building a strong rapport between students and teachers is a key element of school culture. Several characteristics define a positive relationship and pave ways for creating powerful student-teacher relationships (Lee, 2022), including:

- good communication
- a safe learning environment and mutual respect
- a positive and patient attitude

- student equality
- timely praise (para. 3)

Other attributes of strong student-teacher relationships include expressing care, challenging growth, providing support, sharing power, and expanding possibilities (The Education Trust, 2021). Building these relationships takes time, and they begin on day one in the classroom.

The Education Trust (2021) explains that students are more engaged in learning and have a stronger sense of belonging when they have a relationship with their teachers. With strong teacher-student relationships, students feel safe to share information with their teachers which instead can improve instructional practice, which makes lessons more interesting and engaging (Lee, 2022). Student engagement increases with high-quality relationships between students and teachers (The Education Trust, 2021).

Teacher-Teacher Relationships. Strong relationships among teachers not only enhance students' motivation to learn, but also promote learning (The Education Trust, 2021). Teachers who collaborate and share ideas can improve instructional practice by learning from one another. Collaboration is particularly important with novice and veteran teachers, as well as for teachers who are new to a building or district. Teaching can be somewhat isolating because of the time and space constraints, so having opportunities to connect with other teachers can contribute to their professional growth (Worline & Dutton, 2019).

Worline & Dutton (2019) explain that positive connections among teachers have many benefits. Teachers who are accepting and encouraging of each other also collaborate and are supportive of each other's success (Worline & Dutton, 2019). When

teachers feel supported by their colleagues, they are more committed to the organization, experience higher levels of positivity and job satisfaction, and can more easily cope with stress (Worline & Dutton, 2019).

Teacher-Principal Relationships. Principals have the most influence on school culture by setting the tone for how others should behave and interact in the school environment (Lynch, 2020). Creating a safe and collaborative space where trust and respect are valued allows for a strong teacher-principal relationship. Teachers need to know that they can depend on their principal for leadership and support, and conversely, the principal needs to be able to rely on his or her teachers to provide the best instruction for students. Building this trust takes time and effort.

The teacher-principal relationship is extremely influential on retaining teachers (Boyd, 2011, as cited in Zeis, 2020). An essential component to building a trusting relationship is the principal getting to know teachers beyond the school and classroom (Prokopchuk, 2016). The daily interactions and conversations between principals and teachers provide the basis for establishing valuable teacher-principal relationships. Principals further develop relationships and respect by recognizing and celebrating teachers' contributions to the school's success (Prokopchuk, 2016).

Organizational Arrangements

Organizational arrangements refer to the school's day-to-day operations or how the school's function, or purpose, is accomplished (MacGilchrist et al., 2004). Examples include staffing, scheduling, rostering of students, cleanliness and upkeep of school grounds, decor in classrooms and hallways, and allocation of funds and spending. These examples are symbols that express the school's shared beliefs and commitments (Deal &

Peterson, 2016). Important messages and meanings are conveyed in the words, actions, and nonverbal communication that occurs in the school's daily operations (Deal & Peterson, 2016).

How principals spend their time and what they pay attention to are powerful symbolic messages of culture (Deal & Peterson, 2016). Placement of teachers to instruct the grade level(s) and content area(s) where they feel most confident and passionate symbolizes a school culture that values teachers' strengths and input when assigning schedules. The physical environment, both inside and outside of the school, also sends a message about the school's values and beliefs. Displaying student work in the hallways represents celebrations of hard work, creativity, and accomplishments (Deal & Peterson, 2016). How funds and resources are allocated to support students and teachers speaks to what is deemed important to the school community (Willis et al., 2019). While organizational arrangements within a school may be routine, it is through these operations that the school is able to carry out its purpose. School stakeholders connect through the use of symbols, artifacts, and logos of a school (Deal & Peterson, 2016). The symbols, signs, and signals create connections with the deeper purposes and meaning of the school (Deal & Peterson, 2016).

Opportunities for Learning

Opportunities for learning refer to the actual learning that takes place for both adults and students to develop and grow their skills and knowledge (Elliot & Bartlett, 2014). For students, it is the curriculum offered and their attitudes and expectations about what is possible for them to achieve, including equal opportunities and provisions for special education needs. For teachers, it is their own professional development and their

attitude towards their own learning (MacGilchrist et al., 2004; Shuls & Flores, 2020). Staff members discussing effective instructional practices and sharing new educational technology strategies symbolize a culture of professional learning (Deal & Peterson, 2016). Reflection upon, and introspection of, both accomplishments and challenges in one's application of learning provides further opportunities for growth. The value placed on learning and growth, as well as the focus on encouraging and providing multiple learning opportunities for the school community, are important features of the school's culture.

Types of School Culture

Depending upon the characteristics of the professional relationships, organizational arrangements, and learning opportunities, a school can be classified as having a healthy or a toxic school culture. Educational sociologist Willard Waller argued that every school has a culture of its own with complex rituals and personal relationships that shape the moral code of behavior (Waller, 1932, as cited in Deal & Peterson, 2016). This moral code of behavior, or ethical behavior, refers to conduct that is rooted in morality and consistent values (Cetin & Kinek, 2015; Peek, 2022). Ethical behaviors, or lack thereof, contribute to school culture. The type of school culture, healthy or toxic, influences all aspects of the school, including how people treat and talk to one another, the type of instruction that is valued, and how professional knowledge is viewed (Deal & Peterson, 2016).

Healthy School Culture

A healthy school culture can also be referred to as strong, effective, and positive (Freeman, 2020). At the heart of a school's culture are a mission and purpose that form

and reflect what the school aspires to accomplish (Deal & Peterson, 2016). Connecting people to the mission and vision by imparting an understanding of the greater purpose creates organizational coherence (Skeet, 2019; Tassiker-Dowson, 2019). Understanding the school's reason for existence shapes the way people believe, think, and act (Deal & Peterson, 2016). Skeet explains a healthy organizational culture provides people with positive goals to work towards and can be developed using research defining mental health in human beings. Like a healthy brain, a healthy organization functions effectively when its members can regulate themselves and communicate (Skeet, 2019). A healthy school culture has a mission and purpose that inspires teachers to teach, school leaders to lead, children to learn, and parents and the community to have confidence and faith in their schools (Deal & Peterson, 2016).

According to Shafer (2018), a strong school culture starts with connections and many overlapping and cohesive interactions among all school community members. Schools with a healthy school culture feel energetic and upbeat, as the administrators, teachers, and students work well together, strive to achieve common goals, and share strong bonds (Freeman, 2020). MacGilchrist et al. (2004) identified the three interrelated components of culture as professional relationships, organizational arrangements, and learning opportunities, and Skeet (2019) describes healthy organizational culture as having three similar capacities:

- relationships and connections inside and outside of the organization
- strategic and tactical functions
- self-awareness and reflection (para. 5)

Relationships and Connections. Establishing an environment where relationships and connections can flourish begins with establishing shared values and agreed-upon norms (Shafer, 2018). Shared values include the beliefs of what is right or wrong, good or bad, and just or unjust (Shafer, 2018). For example, a school culture that values collaboration may believe it is right to provide weekly time for teachers to share effective instructional practices. The norms or agreements are in place to describe how members of the school community should act and behave (Shafer, 2018). For instance, teachers should be engaged and actively participate in weekly collaboration meetings if the agreed-upon norms for the meeting are to be fully present and involved. A healthy organizational culture uses these shared values and norms to foster empathetic relationships, which lead to developing a foundation for interaction with others (Skeet, 2019).

Strategic and Tactical Functions. Cultivating shared values and establishing shared expectations provides the basis for the school's day-to-day operations. Healthy school cultures integrate organizational functions by creating a framework for ethical decision-making, creating opportunities for collaboration, and always connecting to the mission and vision (Skeet, 2019). While formal rules, such as job descriptions and policies, can influence what people do, cultural rules, such as rites and rituals, may lead to more positive action and sustained progress (Deal & Peterson, 2016). Focusing on what is important and valued, as well as centering daily work on important issues, contributes to a healthy culture (Deal & Peterson, 2016).

Self-Awareness and Reflection. Developing organizational introspection provides an opportunity for learning as an individual, as well as a collective whole. Skeet

(2019) explains that regular evaluation of conditions within the organization develops members' abilities to look toward the future and identify and manage realms of uncertainty. Goodman (2015) describes cultural self-reflection as a way to become more aware of self and others. Through reflection, inquiry, and discussion, the culture of the school can be transformed, as problems are identified and collaboratively solved (Goodman, 2015).

The integration of relationships, functions, and introspection creates healthy environments that also support ethical behavior (Skeet, 2019). Healthy school cultures value social relationships, physical and emotional safety, and supportive learning opportunities (Glossary of Education Reform, 2013; Lynch, 2016). In a healthy school culture, the school community regards trust, respect, and support as the foundation for building strong relationships, where what is deemed as important is prioritized in daily operations and decision-making (Murray, 2017).

Tangible evidence of the beliefs and values of a healthy school culture can be found through visible displays of student awards and recognition, as well as through friendly and supportive interactions amongst students and teachers (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Shafer, 2018). This is not the case in a school with a toxic culture. Warning signs of a toxic school culture include hostile relations amongst students and teachers, punishment instead of recognition, rewards and behavior motivated by the avoidance of punishment, and an emphasis on rules over people or mission (Epitropoulos, 2019).

Toxic School Culture

A toxic school culture can also be referred to as weak and negative, and it is difficult for people to learn the organization's culture because of sparse interactions

(Shafer, 2018). Shared beliefs and commitments do not spread because people are working in isolation from others without direct communication or clear messaging (Shafer, 2018). A toxic school culture does not have a clearly articulated mission or vision towards which all members of the school community are working, and core beliefs and values have not been established (Koppers, 2021; Peterson, n.d., as cited in Education World, n.d.). Norms for how to behave and interact with others have not been agreed upon. Without a commitment to a common goal, people work in silos instead of in collaboration with one another, and the lack of strong leadership keeps the school from moving forward (Prokopchuk, 2016).

Toxic school culture does not prioritize professional relationships (Epitropoulos, 2019; Koppers, 2021). Without strong relationships, people do not feel confident to share new ideas or try new things because of the possible repercussions (Epitropoulos, 2019; Koppers, 2021; Tassiker-Dowson, 2019). This can cause hostile relations among staff, students, and parents, as well as avoidance of honest conversations, preservation of self over collaboration, and lack of trust and safety (Epitropoulos, 2019; Koppers, 2021). According to Tassiker-Dowson (2019), the lack of professional relationships may result in teachers speaking negatively of other teachers and the principal. People are afraid to speak up and address problems head-on because they do not feel safe in uncomfortable conversations and may also fear punishment (Epitropoulos, 2019; Tassiker-Dowson, 2019).

Curriculum standardization, increased testing, and research-based teaching methods have negatively affected teachers who have lost discretion, faith, creativity, and teacher ingenuity (Deal & Peterson, 2016). Organizational arrangements and

opportunities for learning in a toxic school culture are focused on these school reform efforts rather than what the school community values and needs. School pressure and measurement also contribute to students' stress, anxiety, and depression (Strauss, 2022). In a study of high school students, the primary sources of stress and distress were school and school culture (Abeles, 2022, as cited by Strauss, 2022).

Impact of Culture on the Profession

In summary, toxic school cultures are places where the conditions are so negative that they become deadly to the professional and emotional lives of those who work and learn there (Eller & Eller, 2017). Teachers dread coming to work in the mornings and keep to themselves once they get there; students enter the building with their heads down to avoid interacting with others (Raudys, 2018). On the other hand, a healthy school culture is a place where both staff and students have positive attitudes and experiences of success, joy, and accomplishment (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Raudys, 2018; Skeet, 2019). Teachers look forward to coming to work and are excited and enthusiastic at the start of each class; students laugh in the hallways and interact with fellow students and their teachers (Raudys, 2018).

Teaching is considered a stressful occupation, which makes teacher retention difficult (Shuls & Flores, 2020). More than half of teachers who leave the profession each year cite dissatisfaction with some aspect of the job including poor leadership, lack of control over teaching, or too much testing pressure with too little support (Shuls & Flores, 2020). Veteran teachers are choosing to leave the profession early and telling their students and their children not to go into education (Deal & Peterson, 2016). With this in mind, creating healthy school cultures that provide teachers with valuable professional

development, opportunities for growth, and appropriate support is important to increase teacher job satisfaction and retention (Shuls & Flores, 2020).

Teacher Job Satisfaction

Approximately eight percent of teachers leave the profession every year in the United States (Kurtz, 2022; Shuls & Flores, 2020; Sutcher et al., 2016; Will, 2017). National and international surveys have been conducted to examine teachers' opinions regarding job satisfaction and various challenges and responsibilities of the profession. The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher (MSAT) was an American survey that gathered information from teachers and principals from 1984 until 2012 when it was replaced with the Merrimack College Teacher Survey (MCTS) (Kurtz, 2022; Will, 2022). The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) is an international survey of teachers and school leaders that garners information about schools' working conditions and learning environments (Wang et al., 2020).

As shown in Table 1, survey results from the MSAT and MCTS indicated that the percentage of teachers who reported job satisfaction decreased from 2009 to 2022, while the percentage of teachers who were likely to leave the profession increased. MCTS 2022 results showed that only 12% of teachers were very satisfied with their jobs, and more than 40% said they were likely to leave the profession within the next two years (Kurtz, 2022; Will, 2022). Teachers reported feeling overworked, underpaid, and under-appreciated, which led to a decrease in job satisfaction from 2011 to 2022. (Kurtz, 2022; Will, 2022).

Table 1

Survey Results of Teacher Job Satisfaction and Teachers Leaving the Profession

Survey Year	Percentage of Teachers "Very Satisfied" with Their Jobs	Percentage of Teachers Likely to Leave the Profession
2009	59	17
2011	44	29
2022	12	44

**Note*: 2009 and 2011 survey results were from the MSAT, while 2022 survey results were from the MCTS.

The 2011 MSAT concluded that 44% of teachers were very satisfied with their jobs, while 29% were likely to leave the teaching profession within the next five years. The percentage of teachers likely to leave the profession increased by 12% in just two years (Loewus, 2012). Loewus reported that less teachers reported being very satisfied in their jobs from 2009 to 2011. The last time that job satisfaction dipped this low was in 1989. With teacher job satisfaction decreasing by 47% since 2009, and the number of teachers planning to leave the profession early increasing by 27% in the same timeframe, it is evident that there are potential implications for recruiting new teachers and retaining current teachers in the profession (Kurtz, 2022).

While there are many factors that contribute to teacher job satisfaction, Deal & Peterson (2016) find that seasoned teachers are leaving the profession and discouraging others from joining education as a career because of a negative climate. Gallant & Riley (2014) state that working conditions (e.g., discipline issues, lack of administrative support, and negative school culture) are problems leading to high levels of teacher attrition. These and other issues, such as crowded classrooms, job difficulty, and

institutional functions and policies, negatively influence teachers' levels of job satisfaction (Gallant & Riley, 2014).

Wang et al. (2020) examined three aspects of teacher job satisfaction: teacher, student, and school. Examples of teacher factors included self-efficacy, relationships with colleagues and students, and professional development opportunities or qualities. Student characteristics, such as the percentage of students with misbehaviors and classroom discipline climate, were found to significantly affect teacher job satisfaction (Buckman & Pittman, 2021; Wang et al., 2020). According to Buckman & Pittman, poor student discipline refers to students who are suspended or expelled from school because of their disregard and disrespect towards school authority which causes increased stress for teachers (p. 1). Finally, Wang et al. referred to school factors as school culture, distributed leadership in the school, and principal job satisfaction.

Analyzing U.S. data from the 2013 TALIS, Wang et al. (2020) studied job satisfaction factors from all three aspects. Wang et al. found four factors that predicted teacher job satisfaction:

- participation among stakeholders (school factor)
- teacher self-efficacy (teacher factor)
- teacher-student relationship (teacher factor)
- classroom discipline climate (student factor) (p. 528)

Gallant & Riley (2014) also reported higher teacher attrition in schools that lack collaboration, teacher networking, and administrative support.

The most recent survey results linked to teachers' job satisfaction were from the 2022 MCTS, which indicated that teachers were disillusioned and exhausted (Will,

2022). Teachers proclaimed their love for teaching, but they shared their frustration for "everything else" (Will, 2022, para. 4). They felt overwhelmed with a larger workload, unable to meet their students' growing academic and social-emotional needs, underpaid for all they were required to do, and disrespected as professionals (Kurtz, 2022; Will, 2022). With teachers' stress levels at all-time highs, many teachers are slowly losing the joy of teaching (Will, 2022). Wang et al. (2020) explained that according to the National Science Teachers Association, almost half of the teachers who have left teaching said that they were dissatisfied with the school's culture or administration.

The quality of instruction, classroom management, and student-teacher relationships are suffering because of a dissatisfied teacher workforce (Will, 2022). The culmination of these factors (e.g., relationships, functions, and introspection) make up school culture (Skeet, 2019). Sutcher et al. (2016) reported that working conditions were significant predictors of teacher attrition, and they specifically cited teachers' perceptions of the principal, relationships with colleagues, and school culture. According to Susan Moore Johnson, a Harvard University professor of education (Will, 2022):

> What people want is to be able to teach and teach well, and if they can't do it because they can't afford to do it or because they have a toxic work environment, that discourages them from acting as teachers who are learning and growing and getting better and increasing their commitment to the work. That's the side of satisfaction that needs attention. (para. 12)

Meaningful changes must be made to retain current teachers and attract new ones to the profession. Attention must be paid to improving working conditions and school culture (Ansley et al., 2019; Will, 2022). Leading the charge to improve school culture, and in

turn, increase teachers' job satisfaction, falls on principals, as principals are the instructional leaders giving teachers support and voice (Ansley et al., 2019; Will, 2022).

Principal Impact on Culture as a Transformational Leader

The principal is identified as being highly impactful and critical to the success of any learning environment (ODE, 2018). As such, the principal remains the central source of leadership influence (The Wallace Foundation, 2013). In schools, there is an increasing demand for a principal to be the manager, instructional leader, community builder, and student and educator advocate (ODE, 2018). The school principal is instrumental in shaping school culture and the adoption and enactment of the school's vision, mission, and actions toward students, families, teachers, and the community (Bass et al., 2018).

Transformational leadership is characterized by a leader's ability to work with followers to identify areas needing to change, develop a vision that will lead to change, and model the execution of change (Anderson, 2017). This leadership style is one that inspires change through communication, charisma, adaptability, and empathetic support (Cherry, 2020). As a transformational leader, the principal can profoundly affect the school community by articulating a clear vision, demonstrating passion for the work, and making everyone feel motivated and committed (Cherry, 2020). If school culture needs to improve to increase teachers' job satisfaction, then the principal, as a transformational leader, will be most effective in improving performance and outcomes (Kovjanic et al., 2012). As a transformational leader, the principal inspires motivation by articulating a clear vision and encouraging followers to also feel inspired and optimistic in fulfilling the goals (Cherry, 2020). By keeping the vision and goals present and at the forefront

through repetition and enthusiasm (Page, 2021), the principal encourages followers to achieve more than they expected (Cetin & Kinik, 2015).

The role of the principal is essential to creating and sustaining school culture by creating a clear mission and vision for the school and its stakeholders, providing shared leadership through collaboration and continuous learning opportunities for teachers, and building and maintaining trusting relationships (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Prokopchuk, 2016; Shaffer, 2018; Skeet, 2019). Shuls & Flores (2020) explained several ways principals can build a positive school culture by supporting staff, encouraging teacher self-efficacy, providing differentiated professional development opportunities, and establishing and conducting an onboarding program for new and beginning teachers. Welcoming new and beginning teachers into the school by creating an induction program establishes a foundation for a positive school experience (Sutcher et al., 2016). Induction programs allow new teachers to meet other teachers and learn more about the school's traditions and goals (Shuls & Flores, 2020). Part of the induction program should also include a well-designed mentor program to support new teachers (Shuls & Flores, 2020).

District leaders attribute positive school culture to having building principals who value teacher voice and shared leadership, as well as nurture and support teachers (Shuls & Flores, 2020). Principals are responsible for investing in the school's culture by providing learning environments that are shaped by relationships and commitment to students (Shuls & Flores, 2020). The idealized influence of the principal exemplifies the qualities that are most respected and admired by the school community such as being trustworthy and honest (Cetin & Kinik, 2015). Followers trust the principal as a transformational leader because the principal provides the vision and a sense of mission,

while also empowering and inspiring relationships with followers (Afshari, 2021). The loyalty and dedication of the school community increases with the principal's idealized influence (Alqatawenah, 2018).

Supportive leadership includes creating a culture of trust, openness, and academic freedom for teachers (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Prokopchuk, 2016; Shaffer, 2018; Shuls & Flores, 2020; Skeet, 2019). Through intellectual stimulation, the principal establishes a team atmosphere and builds teacher-leaders. Shuls & Flores explain one way that this can be accomplished is through creating committees at the building and district level for teachers to join and even lead. The committees engage in problem-solving and decision-making processes that include thoughts and input from teachers. These practices build trust and collaboration, as teachers feel heard and valued.

Developing Leaders

Creating leadership training programs to help teachers grow and develop their own leadership skills is a way for principals to build a healthy culture that supports teachers who want to advance their careers into administrative roles (Shuls & Flores, 2020). These programs allow teachers to take on leadership roles within the school and district with the support of their principals. Treating teachers as professionals by providing them with the freedom and flexibility to make instructional decisions creates a culture that honors teacher voice, thoughts, and opinions (Shuls & Flores, 2020). According to Gallant & Riley (2014), teachers become dissatisfied, and ultimately leave the profession, due to their inability to try new instructional strategies which leads to "…a stifled sense of creativity or innovation" (p. 11). Focusing too much on test scores, as well as emphasizing uniformity and conformity, leads to teachers feeling obstructed

and unsuccessful in the classrooms with their students (Gallant & Riley, 2014). As transformational leaders, principals assess current values and beliefs, as well as inspire new ways of thinking and doing (Anderson, 2017). They intellectually stimulate followers to be innovative and take risks (Alqatawenah, 2018).

Shuls & Flores (2020) explained how differentiated professional development that meets personal growth and areas of need for teachers is important to building a healthy school culture. Principals who collaborate with teachers to determine professional development needs further provide teachers with opportunities to develop skills and knowledge that enhance instructional practices and classroom management (Davenport, 2018; Shuls & Flores, 2020). Offering support and encouragement is a principal's way of showing individualized consideration to followers (Cherry, 2020). Teachers' commitment and engagement in professional development is greater when it fits their needs for personal growth, and they have multiple options to choose from (Shuls & Flores, 2020). As a transformational leader, the principal shows genuine care and concern for followers by creating an environment of openness and trust (Page, 2021). While individual differences are respected, the principal cultivates a supportive environment where followers feel safe to collaborate (Cetin & Kinik, 2015). The growth and development of followers is promoted through the principal's ability to coach and mentor with empathy (Page, 2021).

Summary

While principals have many demands, one of a principal's most important and influential roles is creating a healthy school culture (Spicer, 2016). The principal sets the tone for a healthy school culture by clearly articulating and exemplifying the vision and

mission of the school while seamlessly meeting numerous other demands (Prokopchuk, 2016). Principals articulate and model the expectations for professional relationships, organizational functions, and opportunities for learning in the school so that teachers feel supported and valued, which are important for a healthy school culture.

As a transformational leader, the principal impacts school culture by challenging existing conditions, inspiring creativity, and motivating new opportunities to learn (Cherry, 2020). By believing in and committing to the mission and vision, the principal's behaviors and attitudes motivate followers to work toward fulfilling goals and exceeding expectations (Reza, 2019).

Examining the relationship between school culture and teacher job satisfaction requires understanding the types of school culture and factors that contribute to teacher job satisfaction. Transformational principals create healthy school cultures that lead to higher job satisfaction of teachers. This study sought to fill the gap in research related to school culture and teacher job satisfaction.

Chapter Three

Methodology

This study examined the reasons for K–12 public school teachers leaving the profession. A better understanding of teachers leaving the profession is necessary so that school leaders can work to retain current teachers and recruit new teachers to the profession. A decline in teacher job satisfaction, due to toxic school culture, has led to more and more teachers leaving the profession (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Gallant & Riley, 2014). Without a comprehensive understanding of the reasons for teacher job dissatisfaction, principals have difficulty providing teachers with what they need to feel valued and to remain in the profession.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of the teaching profession, school culture, and the school principal on teachers' decisions to leave the profession. To accomplish this, the following questions were pertinent to this research:

1. Why are teachers leaving K–12 public school teaching?
    a. Which factors (i.e., job satisfaction, school culture, school administration) contributed to their decision to leave?
2. What do teachers indicate about the culture of their former K–12 public-school?
    a. Were professional relationships within the school cultivated and supported?
    b. Were the organizational arrangements of the school aligned to one purpose?

c. Were learning and growth opportunities valued and prioritized for teachers and students?

3. What do teachers indicate about the role of the school principal in their decision to leave?

These questions are significant because they add to the existing literature regarding teacher job satisfaction and possible reasons for teachers leaving the profession.

Research Method

The design of this study utilized a mixed-methods approach through Q-methodology. "Q-methodology combines qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate the subjective views of those directly involved in a particular topic" (Herrington & Coogan, 2011, p. 24). Q-methodology cannot prove hypotheses, as it is an exploratory research technique that can bring coherence to research questions with complex and socially-contested answers (Watts & Stenner, 2005).

For this study, Q-methodology allowed for the understanding of perceptions of former K–12 public school teachers to be examined while also looking for patterns in responses (Cross, 2005; Watts & Stenner, 2005). The target population was former K–12 public school teachers from various school districts throughout the United States. Participants were purposefully selected to provide insight into the reasons for leaving the teaching profession. Data was collected through an online Q-Method Software Program.

There are seven phases of Q-methodology:

- building a concourse
- selecting a Q-sample
- running a pilot study

- selecting a P-sample
- gathering the Q-sorts
- completing data analysis
- providing interpretation of the data (Bartlett & DeWeese, 2014)

Defining and building a concourse begins by generating statements from the concourse, which provides meaning about the phenomenon being studied (Coogan & Herrington, 2011). Seventy-five statements were generated through an examination of the literature related to teacher job satisfaction.

To develop the Q-set, a pilot survey was conducted with current K–12 public school teachers. The pilot survey contained 75 statements regarding the teaching profession, salary, school culture, and school leadership. Each statement was evaluated by its impact on teacher retention (i.e., strongly agree to strongly disagree), wording of the statement (i.e., positive, negative, neutral), and the category to which the statement best fits (i.e., teaching profession, salary, school culture, school leadership). Data from this survey was used to narrow the 75 statements down to the 30 statements that were used for the Q-sort.

Participants

Participants were purposefully selected, as Q-methodology seeks to ensure a diverse and comprehensive range of perspectives of participants who have experienced the phenomenon (Cross, 2005; Watts & Stenner, 2005). A purposive sampling method was used by the researcher to select and contact individuals who recently left various K–12 public school districts in the United States and were no longer teaching in K–12 public education. According to Watts & Stenner (2005), Q-methodological studies do not

require a large number of participants; therefore, the participants for this study are 22 former K–12 public school teachers from various districts in the United States.

The former K–12 public school teachers were invited to participate in the research study through purposive sampling using targeted electronic communication (e.g., Facebook, emails). Those who were interested in participating in the study were contacted through electronic communications, which was intended to lessen the likelihood of feeling pressured to participate.

Role of the Researcher

After spending a decade in a public school district with a toxic environment, the researcher encountered leadership that had a detrimental impact on the emotional, social, professional, and personal well-being of the educators working there. Despite the district's mission, vision, and values being prominently displayed on various platforms such as the district website, billboards, and letterhead, they were not put into practice. The district leaders often used the phrase "Do what's best for kids," but their actions did not reflect this sentiment. Instead, they micromanaged and criticized the building leaders and teachers, instilling a constant fear of making mistakes. Instances of misconduct were overlooked for those favored by the district leaders, while those who were not favored were treated so poorly that they were forced to leave.

In the summer of 2022, approximately 14% of the district's teachers decided to leave in search of healthier work environments, even if it meant accepting lower salaries. During this time, the researcher also made the choice to depart from the district due to conflicting beliefs regarding education, leadership, and basic human decency, which did not align with the principles upheld by the district's leaders.

Because of the researcher's experience, the positionality of the researcher is one of an insider. To lessen bias, Q-methodology was the preferred method of research to understand this phenomenon, as it assumes that the participants are forthcoming in their sorting of the concourse statements (Watts & Stenner, 2005). While participants complete the Q-sort and respond to open-ended questions electronically, social desirability bias cannot be completely eliminated from the participants' responses.

The role of the researcher was to provide insight into the devastating effects of a toxic school culture by investigating the perceptions and thoughts of teachers who have left K–12 public education. Exploring teachers' viewpoints of the impact of school culture and leadership on their decision to leave may provide critical insights related to teacher shortages experienced by school districts across the nation.

Instrumentation: Developing the Concourse

The first step in Q-methodology is to create a concourse, which is a collection of statements that reflect potential perspectives on a research topic (Coogan & Herrington, 2011; Watts & Stenner, 2005). An effective Q-set includes non-redundant concourse statements that do not exhibit any bias toward a particular viewpoint and enables participants to respond to the research question (Watts & Stenner, 2005). To build this concourse, peer-reviewed literature from 2012-2022 was thoroughly examined, and informal interviews with current educators related to school culture, leadership, and teacher job satisfaction were completed. Using research from the Minnesota Department of Education (n.d.) and Panorama Education (n.d.), as well as statements from the *Teacher Job Satisfaction Questionnaire* (Lester, 1987), an initial concourse of statements was proposed and adapted to reflect the context of job satisfaction in the school setting.

The original concourse consisted of 75 statements (S*ee Appendix A*). To reduce the concourse to 30 statements, the researcher created a Google survey to conduct a pilot study with a target sample of a minimum of ten individuals.

Pilot Study

For the pilot study, 17 practicing teachers completed the Google survey. To maintain anonymity, the invitation to participate, along with the Google survey, was emailed to each individual separately. The survey did not ask for names, nor did it collect email addresses. Seventeen of the 24 individuals responded to the survey within two days. Participants responded to each of the 75 statements in three areas:

- Rate the statement in regard to its impact on teacher retention — strongly agree to strongly disagree.
- Identify the statement as positive, negative, or neutral.
- Categorize the statement as belonging to the teaching profession, teacher salary, leadership, or school culture.

Based on the responses from the participants, the researcher examined each statement to determine its variability, wording, and category. The statements were transferred into a chart which can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2

Analysis of Proposed Concourse Statements

Proposed Concourse Statements for the Q-sort	Impact on Teacher Retention (strongly agree to strongly disagree)	Type of Statement Wording (positive, negative, neutral)	Statement Category (teaching profession, teacher salary, leadership, school culture)
"Teaching provides me with an opportunity to advance professionally" (Lester, 1987, p. 229).	Varied	Neutral	Profession
"Teacher income is adequate for normal expenses" (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Negative	Salary
My principal turns one teacher against another (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Negative	Leadership
"No one tells me that I'm a good teacher" (Lester, 1987, p. 229).	Varied	Negative	Culture
The mission and vision for our school is well known.	Varied	Neutral	Culture
"Teaching provides an opportunity to use a variety of skills" (Lester, 1987, p. 229).	Varied	Positive	Profession
"I do not have the freedom to make my own decisions" (Lester, 1987, p. 229).	Varied	Negative	Profession
Working conditions in my school can be improved (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Strongly Agree/Agree	Negative	Culture
"The work of a teacher consists of routine activities" (Lester, 1987, p. 229).	Varied	Neutral	Profession

My students' scores on state tests are an accurate reflection of my teaching.	Varied	Negative	Profession
“I am not getting ahead in my present teaching position” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).	Varied	Negative	Profession
“I try to be aware of the policies of my school” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).	Varied	Neutral	Culture
“Teaching provides a good opportunity for advancement” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).	Varied	Negative	Profession
My principal is not willing to listen to suggestions (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Negative	Leadership
When I teach a good lesson, my principal notices (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Positive	Leadership
“Working conditions in my school could not be worse” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Negative	Culture
“I get along well with my students” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Strongly Agree/Agree	Positive	Culture
“Teaching provides me an opportunity to help my students learn” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).	Varied	Positive	Profession
“Teaching encourages me to be creative” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).	Varied	Positive	Profession
“Teaching provides me with financial security” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Negative	Salary
My principal makes available the material I need to do my best (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Strongly Agree/Agree	Positive	Leadership
“My colleagues stimulate me to do better work” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Positive	Culture

"I am not interested in the policies of my school" (Lester, 1987, p. 229).	Varied	Negative	Culture
My teacher evaluations are not an accurate reflection of my teaching.	Varied	Negative	Profession
"Teaching is very interesting work" (Lester, 1987, p. 229).	Varied	Positive	Profession
"I never feel secure in my teaching job" (Lester, 1987, p. 229).	Varied	Negative	Profession
My principal makes me feel uncomfortable (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Negative	Leadership
My principal values my thoughts and opinions.	Varied	Positive	Leadership
"My colleagues are highly critical of one another" (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Negative	Culture
"The physical surroundings in my school are unpleasant" (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Negative	Culture
"I receive too little recognition" (Lester, 1987, p. 229).	Varied	Negative	Leadership
"Teaching does not provide me with the chance to develop new methods" (Lester, 1987, p. 229).	Varied	Negative	Profession
"Teacher income is less than I deserve" (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Strongly Agree	Negative	Salary
My principal explains what is expected of me (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Positive	Leadership
"My students respect me as a teacher" (Lester, 1987, p. 229).	Strongly Agree/Agree	Positive	Profession
"I like the people with whom I work" (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Strongly Agree/Agree	Positive	Culture
The families of my students do not care about their learning.	Varied	Negative	Culture

"Working conditions in my school are good" (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Positive	Culture
My principal gives me assistance when I need help (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Positive	Leadership
"The administration in my school communicates its policies well" (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Positive	Leadership
"I have made lasting friendships among my colleagues" (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Positive	Culture
I receive recognition from my principal (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Positive	Leadership
"I am afraid of losing my teaching job" (Lester, 1987, p. 229).	Varied	Negative	Profession
The parents of my students support me as their teacher.	Varied	Positive	Culture
My community respects me as a teacher.	Varied	Positive	Profession
"My colleagues seem unreasonable to me" (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Negative	Culture
I receive too many meaningless instructions from my principal (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Negative	Leadership
"Teaching provides for a secure future" (Lester, 1987, p. 229).	Varied	Positive	Profession
"My interests are similar to those of my colleagues" (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Neutral	Culture
My principal praises good teaching (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Positive	Leadership
"Insufficient income keeps me from living the way I want to live" (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Negative	Salary

"Teaching provides me limited opportunities for advancements" (Lester, 1987, p. 229).	Strongly Agree/Agree	Negative	Profession
"I receive full recognition for my successful teaching" (Lester, 1987, p. 229).	Varied	Positive	Leadership
"I dislike the people with whom I work" (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Negative	Culture
My principal treats everyone equitably (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Positive	Leadership
"Pay compares with similar jobs in other school districts" (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Positive	Salary
"The work of a teacher is very pleasant" (Lester, 1987, p. 229).	Varied	Positive	Profession
"I am responsible for planning my daily lessons" (Lester, 1987, p. 229).	Varied	Positive	Profession
"Teaching provides an opportunity for promotion" (Lester, 1987, p. 229).	Varied	Negative	Profession
My principal offers suggestions to improve my teaching (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Positive	Leadership
"I get along well with my colleagues" (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Strongly Agree/Agree	Positive	Culture
"Teaching discourages originality" (Lester, 1987, p. 229).	Varied	Negative	Profession
"Teacher income is barely enough to live on" (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Negative	Salary
The families of my students do not support me as a teacher.	Varied	Negative	Culture
"The administration in my school does not clearly communicate its policies" (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Negative	Leadership

I do not get cooperation from my colleagues (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Negative	Culture
“I am indifferent towards teaching” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).	Varied	Neutral	Profession
My students' families are involved in their learning.	Varied	Positive	Culture
My principal does not back me up (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Negative	Leadership
“I am well paid in proportion to my ability” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Positive	Salary
“Working conditions in my school are comfortable” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).	Varied	Positive	Culture
My students are not interested in learning.	Varied	Negative	Culture
I receive fair teacher evaluations.	Varied	Positive	Profession
My students are important to me.	Strongly Agree	Positive	Profession
My principal is a role model for our school community.	Varied	Positive	Leadership

Since the goal was to have 30 statements for the final concourse that represented a variety of possible responses relating to the topic of teacher retention, the researcher filtered the statements to eliminate those that were not varied. Statements labeled as “varied” had responses that both agreed and disagreed. Next, the statements were sorted based on category and wording to ensure all aspects of the topic of interest were covered without favoring one aspect over another (Coogan & Herrington, 2011). Upon analysis, 45 statements were eliminated from the concourse. This resulted in 30 statements for the final concourse:

1. “Teaching provides me with an opportunity to advance professionally” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).

2. “Teacher income is adequate for normal expenses” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
3. My principal turns one teacher against another (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
4. “No one tells me that I’m a good teacher” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
5. The mission and vision for our school is well known.
6. “The work of a teacher consists of routine activities” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
7. “I try to be aware of the policies of my school” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
8. My principal is not willing to listen to suggestions (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
9. “Teaching provides me with financial security” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
10. “My colleagues stimulate me to do better work” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
11. My teacher evaluations are not an accurate reflection of my teaching.
12. My principal makes me feel uncomfortable (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
13. My principal values my thoughts and opinions.
14. My principal explains what is expected of me (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
15. I receive recognition from my principal (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
16. “I am afraid of losing my job” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
17. I receive too many meaningless instructions from my principal (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
18. “Teaching provides for a secure future” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
19. “My interests are similar to those of my colleagues” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
20. “Pay compares with similar jobs in other school districts” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
21. “The work of a teacher is very pleasant” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
22. “Teaching provides an opportunity for promotion” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
23. My principal offers suggestions to improve my teaching (Lester, 1987, p. 228).

24. I do not get cooperation from my colleagues (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
25. “I am indifferent towards teaching” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
26. My students’ families are involved in their learning.
27. “I am well paid in proportion to my ability” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
28. “Working conditions in my school are comfortable” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
29. My students are not interested in learning.
30. My principal is a role model for our school community.

Procedure

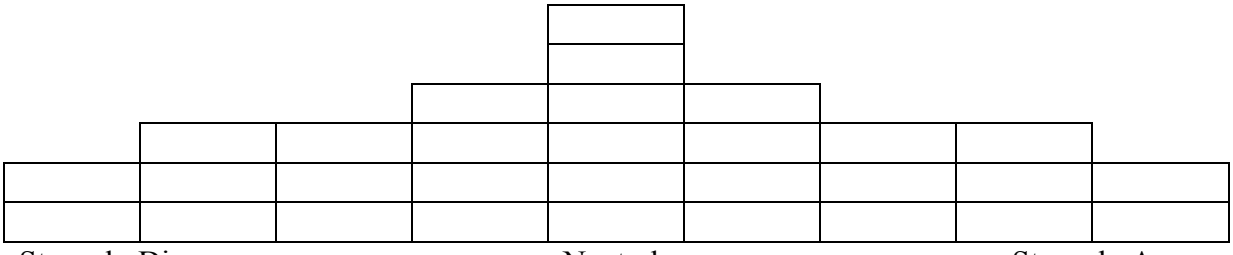
Upon obtaining approval from the Youngstown State University Human Subjects/Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher sent email invitations to a purposive sample of participants to participate in the study. The purposive sampling approach ensured that the sample was representative. The study recruited participants who had recently resigned from teaching in K–12 public schools. The recruitment strategy explicitly referred to the research topic and explained the Q-method activity, which was estimated to take 30–45 minutes for participants to complete. Individuals who were not interested in the research topic most likely did not agree to participate because of the amount of time necessary to complete the activity.

The email invitation included a link to the Q-sort, which had questions pertaining to the study’s parameters. The research aimed to gain insight into the diverse perspectives on teachers’ decisions to leave the K–12 public school teaching profession and not make assumptions or generalizations about specific groups. Including demographic information provided a wider range of perspectives on teacher retention.

Participants were asked for their consent to participate. The consent explained that they did not have to be part of this research project, and if they agreed to participate, they could choose to stop participating at any time. Participants' risk of harm was minimal, as the topic of teacher retention is not viewed as having a strong, negative, emotional response; however, the sorting activity asked about the reasons why participants left K–12 public school teaching, which could have led to negative emotions while completing it.

The study's data does not personally identify participants. The Q-set was already generated for participants, and the Q-sort was administered individually through the Q Method Software, a computer web-based program. Participants received the prompt: "Think about why you chose to leave K–12 public school teaching. For each statement, click the icon that aligns most with your view" within the Q-sort. The participants then read each concourse statement and dragged it to the category that best reflected their personal perspective and views on teacher retention. There were no time constraints within which the participant must have completed the Q-sort.

Based on a 30-item concourse, the distribution framework for the Q-sort is as follows:



The Q Method Software automatically recorded each participant's response, eliminating the possibility of human error when collecting Q-sort data. Data analysis

began immediately upon completion. In addition to the Q-sort, participants were asked open-ended questions about their perspectives on teacher retention, their own reason(s) for leaving K-12 public school teaching, and any school culture and leadership contexts they believed impacted their decision to leave the profession.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the Q-sort followed the guidelines established by Watts and Stenner (2005). The Q Method Software provides options for the researcher to choose the number of desired factors, the rotation method (i.e., orthogonal, oblique, or Varimax), the correlation method (i.e., Pearson, Kendall, or Spearman), and principal component analysis (PCA). The Q Method Software can generate the following reports that can be used for data analysis:

- rank statements totals
- normalized scores for factors
- descending array of differences for factors
- factor characteristics
- statement factor scores
- standard error of differences
- correlation between factor Z-scores
- distinguishing statements
- consensus statements (Q Method Software, 2021)

The Q Method Software procedure also collected demographic information about each participant.

To identify the primary themes related to participants' subjective views on teacher retention, the short answer responses from the survey underwent factor analysis. Furthermore, the researcher also scrutinizes the school culture and leadership contexts reported by the participants that influenced their decision to resign from K–12 public school teaching.

Assumptions, **Limitations, and Delimitations**

The goal of this study was to explore teachers' reasons for leaving K–12 public education, specifically the impact of school culture and leadership on their decision to leave. An assumption in this study was that data on teachers' reasons for leaving K–12 public education could be gleaned from a mixed-methods research design using Q-methodology to avoid bias. Collecting self-reported data using a survey design could lead to unreliable responses due to participants' being influenced by social desirability (Cross, 2005). Q-methodology assumes that participants answer the questions honestly and completely (Watts & Stenner, 2005).

A delimitation of this study was that the participants in the study were purposefully selected. The participants may not fully represent all teachers who have left the teaching profession; however, Q-methodology allows participants to express their vantage points on a topic to reveal subjective structures, attitudes, and perspectives (Cross, 2005; Herrington & Coogan, 2011). Findings may not be generalizable to the larger population (Watts & Stenner, 2005). Results from this study could be used to strengthen principal preparation programs and leadership development training, especially related to creating a healthy school culture that improves teacher job satisfaction.

Ethical Considerations

Q-methodology involves studying subjective viewpoints through factor analysis of a sorted set of statements. The following ethical considerations were considered when conducting this Q-methodology research:

1. *Informed Consent* – Participants will be informed about the purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits of the study via email before agreeing to participate. A general description of the study and an individual link to the Q Method Software Program will be included in the email to participants. Informed consent is provided when the participants enter the Q Method Software Program.
2. *Confidentiality and Anonymity* – Participants' personal information and data will not be shared or disclosed without consent. Anonymity is ensured, as each participant is provided with a unique four-digit identification number. Names of participants will not be entered in the Q Method Software Program.
3. *Respect for Participants' Autonomy* - Participants can leave the Q-sort program and discontinue participation at any time in the study.
4. *Ethical Data Analysis* – When analyzing data obtained from participants, ethical principles will be followed. Demographic information will be collected from participants to ensure representation of varying perspectives in the final sample. Demographic information collected includes race/ethnicity, gender identification, age, total number of years teaching in K–12 public schools, general category of teaching experience (i.e., elementary, middle, or high school), year the participant left K– 12 public education, and informed consent.

Summary

Q-methodology was chosen to investigate the influence of school culture and leadership on teachers' decisions to leave the profession. Q-methodology uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques to identify and categorize people's viewpoints on an issue (Herrington & Coogan, 2011). The focus of Q-methodology research is to understand the diverse perspectives, thoughts, and opinions of participants (Watts & Stenner, 2005).

Participants were purposefully selected, as they had to be former teachers who have left the profession. A set of statements, referred to as a concourse, related to the teaching profession, school culture, and leadership were developed. The concourse included a range of viewpoints, including positive and negative views. Participants were asked to rank-order the statements based on their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement. Using factor analysis, clusters of participants who shared similar viewpoints were identified (Cross, 2005; Watts & Stenner, 2005). Finally, the findings were interpreted, and conclusions were drawn about the influence of the teaching profession, school culture, and leadership on the former teachers' decisions to leave the profession.

By using Q-methodology, insight was gained into the subjective experiences and perspectives of teachers who left the profession, and common themes or factors that contributed to their decision to leave were identified. These insights can inform policies and interventions aimed at improving teacher retention and recruitment practices.

Chapter Four

Results

This investigation examined the influence of the teaching profession, school culture, and the school principal on K–12 public school teachers' decisions to leave the profession. Quantitative and qualitative data were synthesized to provide meaning and understanding for the different viewpoints from the perspective of former K–12 public school teachers. Results of the analysis were used to respond to the following initial research questions that framed the study:

1. Why are teachers leaving K–12 public school teaching?
    a. Which factors (i.e., job satisfaction, school culture, school administration) contributed to their decision to leave?
2. What do teachers indicate about the culture of their former K–12 public-school?
    a. Were professional relationships within the school cultivated and supported?
    b. Were the organizational arrangements of the school aligned to one purpose?
    c. Were learning and growth opportunities valued and prioritized for teachers and students?
3. What do teachers indicate about the role of the school principal in their decision to leave?

This chapter includes a presentation of the analyzed data. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how the collected data supports the investigation of viewpoints from former K–12 public school teachers who left the teaching profession.

Participants

Participants were provided with a link to complete this study. The survey was initiated by 22 participants. Ten participants were between the ages of 40-49 (45%); five participants were ages 60 and over (23%); three participants were between the ages of 30-39 (14%); three participants were between the ages of 50-59 (14%); and one participant was between the ages of 18-29 (5%). Twenty participants were female (91%), and two participants were male (9%). Twenty-two participants were White/Caucasian (100%).

Eleven participants reported teaching in suburban public schools (50%); nine participants reported teaching in urban public schools (41%); and two participants reported teaching in rural public schools (9%). Ten participants reported teaching in high schools (45%); six participants reported teaching in elementary schools (27%); and six participants reported teaching in middle schools (27%). Six participants reported teaching in public schools for 16-20 years (27%); four participants reported teaching in public schools for 1-5 years (18%); four participants reported teaching in public schools for 11-15 years (18%); four participants reported teaching in public schools for 21-25 years (18%); three participants reported teaching in public schools for 6-10 years (14%); and one participant reported teaching in public schools for 26-30 years (5%). Participants reported leaving K-12 public school teaching over a span of more than 30 years, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Years Participants Left K-12 Public School Teaching

Year	Number of Participants
1990-1999	2
2000-2010	3
2011-2020	5
2021-2023	11
Still Teaching	1*

**Note.* Each participant specified the last year of teaching in K-12 public schools. One participant indicated he or she was "still teaching"; however, in the follow-up questions, the participant pointed out that he or she would be leaving the profession at the end of the current school year.

Table 3 reflects the number of participants who left public school teaching since 1990. Eleven participants (50%) left K-12 public school teaching in the last two years.

Refer to Appendix B for descriptive data and factor loading information for each participant. Raw data can be found at the following link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/139_MWy48GOLwOqm5nHRac9GTpeUT84aq/view?usp=sharing

Q-Sort Results

Correlation Matrix

The correlation matrix analysis between the 22 Q-sorts can be found in the raw data link (above). The correlation matrix represents the interrelationship among the participants' Q-sorts (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Correlations are reported on a scale ranging from -1.00 to +1.00. As the numbers move closer to ± 1.00, the strength of the correlation increases. Positive correlations, or numbers closer to +1.00, reflect similarities between participants. Negative correlations, or numbers closer to -1.00, reflect differences between participants. Table 4 provides the correlations between factor scores.

Table 4

Correlation Between Factor Scores

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Factor 1	1.00	0.02	0.38	-0.14
Factor 2	-	1.00	-0.22	0.12
Factor 3	-	-	1.00	0.04
Factor 4	-	-	-	1.00

As shown in Table 4, all four factors show a low correlation, upholding discriminating viewpoints from the participants' Q-sorts. The 22 Q-sorts were analyzed through extraction of four factors with a varimax rotation of the factors. Factor analysis identifies individuals who can be categorized together based on exhibiting similar viewpoints on a specific matter (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Auto-flagging was set to the majority of common variance.

Factor analysis was run three separate times to ensure the optimal number of factors to participants with Q-sort extraction. Initially, a four-factor model was used, resulting in 46% of variance captured with four participants not loading on one of the factors. A three-factor model was then used, resulting in a 37% variance captured with seven participants not loading on one of the factors. A five-factor model was also evaluated, resulting in 52% of variance captured with five participants not loading on one of the factors. The comparison between the models revealed the four-factor model to be the most parsimonious and best fit for this study. Table 5 provides the factor characteristics for all four factors.

Table 5

Factor Characteristics

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
No. of Defining Variables	4	7	2	5
Avg. Rel. Coef.	0.80	0.80	0.80	0.80
Composite Reliability	0.94	0.97	0.89	0.95
S.E of Factor Z-Scores	0.24	0.19	0.33	0.22

As shown in Table 5, the four-factor model resulted in four defining variables in Factor 1, seven defining variables in Factor 2, two defining variables in Factor 3, and five defining variables in Factor 4.

The analysis indicated that 45.65% of the variance responses could be identified in four factors. Table 6 reveals eigenvalues for the four factors.

Table 6

Eigenvalues

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Eigenvalues	3.38	2.79	2.00	1.87
% Explained Variance	15.39	12.68	9.08	8.51
Cumulative Variance	15.39	28.06	37.14	45.65
Humphrey's Rule	0.43	0.31	0.24	0.29
Standard Error	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05

As shown in Table 6, the 22 Q-sorts were intercorrelated and factor analyzed. Four factors were extracted and rotated because, together, this represented 45.65% of the total study variance. These four factors represent people of similar perspectives. Four factors exceeded the acceptable 1.0 cutoff with eigenvalues of 3.38, 2.79, 2.00, and 1.87.

Therefore, a four-factor model was considered the most efficient and parsimonious model in explaining the participants' viewpoints.

Varimax Rotation

This study used factor rotation by varimax rotation, which was done automatically in the Q Method Software Program. Varimax rotation is a statistical method used to rotate the factors to achieve the highest possible factor loading in a Q-sort (Watts & Stenner, 2012). This rotation aims to produce a configuration where one factor dominates the fit (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Table 7 represents the Q-sort associated with each participant following the varimax rotation. Factor extraction is indicated by bold numbers and X in the appropriate column.

Table 7

Factor Matrix with an X Indicating a Defining Sort

Participant	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
20Y0	-0.16	0.17	0.11	0.03
24XI	0.20	0.18	-0.02	-0.07
53BW	0.14	-0.08	**0.24 X**	0.02
5VIH	0.15	0.11	0.04	**-0.20 X**
75AM	-0.11	-0.06	0.05	**0.28 X**
7A7S	-0.01	0.07	**0.32 X**	-0.05
7JLA	0.16	**-0.20 X**	0.09	-0.01
ALNZ	0.10	**-0.20 X**	0.16	0.02
B199	0.14	-0.13	0.17	0.10
D5NP	-0.04	**0.24 X**	0.15	0.001

E7K1	-0.07		0.05		0.18	**0.20**	**X**
F8Z30U2C	-0.08		**-0.21**	**X**	0.12	-0.14	
FO5U	**-0.22**	**X**	-0.03		-0.15	0.04	
G40R	0.12		**0.25**	**X**	-0.05	-0.07	
HC4Y	-0.18		0.07		0.19	0.02	
IH01	0.04		0.11		0.08	**0.28**	**X**
KLCR	0.07		0.05		-0.08	**0.31**	**X**
OPCQ	**0.21**	**X**	0.06		0.16	-0.07	
Q1AP	**0.30**	**X**	0.01		0.06	-0.01	
V6CJN5	**0.27**	**X**	0.07		-0.08	0.01	
YEY2	0.08		**-0.22**	**X**	-0.03	0.14	
Z1C2	0.07		**0.20**	**X**	-0.09	0.16	

As shown in Table 7, 18 of the 22 participants loaded significantly on one of the four factors. Combined, Factors 1, 2, 3, and 4 account for 45.65% of the total study's variance. Four participants did not load significantly on one of the four factors. This indicates that the participants did not fit well within the four main factors that were extracted from the study. For this study, Factor 1 is referred to as Judy Bernley; Factor 2 is referred to as Violet Newstead; Factor 3 is referred to as Doralee Rhodes; and Factor 4 is referred to as Franklin Hart Jr.

Factor Arrays, Identification, and Interpretation

Q-methodology reflects participants' viewpoints, and for this study specifically, their reasons for leaving K–12 public school teaching. Thus, a factor array is a visual tool of the participants' collective viewpoints, not any specific individual's comments,

statements, or views, but a group of individuals with similar viewpoints. Along with the factor's identification and interpretation of participants' viewpoints, the following section provides arrays displayed in Figures 2, 3, 4, and 5 for each of the four factor models. Also in this section, Tables 8, 9, 10, and 11 display distinguishing statements for each factor.

Factor 1: Judy Bernly

Judy Bernly is a relatable, resilient, and transformative character in the 1980 comedy film *9 to 5*. At the beginning of the film, Judy is introduced as a meek and inexperienced woman who finds herself thrust into the workforce. She is timid, lacking confidence in her abilities, and unsure of how to navigate the corporate world. Judy's journey serves as a representative story for countless women who have been underestimated and undervalued due to societal expectations and gender bias. Through Judy's experiences in the film, she finds her voice and recognizes the importance of standing up for herself and her colleagues. Judy's character highlights the empowerment that comes from challenging social norms and fighting against systemic injustice.

Figure 2 represents the factor array for *Judy Bernly* followed by distinguishing statements in Table 8.

Figure 2

Model Sort for Former K-12 Public School Teachers Who Loaded Significantly on Factor 1, Judy Bernly

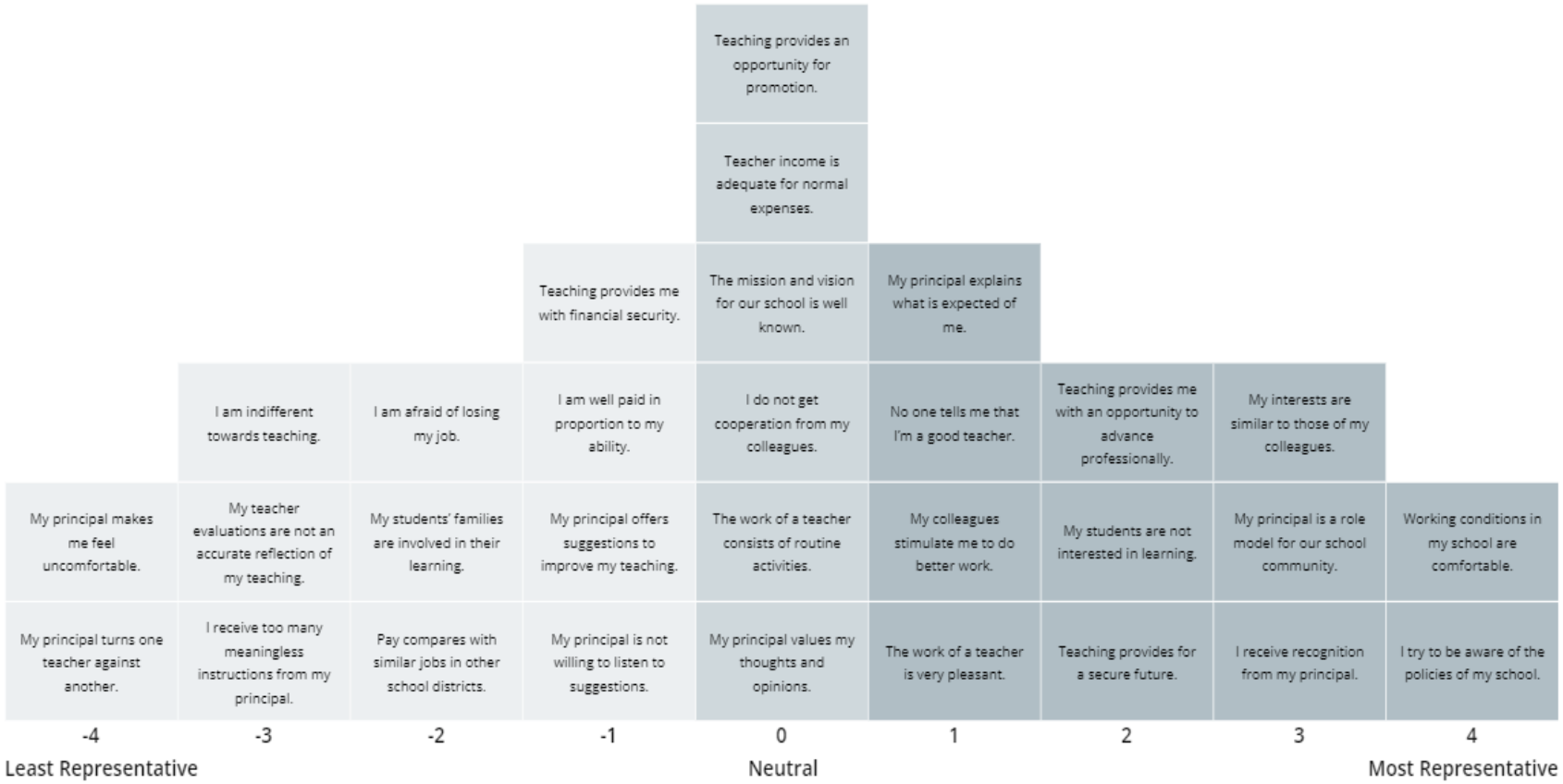


Table 8

Distinguishing Statements for Factor 1, Judy Bernly

Statement Number	Statement	Endorsement
7	I try to be aware of the policies of my school.	^
15	I receive recognition from my principal.	+
1	Teaching provides me with an opportunity to advance professionally.	^
22	Teaching provides an opportunity for promotion.	-
23	My principal offers suggestions to improve my teaching.	+
17	I receive too many meaningless instructions from my principal.	-
11	My teacher evaluations are not an accurate reflection of my teaching.	-
3	My principal turns one teacher against another.	-
12	My principal makes me feel uncomfortable.	-

**Note*: Endorsement indicated as positive (+), neutral (^), or negative (-)

Figure 2 depicts the factor array for *Judy Bernly* which had 4 statistically loading participants, accounting for 15% of the study variance, and an eigenvalue of 3.38. Table 8 lists the distinguishing statements for *Judy Bernly*. The participants ranged in age from 30–60+, with most participants between the ages of 40–49 (50%). All participants in *Judy Bernly* reported being White or Caucasian females. The majority of participants in this factor taught in urban schools (75%). Participants' years of experience in K–12 public education ranged from 1–5 years (25%), 6–10 years (25%), 11–15 years, 25%, and 21–25 years (25%). Two participants (50%) in *Judy Bernly* had a majority of their teaching experience in middle school, while the other two participants (50%) in *Judy Bernly* had high school teaching experience. Participant V6CJN5 reported leaving public school

teaching in 2003; participant Q1AP reported leaving public school teaching in 2006; participant OPCQ reported leaving public school teaching in 2017; and participant FO5U reported leaving public school teaching in 2021. *Judy Bernly* generated the lowest percentage of participants (25%) who believed the statement, *My principal values my thoughts and opinions,* was representative of their reason for leaving K–12 public school teaching.

The *Judy Bernly* General Viewpoint. *Judy Bernly* is empowered by learning and growth opportunities provided for teachers and students by the school and district. *Judy Bernly* states that professional relationships with former colleagues were good, and the majority of colleagues worked as a team and supported one another. Day-to-day operations such as staffing, décor, and resources were suitable. Participant OPCQ stated that the school's décor and resources were modern and updated, and participant V6CJN5 explained that staffing seemed to be adequate, and enough materials were provided to conduct class. All participants in *Judy Bernly* described having worked with good principals during their teaching careers; however, three of the four participants explained that their principals "tried": *tried hard but was defeated* (FO5U); *tried to address issues as best he could* (V6CJN5); and *tried to be consistent and supportive* (Q1AP).

Judy Bernly left K–12 public school teaching for reasons such as ailing parents, inadequate pay, negative work environment, and emphasis on state testing and report cards. FO5U stated:

> *The financial responsibility of having a family caused me to leave, but I was unhappy with the leaders at my school before I left. If my last year would have been positive, I would have made more of an effort to return.*

Overall, *Judy Bernly* may have continued teaching had they felt valued and recognized through better pay, more autonomy and creativity in their classrooms, and a more positive work environment.

Factor 2: Violet Newstead

Violet Newstead is a strong, determined, and resourceful character in the 1980 comedy film *9 to 5*. Violet is portrayed as an intelligent and experienced employee at Consolidated Companies, where she holds a supervisory position. She is known for her sharp wit, assertiveness, and unwavering work ethic. While Violet is a formidable force in the fight against injustice, she also grapples with her own insecurities and doubts, particularly regarding her chances for career advancement. As the film progresses, Violet emerges as a natural leader within the group, gaining confidence in herself and realizing her true potential as a capable and influential leader. Violet's character embodies a feminist spirit, fighting against the patriarchal hierarchy and advocating for equal treatment and opportunities for women in the workplace. Violet demonstrates the power of unity, perseverance, and the ability to challenge oppressive systems for the greater good.

Figure 3 represents the factor array for *Violet Newstead* followed by distinguishing statements in Table 9.

Figure 3

Model Sort for Former K-12 Public School Teachers Who Loaded Significantly on Factor 2, Violet Newstead

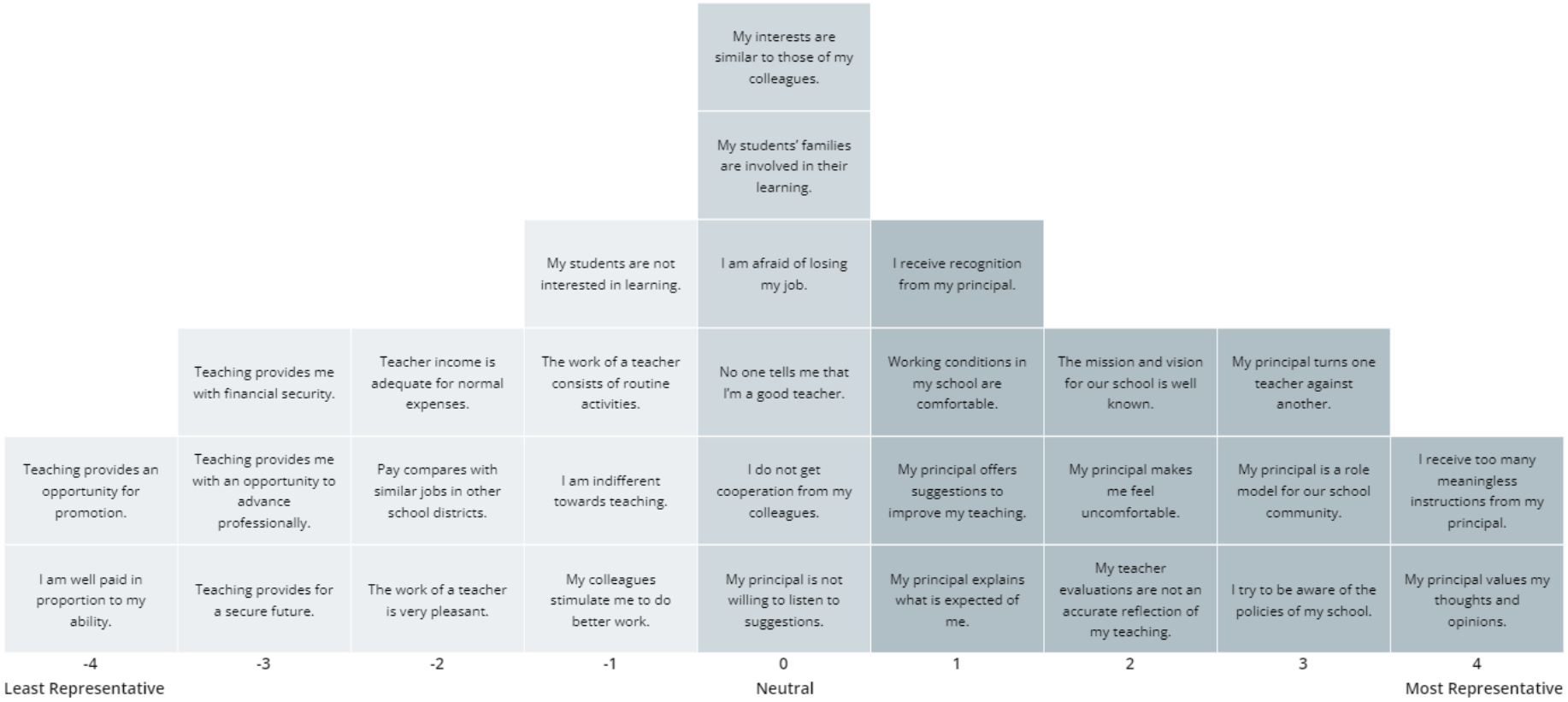


Table 9

Distinguishing Statements for Factor 2, Violet Newstead

Statement Number	Statement	Endorsement
13	My principal values my thoughts and opinions.	+
7	I try to be aware of the policies of my school.	^
3	My principal turns one teacher against another.	-
11	My teacher evaluations are not an accurate reflection of my teaching.	-
5	The mission and vision for our school is well known.	^
23	My principal offers suggestions to improve my teaching.	+
28	Working conditions in my school are comfortable.	+
16	I am afraid of losing my job.	-
10	My colleagues stimulate me to do better work.	+
25	I am indifferent towards teaching.	^
21	The work of a teacher is very pleasant.	+
1	Teaching provides me with an opportunity to advance professionally.	^
9	Teaching provides me with financial security.	-
27	I am well paid in proportion to my ability.	+
22	Teaching provides an opportunity for promotion.	-

**Note*: Endorsement indicated as positive (+), neutral (^), or negative (-)

Figure 3 represents the factor array for *Violet Newstead* which had seven statistically loading participants, accounting for 13% of the study variance, and an eigenvalue of 2.79. Table 9 states the distinguishing factors for *Violet Newstead.* The participants ranged in age from 30–60+, with the highest number of participants between

the ages of 40–49 (43%). Participants in *Violet Newstead* were 86% female participants and 14% male participants. All participants reported being White or Caucasian.

The majority of participants in this factor taught in suburban schools (57%). Two participants reported teaching in urban schools (29%), and one participant reported teaching in a rural school (14%). Participants' years of experience in K–12 public education ranged from 1–5 years (29%), 11–15 years (29%), 16–20 years (14%), 21–25 years (14%), and 26–30 years (14%). Two participants reported that a majority of their teaching experience was in elementary school (29%), two participants reported a majority in middle school (29%), and three participants in high school (42%). Participant Z1C2 reported leaving public school teaching in 2015; participant 7JLA reported leaving public school teaching in 2017; participant F8Z30U2C reported leaving public school teaching in 2019; participants D5NP and G40R reported leaving public school teaching in 2022; and participants YEY2 and ALNZ reported leaving public school teaching in 2023. *Violet Newstead* generated the highest percentage of participants (29%) who believed the statement, *My principal values my thoughts and opinions,* was most representative of their reason for leaving K–12 public school teaching. Based on the factor array and comments made in the follow-up questions, *Violet Newstead* placed this positive statement as being most representative of them leaving the profession because they felt the least valued by their principals.

The *Violet Newstead* General Viewpoint. *Violet Newstead* generally felt overwhelmed, unsupported, confined, and bored. *Violet Newstead* stated they had an abundance of responsibilities, most of which were out of their sphere of control. Participant YEY2 stated that:

> *...the amount of daily work (planning, grading) is more than teachers can handle. Add on to that the every-increasing requirements from state and administration, and it has become overwhelming. One planning period cannot come close to the amount of time needed.*

Additionally, participant G40R stated:

> *Parental and administrative relationships with teachers have become much more adversarial. District and state-level initiatives/requirements for teachers have become so disconnected from the day-to-day work of education as to become counterproductive to an educational environment. Shared goals among stakeholders are not explicit or clear, leading to having many of those goals be in opposition to each other (education of an individual vs. education of a group). Responsibilities of staff for factors outside of their control (home-life, physical buildings, technology requirements, trauma of students) has increased while resources (time, money, support, etc.) are not adequate.*

These statements directly reflect the frustration and lack of support for *Violet Newstead.*

Violet Newstead reported strong professional relationships with colleagues with many participants describing their colleagues as *"the best part about the job"* (7JLA) and having a *"tremendous respect for each other"* (D5NP). Participant D5NP stated, *"If it wasn't for them, I would not have stuck it out as long as I did."* Professional relationships with administration were not as positive. *Violet Newstead* described their school principals as ever-changing, lacking support themselves, and inconsistent. Participant Z1C2 supports these statements with the comment, *"I don't feel (the principal) had our, and the students, best interests at heart."*

Factor 3: Doralee Rhodes

Doralee Rhodes is a vibrant and spirited character in the 1980 comedy film *9 to 5*. Doralee is a smart, sassy, and ambitious secretary working at Consolidated Companies. She stands out not only for her impeccable fashion sense, but also for her distinctive Southern accent and vivacious personality. Despite her stunning appearance and friendly nature, Doralee often finds herself subject to underserved prejudice and false assumptions due to her looks and flirtatious manner. Doralee strives to prove her intelligence, professionalism, and moral integrity. Throughout the film, Doralee's character evolves, revealing her resilience, courage, and loyalty. Her unwavering determination and infectious optimism inspire her companions and empower them to stand up against injustice. Doralee's character challenges stereotypes and preconceived notions, demonstrating that appearances can be deceiving and that every individual should be judged based on their merits and actions.

Figure 4 represents the factor array for *Doralee Rhodes* followed by distinguishing statements in Table 10.

Figure 4

Model Sort for Former K-12 Public School Teachers Who Loaded Significantly on Factor 3, Doralee Rhodes

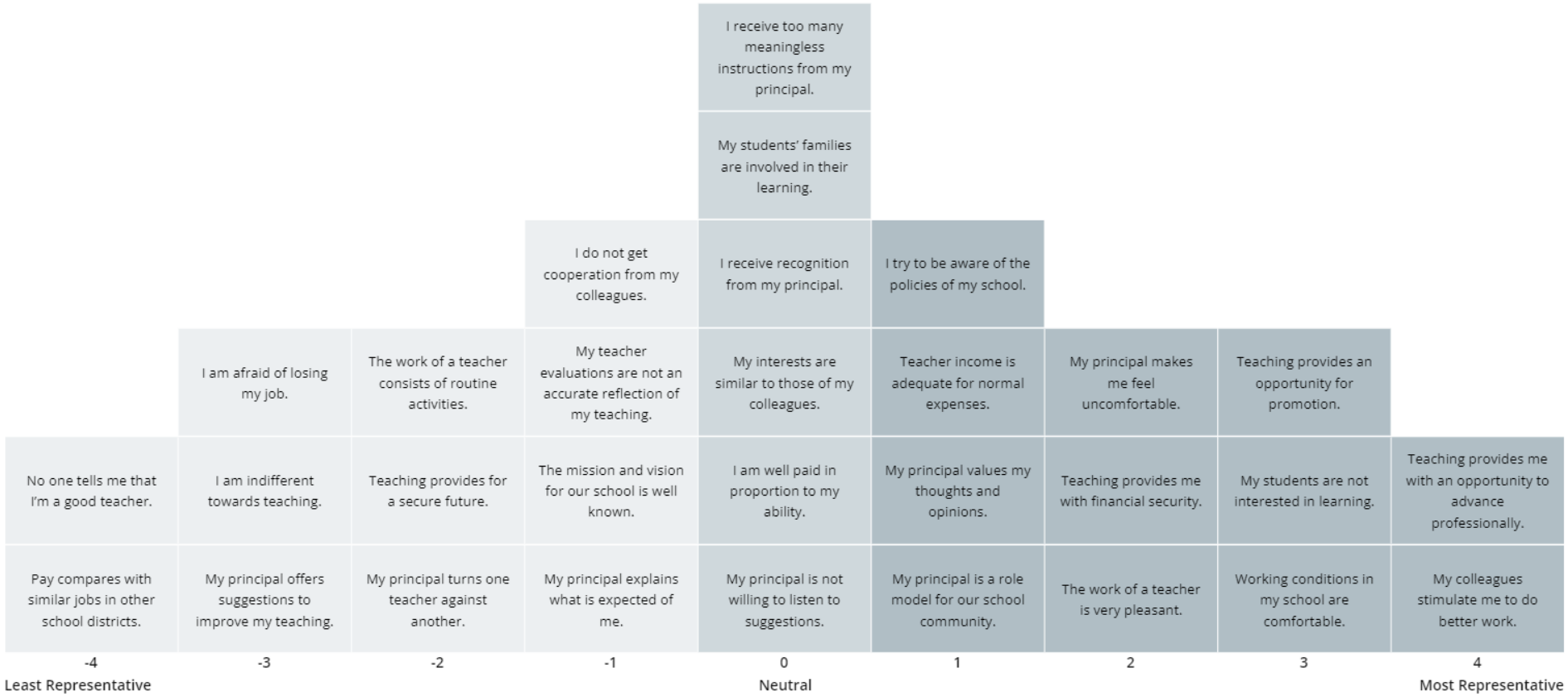


Table 10

Distinguishing Statements for Factor 3, Doralee Rhodes

Statement Number	Statement	Endorsement
10	My colleagues stimulate me to do better work.	+
1	Teaching provides me with an opportunity to advance professionally.	^
22	Teaching provides an opportunity for promotion.	-
9	Teaching provides me with financial security.	-
30	My principal is a role model for our school community.	+
17	I receive too many meaningless instructions from my principal.	-
3	My principal turns one teacher against another.	-
4	No one tells me that I'm a good teacher.	-

**Note*: Endorsement indicated as positive (+), neutral (^), or negative (-)

Figure 4 signifies the factor array for *Doralee Rhodes* which had two statistically loading participants, accounting for 9% of the study variance, and an eigenvalue of 2.00. Table 10 lists the distinguishing factors for *Doralee Rhodes*. The participants ranged in age from 40-59, with no defining majority age bracket. *Doralee Rhodes* had 50% male and 50% female participants with 100% of participants reporting White/Caucasian. One participant in *Doralee Rhodes* taught in urban schools (50%), while the other participant in *Doralee Rhodes* taught in suburban schools (50%). Participants' years of experience in K-12 public education ranged from 6-10 years (50%) and 16-20 years (50%). Each participant reported that the majority of their teaching experience was in either elementary school (50%) or middle school (50%). Participant 7A7S reported leaving public school teaching in 2018, and participant 53BW is still teaching. *Doralee Rhodes* generated a split between participants who believed that the statement, *My principal*

values my thoughts and opinions, was least to most representative of their reason for leaving K-12 public school teaching.

The *Doralee Rhodes* General Viewpoint. *Doralee Rhodes* reports positive relationships with colleagues. Participant 7A7S stated: *"I love my co-workers. We support each other and work well together. However, it has become hard to do that when we are not supported by upper administration and our voices are never heard." Doralee Rhodes* is frustrated with the lack of support and appreciation from upper administration. Participant 7A7S stated that the new principal is young and *"has the potential to be a great leader, but right now (the principal) is a follower rather than a leader."* Additionally, 7A7S explained that decisions are made by upper administration without approval from the new principal. Participant 7A7S explained the reason for leaving K-12 public school teaching:

> *Teachers in our school district are overworked, overwhelmed, and underappreciated. The district is constantly adding new 'programs' into our curriculums. They are getting paid for implementing the 'programs'. However, we are working overtime and are not compensated for that. Our district has created four new positions in upper administration. My overall decision to leave the education field is due to not having enough time with my family. I have worked very hard the past two years implementing this new program, and they pulled me from my subject. They are expecting me to start over with a new subject, new curriculum, become pre-AP certified, and redo all the work I completed last year. I was never asked what I would like to do, but told. I have spent 17 years putting my career first, and it is time.*

Factor 4: Franklin Hart Jr.

Franklin Hart Jr. is the main antagonist in the 1980 comedy film *9 to 5*. Franklin is the sexist, egotistical, and tyrannical boss at Consolidated Companies. He is portrayed as a manipulative and self-serving character who abuses his position of power. He objectifies women, creating a toxic environment where sexual harassment and demeaning behavior are normalized. Franklin's actions and behavior throughout the film are designed to establish his despicable nature. He consistently undermines and dismisses the capabilities of his female employees, denying them opportunities for advancement and subjecting them to unequal treatment. Frankin's character embodies the entitlement and arrogance often associated with those who abuse their power.

Figure 5 represents the factor array for *Franklin Hart Jr.,* followed by distinguishing statements in Table 11.

Figure 5

Model Sort for Former K-12 Public School Teachers Who Loaded Significantly on Factor 4, Franklin Hart Jr.

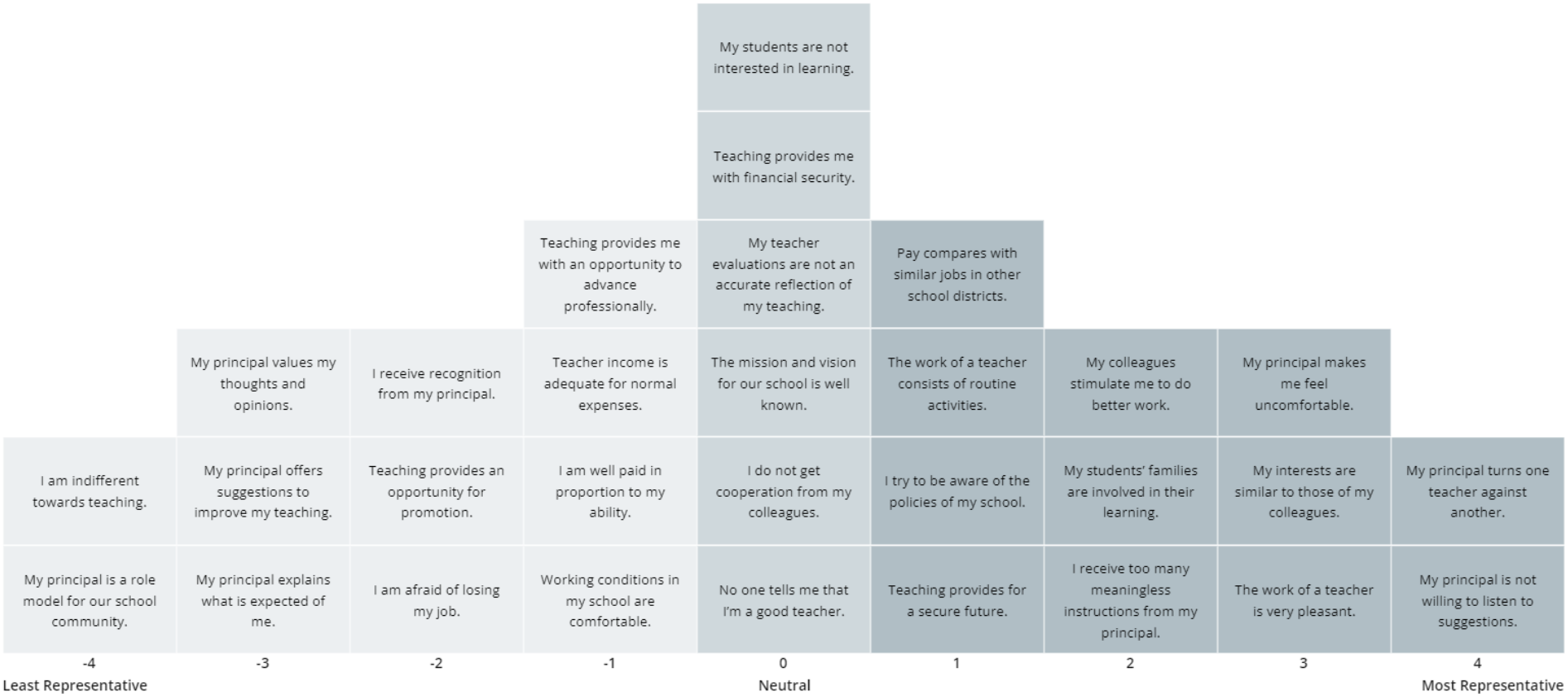


Table 11

Distinguishing Statements for Factor 4, Franklin Hart Jr.

Statement Number	Statement	Endorsement
8	My principal is not willing to listen to suggestions.	-
3	My principal turns one teacher against another.	-
26	My students' families are involved in their learning.	+
20	Pay compares with similar jobs in other school districts.	+
28	Working conditions in my school are comfortable.	+
1	Teaching provides me with an opportunity to advance professionally.	^
22	Teaching provides an opportunity for promotion.	-
15	I receive recognition from my principal.	+
14	My principal explains what is expected of me.	+
13	My principal values my thoughts and opinions.	+
30	My principal is a role model for our school community.	+

**Note*: Endorsement indicated as positive (+), neutral (^), or negative (-)

Figure 5 depicts the factor array for *Franklin Hart Jr.* which had five statistically loading participants, accounting for 9% of the study variance, and an eigenvalue of 1.87. Table 11 lists the distinguishing factors for *Franklin Hart Jr.* Participants ranged in age from 18-59 with the highest number of participants between the ages of 40–49 (60%). All participants in *Franklin Hart Jr.* reported being White or Caucasian females. Three participants in this factor taught in suburban schools (60%), and two participants taught in urban schools (40%). Participants' years of experience in K–12 public education ranged from 1–5 years (20%), 16–20 years (40%), and 21–25 years (40%). The majority of teaching experience for one participant in *Franklin Hart Jr.* was in elementary school (20%); one participant in *Franklin Hart Jr.* taught in middle school (20%), and three

participants in *Franklin Hart Jr.* taught in high school (60%). Participant E7K1 reported leaving public school teaching in 2022, and participants 75AM, 5VIH, IH01, and KLCR reported leaving public school teaching in 2023. *Franklin Hart Jr.* generated the highest percentage of participants (40%) who believed the statement, *My principal values my thoughts and opinions,* was least representative of their reason for leaving K–12 public school teaching.

The *Franklin Hart Jr.* General Viewpoint. *Franklin Hart Jr.* does not feel that administration is welcoming, supportive, and collaborative. Most of *Franklin Hart Jr.* decided to leave education because of the lack of support from their school principals. Participant E7K1 shared that there was a lack of being heard by administrators. Additionally, E7K1 explained, *"The administration was very demonstrative and could be demeaning if they felt challenged."* Participant 75AM stated, *"The principal lead (sic) by being friends with the popular students and coaches in the building."*

When asked about professional relationships, *Franklin Hart Jr.* reported positive relationships with colleagues. Participant 5VIH described staff as *"very professional and always willing to help each other."* However, there was some negativity. Participant IH01 stated, *"Most teachers were not supportive of each other and did lots of back-stabbing."*

While resources and materials were provided and day-to-day operations were reported as being fair, *Franklin Hart Jr.*, stated that the décor was plain and bland. Opportunities for learning and growth for *Franklin Hart Jr.* were adequate, but most were either chosen for the teachers or only provided to a select group.

Summary

The current investigation explored the factors influencing K–12 public school teachers' decisions to leave the profession, focusing on the teaching profession itself, school culture, and the role of the school principal. A combination of quantitative and qualitative data was used to gain insight into the viewpoints of former K–12 public school teachers. Quantitative analysis, specifically factor analysis, was employed to identify distinct viewpoints among the participants. Four factors emerged, representing different perspectives based on the participants' responses. The factors were labeled as Judy Bernly, Violet Newstead, Doralee Rhodes, and Franklin Hart Jr.

Judy Bernly reflected the viewpoint of participants who left due to reasons like inadequate pay, negative work environments, and emphasis on state testing. They valued learning and growth opportunities and positive professional relationships within the school.

Violet Newstead's perspective encompassed feelings of being overwhelmed, lack of support, frustration with changing curricular requirements, and ineffective leadership. Strong professional relationships with colleagues were highlighted.

Doralee Rhodes represented participants who reported positive relationships with colleagues but felt underappreciated and unsupported by upper administration. They left the profession due to being overworked and receiving inadequate compensation.

Franklin Hart Jr. encompassed participants who left due to a lack of support from school principals. While they had positive relationships with colleagues, they felt that administration was unwelcoming and unsupportive.

This study sheds light on the multifaceted reasons for teachers leaving the profession, highlighting the importance of addressing job satisfaction, school culture, and the role of school leaders in retaining teachers. The distinct viewpoints provide valuable insights into the complexities of the issue, and the findings can be used to inform strategies for improving teacher retention in K–12 public schools. The next chapter will address the strategies and future implications from the research including how principals could influence teachers' decisions to stay in or leave the profession.

Chapter Five

Discussion

Introduction

This study was inspired by a personal interest in figuring out how to retain and attract teachers in K–12 public schools. Research suggests that promoting positive work environments and a healthy school culture can improve teacher retention rates (Shuls & Flores, 2020). Principals play a crucial role in sharing school culture, with transformational leadership being the most effective approach (Kovjanic et al., 2012; Spicer, 2016). Transformational leaders serve as role models, motivate and inspire their teams, provide individualized support, and encourage shared leadership and decision-making (Afshari, 2021; Anderson, 2017; Cetin & Kinik, 2015; Cherry, 2020; Page, 2021; Reza, 2019).

Based on the current investigation results, school culture and leadership are important topics for teacher retention and recruitment. The current mixed-methods study examined the perceptions and thoughts of teachers who left K–12 public education. This study included quantitative results from a Q-Sort analysis, as well as qualitative data from follow-up questions. This research aimed to explore teachers' perspectives regarding how school culture and leadership affected their decision to leave K–12 public education, leading to valuable insights into the teacher shortages facing school districts nationwide.

The quantitative portion of this study was completed in one phase over the course of one month. During the study, Q-Sort data were collected to determine viewpoints on job satisfaction, school culture, and leadership. Purposive sampling was used to select 22 former K–12 public school teachers from rural, suburban, and urban school districts with

a wide range of teaching experience. Summary, interpretation, and context of findings for all three research questions and limitations to the study, as well as future research directions are discussed below.

Summary of Findings

The reasons for leaving K–12 public school teaching somewhat varied; however, three of the four factor groups, *Violet Newstead, Doralee Rhodes*, and *Franklin Hart Jr*., expressed negative perceptions of their leadership. *Violet Newstead* reported not having positive interactions with administration and did not feel as though their thoughts and opinions were valued. *Doralee Rhodes* had similar viewpoints, as they described feeling underappreciated and felt they lacked support from their principals. *Franklin Hart Jr.* shared these perspectives, as they also perceived their principals as not being welcoming or supportive.

Conversely, *Judy Bernly* believed that their principals valued their input and ideas. *Judy Bernly* reported that they may have chosen to continue teaching if they felt more valued and appreciated through higher pay and compensation, greater autonomy and creative freedom in the classroom, and a more positive work environment. Most of the factors that would have influenced *Judy Bernly* to stay in the profession were out of their principals' control.

Research Question 1

- ***Why are teachers leaving K–12 public school teaching?***
    - ***Which factors (i.e., job satisfaction, school culture, school administration) contributed to their decision to leave?***

Judy Bernly's reason for leaving K–12 public school teaching stemmed from a combination of personal reasons such as ailing parents, concerns regarding inadequate pay, unfavorable working conditions, and overemphasis on state testing and report cards. *Violet Newstead's* perspective for leaving K–12 public school teaching revolved around a sense of being overwhelmed, experiencing a lack of support, frustration with shifting demands on curriculum and instruction, and the perception of ineffective leadership. *Doralee Rhodes's* departure from K–12 public school teaching was primarily related to feeling overworked and undercompensated. *Franklin Hart Jr.'s* decision to leave the profession was largely influenced by the absence of support from their principals.

While the majority of *Judy Bernly's* reasons for leaving the profession were out of the sphere of school principals' control, *Violet Newstead's, Doralee Rhodes's, and Franklin Hart Jr.'s* decisions to depart K–12 public school teaching may have been alleviated with greater support from their principals, as well as more effective leadership practices of the principals in their schools.

Research Question 2

- ***What do teachers indicate about the culture of their former K–12 public school?***
    - ***Were professional relationships within the school cultivated and supported?***

All four factors indicated positive relationships with colleagues; however, none of the factors explicitly noted these professional relationships as being cultivated and supported by leadership. *Judy Bernly* highlighted positive professional relationships with former colleagues, emphasizing teamwork and mutual support. *Violet Newstead* stressed the importance of strong professional bonds with their colleagues, and *Doralee Rhodes*

and *Franklin Hart Jr.* also expressed a favorable presence of positive relationships with colleagues. In most instances, professional relationships provided support and sharing of best practices, even in the absence of effective leadership.

- ***Were the organizational arrangements of the school aligned to one purpose?***

Only two of the factors reported that organizational arrangements were present; however, none of the factors indicated that they were aligned to a purpose. Day-to-day operational aspects (e.g., staffing, décor, resources) were described as satisfactory by *Judy Bernly*, and *Franklin Hart Jr.* conveyed day-to-day operations as fair. *Franklin Hart Jr.* noted that resources and materials were available; however, the décor was plain and uninspiring.

- ***Were learning and growth opportunities valued and prioritized for teachers and students?***

Two of the four factors described learning and growth opportunities. *Judy Bernly* was appreciative of the school and district's commitment to fostering learning and growth opportunities for both teachers and students, and *Franklin Hart Jr.* indicated that growth opportunities were limited and often selected by their principals.

Research Question 3

- ***What do teachers indicate about the role of the school principal in their decision to leave?***

Only one of the four factors expressed positive interactions with leadership. *Judy Bernly* noted having worked with effective principals throughout their teaching careers. *Violet Newstead* reported negative interactions with principals and characterized their

principals as frequently changing, lacking their own support structures, and displaying inconsistency in their leadership practices. *Doralee Rhodes* expressed frustration with the absence of support and acknowledgement from their principals. In *Franklin Hart Jr.'s* view, the principals were not regarded as welcoming, supportive, or collaborative.

Implications of Findings

The results of the study suggest that leadership does have an impact on teachers' decisions to leave the K–12 public school teaching profession. The implications for retaining and recruiting high-quality teachers in the profession highlight the need for leaders who demonstrate value and support for their teachers, provide professional development resources and time allocation for collaboration and building relationships with colleagues, and remain dedicated and actively involved in the day-to-day work of teachers and students in the classrooms.

While principals are unable to control some of the issues leading to teachers leaving the profession such as family obligations, inadequate pay, and heavy emphasis on state accountability measures, they can create an environment where teachers feel appreciated and recognized for their hard work and dedication to their students. They can value and cultivate collegial relationships, teamwork, and support. They can create a safe and welcoming school where teachers and students want to come every day. They can promote everyone working towards the same vision, mission, and goals, and they can have honest conversations that lead to growth because they are trusted by teachers and students.

According to the findings in this study, the school's culture affects teacher retention. A healthy school culture is centered around a clear mission and purpose and

shapes the school's objectives and aspirations (Deal & Peterson, 2016). According to Ebert (2023), putting staff and students at the center of the work creates a school culture that achieves "positive outcomes for children, strong relationships with families, multiple successful school renewals, and incredibly high staff retention, even during COVID" (para. 2). The environment of this type of school culture can be described as strong, effective, and positive (Freeman, 2020). Professional relationships, organizational arrangements, and learning opportunities are prioritized and aligned to the goals of the school (MacGilchrist et al., 2004).

Central to the creation of a healthy school culture is the school's principal (The Wallace Foundation, 2013). The principal, as a transformational leader, cultivates a culture of care for adults by letting teachers teach, supporting teachers through coaching and mentorship, and "protecting them from everything else that is not teaching, assessment, and planning" (Ebert, 2023, para. 21). The foundation to building these caring relationships starts with the principal having meaningful conversations with teachers. These conversations may be about the challenges of being a working parent, taking care of older parents, or how to simply just make it through the day. While some of the participants in this study indicated the need to leave the profession because of ailing parents or for financial reasons, one of the participants reported that he or she may have made more of an effort to keep teaching had their experience with their principal been more positive.

As described by Freeman (2020), transformational leaders foster an environment where their team feels encouraged, inspired, and motivated to meet and exceed expectations. Teachers feel vested, safe, and trusted when their ideas and initiatives are

valued, discussed, implemented, and tweaked. Through a culture of care, the principal takes action to enable teachers to be more innovative and to try new things. By prioritizing adults, transformational leaders "empower teachers to make decisions and give them a safe space to make mistakes" (Ebert, 2023, para. 12).

Principals who embody transformational leadership create school cultures that value relationships, support, and opportunities for growth (Shuls & Flores, 2020). School districts with high rates of teacher attrition could use these viewpoints to evaluate the effectiveness of principals in creating a healthy school culture. "If we want teachers to stay, then we need to give them the time, space, mentorship, and care that they require to find joy and success in the workplace" (Ebert, 2023, para. 22). This can be accomplished by a principal who exudes the characteristics of a transformational leader.

Limitations

The current study aligned with up-to-date research on teacher job satisfaction, school culture, and leadership, as well as included a sample of 22 former K–12 public school teachers from various districts (i.e., rural, suburban, and urban). Most participants were White/Caucasian females, and more than half of the participants were over age 40. Total K–12 public school teaching experience ranged from one year to more than 30 years. The selection of this purposive sample was based on accessibility which may have limited diversity and hindered in-depth subgroup analysis. Having an equal number of participants in each group may have enhanced the study's design.

To minimize bias, the Q Method software served as a data collection method/assessment instrument. Qualitative data can encompass a wide range of information; therefore, these safeguards are in place as "the data in a qualitative study can

include virtually anything that you see, hear, or that is otherwise communicated to you while conducting the study" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 87).

Other potential limitations include the complexity of the computerized Q Sort and follow-up questions. This may have led to confusion, as participants may not have read or fully understood the directions prior to completing the Q-sort and answering the related questions. Participants may have done better with in-person directions and a hands-on Q Sort. All participants successfully completed the study, supporting the effectiveness of computerized data collection.

External validity was reasonably good, but the perspectives of the participants may not represent the entire population. Another concern that may have affected participants' responses was the recent pandemic, which disrupted teaching and learning across the nation. Conducting further research could increase generalizability of the findings.

Suggestions for Future Research

The current study exhibited various viewpoints, via factors, of the participants. The participants were former K–12 public school teachers who left the teaching profession. They were categorized into factors based on collective viewpoints that were similar. The factors were labeled as *Judy Bernly, Violet Newstead, Doralee Rhodes, and Franklin Hart Jr.* Qualitative data collected from participants demonstrated the influence of principals on various aspects of school culture, such as professional relationships and working conditions, as well as their perception of principals in their decisions to leave the profession. Replicating this study in a few years may also provide insight into the impact of COVID on teachers' decisions to leave the profession.

While this study focused on the viewpoints of former teachers, collecting data from the principals of K–12 public schools with high teacher attrition may help to answer questions regarding why teachers are leaving their schools. Additionally, future research could include the collection of perception data from principals in schools with low teacher attrition. Questions such as *Why are their teachers choosing to stay in the profession? What characteristics do the principals in schools with high teacher retention possess?* could be examined.

By extending this study to other populations, such as K–12 public school teachers who have remained in the profession, more viewpoints could be extracted. Future comparison studies of schools with high turnover versus low turnover rates would also be interesting. Collecting perception data of teachers and principals in both settings regarding culture, job satisfaction, and leadership could provide insight into the similarities and differences leading to reasons why teachers choose to stay or leave the profession.

According to the *Work Institute's 2020 Retention Report*, 78% of employees quit their jobs in the previous year for "preventable reasons, such as scheduling problems, a desire for more positive relationships with management, a desire for growth opportunities, or dissatisfaction with compensation and benefits" (Pulver, 2021, p. 11). Finding the disconnect between teachers and their principals could provide strategies for targeting the true needs of high-quality teachers to remain in the profession.

Conclusion

Many teachers enter the profession with the intention of changing the lives of their students by providing them with the knowledge they need to open endless

opportunities that can better their lives. “Teachers aspire to educate, to inspire, to learn, and to affect positive change” (EdX, 2020, para. 2). Teacher preparation programs expose hopeful teachers to the rudimentary skills necessary to enter the teaching profession such as pedagogy and methodology. The other responsibilities of teaching are incredibly underestimated and can lead to teacher burnout; however, “administrators can change the narrative and use practical strategies to ensure greater job satisfaction and ultimately encourage teachers to remain in the profession” (Prendergast & French, 2022, para. 15).

Betterteam (2023) provides a template for a teacher’s job responsibilities as follows:

- developing and issuing educational content including notes, tests, and assignments;
- supervising classes to ensure all students are learning in a safe and productive environment;
- organizing supplies and resources for lectures and presentations;
- delivering personalized instruction to each student by encouraging interactive learning;
- planning and implementing educational activities and events;
- ensuring a clean and orderly classroom;
- preparing and distributing periodic progress reports and semester report cards;
- attending parent-teacher meetings;
- evaluating and documenting students’ progress; and
- allocating and grading homework, assignments, and tests. (para. 4)

This description of responsibilities only scratches the surface of what is expected from teachers. While each state has its own standards, or competencies, for teachers,

according to the Ohio Department of Education's (ODE) *Ohio Standards for the Teaching Profession* (2005), there are seven standards organized under three larger domains:

- focus of teaching and learning
- conditions for teaching and learning
- teaching as a profession (p. 14)

According to ODE (2005), the *focus of teaching and learning* is delineated into four standards (i.e., students, content, assessment, and instruction). The *conditions for teaching and learning focus* on the learning environment, and *teaching as a profession* provides direction in collaboration and communication, as well as professional responsibility and growth.

Based on ODE's (2005) focus of teaching and learning, teachers are responsible for designing and executing culturally relevant and engaging lessons that are aligned to content standards and differentiated based on the needs of their students. This requires teachers to fully understand their content standards, as well as the connections to previous and future standards. In addition, teachers need to know their students' background knowledge and experiences to create lessons that are developmentally and grade-level appropriate, as well as interesting and engaging to the various types of learners in their classrooms.

Teachers must also be able to assess students to inform instruction and monitor students' progress. The assessments, which are often teacher created, should align to the instructional targets which are derived from content standards. After gathering

assessment data, teachers take time to score and analyze the data to plan their next steps and modify and differentiate future instruction for individuals and groups of students.

According to ODE (2005), the conditions for teaching and learning direct attention to creating a safe and conducive learning environment for students. Caring for students, treating them fairly, and modeling respect are all components of creating this type of environment. Additionally, teachers should motivate students and vary learning situations which includes having students work collaboratively and independently. All students should be able and expected to learn in the classroom environment created by the teacher.

Finally, under teaching as a profession domain, ODE (2005) requires that teachers collaborate and communicate, as well as take responsibility for their own professional development and growth. Not only are teachers communicating with students, but they are also expected to create lines of communication with parents and families to support student learning. Teachers should collaborate with their colleagues to share instructional practices, gather and analyze student data, identify critical needs, and monitor and evaluate progress. Setting short and long-term professional growth goals and developing plans to meet those goals is also required of teachers under this standard.

As if state standards and competencies for the teaching profession are not enough, there are many more responsibilities that are not listed in the job description or standards for teachers. When students do not come to school ready to learn, it is up to the teacher to get them where they need to be. Some students come to school without their basic needs having been met. They may be hungry. Their clothes may not fit. They may not have running water or heat. They may not have had enough sleep. They may be homeless.

Teachers take on more than teaching their students, and their students need teachers for more than learning. “From kindergarten to high school and special education to statistics, one theme runs consistently throughout every great teacher’s career: their job does not end with the school” (EdX, 2020, para. 1). As state by Doris Smith Jones (2023):

- They get arrested, we go visit in jail, go to court, or help their parents figure out how to get them out.
- They have a baby, and we take their work home to them and buy diapers and wipes.
- They are hungry, and we feed them.
- They get into a fight, and we teach them coping skills and how to communicate with words.
- They are sad, depressed, or suicidal, and we listen and find as much support for them as we can.
- Parents die or leave them, and we become surrogates.
- They skip class, fight with their teachers, and fail classes. We rally the troops and create an individualized plan to redirect behaviors.
- And when they feel hopeless, we speak life into them and help them find their purpose.

While students who come to school under the most extreme of circumstances are supposed to be there to learn, teachers must take time away from instruction to counsel, mother or father, and nurse their students before learning can take place; however, teachers are still held accountable for students’ meeting competency or proficiency on state tests. Teachers do not always have ample resources and support to provide all that is

needed for their students, yet somehow, great teachers get it done. “When a teacher says their goal is to ‘make a difference’ this is what they mean” (edX, 2020, para. 10). Teaching becomes more than a job; it becomes a teacher’s identity (Will, 2023).

According to the results of this study, teachers leave the profession for a variety of reasons. They feel underappreciated, unsupported, undervalued, underpaid, and micromanaged. The demands on a teacher’s time are overwhelming and can be frustrating. Pair this with the lack of positive interactions and perceptions of their leaders, and teachers make the decision to leave. “How can school leaders take meaningful action to offset the frustrations, disenchantment, and burnout that teachers may be experiencing?” (Prendergast & French, 2022, para. 2).

People who enter the field of education often do so because of their passion for service, not for making money (Will, 2023). This ideal becomes tricky, as teachers want to serve, “but often that passion can obfuscate the less-than-ideal conditions that they are forced to teach within” (Will, 2023, para. 8). Constant interruptions and disruptions to instruction, criticism and judgment from the public, contentious phone calls or meetings with parents, implementation of new initiatives and programs, and the insurmountable number of decisions and choices that teachers must make on a daily basis affect teachers’ effectiveness at school and at home (Prendergast & French, 2022).

The idea that teachers can complete all that is required of them in a seven-and-a-half or eight-hour workday is unreasonable. As cited by Klein (2023):

> …the typical teacher works 54 hours per week, 25 of them spent teaching students, according to the first annual Merrimack College Teacher Survey

> commission by the Winston School of Education and Social Policy at Merrimack College and conducted by the EdWeek Research Center. (para. 3)

Additionally, teachers give an incredible amount of time outside of the workday to their students. There is a natural tendency to go home and reflect upon the school day, the students, and everything that still needs to be done (Will, 2023). Prendergast & French (2022) also include attending collaboration meetings, analyzing data, and participating in various committees as work that teachers are expected to engage in outside of the instructional day. Being able to set boundaries, practice self-care, and create a better work-life balance is often placed on the teachers (Will, 2023). "And in actuality, the onus really falls on the leaders of the systems themselves, whether that is the school administrators or district as a whole" (Will, 2023, para. 22).

"Leaders play a critical role in building a culture where teachers thrive and stay" (Prendergast & French, 2022, para 3). Principals who walk the walk with their teachers by sacrificing time in their schedule, substituting or covering classes when there are staff shortages, trusting teachers' professional judgment and authority, or offering to handle challenging phone calls or parent meetings are examples of ways that principals can create supportive leadership structures and systems that value and protect the time and space for teachers to do their jobs (Prendergast & French, 2022).

Perhaps, it is the principals who clearly and frequently communicate, value and support teachers' ideas and decisions, protect instructional time, and show appreciation and provide praise for teachers who are the school leaders for whom the participants in this study needed in order to stay in the profession. Maybe they would have kept teaching had they had positive interactions, felt welcomed and supported by their principals, and

been granted greater autonomy and creativity in the classroom. This study serves as a reminder of the substantial impact and responsibility that principals have to create healthy school cultures that lead to increased job satisfaction and ultimately impact teachers' decisions to keep teaching.

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Appendix A

Original List of Concourse Statements

1. “Teaching provides me with an opportunity to advance professionally” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
2. “Teacher income is adequate for normal expenses” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
3. My principal turns one teacher against another (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
4. “No one tells me that I'm a good teacher” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
5. The mission and vision for our school is well known.
6. “Teaching provides an opportunity to use a variety of skills” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
7. “I do not have the freedom to make my own decisions” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
8. Working conditions in my school can be improved (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
9. “The work of a teacher consists of routine activities” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
10. My students' scores on state tests are an accurate reflection of my teaching.
11. “I am not getting ahead in my present teaching position” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
12. “I try to be aware of the policies of my school” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
13. “Teaching provides a good opportunity for advancement” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
14. My principal is not willing to listen to suggestions (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
15. When I teach a good lesson, my principal notices (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
16. “Working conditions in my school could not be worse” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
17. “I get along well with my students” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).

18. “Teaching provides me an opportunity to help my students learn” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
19. “Teaching encourages me to be creative” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
20. “Teaching provides me with financial security” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
21. My principal makes available the material I need to do my best (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
22. “My colleagues stimulate me to do better work” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
23. “I am not interested in the policies of my school” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
24. My teacher evaluations are not an accurate reflection of my teaching.
25. “Teaching is very interesting work” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
26. “I never feel secure in my teaching job” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
27. My principal makes me feel uncomfortable (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
28. My principal values my thoughts and opinions.
29. “My colleagues are highly critical of one another” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
30. “The physical surroundings in my school are unpleasant” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
31. “I receive too little recognition” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
32. “Teaching does not provide me with the chance to develop new methods” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
33. “Teacher income is less than I deserve” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
34. My principal explains what is expected of me (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
35. “My students respect me as a teacher” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
36. “I like the people with whom I work” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).

37. The families of my students do not care about their learning.
38. “Working conditions in my school are good” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
39. My principal gives me assistance when I need help (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
40. “The administration in my school communicates its policies well” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
41. “I have made lasting friendships among my colleagues” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
42. I receive recognition from my principal (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
43. “I am afraid of losing my teaching job” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
44. The parents of my students support me as their teacher.
45. My community respects me as a teacher.
46. “My colleagues seem unreasonable to me” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
47. I receive too many meaningless instructions from my principal (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
48. “Teaching provides for a secure future” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
49. “My interests are similar to those of my colleagues” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
50. My principal praises good teaching (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
51. “Insufficient income keeps me from living the way I want to live” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
52. “Teaching provides me limited opportunities for advancements” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
53. “I receive full recognition for my successful teaching” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
54. “I dislike the people with whom I work” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
55. My principal treats everyone equitably (Lester, 1987, p. 228).

56. “Pay compares with similar jobs in other school districts” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
57. “The work of a teacher is very pleasant” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
58. “I am responsible for planning my daily lessons” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
59. “Teaching provides an opportunity for promotion” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
60. My principal offers suggestions to improve my teaching (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
61. “I get along well with my colleagues” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
62. “Teaching discourages originality” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
63. “Teacher income is barely enough to live on” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
64. The families of my students do not support me as a teacher.
65. “The administration in my school does not clearly communicate its policies” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
66. I do not get cooperation from my colleagues (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
67. “I am indifferent towards teaching” (Lester, 1987, p. 229).
68. My students' families are involved in their learning.
69. My principal does not back me up (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
70. “I am well paid in proportion to my ability” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
71. “Working conditions in my school are comfortable” (Lester, 1987, p. 228).
72. My students are not interested in learning.
73. I receive fair teacher evaluations.
74. My students are important to me.
75. My principal is a role model for our school community.

APPENDIX B

do-not-reply@cayuse.com <do-not-reply@cayuse.com>
Tue 5/16/2023 3:08 PM
To: Karen H Larwin <khlarwin@ysu.edu>; Megan Marino <mlmarino@student.ysu.edu>

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

May 16, 2023 3:07:54 PM EDT

Karen Larwin
Teacher Ed and Leadership St

Re: Exempt - Initial - 2023-271 Honoring Teacher Voice, Thoughts, and Opinions: The Impact of Transformational Leadership on Teacher Retention

Dear Dr. Karen Larwin:

Youngstown State University Human Subjects Review Board has rendered the decision below for Honoring Teacher Voice, Thoughts, and Opinions: The Impact of Transformational Leadership on Teacher Retention

Decision: Exempt

Selected Category: Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording). The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Any changes in your research activity should be promptly reported to the Institutional Review Board and may not be initiated without IRB approval except where necessary to eliminate hazard to human subjects. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects should also be promptly
reported to the IRB.

The IRB would like to extend its best wishes to you in the conduct of this study.

Sincerely,
Youngstown State University Human Subjects Review Board