

## Contribution of Research

# Factors that Influence a Veteran Teacher’s Decision to Leave or Stay in the Classroom

**Lori Toney**

Sam Houston State University

**Michelle Parker, Ed.D.**

Sam Houston State University

**Casey Creghan, Ed.D.**

Sam Houston State University

### Abstract

*Teacher turnover is a startling phenomenon in education. Much of the literature focuses on reasons newer teachers leave, while little has been done to study those who plan to stay. This study explored why veteran teachers leave or stay in the field. 597 teachers participated in a questionnaire that communicated long-term career plans. While most respondents planned to stay, their reasons varied. Teachers who plan to leave do so due to low wages and burnout. To conclude, researchers and school districts should consider solutions to increase veteran teacher retention to promote a higher quality of education for all students.*

Keywords: veteran teachers, attrition, retention, education

It is no secret that public school teachers across the country are leaving the profession at an unprecedented rate. According to a recent survey conducted by the National Education Association (NEA), a “staggering 55% of educators are thinking about leaving the profession earlier than planned” (Walker, 2022). In her 2021 article, *Why teachers leave—or don’t: A look at the numbers*, Liana Loewus shared that federal data have long shown that eight percent of teachers typically leave the profession each year. Likewise, Lopez (2022) noted that “issues like receiving low pay, being overworked, and having bad benefits” have always plagued educators. However, he also shared that new problems, such as teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as cultural and political shifts, have pushed teachers to the brink of quitting. Considering the more recent upheavals in public education, this begs the question, “What factors influence a

veteran teacher’s decision to leave or stay in the classroom?”

Regarding teacher attrition, “some estimates suggest that almost half of new teachers leave the profession within five years” (Sims & Jerrim, 2020, as cited in Madigan & Kim, 2021, p. 2). By these estimates, over half choose to stay in the profession, sometimes over the course of many years including for the entire span of their careers, making them highly experienced veterans in the field. In her study surrounding the factors that motivate teachers to stay in the field, Anderson (2020) discovered that “the relationships and connections that are formed between teachers and the people they work with and serve...have the greatest impact on their decision to remain in the profession” (p. 3). Overall, the results of her study revealed that teachers who feel connected with and supported by those surrounding them felt more confident and thereby more likely to feel

optimistic about their jobs, motivating them to stay in the field longer (Anderson, 2020). Conversely, there are a variety of reasons why experienced teachers choose to leave the profession mid-career, with many of those reasons linked to psychosocial and emotional well-being, as well as job dissatisfaction (Madigan & Kim, 2021). To address the problem of teacher attrition amongst veteran educators, it is crucial to dissect the factors that influence them to stay in the profession alongside those that motivate them to leave.

### **Reasons Why Veteran Educators Stay in the Profession**

Teachers who stay in the classroom typically stay for reasons that are connected to emotional factors that root them to the classroom, such as those who genuinely love the profession, and those who characterize themselves as learners and leaders with high levels of self-efficacy (Anderson, 2020). However, the Anderson (2020) discovered that “the relationships and connections that are formed between teachers and the people they work with and serve...have the greatest impact on their decision to remain in the profession” (p. 3). This study indicated that the emotional connections that teachers forge with colleagues, administrators, students, and parents served as the main motivating factor that influenced them to stay in the profession (Anderson, 2020). In addition, the author found that “the amount of support that is provided to teachers at all stages of their careers is paramount for teacher retention” (Anderson, 2020, p. 3). Overall, the results of this study revealed that teachers who feel connected with and supported by those surrounding them felt more efficacious in their positions and reflected more positively about their jobs, lessening the likelihood of teacher attrition (Anderson, 2020).

Similarly, in studies that examined teacher culture and motivation, results consistently showed that teacher connections and collaborations positively influence a teacher’s intent to stay in the field. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2021) discovered that “the perception of shared values among the teachers correlated positively with job satisfaction and negatively with symptoms of burnout and motivation to leave the teaching profession” (p. 1392). Furthermore, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2021) found that administrators also play a role in building a collective shared culture within a school that could positively influence a teacher’s job satisfaction. Conversely, the

authors discovered that if a common culture only applied to a limited group of teachers on a campus while others disagreed, it “may result in [a] lower feeling of belonging, lower job satisfaction, and less feeling of autonomy” (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2021, p. 1401). The findings implied that administrators are responsible for setting a tone for shared culture and collaboration, and when done ineffectively, job dissatisfaction builds and spreads throughout a school. Likewise, Santoro (2018) found that “the best school leaders acted as gatekeepers of policies and mandates, [and] assessed them in relation to the school’s vision” (p.147). Again, the studies consistently showed that collaboration and feelings of connection positively influenced teachers’ motivation to stay in the teaching profession, while the lack thereof proved influential for leaving.

### **Reasons Why Veteran Educators Leave the Field**

The education profession is widely known for high rates of teacher attrition, especially when compared to other professions as “evidence also suggests that teachers may be extreme outliers in this regard” (Borman & Dowling, 2008, as cited in Madigan & Kim, 2021). Because teacher retention consistently poses challenges for school districts globally, there is a wide berth of research regarding the many factors that lead educators to leave the classroom, with a multitude of identified ways to analyze teacher attrition (Billingsley, 1993, as cited in Madigan & Kim, 2021). In general, the causes that lead teachers to leave the classroom can be categorized into two overarching categories: emotional reasons and work conditions.

#### ***Emotional Reasons That Influence Teachers to Leave Teaching***

**Burnout and Demoralization.** The topic of teacher burnout as a major reason for school retention issues has been widely studied in recent years. In a study comparing the most compelling reasons that cause teachers to quit between burnout and job dissatisfaction, Madigan and Kim (2021) discovered that “teachers who are dissatisfied are not necessarily burnt out, and those who are satisfied are not necessarily burnout free” (p. 11). This speaks volumes of the varying complex reasons that compel educators to leave, but the researchers were about to conclude that “burnout...accounts for a larger proportion of the variance than does job satisfaction” (Madigan & Kim, 2021, p. 11). The authors state that burnout may originate from the high

demands and workload that are placed on teachers who also have low resources at their disposal to meet those demands (Madigan & Kim, 2021). In comparing burnout versus job satisfaction, they state that “those teachers whose resources outweigh their demands are less likely to leave their jobs...while those whose demands outweigh their resources are increasingly likely to want to leave” (Madigan & Kim, 2021, p. 4). Likewise, a study conducted by Räsänen et al. (2020) indicated that “teachers reported that a heavy workload was one of the main reasons for considering a career change” (p. 852). Taken together, this seems to indicate that teachers experience burnout when they feel that they are not effective when their demands exceed their ability to meet students’ needs. As a result, when teachers do not feel efficacious, they are more likely to leave than those who are simply dissatisfied with their position.

One reason why educators may feel frustrated in meeting the demands placed upon them is because of a loss in decision making they face in recent years. In their article examining data surrounding teacher shortages, Berry and Shields (2017) revealed that “teachers have experienced a steep decline in professional autonomy, particularly in high-poverty schools” (p. 9). They indicated that fewer teaching candidates enter the profession, while educators are increasingly disenchanted with the profession due to political school reform that has taken away a teacher’s ability to make his or her own choices in the classroom (Berry & Shields, 2017). Because of the pressures that schools face regarding standardized test scores, new initiatives and scripted curriculums meant to prepare students for testing take away a teacher’s autonomy to make curricular choices in their classroom, leading to both feelings of burnout and job dissatisfaction (Berry & Shields, 2017).

Similarly, in her article, Santoro (2019) challenges the concept of burnout claiming that it “suggests that a teacher has nothing more to give” (p. 31). The author acknowledges burnout and the concept of demand versus resources by affirming that “if teachers are burning out, it is because they are asked to do too much with insufficient support and low salaries” (Santoro, 2019, p. 28). However, she argued that teachers are not merely dissatisfied and worn out, but that they face demoralization because they “care deeply about students and the profession and they realize that school policies and conditions make it

impossible for them to do what is good, right, and just” (Santoro, 2019, p. 28). This concept seems to connect the loss of teacher autonomy with the concept of demoralization, where educators are unable to exercise their own professional judgement of what they believe to be morally and ethically right. Santoro (2019) contended that “demoralization is the more accurate diagnosis for teachers who find they can no longer do good work” (p. 52), which is to say that not only are teachers overburdened with a heavy workload but are stifled in what they can do about it.

### ***Poor Working Conditions and Job Dissatisfaction.***

As already revealed by the literature surrounding the reasons that teachers choose to remain in the field, positive emotional connections and professional collaboration between teachers and school leaders proved to be important factors. However, a study by Amorim Neto et al. (2018) made a surprising discovery that in schools that incorporate teamwork, motivation to quit could not be predicted. They concluded that “it is possible that some of the disadvantages of teamwork...may reduce its positive impact on teachers’ satisfaction and commitment” (Amorim Neto et al., 2018, p. 221). This showed that while professional collaboration contributes to an educator’s intent to stay in the profession, simply allowing for teamwork is not effective if real emotional connection and support is absent. Consequently, working conditions at a specific district and campus could also influence teacher turnover amongst mid-to-late career teachers.

Furthermore, Redding and Henry (2018) found in their study comparing mid-year and end-of-year turnover, that “an increase in the quality of principal leadership is associated with a lower risk of within-and end-of-year turnover” (p. 591). Their findings suggested that poor leadership deters school-to-school mobility, but surprisingly does not affect teachers who eventually choose to leave the profession entirely (Redding & Henry, 2018). These results suggested that workplace conditions play a pivotal role in retention and attrition on a year-to-year basis, but other, more compelling factors lead educators to leave the field regardless of leadership and school quality. Interestingly, a study Bukko et al. (2021) revealed that at schools with poor leadership, “results [suggested that] the pressure to implement educational initiatives made teachers work more challenging. Evidence indicates these

challenges were countered by specific principal actions supporting teacher development of social capital and self-efficacy” (p. 64). This study showed that poor working conditions in a school contribute to teacher retention issues; however, if principals give specific and targeted support to teachers, the effects could be mitigated. Overall, this seems to show that workplace conditions and job dissatisfaction is intimately linked to other, more emotional factors for teachers who choose to leave the field.

## Research Design

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to explore current trends that reveal underlying factors that motivate experienced teachers to stay in the classroom. In addition, the research aimed to seek the most common reasons that influence a veteran teacher’s decision to leave the profession.

The research questions that guided the study were:

1. What factors contribute to an experienced teacher’s decision to stay in the classroom and continue teaching over a long period of time?
2. What factors are likely to cause an experienced teacher to decide to leave the profession midway through or during the later years of their career?

## Participants and Sampling Methods

The targeted population for this research was experienced classroom teachers with at least five years of teaching experience. As such, the sample population included a purposive sampling strategy in which participants were selected given that they met specific eligibility criteria. To qualify, the study required individuals to have been K-12 teachers as of the 2021-2022 school year, and each participant must have had at least five years of classroom teaching experience. The participant pool was one of convenience due to the researcher having access to several teacher-specific interest groups on social media, and to garner the highest number of responses possible.

Sampling was conducted via a questionnaire distributed amongst the members of three different teacher-interest groups on Meta’s Facebook social media site. In addition, the researcher also posted the survey on her profile wall to make it accessible and shareable by other teachers who may see the post. In all, 597 eligible

responses were recorded and included in this study. Of those participants, 137 indicated that they taught grades K-3, 244 taught grades 4-8, and 215 taught grades 9-12. 1 participant did not indicate which grade level he/she taught (See table 1).

**Table 1**  
*Participants’ Grade Levels Taught*

| Grade levels taught | Number of participants |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| K-3                 | 137                    |
| Grades 4-8          | 244                    |
| Grades 9-12         | 215                    |
| No response         | 1                      |

As for years of experience, 283 respondents indicated that they have taught between 5-15 years, 206 taught between 16-25 years, and 108 have taught for 26 or more years. Any responses received that indicated that a teacher taught for less than five years were eliminated and not included in the 597 responses accounted for above (See table 2).

**Table 2**  
*Participants’ Years of Experience in the Classroom*

| Years of experience | Number of participants |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| 5-15 years          | 283                    |
| 16-25 years         | 206                    |
| 26 or more years    | 108                    |

## Data Collection Instruments

Data was collected by distributing a ten-question survey that was created using Qualtrics. The questionnaire included two questions related to demographics, two multiple choice questions with only one allowable answer, which determined the remaining questions participants would answer. If participants selected “probably yes” or “definitely yes” to number four on the survey, they would go on to complete a multiple-choice response that allowed numerous answers, including an option to fill in their own; in addition, participants went on to answer an optional qualitative response short answer question that allowed them to explain their reasoning. The purpose of these items was to gather data that explains the respondent’s reasoning

for wanting to stay in the classroom, and what it might take to cause them to leave.

If participants selected “probably not” or “might not”, participants went on to answer a multiple-choice response that allowed more than one response, including an option to fill in their own answer; in addition, respondents were asked to complete an ordinal scale ranking response task in which they ordered their responses from most to least influential.

Finally, all participants were asked one of two qualitative short answer responses at the end of the survey which was dependent upon their answer for number four on the survey. The purpose of these items was to gather data that explains the respondent’s reasoning for wanting to leave the profession and what it would take to cause them to stay.

### Procedures

The first step in the data collection procedure was to design a questionnaire that was relevant to the research questions and purpose of the study. Because the research is applicable to all teachers without regard to what or where they teach, highly specific questions were designed to target only relevant information. Once the survey was created in Qualtrics, the next step was for the researcher to pinpoint specific teacher groups on social media to ensure that the data gathered is collected from only eligible participants. The researcher then joined those groups and monitored discussions and postings before deciding to post the survey in those groups. An electronic link was distributed through three separate postings, one per group chosen, and made available on the researcher’s page for fellow teachers. The survey was active and accepted responses between May 7-11, 2022 and was closed for responses on the evening of May 11<sup>th</sup>. Questionnaire responses were saved by the researcher only for participants who consented to the study. One response that indicated that they did not consent was removed from the study and deleted. Once the survey was closed, the researcher saved all data in Qualtrics for the purpose of data analysis.

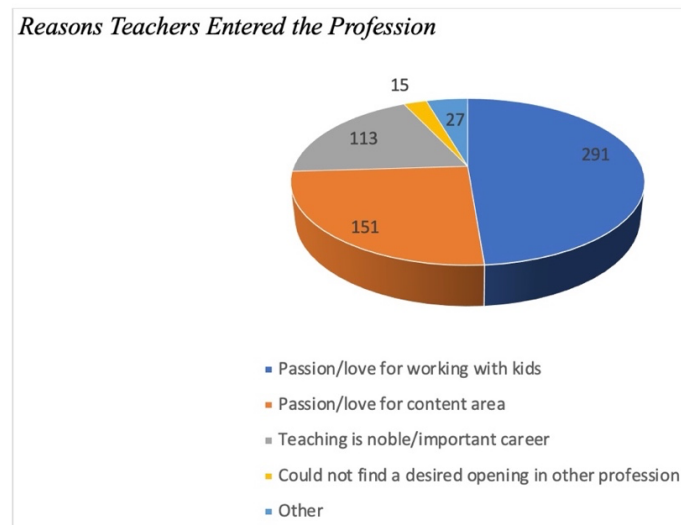
### General Participant Information

The survey asked participants to mark which grade levels they currently serve. 137 teachers indicated that they teach kindergarten through third grade, 244 teach at the

intermediate level which consists of grades four through eight, and 215 teach high school, which includes grades 9-12. One participant did not respond to this question.

The third survey question asked teachers to choose a response that best describes why they chose to enter the teaching profession. 291 respondents chose, “the passion/love I have working with children”, followed by 151 teachers who chose “the passion/love towards my subject/content area”. 113 marked that they “believe that teaching is a noble and important profession”, while 15 indicated that they “could not find a preferred job in [their] desired field” (See Figure 1).

**Figure 1**



Finally, 27 participants selected “other” and filled in their own personal reason for entering the profession. For this response, teachers were able to optionally provide their own response to explain their reasoning for entering the field. The researcher read through the responses to categorize and tally them by theme. It should be noted that some respondents provided more than one answer in the text box, and each answer was categorized independently and fit into their corresponding themes.

Of the teachers who chose to provide written responses, six indicated that they entered the profession due to the flexible work schedule it allowed. Four responded that they enjoyed helping children and watching them learn, while an additional three noted that they have a passion for both their subject area and the students they teach. Another three participants shared that teaching is

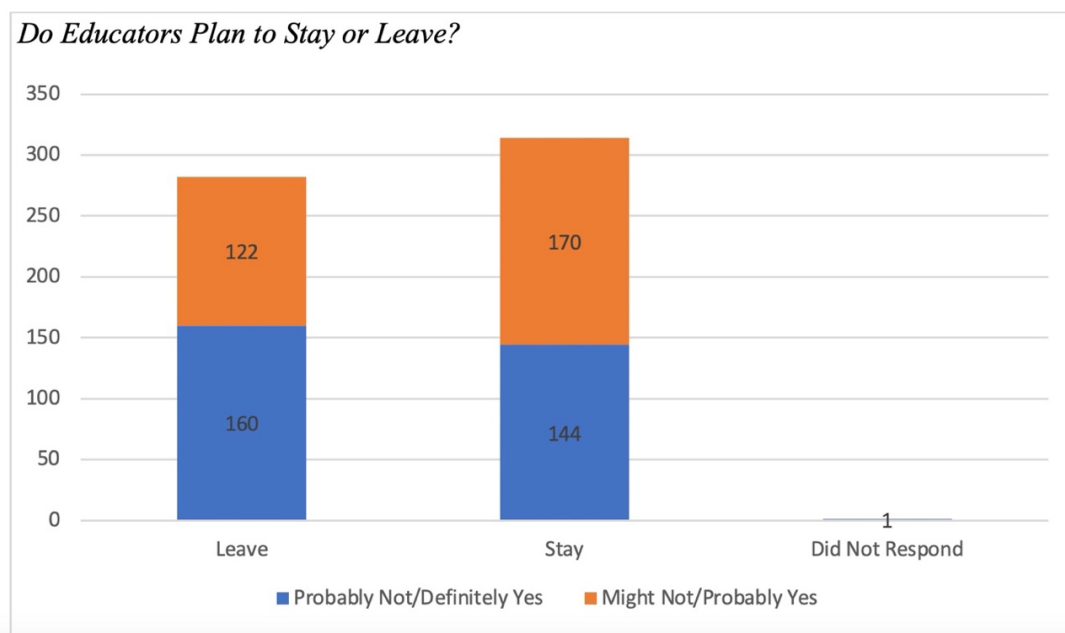
their second career, and another two cited teaching more specifically as their backup plan. One respondent shared that they came to teaching as a personal goal to overcome adversity after having been told from a young age that they would not amount to anything in life. Two responses were removed for a lack of clarity.

### Survey Results

The fourth survey question dictated the remainder of the questionnaire for participants. It asked whether teachers

planned to remain in the profession as a classroom teacher. The answer choices included a range of responses that gauge a participant’s plans between “probably not” to “definitely yes”. For those who think they may leave, 160 educators responded, “probably not”, while 122 indicated “might not”. For teachers who plan to remain in the classroom, 170 answered “probably yes” while 144 responded “definitely yes”. One participant did not respond (See Figure 3).

**Figure 3**



### *Results for Teachers Who May Consider Leaving the Profession*

For participants that indicated that they may not stay in the classroom until retirement by choosing either “probably not” or “might not”, they were redirected to question seven, which asked respondents to mark all reasons that they consider to be factors in deciding to leave. Out of 282 that responded that they may or probably will leave the classroom, 171 indicated that they feel they have too heavy of a workload and/or feel burnout. 155 participants selected “low salary”, 135 chose “poor behavior”, 133 selected

“lack of support from society members”, 127 chose “poor benefits, such as no paid maternal or family leave or expensive medical insurance”, 122 selected “unreasonable expectations from administrators”, and 105 chose “unreasonable expectations from parents”. Some of the less popular choices included 74 teachers who chose “I need to work an extra job to remain financially secure”, while 58 selected a lack of autonomy in in the curriculum, 54 sited moral objections in duties or initiatives they were asked to perform, 51 indicated a “lack of resources”, 42 chose to fill in their own response in the “other” category, and 34 teachers selected a poor classroom culture (See Table 3).

**Table 3***Participants' Reasons for Wanting to Leave the Classroom Before Retirement*

BlockSeparator

| <b>Reasons</b>  | <b>Number of Participants Who Chose This Response</b> |
|---|---|
| Too heavy of a workload; burnout  | 171   |
| Low Salary  | 155   |
| Poor Student Behavior   | 135   |
| Lack of support from society members, such as the <u>general public</u> and/or politicians                  | 133   |
| Poor benefits, such as no paid parental leave, or expensive medical insurance                               | 127   |
| Unreasonable expectations from administrators   | 122   |
| Unreasonable expectations from parents  | 105   |
| I need to work an extra job to be financially secure  | 74  |
| Lack of autonomy in the curriculum  | 58  |
| I am asked to implement classroom policies/procedures that I do not personally agree with and/or believe in | 54  |
| Lack of resources   | 51  |
| Other   | 42  |
| Poor classroom culture/climate  | 34  |

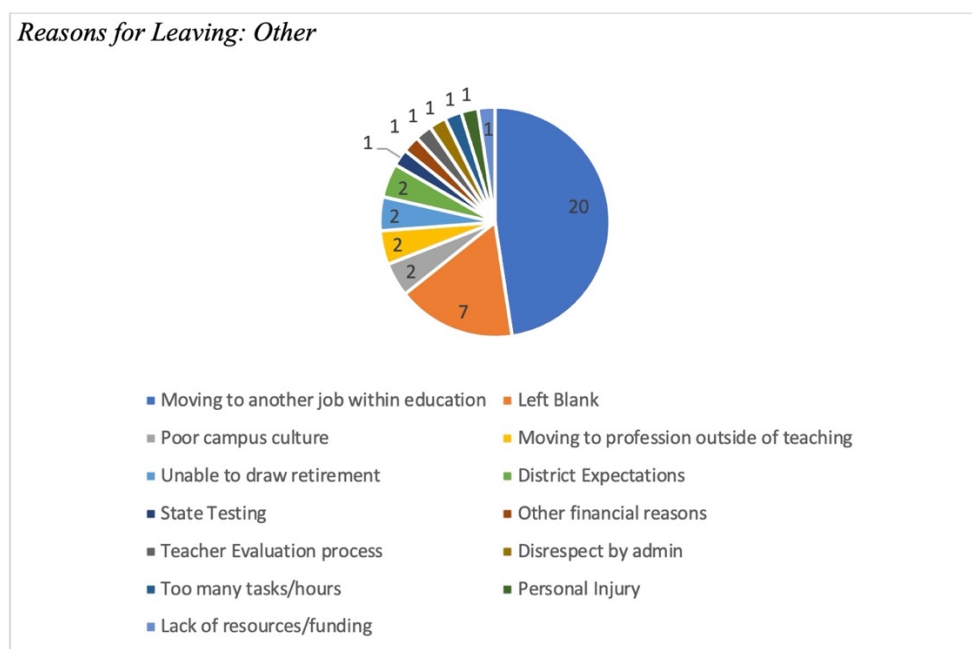
For participants who chose the “other” answer choice as part of their response for number seven on the questionnaire, the researcher compiled responses and categorized them by theme. 42 respondents selected

“other”; of those participants, 35 teachers wrote in their own response, while seven left the optional text box blank. For those who filled in the box, 20 indicated that they would be moving to another position outside of the

classroom, but still in the education field. This included teachers who planned to enter administration, instructional coaching, special education, or counseling. In addition, two respondents cited poor campus climate or culture, two indicated they were moving to a new profession outside of teaching, two responded that they are leaving the profession for another occupation, two stated that they are leaving due to needing to draw from social security retirement funds instead of a teacher retirement system, and

two cited that they disagree with district expectations of teachers. Finally, in each of the following themed categories, only one participant each had cited it as a reason: disagreement with state testing requirements, general unspecified financial reasons, disapproval of the teacher evaluation process, disrespect by campus administration, too many tasks/responsibilities, risk of personal injury on campus, and a general lack of funds and/or resources (See Figure 4).

**Figure 4**



While participants selected factors for why they may choose to leave the profession, the next question they were asked allowed them to rank their choices in an order from most to least influential. This task's purpose was to determine which factors were the most and least important in their decision to potentially leave the field. Respondents viewed each of the thirteen choices, one of which included an "other" option that allowed for text input and dragged and dropped them into a ranking order with the most influential choice at the top.

Because participants were only shown the ranking task if they responded that they are considering leaving the profession, 239 respondents completed this response. The category that had the highest number of respondents rank as the top or more influential factor was low salary, of which 83 respondents selected it as their number one reason for leaving. 31 participants ranked low salary in 2nd

place, 24 marked 3<sup>rd</sup> place, 19 selected 4<sup>th</sup> place, 14 ranked 5<sup>th</sup>, 16 chose 6<sup>th</sup>, 12 selected 7<sup>th</sup>, 11 marked 8<sup>th</sup>, 11 chose 9<sup>th</sup>, 6 marked 10<sup>th</sup>, eight chose 11<sup>th</sup>, three chose 12<sup>th</sup>, and only one marked last place in the 13<sup>th</sup> ranking. The mean for this answer choice was 3.88.

The next category that reported a high number of participants ranking in 1st place was too heavy of a workload and/or burnout with 71 respondents choosing this as their most influential factor. 40 participants selected it as 2nd, 39 marked 3rd place, 35 selected 4th place, 14 ranked 5th, 18 chose 6th, 10 selected 7th, five marked 8th, three chose 9th, zero marked 10th, two chose 11th, two chose 12th, and no respondents marked last place in the 13th ranking. The mean for this response was 3.22.

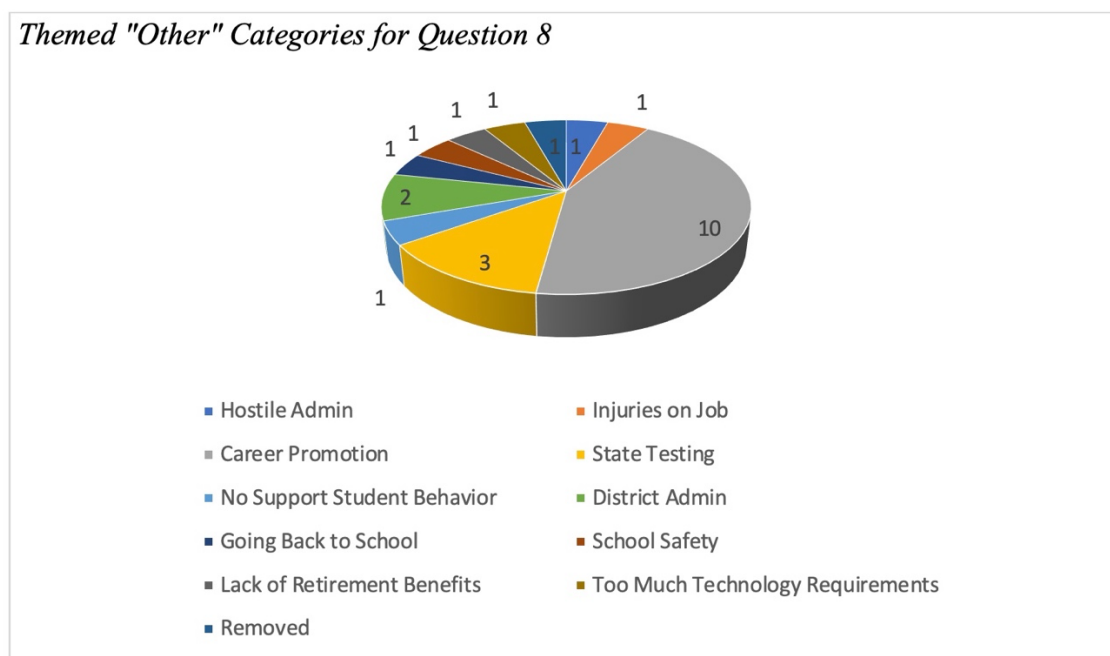
After the categories mentioned above, there was a significant drop in the number of participants who selected



each subsequent factor in 1st place. The next highest category is poor student behavior, of which only 17 respondents selected as the most influential factor causing them to consider leaving the profession. Likewise, the mean for this answer choice was 5.65. 27 participants ranked poor student behavior in 2nd place, 30 marked 3rd place, 23 selected 4th place, 23 ranked 5th, 19 chose 6th, 33 selected 7th, 22 marked eight, 19 chose 9th, seven marked 10th, nine chose 11th, nine chose 12th, and only one respondent marked last place in the 13th ranking.

Following poor student behavior is unreasonable expectations by administrators with 14 teachers who selected it as their 1st most influential factor for potentially leaving the field, and the mean for this response was 5.36. 29 participants ranked it in 2nd place, 23 marked 3rd place, 30 selected 4th place, 39 ranked 5th, 25 chose 6th, 23 selected 7th, 23 marked 8th, 14 chose 9th, 10 marked 10th, 4 chose 11th, 5 chose 12th, and no respondents marked last place in the 13th ranking.

**Figure 5**



The next highest category for respondents choosing it as their 1st most influential factor in leaving was poor benefits with 11 teachers choosing as 1st place. 51 participants ranked poor benefits in 2nd place, 27 marked 3rd place, 29 selected 4th place, 22 ranked 5th, 21 chose 6th, 18 selected 7th, 19 marked 8th, 13 chose 9th, 12

The “other” category with an optional text box showed a unique pattern of responses unlike that of any other category. 13 participants selected it as their 1st most influential factor, while only 3 selected it as their 2nd, and 3 as their 3rd choice, 2 marked it as 4th, 0 participants selected it as 5th through 8th place, 1 chose it as 9th, 2 as 10th, another 2 as 11th, 9 as 12th, and 204 selected it in last place as 13th. The mean for this response was 11.91. The majority of these respondents did not choose to type in an optional response, but for those who did, career advancement/promotion was the highest themed response in this category, garnering 10 responses. 3 wrote in state testing, 2 cited district administrators, and 1 participant each typed in a response relevant to the following themes: hostile administration, injuries on the job, no support for student behavior, leaving to go back to school in higher education, and school safety concerns (See Figure 5).

marked 10th, 9 chose 11th, 6 chose 12th, and only 1 marked last place in the 13th ranking. The mean for this answer choice was 5.21.

The next highest category for respondents choosing it as their 1st most influential factor was no support from society and/or politicians with 7 participants choosing it,

and a mean of 7.18. 16 participants ranked it in 2nd place, 13 marked 3rd place, 23 selected 4th place, 25 ranked 5th, 28 chose 6th, 19 selected 7th, 14 marked 8th, 14 chose 9th, 18 marked 10th, 44 chose 11th, 16 chose 12th, and only 2 marked last place in the 13th ranking.

Next, only six teachers selected unreasonable expectations from parents as their most influential factor in causing them to consider leaving the field. 10 participants ranked this category in 2nd place, 23 marked 3rd place, 22 selected 4th place, 28 ranked 5th, 42 chose 6th, 32 selected 7th, 32 marked 8th, 17 chose 9th, 13 marked 10th, 10 chose 11th, four chose 12th, and no participants marked last place in the 13th ranking. The mean for this answer choice was 6.26.

While two categories tied for having five participants in each select it as their 1st ranking factor, the category entitled “I need to work an extra job” held significantly more respondents choosing it near the top of the ranking scale. Correspondingly, the mean for this response was 7.83. 13 participants ranked it in 2nd place, 26 marked 3rd place, 22 selected 4th place, 19 ranked 5th, 11 chose 6th, 15 selected 7th, 14 marked 8th, 13 chose 9th, 14 marked 10th, 18 chose 11th, 55 chose 12th, and 14 marked last place in the 13th ranking.

Another five respondents selected the category entitled, “I am asked to implement classroom policies/procedures that I do not personally agree with and/or believe in” as their 1st most influential factor in considering whether to

leave the profession. The mean for this answer choice was 8.03. Six participants ranked it in 2nd place, six marked 3rd place, 13 selected 4th place, 13 ranked 5th, 15 chose 6th, 23 selected 7th, 43 marked 8th, 40 chose 9th, 37 marked 10th, 15 chose 11th, 22 chose 12th, and only one marked last place in the 13th ranking.

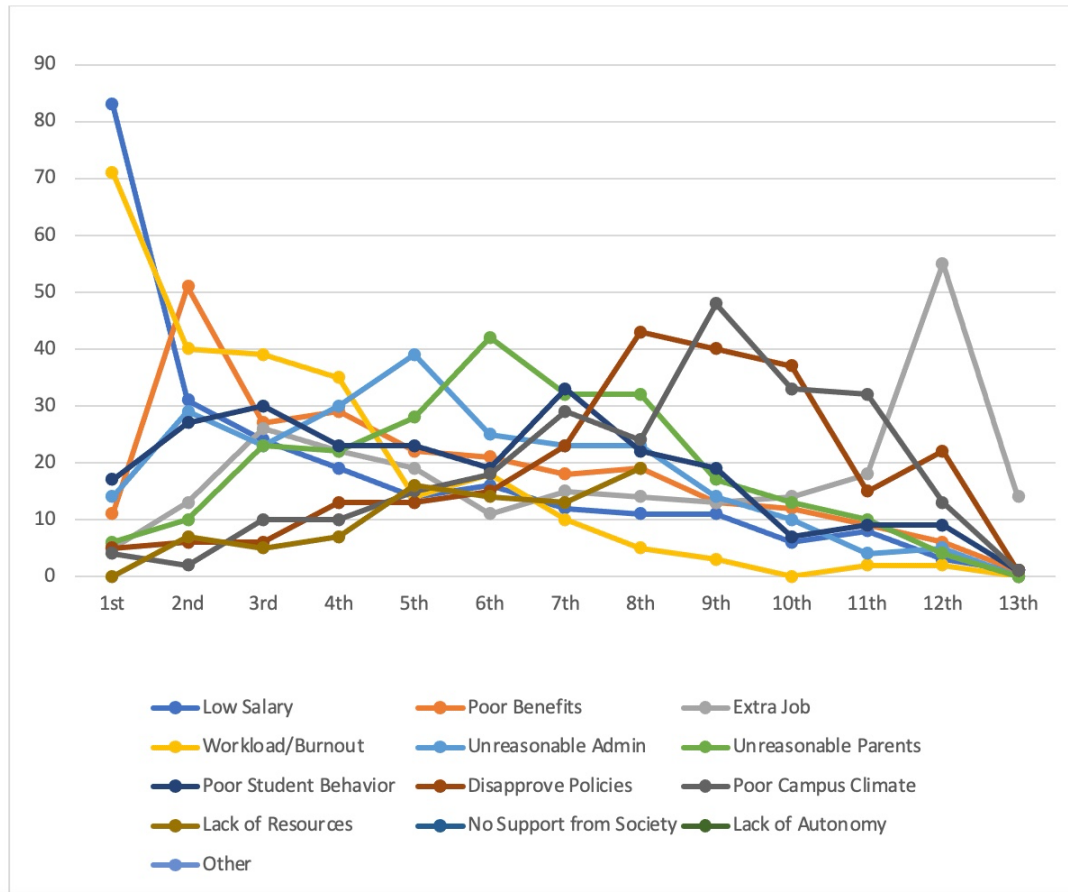
Next, poor campus climate/culture garnered four teacher responses that ranked the category in 1st place with a mean of 8.11. Two participants ranked low salary in 2nd place, 10 marked 3rd place, 10 selected 4th place, 15 ranked 5th, 18 chose 6th, 29 selected 7th, 24 marked 8th, 48 chose 9th, 33 marked 10th, 32 chose 11th, 13 chose 12th, and only 1 marked last place in the 13th ranking.

Lack of autonomy in the curriculum only received three teachers who indicated it as a 1st ranking choice, and a mean of 9.56. Four participants ranked it in 2nd place, 10 marked 3rd place, Four selected 4th place, 11 ranked 5th, 12 chose 6th, 12 selected 7th, 13 marked eight, 15 chose 9th, 28 marked 10th, 39 chose 11th, 75 chose 12th, and 13 marked last place in the 13th ranking.

Finally, a lack of resources in the classroom received zero teacher rankings as 1st place, and its mean was 8.80. Seven participants ranked it in 2nd place, five marked 3rd place, seven selected 4th place, 16 ranked 5th, 14 chose 6th, 13 selected 7th, 19 marked 8th, 31 chose 9th, 59 marked 10th, 47 chose 11th, 20 chose 12th, and only one marked last place in the 13th ranking (See Figure 6).

**Figure 6**

*Most and Least Influential Factors for Leaving the Profession*



Finally, all teachers who answered “might or might not” or “probably not” to question four were tasked with one last qualitative exit question, which was question number nine. This question was unique in that it asked participants to consider what it might take to change their minds to consider staying in the profession until retirement. The purpose of this question was to seek what factors may be considered as solutions for teacher retention issues within the field. For this qualitative task, the researcher compiled responses and categorized them into themes. It should be noted that participants were able to, and in many cases did type in multiple answers, which were each individually themed.

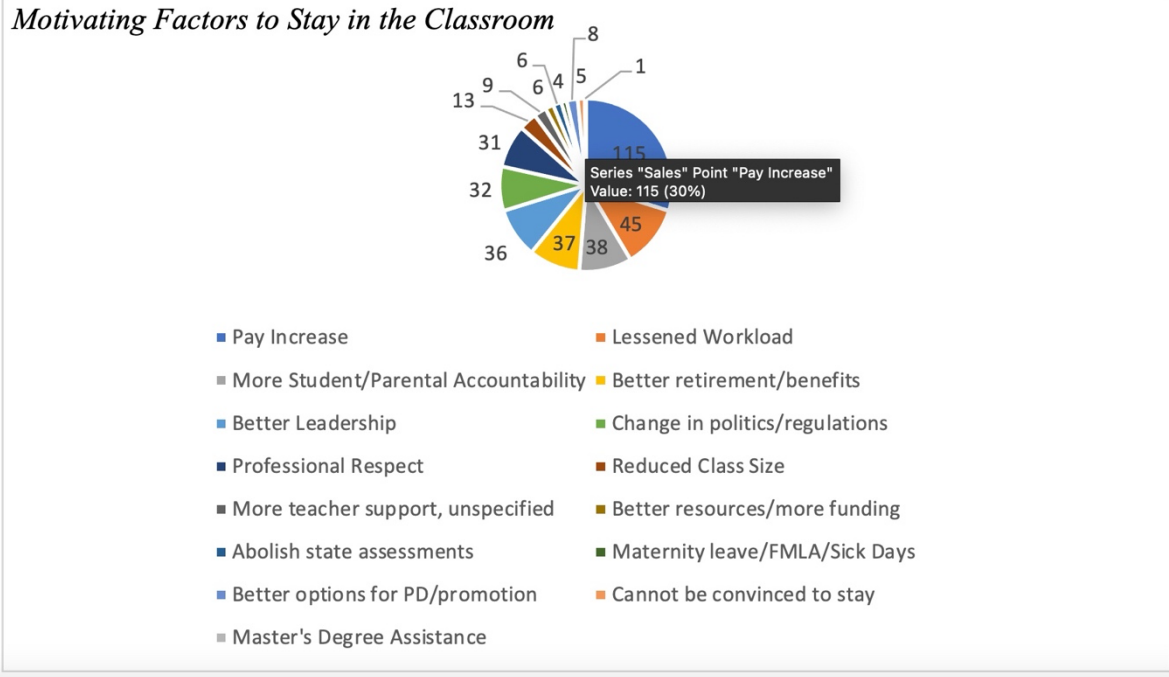
All considered, 115 respondents cited that a pay/salary increase would motivate them to consider staying in the teaching profession. 45 wrote about reduced workload, while 38 noted an increase in student and/or parental

accountability as motivating factors to staying within the field. 37 teachers mentioned an enhanced retirement and/or medical benefits. 37 respondents noted that better leadership might entice them to stay, while 32 participants wrote about a preference for a change in the politics surrounding education, especially regarding lessened regulations and/or micromanagement. 31 teachers wish to feel more respected a professional by others, especially by those outside of education. 13 teachers noted a need for reduced class sizes, and nine wrote about more general/unspecified support for teachers and in the classroom. Eight participants wanted to have better options for professional development and/or advancement within the field, while six teachers wish for more or better funding and/or resources, and another six said it would take abolishing state assessments. Four respondents wrote about receiving paid maternity leave, better FMLA leave and/or increased sick or personal days. One teacher wanted

financial assistance with obtaining a master’s degree, and five teachers indicated that they cannot be convinced to stay in the profession by any means. It should be noted that

nine qualitative responses were removed for lack of clarity (See Figure 7).

**Figure 7**



**Results for Teachers Remaining in the Field**

For participants who answered “probably yes” or “definitely yes” to question four, respondents were redirected to question five, which was a multiple-choice response in which teachers could select all possible factors that contribute to them wishing to stay in the field. The purpose of this item was to determine what motivating reasons contribute to educators remaining within the classroom.

With the most selections, the category, “the passion/love for working with teaching children” received

207 responses as the reason that teachers chose to stay in the classroom over the long term. 145 participants chose “the passion/love towards my subject/content area”, while 139 chose preferable work schedules, 137 selected the support and relationships they had with other teachers, 127 noted that they believe that teaching is a noble and important profession, 105 cited job security, 82 selected no other prospective job opportunities, or that they are close to retirement age, 55 selected the support and relationships with administrators, and 26 participants selected the “other” category, in which they optionally filled in a response. It should be noted that respondents could select all factors that apply to them (See Table 4).

**Table 4***Participants' Reasons for Wanting to Remain in the Classroom Until Retirement*

| Reasons   | Number of Participants Who Chose This Response |
|---|--|
| The passion/love for working with and teaching children             | 207  |
| The passion/love towards my subject/content area                    | 145  |
| Work schedules, such as regular breaks to spend time with my family | 139  |
| Support and relationships with other teachers                       | 137  |
| I believe that teaching is a noble and important profession         | 127  |
| Job Security  | 105  |
| No other prospective job opportunities; close to retirement age     | 82   |
| Support and relationships with administrators                       | 55   |
| Other   | 55   |

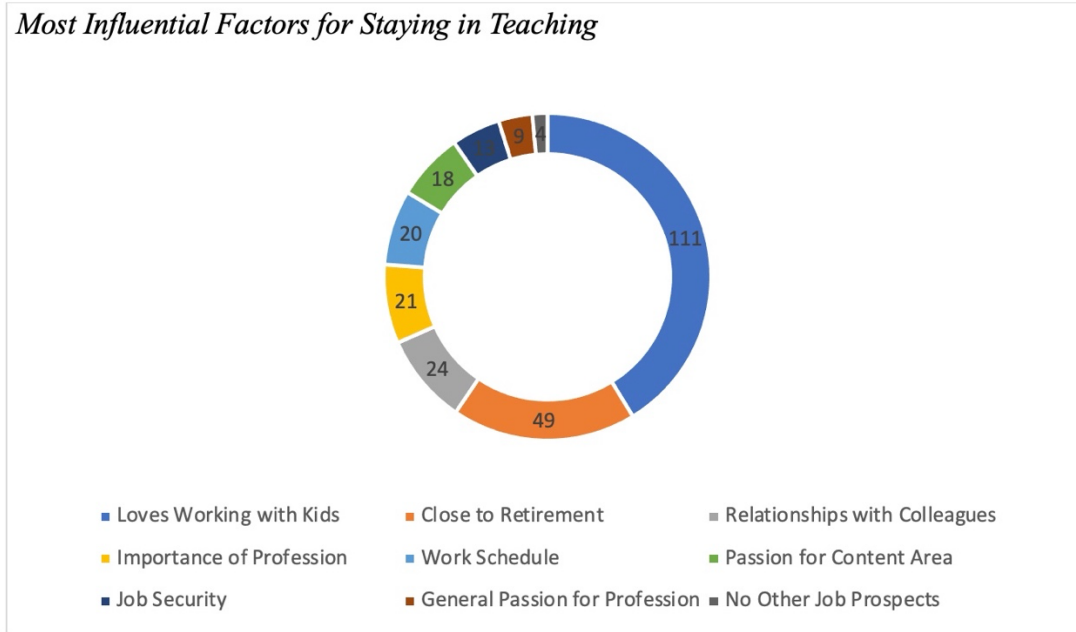
After responding to question five, participants who originally selected “probably yes” or “definitely yes” to question four went on to complete number six, which was a qualitative response in which respondents typed in their own answer. The purpose of this question was to learn which motivating reason they selected in number five they felt the most strongly about to determine their most influential factor in their consideration to stay within the teaching profession. For this qualitative task, the researcher gathered the data and categorized and tallied the responses. Some participants chose to write in multiple responses,

which were organized as separate responses and categorized into the themes in which they fit.

Of these themed responses, 111 participants indicated that their love for working with children was the most influential in their decision to remain in the profession. 49 respondents cited that they were close to retirement age, while 24 mentioned the relationships and support they have with colleagues. 21 wrote about the importance of the teaching as a profession, and another 20 cited the flexible work schedule with breaks throughout the year. 18 noted their passion for their content area, 13 wrote about job security, nine indicated a general passion for the profession,

and four indicated that they had no other job prospects (See Figure 8).

**Figure 8**

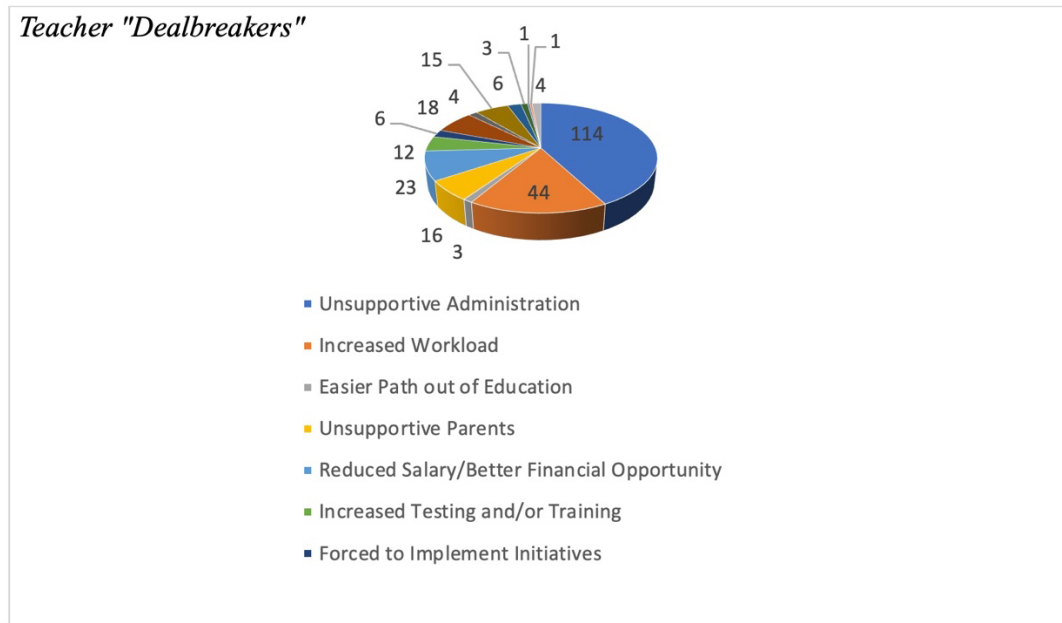


Finally, as with the respondents who indicated that they are considered leaving the profession, each participant who selected that they might or will stay in teaching until retirement was asked to complete a final qualitative response task. This led these teachers to question ten, which was unique in that it asked teachers who plan to stay in the field to consider what might be a “dealbreaker” that could cause them to change their minds about remaining in the classroom. The purpose of this question was to understand what could go wrong in their jobs to cause them to change wish to leave. The researcher compiled data and categorized statements into themes. Many participants provided more than one answer, and each was tallied as an individual response and categorized appropriately.

Of the factors that teachers noted as “dealbreakers”, the category of “unsupportive administration” topped the list with 114 responses. 44 cited increased workloads as a

dealbreaker, while 23 indicated that reduced salary or a better financial job opportunity might cause them to reconsider teaching. 16 respondents noted unsupportive parents, and 15 wrote about being moved to a new campus and/or position against their will. 12 teachers mentioned increased testing or training requirements, eight indicated negative political changes within the educational system, and six wrote about being forced to implement unreasonable new initiatives. Another six teachers wrote about family and/or health reasons, while four indicated poor campus climate, and another four participants cited abuse on the job and/or workplace injury. Three mentioned a reduction in force that might eliminate their position, while another three respondents indicated that they might leave if there was an easier path out of education. Finally, one teacher noted each of the following categories: revocation of a teaching license, false accusations and on the job (See Figure 9).

**Figure 9**



**Conclusions**

It is obvious from the research that the overwhelming number of teachers surveyed entered the profession for what most would consider positive reasons. Because so many educators noted their love for working with children, their passion for their subjects, and a strong belief that the education profession is an important and worthy field, it can be concluded that the majority of teachers began their careers by wanting to be in the classroom and were likely positively motivated.

However, it is also clear from the data that educators’ motivation wanes due to factors such as low salary, high workload and stress levels, and low respect amongst administrators, parents, and society in general. In fact, given that 49 veteran teachers indicated that they will remain in the profession because they are too close to retirement age, and another four stated that they have no other job prospects, indicates that some educators feel “stuck”, and are only staying because of what they would lose should they leave.

**Recommendations**

Because nearly half of teachers reported that they are considering leaving the field before retirement, and another subset of respondents indicated that they may wish to leave but are unable to do so, it is recommended to conduct further studies into morale amongst veteran educators. Something that this study did not ask about or address is job satisfaction; while unhappiness can be inferred based on responses to the survey, the questionnaire did not explicitly ask subjects about their level of job satisfaction.

In addition, it is also recommended that further studies be conducted into schools and/or districts that have attempted to integrate solutions to attract and retain veteran teachers. For example, some districts may have offered signing bonuses, retention stipends, higher starting salaries, increased salary steps, staff social events, extra planning and preparation time, or other measures to address some of the aforementioned factors that motivate teachers to leave or stay in the field. It would be helpful to study whether these interventions have helped to increase retention and deter attrition over time.

## References

- Amorim Neto, R.D.C., Bursey, A., Janowiak, D., Mccarty, C., & Demeter, B. (2018). Teamwork and motivation to leave the teaching profession. *The Journal of Education* 198(3), 215-224. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26612680>.
- Anderson, C. (2020). *The other 50%: Why long-serving teachers remain in the profession* (Order No. 27998365). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2421514675). <https://ezproxy.shsu.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/other-50-why-long-serving-teachers-remain/docview/2421514675/se-2?accountid=7065>
- Bukko, D., Liu, K., & Johnson, A.H. (2021). Principal practices that build and sustain trust: Recommendations from teachers in a high-trust school. *Planning and Changing* 50(1/2), 58-74.
- Loewis, L. (2021, May 4). Why teachers leave—or don't: A look at the numbers. *Education Week*. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/why-teachers-leave-or-dont-a-look-at-the-numbers/2021/05>.
- Lopez, B. (2022, July 25). *It's not just Covid-19: Why Texas faces a teacher shortage*. The Texas Tribune. [https://www.texastribune.org/2022/07/25/texas-teacher-shortage/?gclid=CjwKCAjwsMGYBhAEEiwAGUXJacmbkKcGtHx8GmDwV-9zNpxf65fNOv5suqN7wCx55XS-xh-RndElyRoCh\\_YQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.texastribune.org/2022/07/25/texas-teacher-shortage/?gclid=CjwKCAjwsMGYBhAEEiwAGUXJacmbkKcGtHx8GmDwV-9zNpxf65fNOv5suqN7wCx55XS-xh-RndElyRoCh_YQAvD_BwE).
- Madigan, D.J., & Kim, L.E. (2021). Towards an understanding of teacher attrition: A meta-analysis of burnout, job satisfaction, and teachers' intentions to quit. *Teaching & Teacher Education* 105, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103425>.
- Redding, C., & Henry, G.T. (2018). New evidence on the frequency of teacher turnover: Accounting for with-year turnover. *Educational Researcher* 47(9), 577-593. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45177481>.
- Santoro, D. (2018). *Demoralized: Why teachers leave the profession they love and how they can stay*. Harvard Education Press.
- Santoro, D. (2019). The problem with stories about teacher burnout. *Phi Delta Kappa International*, 101(4), 26-33. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26861451>.
- Skaalvik, E., & Skaalvik, S. (2021). Collective teacher culture: exploring an elusive construct and its relations with teacher autonomy, belonging, and job satisfaction. *Social Psychology of Education*, 24: 1389-1406. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-021-09673-4>.
- Walker, T. (2022, February 1). Survey: Alarming number of educators may soon leave the profession. *National Education Association*. <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/survey-alarming-number-educators-may-soon-leave-profession>.