

**WHAT AND HOW CAN DISTRICT STRATEGIES BE USED TO RETAIN  
TEACHERS?**

by

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A Scholarly Delivery Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

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## **ABSTRACT**

This composite submission addresses teacher retention, which has been an area of concern for school districts for decades. The first scholarly deliverable is a case study titled “Can Using Strengths Find and Keep a Teacher Workforce?” This article challenges how the reader thinks about solving issues like teacher turnover and could be utilized in a graduate program for educational leadership to discuss and explore different solutions that would help decrease teacher turnover rates. The second scholarly deliverable is titled “What and How Can District Strategies Be Used to Retain Teachers?” This article explains how one Texas school district addressed its teacher turnover rates over 5 years.



**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS  
Letter of Amendment Approval**

June 20, 2023

Dr. Bigham:

The West Texas A & M University Institutional Review Board is pleased to inform you that upon review, the amendment to proposal # **2023.04.025** for your study titled, “**What and How Can District Strategies Be Used to Retain Teachers,**” meets the requirements of the WTAMU IRB Manual, and approval for the amendment is granted until April 28, 2024.

Principal investigators assume the following responsibilities:

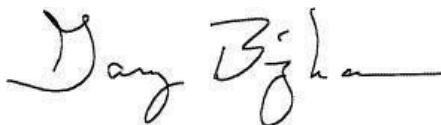
1. **Continuing Review:** The protocol must be renewed on or before the expiration date if the research project requires more than one year for completion. A [Continuing Review form](#) along with required documents must be submitted on or before the stated deadline. Failure to do so will result in study termination and/or loss of funding.
2. **Completion Report:** At the conclusion of the research project (including data analysis and final written papers), a [Close out form](#) must be submitted to AR-EHS.
3. **Unanticipated Problems and Adverse Events:** Pursuant to [SOP No. 15.99.05.W1.13AR](#), unanticipated problems and serious adverse events must be reported to AR-EHS.
4. **Reports of Potential Non-Compliance:** Pursuant to [SOP No. 15.99.05.W1.05AR](#), potential non-compliance, including deviations from the protocol and violations, must be reported to the IRB office immediately.
5. **Amendments:** Changes to the protocol must be requested by submitting an [Amendment form](#) to AR-EHS for review by the IRB. The IRB must approve the Amendment before being implemented. Amendments do not extend time granted on the initial approval
6. **Consent Forms:** When using a consent form, only the IRB approved form is allowed.
7. **Audit:** Any proposal may be subject to audit by the IRB Administrator during the life of the study. Investigators are responsible for maintaining complete and accurate records for five years and making them available for inspection upon request.

8. **Recruitment:** All recruitment materials must be approved by the IRB. Recruitment materials distributed to potential participants must use the approved text and include the study's IRB number, approval date, and expiration dates in the following format:  
WTAMU IRB# #####.##.### Approved: ##/##/#### Expiration Date: ##/##/####.
9. **FERPA and PPRA:** Investigators conducting research with students must have appropriate approvals from the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) administrator at the institution where the research will be conducted in accordance with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) if applicable to the research being proposed. The Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA) protects the rights of parents in students ensuring that written parental consent is required for participation in surveys, analysis, or evaluation that ask questions falling into categories of protected information.

Sixty days prior to the expiration of this proposal, you will receive a notification of the approaching expiration date at which time you will need to submit an [Amendment/Continuation/Close out](#) form.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,



Dr. Gary Bigham  
Chair, WTAMU IRB



Dr. Angela Spaulding,  
Vice President of Research and Compliance

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

What a journey this has been! I am so grateful for the opportunity to have attended West Texas A&M University and participated in Cohort 3 of the Educational Leadership doctoral program. The learning experience was like no other, and I am proud to now be a WTAMU alumna.

I am deeply indebted to my committee members and especially to Dr. Gary Bigham, my committee chair and Dean of the College of Education and Social Services. Dr. Bigham, words cannot express my appreciation for your shared wisdom, constant support, and belief in me. I will value your lessons in leadership. To Dr. Irma Harper, I am grateful for your kind encouragement, continual edits, and insight. Thank you for your gracious feedback that refined my writing. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Mark Garrison for your generosity of time, deep explanations, and willingness to explore ideas.

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In the end, it was God Almighty who provided the opportunity, strength, and endurance needed to earn this degree. To Him be the glory for this accomplishment and for what He has orchestrated for the future as a result of completing this journey. As stated in the red letters of John 13:34, "I am giving you a new commandment: love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other." I am grateful that this research reiterated Your words that we must love others before self just as You have modeled through your son, Jesus Christ, whose death paid for our redemption.

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## **Can Using Strengths Find and Keep a Teacher Workforce?**

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### **Abstract**

Teacher retention is of crucial importance across the nation. With the increasing teacher turnover rates exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, student achievement and staff morale are at risk for steep declines. District leadership must carefully analyze how to use available resources to recruit and retain high-quality teachers while overcoming the practice of using technical solutions for adaptive challenges. This case study presents the need for a district leadership team to confront differing approaches to address the growing teacher attrition.

*Keywords:* teacher retention, turnover rates, attrition, CliftonStrengths

## **Can Using Strengths Find and Keep a Teacher Workforce?**

As the years progress in public education, an issue that many school districts face is the increasing teacher turnover rate. Each year, teachers leave the classroom not to return the following school year. According to Tran and Smith (2020), “two-thirds leave the profession before retirement age” (p. 85). Districts call upon their campus leaders and human resource departments to develop retention plans to curb the high turnover rate.

Many industries have been affected by the recent trend named “The Great Resignation” and are naming the COVID-19 global pandemic as a significant contributor to this exodus from current workplaces; education is no different (Thompson, 2021). However, research conducted prior to the global pandemic stated that teacher turnover has been an ever-present concern in fluctuating percentages (Norton, 1999; Sass et al., 2012). As educators continue their service to public education, the pandemic is not the only problematic situation that must be navigated daily. Teachers share their concerns regarding the lack of bus drivers, the inadequate number of substitutes to cover staff absences, and significant gaps in achievement due to learning loss.

Thus, the need for districts to effectively analyze and utilize resources to retain teachers is imperative. This case study explores the dynamics of Sunshine Independent School District (Sunshine ISD), a growing school district, and how district leadership plans to position staff members according to their strengths per the Clifton StrengthsFinder assessment.

### **The District**

Sunshine ISD is nestled between a growing suburban area about 25 miles from a central metropolitan area and a rural community that values its history and slower pace of

life. This school district is in Texas and is the largest district in the county, spanning over 150 square miles; however, it is not the most populous district in the county. About 4,200 enrolled students are served in four elementary campuses, one middle school, one high school, and an accredited alternative education facility. The district employs approximately 500 staff members, with approximately 51% teachers, 16% administrators, and 33% paraprofessionals and auxiliary staff. The student demographics include 28.1% African American, 39.8% Hispanic, 28.4% White, 2.9% Two or More Races, and less than 1% combined in all other ethnic groups. Sunshine ISD serves 82.9% economically disadvantaged students, with the five largest campuses designated as Title I campuses.

The superintendent, Dr. Ritter Raymond, has served in this capacity for almost 2 years. Sunshine ISD is his first district to lead as a superintendent, and his previous experience was predominantly in large suburban districts directly bordering the third-largest metropolitan area of the state. The district is supported by one deputy superintendent and one assistant superintendent. Penny Winn, the deputy superintendent of finance and operations, is known in the area as a financial firecracker. She has been successful throughout her career of over 20 years in helping districts overcome financial hardships; she is also reasonably new to Sunshine ISD. Dr. Jacob Johns has been the assistant superintendent of leadership and curriculum for the past 4 years. Dr. Johns is skilled in personal coaching and is well-read in research.

The newest addition to the district leadership cabinet is Yolanda Sanchez, the new executive director of human resources (HR); Mrs. Sanchez has been part of the district for over 2 decades, serving in multiple capacities from teacher to campus administration to district curriculum coordinator and now has been chosen to lead the human resources

department. This change in position comes after the former HR executive director retired after faithful service to the district and through a couple of tumultuous personnel issues that rocked the community. Mrs. Sanchez was hired for this position due to her loyalty to the district and creative ideas regarding how to address recruiting and retaining staff.

### **The Schools**

Five of the seven campuses had leadership changes within the last 3 years. The high school had three different principals in 5 years; the current principal, Mr. Steve Sterling, came to Sunshine ISD from Dr. Raymond's previous district and had about 4 years of experience as a middle school principal. Sunshine's middle school's principal, Mrs. Starla Wright, was a first-year principal last year but is beginning to acclimate to this new role and district. Of the five elementary campuses, two campuses have a first-year principal, two principals were first-year principals at their campuses 2 years ago, and the fifth campus has shown the most consistency with the principal serving in her role for 5 consecutive years. The alternative education campus is also led by a first-year principal this year.

Bartanen et al. (2019) outlined that when personnel in leadership roles change, campuses experience more significant percentages of teacher turnover. Thus, due to the number of leadership changes in Sunshine ISD in the past few years, the human resources department has processed its highest number of resignations and new hires in the past 3 consecutive years. This past summer, Mrs. Sanchez was initiated into her new role as the district hired 155 personnel collectively, and as the campuses have already completed the first 6 weeks of school, the district must manage 28 vacant positions. The number of vacancies adds stress to current personnel as they are supporting the campus by taking on

additional responsibilities, including rotating to teach in open-position classrooms during their conference periods. Due to a lack of consistency, student misbehavior is rising, and reciprocally, there are frustrations on the part of the staff. Campus principals are sharing growing concerns about mass teacher turnover by the end of the year.

### **The Problem**

In the invitation for this week's leadership cabinet meeting, Dr. Raymond called on the district administration to be prepared to address a few of the critical concerns generated from the staff survey. The main concerns from the survey data shared included teachers' concerns regarding lack of recognition, lack of confidence in the district's future, and lack of being able to use strengths at work each day. The identified stressors, as per the survey results, included the lack of time to do required tasks, student discipline issues, and lack of efficacy.

Being the executive director of HR, Mrs. Sanchez understood that the teacher concerns from the survey were directly related to the high attrition rate of the district. She felt predominantly responsible for having a plan, or two, to propose to the cabinet leaders to retain teachers and be proactive in decreasing the number of new hires. Knowing the growing percentages of teacher turnover, not only in Sunshine ISD but even nationally, Mrs. Sanchez has been researching causal factors to determine if the same factors apply to Sunshine ISD's circumstances, and if so, what are some ideas to address such needs. Some of the macro factors (state/national level) reported included an increase in student population, changes in national education policy, and decreased prestige for the teaching profession; micro factors (district/organization level) included discipline problems, lack of leadership support, and lack of teacher autonomy (Boyd et al., 2011; Donitsa-Schmidt

& Zuzovsky, 2016; Jihyun, 2019). Understanding that the macro factors are outside of her circle of control, Mrs. Sanchez began to focus on the micro factors. These identified micro factors were also sentiments reported in the recent survey sent to all staff by Dr. Raymond. Two of the three factors were more campus-level practices: discipline and teacher autonomy; thus, Mrs. Sanchez began to focus on the need for more leadership support. Recently, the district leadership members began a book study on *Nine Lies About Work* by Marcus Buckingham and Ashley Goodall (2019). Mrs. Sanchez connected the theme from the book that outlined people are more concerned about who they directly work with rather than the organization as a whole. Through her years of service in Sunshine ISD, Mrs. Sanchez recognized that the efficacy of a team is rooted in its ability to collaborate and cooperate.

Connecting *lack of leadership* to understanding the campus as a large team, Mrs. Sanchez began diving deeper into what made teams more successful than others. A website that she periodically reviewed presented several qualities of a successful team, which included clear communication, contributions by members, support for all, and diversity (Deering, n.d.). This prompted Mrs. Sanchez to pull out the data chart presented at the district leadership retreat from when many new leaders came to Sunshine ISD. Since Dr. Raymond emphasized how each person's strengths made the team successful and diverse, Mrs. Sanchez began to think forward:

If our administrative teams can see their strengths and positive potential, how might this strengths-based philosophy help improve the teacher turnover percentages? Or, if hiring new teachers, how might knowing the team dynamics and strengths help hire the best candidate for longer retention?

This line of thought also reinforces the opportunity to use one's strengths daily, as the shared survey found this to be the third lowest area on the survey. Mrs. Sanchez also understood she would need to pull from her prior learning about adaptive leadership and how to connect with others' values genuinely. Heifetz et al. (2009) emphasized that failure results when leaders attempt to fix adaptive challenges with technical solutions.

As Mrs. Sanchez continued her research into team strengths and learned more about the CliftonStrengths, she repeatedly heard or read that if a team was lacking in a particular strength area, it did not mean to go hire or find someone to fill that gap specifically; instead, it meant to think about the team member's strengths to determine what could be used. Then, as the team (school or department) began to look for additional team members, questions could be used to determine applicants' areas of strength that would benefit all the members and the team collectively. Mrs. Sanchez felt more prepared with this idea to help address Dr. Raymond's call for ideas at the next leadership meeting. She also prepared to explain this concept utilizing the district leadership team's strength grid.

At the leadership meeting, Mrs. Sanchez greeted her comrades and awaited the opportunity to share her research and findings on recruiting and retaining staff based on team strengths. When Dr. Raymond opened the discussion regarding the recent survey and shared the concerns of potentially high teacher turnover rates from the secondary principals, Mrs. Sanchez sat straighter in her seat, awaiting her turn. Dr. Raymond continued, "Two of the three closest neighboring districts have been able to lower their teacher turnover rates the past 2 years, but we have steadily increased in ours. Mrs.



Sanchez, what are your thoughts on this?” Mrs. Sanchez proceeded to share her research results,

This is a concerning trend. Per our district data, our teacher turnover rates have increased significantly over the past 2 years, from 12% to 31%, which equates to about 150 staff members. From this number, most of the turnover is observed at our two secondary campuses.

Mrs. Sanchez directly spoke to the survey data of staff’s key concerns and identified stressors. She also presented the mid-year non-binding survey results that showed 51% of personnel were returning next school year, 37% were undecided, and 12% were not returning. Then she continued,

I propose we help administrators strategize how to recruit and retain staff by addressing team strengths, per our CliftonStrengths results. For example, we as an administrative cabinet have individual strengths with some domains not part of our profile; however, collectively, our strengths address all four domains: executing, influencing, relationship building, and strategic thinking. As a team, we are diverse and equipped for various situations.

Mrs. Sanchez shared a visual of each leader's profile and how, as a team, they complimented each other’s strengths. She also shared a handout of a strengths matrix she had prepared in collaboration with Mr. Sterling, the high school principal. Each teacher’s strengths were represented and organized within department cohorts. In the middle of Mrs. Sanchez’s explanation, Dr. Johns raised his hand to interject.

Mrs. Sanchez, thank you for your work. However, how is this going to address the pressing issue of teacher turnover as it stands now? I am concerned that you have

wasted time developing this presentation, as there is no evidence that this plan will improve our increasing turnover rates.

Dr. Raymond agreed,

Yes, I am concerned about the timing of this proposed plan as we are beginning the hiring season. Is there enough time to coach the campus leaders on determining an applicant's strengths? This appears to be very time-consuming, which was a concern on the staff survey: lack of time to do required tasks. We cannot afford to lose administrators in addition to teaching staff.

Mrs. Winn, using her strength of harmony, began, "I see both sides. We do not want to create a feeling of more work for our administrators. We need to develop a plan of action to address the increasing turnover, especially evident at the secondary campuses." Mrs. Sanchez used this as an opportunity to continue:

During a visit with Mr. Sterling, he shared that his department chairs are struggling with their teams. He is concerned about the science department; although they get along, they cannot move forward with decisions, as they do not want to hurt each other's feelings when they disagree. The math department is overwhelmed and is very vocal in their dissatisfaction with the schedule and class sizes; however, Mr. Sterling believes that if the team were more balanced in strengths, they could better support each other and would seek solutions together rather than being argumentative. Mr. Sterling is confident in his ability to recruit and arrange staff in well-balanced teams that will build long-lasting teams.

Dr. Johns again countered:

Mrs. Sanchez, we cannot expect all administrators to take on a new approach as we begin the hiring season. When we last had a stable turnover rate, we used the Humanex teacher interview questions. Granted, we have several new administrators who will need to be trained, but we were able to hire quickly, and as I mentioned, the turnover rates were lower then.

Mrs. Winn offered, “The Humanex does also come with high cost, but if it is proven to support retention, we can run some estimates of how to absorb the expenditure as teacher turnover is more costly.” Mrs. Sanchez reminded the team,

Yes, we utilized Humanex before we had a significant administrator turnover, so we will need to train most campus leaders. This means that either option, strengths focus or Humanex interviews will need sufficient time to train administrators. If you also recall, Humanex interviews have 75 questions, whereas strengths-focused interviews will build upon the Kenexa assessment given within the application process. Thus, the few strengths-focused questions may not intimidate the applicant as a 75-question interview might. We do not want to scare them away at the onset of their experience with our district.

Leaving the meeting, Mrs. Sanchez felt a bit deflated but stood firm in her idea that building the strengths of teams was necessary for recruiting and retaining staff. She would await Dr. Raymond’s decision after he reviewed all the data she had prepared and his consideration of Dr. Johns' perspective.

### **Teaching Notes**

For decades, teacher retention has been a concern for school districts. Brown and Schinker (2008) noted, “Teacher retention has become a national crisis” (p. 10). The

loss of qualified and high-quality teachers increased even more after the Covid-19 pandemic caused schools to close their classrooms, thus ending face-to-face instruction for many students; some for a few weeks, others for over a year. Fortunately students were able to connect online with tools such as Chromebooks, synchronous learning times, and Zoom. When teachers leave a district, student achievement is negatively impacted. This is a direct result of the lack of experience held by many incoming teachers. Teacher retention may also be attributed to using incorrect tools in less than positive manners.

As a result of the growing number of teachers exiting the classroom, campus administrators need to carefully review which tools are available to maintain high-quality teachers in the classrooms. These tools may be divided into a dichotomy of technical and adaptive practices. As Heifetz et al. (2009) explained, adaptive tools or processes connect with one's values and heart. When technical solutions are used to fix adaptive challenges, failure ensues. Since a set of aligned and proven tools that maintain or improve teacher retention is unavailable, a study is needed to address this ever-growing need to help keep high-quality teachers in the classroom.

### **Questions**

1. Looking at the two presented methods by Mrs. Sanchez and Dr. Johns, which is the most secure way to recruit and retain teaching staff? What are your thoughts to support your choice?
2. Do you agree or disagree with Mrs. Sanchez's recommendation to look at team strengths as a method of teacher retention? Why?

3. Both recruitment and retention of teachers were topics breached. Which topic would be of most significant focus if you were Dr. Raymond? Justify your selected priority.
4. What ideas would you propose to the leadership team to consider addressing teacher retention in Sunshine ISD? Explain your rationale.
5. How does time factor into the teacher retention situation of Sunshine ISD, and how does that impact developing plans?
  - a. How will Mrs. Sanchez's plan support immediate and/or long-term needs?
  - b. What other factors need to be considered when planning? Why?

### **Activities**

1. In small groups, use the provided data to prepare a plan to present to Dr. Raymond regarding how to retain teachers and decrease the number of needed new hires. Present the rationale for your plan, explain the steps to be initiated, and name who will be responsible for completing tasks associated with the following steps within a given timeline.
2. Assign roles of the Sunshine ISD leadership cabinet members. Role-play the final word each has prepared to share with Dr. Raymond one-on-one in debriefs after the leadership meeting regarding their stance on the issue of staff recruitment and retention. Dr. Raymond must then give his final decision with justification.
3. Using Heifetz et al.'s (2009) work regarding adaptive leadership and diagnosing the system, examine the case and identify which of the four adaptive challenge archetypes is demonstrated. Then, choose one "on the balcony" and one "on the

practice field" task for the chosen archetype to complete per the information provided. (Heifetz et al., 2009, pgs. 77-87)

- a. Gallery walk and discuss comparisons and dissonances observed, or
  - b. Jigsaw into groups by archetypes to complete initial tasks (balcony/field) and then reframe groups to include one of each type of archetype to discuss.
4. Develop a set of questions to be used in an interview to determine an applicant's strengths per the given needs of the teams below.

a. Kindergarten Team

It is the middle of the school year, and the kindergarten team has two positions to fill with the five total teacher positions. Of the three remaining teachers, Teacher A has a type A personality and over 20 years of experience teaching kindergarten; four of this teacher's top five strengths fall within the Executing domain of the Clifton Strengths. Teacher B is a quiet and calm teacher with almost 10 years of experience teaching; her strengths are evenly distributed over all four domains (Executing, Influencing, Relationship Building, and Strategic Thinking). Teacher C is a first-year teacher who is exuberant and lively about all things kindergarten, and her top five strengths are Relationship Building and Influencing.

b. Secondary Math Team

It is approaching the end of the year, and the math department is struggling as a team. The five high school math teachers were overwhelmed by the number of preps and voiced their concerns to their curriculum coordinator and the principal, Mr. Sterling, in varying ways. Due to no changes being made to relieve the pressure of multiple preps with limited planning time, three of the five are speaking of resigning at the end of the year. One of the remaining teachers needs two more years to retire and has decided to complete only the minimum tasks required to "survive" the last couple of years. His top strengths fall into the Executing and Strategic Thinking domains. The other remaining teacher is from the community and desires to make a lasting positive change in the school and is willing to take on more responsibilities if it equates to better working conditions for the whole team and effective learning for students. He has strengths in each domain, with two of his top five being in the Influencing domain.

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## **What and How Can District Strategies Be Used to Retain Teachers?**

Melissa Nichols

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

Department of Education

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose:** The purpose of this case study is to provide a descriptive insight into how one public school district has decreased its teacher turnover rates over 5 years. **Research method:** A case study design was adopted with the subject being a school district with exemplary data related to decreasing teacher turnover rates over 5 years. This method allows readers to analyze their context, needs, and possible gaps. The qualitative research methods used included a review of artifacts, observations, and interviews of personnel to identify the strategies used by the district and examine if and how the strategies targeted specific teacher needs. **Findings:** This case study highlights how the presented conceptual framework helps the reader understand what and why certain strategies worked in District A. **Conclusion:** Through this study, it has been revealed that leveraging the adaptive practice of collaboration, which addresses the two specific adaptive low strategies of leader behavior and support, with teachers was the most important overall strategy for District A.

*Keywords: teacher retention, teacher turnover, technical issues, adaptive challenges, teacher needs, retention strategies*

## **What and How Can District Strategies Be Used to Retain Teachers?**

To teach is to touch a life forever. Teaching has been viewed as a consistent employment opportunity with decent benefits and the good fortune to shape and influence students' lives, thus making a positive difference in the world (Bayler & Özcan, 2014; Charalambos, 2017). However, not all believe being a teacher is a prestigious career choice, and after key educational reform efforts pushed into the 21st century, the level of professionalism has been questioned in addition to more recent political attacks on public education overall have caused fewer to enter the profession and more to exit (Alexander et al., 2020; Cupit, 2019). Each year teachers leave their classrooms not to return the following school year.

When teachers leave the classroom, the predominant terms used are teacher attrition and teacher migration. Teacher attrition refers to teachers that leave not only their classrooms, but the teaching profession altogether, and teacher migration is defined as teachers that move from one organization to another organization (Ingersoll, 2002). Both forms of movement create an opening to be filled at the campus level, and thus, both are of concern to campus and district leaders. Teachers who leave their classrooms have various reasons for deciding to change careers or move locations.

### **Problem**

Teachers leaving the classroom has been of concern for several decades, as Terry (1997) commented that at that time over 40% of teachers would not remain in the field of teaching until retirement. That number has now increased significantly. To visualize how significant the impact of attrition is, Tran and Smith (2020) explained, "Two-thirds [of teachers] leave the profession before retirement age" (p. 85). Other studies cite that

within five years of teaching, up to 50% of teachers leave the profession (Brown & Wynn, 2009; Chambers Mack et al., 2019; den Brok et al., 2017; Harmsen et al., 2018). Morello (2014) reported that almost half a million teachers leave the classroom through either attrition or migration. In a more recent study conducted by the Charles Butt Foundation in 2022, 77% of the 1,291 Texas teachers surveyed had seriously considered leaving the teaching profession. Overall, teacher turnover rates continue to be an issue for schools.

### **Purpose of Study**

Teachers must feel their needs are being met effectively to choose to stay when outside factors are not of concern, such as a spouse's employment or a family member's health. Each school district is unique and has different characteristics to consider: demographics, geographic location, teachers' level of education, and years of experience of staff to name a few. For school district leadership to address such concerns, they must recognize there is no one-size-fits-all solution to teacher turnover.

Previous research offers ideas and strategies to implement to reduce teacher turnover as if each one will work no matter the context into which it is applied. The editors of the Journal of Teacher Education outlined the need for global collaboration to address teacher shortages internationally and offered four strategies to be considered: online professional development, extended pre-service preparation, financial incentives, and real-world experiences for pre-service educators (Williams et al., 2022). Shelton (2022) listed teacher wellness, personalized growth plans, positive school culture, and employee assistance programs as opportunities to help teachers feel supported and thus choose to stay in the classroom.

Teacher turnover rates continue to fluctuate pointing to the idea that teachers' perceived needs are not being met in some school districts but are in others. As previously addressed, various strategies have been suggested as solutions; however, teacher turnover rates continue to fluctuate even after suggested strategies are applied. In addressing how school districts manage teacher retention, how the methods are applied is as important as the specific strategies implemented. The purpose of this study is to provide a descriptive insight into how one public school district has addressed teacher turnover over 5 years.

### **Research Questions**

This case study will seek to answer the following research questions for the Texas school district addressed as their teacher turnover data decreased consistently over 5 years:

1. What strategies have been implemented to address teacher turnover rates in the selected school district?
2. How are teachers' needs met or not met by the district's chosen retention strategies?
3. Why have implemented strategies had a documented effect on teacher turnover rates for the school district?

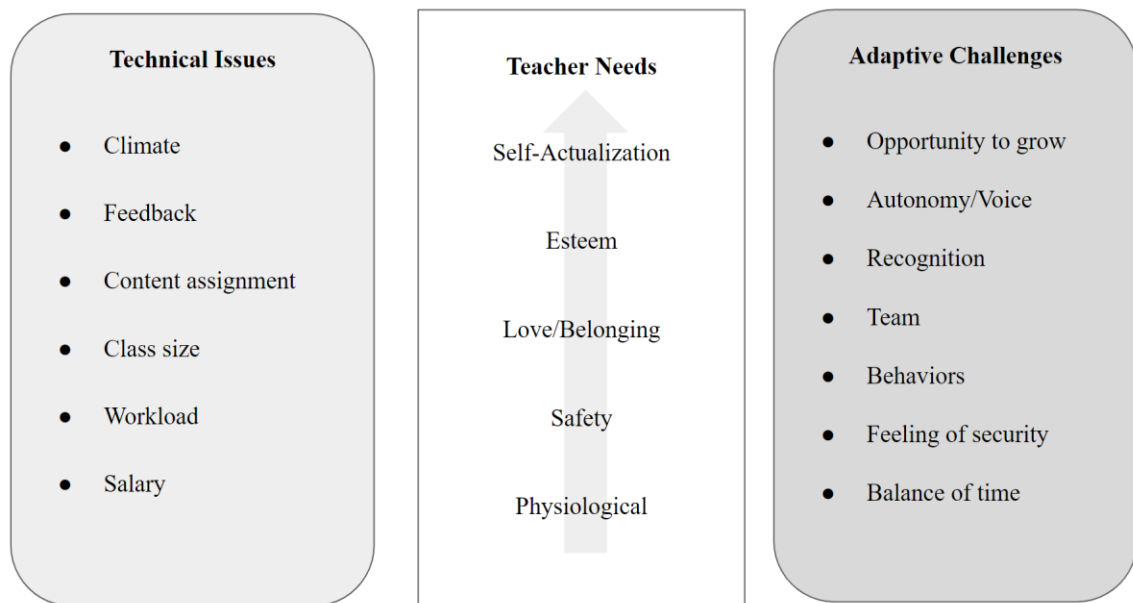
### **Conceptual Framework**

In 1943, Abraham Maslow outlined five main types of motivational needs: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization; he explained how these needs predict one's behavior source. Teachers have voiced their perceived needs through various studies previously conducted (Barnby, 2006; Brown & Wynn,

2009; De Stercke et al., 2015; Glazer, 2018; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Mason & Poyatos Matas, 2015). These perceived needs align with Maslow's types of motivational needs and can be further classified into two categories: technical issues and adaptive challenges, as addressed in Figure 1. Heifetz et al. (2009) explained the difference between technical issues and adaptive challenges; technical issues have "solutions that can be implemented by current know-how," and "adaptive challenges can only be addressed through changes in people's priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties" (p. 19). As outlined in Figure 1, examples of technical issues include salary, workload, job assignment, and feedback, and examples of adaptive challenges include balance of time, behavior, recognition, and opportunities to grow.

**Figure 1**

*Teacher Needs: Technical Issues and Adaptive Challenges*



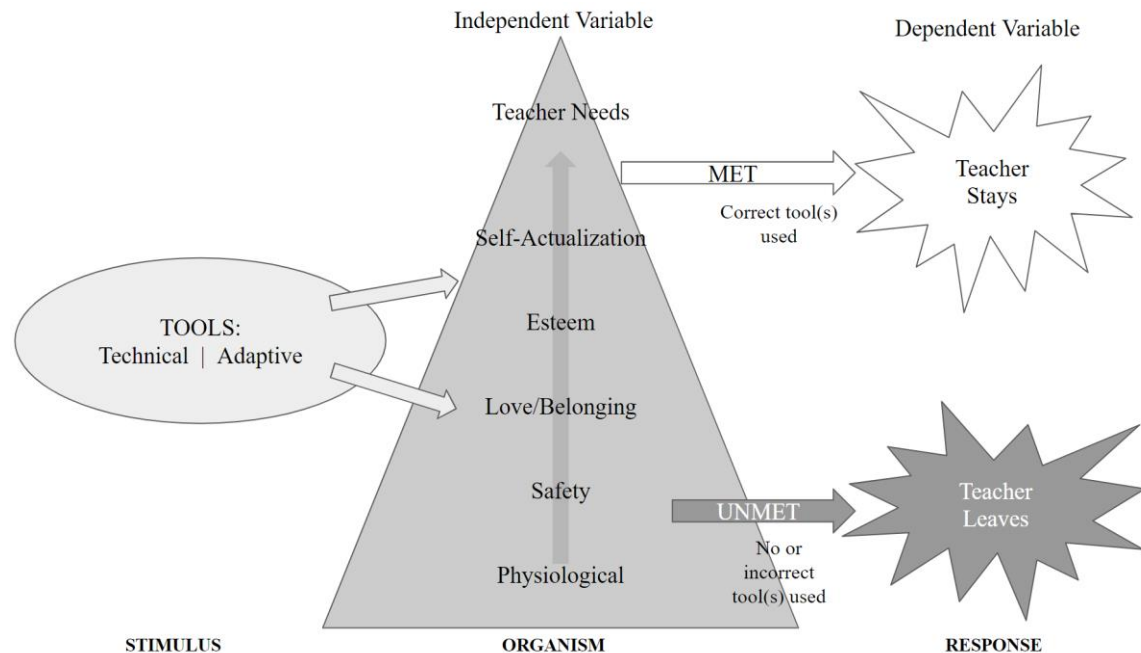
The literature reviewed indicated how teachers ultimately respond to perceived problems in conjunction with how their organizations provide support through various means. This process is similar to the stimulus, organism, response (SOR) theory (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974); their model focused on consumer behavior in a retail environment and was adapted from the Stimulus-Response theory. However, the premise relates to teachers in the field of education. Similar to the consumers of the SOR theory, school teachers' responses to perceived problems faced can be explained. The basis of this theory is that stimuli within the environment cause behavioral responses of people to approach or avoid something based on the evaluation of the situation per environmental cues that determine their behavior response (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs, a theory of behavior motivation, focused on how to help people achieve happiness and thus supports how teachers may be motivated to choose to stay or leave their current roles or the profession altogether. Meeting one's needs produces contentment as the situation is. Bridging Maslow's hierarchy of needs with the SOR theory, as pictured in Figure 2, creates a conceptual framework to understand the causes of teacher turnover and to find solutions. Within the SOR theory design, teachers and their needs represent the organism. When these needs are addressed with various strategies (stimuli) available to organizations, the outcomes (responses) are direct results of their needs being met or not. Technical issues can be addressed with either technical or adaptive solutions; however, adaptive challenges must be addressed with adaptive strategies, as technical strategies will only provide temporary resolution (Heifetz et al., 2009).



**Figure 2**

*Mindmap of Conceptual Framework*



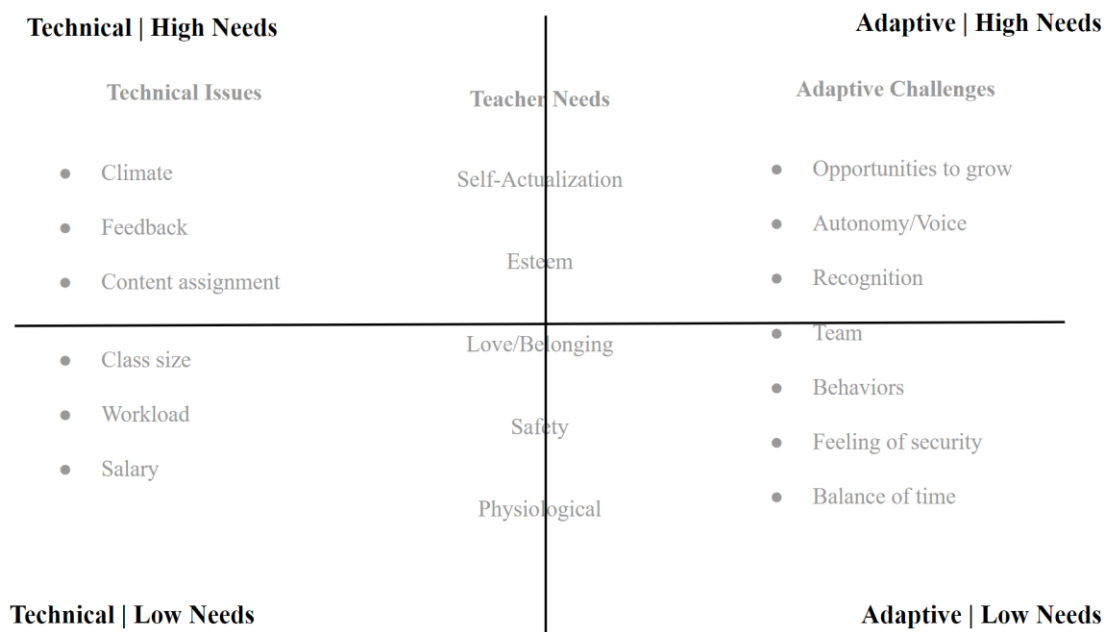
*Note.* Graphic model linking use of strategies (stimulus) on teacher needs (organism) per Maslow's hierarchy of needs and impact on teacher turnover (response)

To better visualize how teachers' perceived needs align with Maslow's hierarchy of needs within a technical/adaptive perspective, Figure 3 illustrates a quadrant of low technical needs, high technical needs, low adaptive needs, and high adaptive needs. When looking at the adaptive needs in the quadrant, the lower adaptive needs are personal concerns of teachers that are not within a school district's circle of control; however, the high adaptive needs quadrant includes adaptive challenges that could be addressed by district strategies through district and campus leadership. The high technical needs within the quadrant could be addressed through campus-level management, and the low technical needs are impacted by district-level decision-making associated with salary

schedules, calendars, and staffing patterns. In short, school district leadership has influence over the perceived teachers' needs within the low technical and high adaptive quadrants. Thus, it is hypothesized this is where the most effective strategies related to teacher retention may be found by school districts, and the more teacher needs are met, school districts can reduce their teacher turnover rates.

**Figure 3**

*Quadrant of Teachers' Perceived Needs*



*Note.* Visualization of alignment of teachers' perceived needs with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and categorized by technical issues and adaptive challenges

## Review of Literature

### *Teacher Needs*

Teachers list a myriad of reasons for leaving their campuses, their districts, or the profession altogether. When sorting the given reasons, two classifications emerge, technical issues and adaptive challenges. Technical issues are problems that "have known

solutions that can be implemented by current know-how;" they can be fixed rather quickly and addressed by someone holding the authority/knowledge to make the ultimate decision (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 19). This statement is not to minimize the weight some of these issues bring to bear. Other factors may complicate the issues at hand, but the bottom line is some solutions can be produced through structures and processes already in effect. Adaptive challenges are the opposite of technical issues as they are addressed through changes in behaviors and beliefs. These solutions are more difficult to acquire as they take time and create disequilibrium, and the process of attaining them can be uncomfortable for those involved (Heifetz et al., 2009). Adaptive challenges are to be addressed by the people who are closest to the challenge; they are not simply fixed by a person of authority issuing a directive.

Technical issues that teachers often cite as reasons for exiting the teaching profession include, but are not limited to, low salaries, class size, and overall workload (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Harmsen et al., 2018; Mason & Poyatos Matas, 2015). These issues align with Maslow's hierarchy of needs within the context of safety; teachers need to feel financially secure, physically safe, and mentally well (Eberhard et al., 2000; Gu & Day, 2013; Harmsen et al., 2018; Steiner & Woo, 2021). This list is not exhaustive; however, when reviewing literature these are three of the most frequently discussed technical issues of concern regarding teacher retention. As a technical issue, someone in power can solve these problems by exercising their authority; for example, a school district superintendent has the authority to allow a principal to hire an additional teacher to reduce class size. The school board has the power to adopt revisions to the annual budget to increase teacher salaries. Administrators have the leverage to deem tasks that

burden the teachers' workload as no longer needed and remove them from their assigned duties. These solutions are not simple due to other factors such as teacher shortages, funding cutbacks, and additional state/federal mandates; however, with technical issues the problem is identified and a solution can be named: hire teachers, pay more, reduce required tasks. Thus, the technical issues may provide low-hanging fruit in the context of addressing teacher retention.

When addressing teacher salary as a factor for not entering the profession, Barmby's (2006) study found the level of importance was third under student behavior and workload, and Brill and McCartney (2008) reiterated that salary is "more of a barrier to entry than a cause of attrition" (p. 761). However, when current teachers were asked about reasons for considering leaving the profession, salary ranked 11th out of 18 factors (Barmby, 2006). In short, once teachers are actively in the profession, other factors are of greater value to them when making personal choices to stay or leave. Eberhard et al. (2000) explained a teacher's salary is relatively no longer an issue (as it relates to deciding to stay in the profession) by the eighth year of teaching. Despite the perceived low importance of salary to teachers as a personal consideration to leave the profession, 91.5% of the same teachers surveyed by Barmby suggested that a better salary would persuade teachers to remain in the profession (Barmby, 2006, p. 12). This suggestion may be a result of teachers naturally attempting to meet the lowest levels of need on Maslow's hierarchy: physiological and safety; salary determines being able to provide for the basic needs of food and shelter while also establishing financial security. Garcia et al. (2022) clarified salary level is important for the retention of early career teachers, and Ryu and Jinnai (2021) found that increased salary can help retain capable teachers who make less

than tenured teachers; districts are unable to increase pay as a means to solely retain teachers on the higher end of the salary schedule as a 20% or higher increase would be needed to make a significant impact and that exceeds what the market can offer (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009).

Similar to salary, class size has been a cursory response to why teachers feel overwhelmed or troubled at work. In fact, "class size reduction was frequently suggested by teachers as a step to increase retention" (Brill & McCartney, 2008, p. 755). Kirby and Grissmer (1993) also explained that teachers perceived smaller class sizes would lower teacher turnover. However, when looking at a previous study conducted, it is not the class sizes themselves that teachers referred to as the issue for leaving their campuses or the profession altogether (Garcia et al., 2022). This clarifies that although smaller class sizes would be preferred, other issues are more pertinent to a teacher's decision to leave the field. In the context of larger class sizes, it is the workload generated due to the increase of students that negatively impacts teachers' abilities to cope with all the associated demands of teaching (Eberhard et al., 2000; Terry, 1997).

Workload is the most frequently cited reason for teacher attrition (Barmby, 2006). The workload affiliated with teaching has increased over time with a growing emphasis on performance and overall test results (Brill & McCartney, 2008). When asked about their workloads, teachers cite paperwork, administrative tasks, and duties other than teaching as the burdensome requirements that intensify their workloads and create dissatisfaction with teaching (Beymer et al., 2022; Eberhard et al., 2000; Mason & Poyatos Matas, 2015). Brill and McCartney (2008) stated, "It is difficult to say whether a guaranteed increase in salary to accompany an increase in workload could have an effect

in increasing teacher satisfaction" (p. 756). This shows the need to address the amount of work being required of teachers. Steiner and Woo (2021) highlighted that perceived working conditions are highly correlated with well-being and the decision to leave the current job. Workload impacts teachers' need for safety and esteem; when the workload is too much to bear, one may fear punishment for not producing per expectations which then intensifies the feelings of inadequacy. As Maslow (1943) stated, when the need for esteem is satisfied, it "leads to feelings of self-confidence, worth...adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world" (p. 382). When one feels unnecessary or inadequate, stress and negative psychological responses incur. In addressing perceptions, Harmsen et al. (2018) offered that "workload reduction decreases the level of perceived high psychological demands" (p. 638). Reduction of tasks could lighten the workload and potentially improve the psychological demands that affect teachers' well-being and ultimately their employment decisions.

Educators and non-educators can name and see these tangible, visual problems. As more studies are conducted on teacher turnover, more authors acknowledge that while these are factors, the value/importance given to these reasons is weakening (Baroudi et al., 2022; Garcia et al., 2022). Reasons such as stress, social perceptions, and dissatisfaction are increasingly emphasized. The technical issues are compounded by the effects that are manifested when needs, in general, are not addressed or are addressed with temporary solutions. Teachers often share concerns regarding the overwhelming stress levels, the ever-growing dissatisfaction related to teaching, and the negative social perceptions they must navigate (Alexander et al., 2020; Baroudi et al., 2022; Chambers Mack et al., 2019; Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014).

Maslow's theory of needs suggested that "unmet needs occupy the mind, preventing the pursuit" of attaining other needs (West, 2022, para. 30). The feeling of being stuck and unable to progress exacerbates the feeling of stress and develops into an overarching feeling of dissatisfaction with current circumstances. Stress is often developed from the unmet needs of the lower, or externally focused, end of the hierarchy, physiological and safety, whereas, dissatisfaction is created due to unmet needs in the higher, or internally focused, ranges of the hierarchy, long/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (West, 2022).

Dissatisfaction is a broad term that encompasses several factors. Baroudi et al. (2022) defined job satisfaction as one's perception of their relationship to and the actual working environment; teachers experience less stress the more significant the satisfaction they have in their working environments. To acquire satisfaction, individuals desire a sense of accomplishment, acknowledgment for what they have done, meaningful work, a chance to take responsibility, and opportunities for advancement; without these, employees are dissatisfied at varying levels (Baroudi et al., 2022). As Eberhard et al. (2000) explained, if one's experience falls "below a critical level of what is necessary for job satisfaction," attrition is a consequence (p. 19). Per this understanding, attrition is most likely to transpire in the early years of teachers' careers when they compare their harrowing experiences to their ideal expectations (Kirby & Grissmer, 1993). Harmsen et al. (2018) stated, "Beginning teachers experiencing discontent are 1.61 times more likely to leave...further showing that beginning teachers' dissatisfaction with their job is related to actual attrition" (pp. 637-638). Knowing this information can allow leadership to

address these issues appropriately to increase the number of beginning teachers choosing to stay in the classroom.

Other factors of dissatisfaction that impact teacher turnover rates at differing intensities include low compensation, demanding working conditions, lack of administrative support, student discipline challenges, and lack of autonomy (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Ingersoll, 2001; Steiner & Woo, 2021). When these concerns are not addressed, the outcome is disappointment and growing dissatisfaction; however, when extrinsic job factors were addressed, "intrinsic factors had a stronger effect on motivation" (Baroudi et al., 2022, p. 130). Thus, there is hope and opportunity to curb the teacher turnover rates by providing mechanisms for teachers to be supported by their administrators, have a voice in decision-making, and enjoy their working environments (Ingersoll, 2001).

Adaptive challenges are tricky because they are perceived differently by the stakeholders involved as they are related to one's mindset: values, attitudes, and behaviors (Burgess, 2019). The "adaptive challenges are difficult because their solutions require people to change their ways" (Heifetz et al., 2009). To exacerbate the problem, when dealing with adaptive challenges, the person or group with the problem ultimately has to do the work to address it or actively participate in the collaboration toward a solution. Adaptive challenges related to teacher turnover include personal concerns, student behaviors, and leadership.

Personal concerns are connected to topics such as "pregnancy, child-rearing, health problems, and family moves," all of which are common motives in all schools and are reported to account for 39% of teacher turnover (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 522). A study



conducted by Stinebrickner (2002) explained that "a large amount of teacher attrition is directly related to changes in teachers' family situations" (p. 212). The same study found that female teachers with a newborn are "7.83 times as likely to leave the workforce" than those without a newborn, and married teachers are almost two times as likely as their unmarried counterparts to leave the workforce (Stinebrickner, 2002, p. 208). School district leadership has no control over teachers' personal concerns such as changes in family situations; thus, needs such as these are found in the low adaptive quadrant and outside of the school district's direct control.

Another causal factor associated with teacher turnover is student behavior. Harmsen et al. (2018) explained that student misbehavior is perceived as one of the most stressful work demands, especially for beginning teachers. Due to the stress of challenging student behaviors, Gu and Day (2013) shared that "more than a fifth [of participating teachers] said they had developed mental health problems as a result," and almost 40% of the total 1,000 teachers surveyed had contemplated exiting the field of education (pp. 23-24). Student behaviors are listed to be one of the top three reasons teachers attrite in multiple studies (Barmby, 2006; Brill & McCartney, 2008; Eberhard et al., 2000). When looking at how student behavior affects the different demographics of teachers, first-year teachers are reported to be more than three times as likely to leave the profession as a result of problematic student behaviors (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). As safety is a basic need to be met, when it is not met, teachers' personal concerns for themselves and the students increase, developing higher levels of stress. The discord in the classroom caused by disruptive behaviors intensifies the lack of fulfillment of the need for esteem, or respect and confidence, needed by classroom teachers to feel satisfied with their work.

Kukla-Acevedo (2009) shared that "when principals maintain direct involvement in dealing with disruptive and difficult students" teachers' overall job satisfaction improves (p. 444). Student behaviors are also found in the low adaptive quadrant, and like personal teacher concerns, are outside of the school district's direct control as student behavior would be more influenced by campus-level decision-making (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Steiner & Woo, 2021).

Leadership also referred to as school administration within this context, is "the most salient dimension of working conditions" for teachers (Ladd, 2011, p. 235). Dissatisfaction with the campus principal was a consistent response regarding teachers' reasoning to leave (Brown & Wynn, 2009). As Johnson et al. (2004) reported, beginning teachers make decisions to leave their schools based on the support they received in serving their students, and Brown and Wynn (2009) upheld this in their study that said, "Lower levels of teacher attrition and migration have consistently been found in schools with more administrative support for teachers" and decisions to remain are most influenced by the campus principal's leadership and the campus climate (p. 42). Per the research collected, leadership's critical qualities of favorable working conditions include schoolwide approaches to student discipline, induction programs and mentoring, a clear school mission, and an organizational culture of collaboration (Brown & Wynn, 2009; Johnson et al., 2004; Ladd, 2011). In addition to favorable working conditions, school administrators must be intentional in integrating new teachers "into the culture, climate, and values of the school" (Eberhard et al., 2000, p. 20). If leadership provides opportunities for teachers to ask questions, seek guidance, and participate in organizational decision-making, such schools will be more attractive options for

employment (Brown & Wynn, 2009; Johnson et al., 2004; Ladd, 2011). School district leadership determines campus-level leadership both through the modeling of leadership practices and through the hiring of strong campus leaders.

### ***The Strategies***

To address critical needs, such as increasing teacher turnover rates, quick solutions are desired and implemented to the best of a school's abilities. However, trying to apply technical solutions to adaptive challenges results in frustration and failure. A simple assessment to verify if a problem is technical or adaptive is to determine if “the problem persists even after a series of attempted technical fixes;” if so, it is an adaptive challenge needing to be addressed differently (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 70). For technical issues, although they “may be very complex and critically important...they have known solutions that can be implemented by current know-how;” thus, they require minimal collaboration on what is needed as current organizational procedures and protocols can be enacted to initiate resolution (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 19). After proper identification of needs as technical or adaptive has occurred, then the most appropriate strategies can be determined and utilized to meet the need.

In looking from the balcony, as Heifetz et al. (2009) recommended, at the categorized and aligned list of teachers’ perceived needs through the lens of the reviewed literature, the lower needs, both technical and adaptive, are most impacted by teachers’ perceived stress. The listed low technical needs are external factors and the listed low adaptive needs are internal factors. Thus, if districts focused on the utilization of strategies that reduce perceived stress, then teacher retention may increase as stress directly impacts teachers’ decisions to stay in the classroom and profession. On the

higher end of the listed perceived needs, both the technical and adaptive needs cause teacher dissatisfaction that results in potential teacher turnover; however, all of these perceived teacher needs are external factors that impact teachers internally. When analyzing the different perceived needs within the context of the reviewed literature, two main pathways towards improvement are suggested: the effort to alleviate the lower-level needs and culture-building for the higher-level needs.

Per the list of perceived teachers' needs, the technical needs of focus from the literature review include salary, class size, workload, feedback, and climate. As illustrated in Figure 3, these perceived technical needs can be further categorized into low and high needs as they align with Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Note that the term "low" does not connote a diminished value of the need itself; it simply refers to the level in which it aligns with Maslow's hierarchy, building upwards from physiological to safety, love/belonging, esteem, and arriving at self-actualization.

Starting with the lower level of technical issues, salary is the initial need as it is how one can provide for shelter and food for oneself and one's family. As outlined previously, simply paying more to teachers does not satisfy the perceived need for increased earnings. However, as Alexander et al. (2020) shared, "salary incentives, in and of themselves, may only be part of the strategy" to improve teachers' perceptions of their career choice (p. 9). Studies of several states within the United States demonstrated that once performance pay incentives were advertised, teacher turnover rates increased and, at varying degrees, plateaued or improved over time (Hill & Jones, 2020; Jones, 2013).

In conjunction with teacher salaries, their workloads are also included as technical needs. The perceived workload consists of several factors, including class size, that can

exacerbate the stress felt by teachers and thus cause feelings of discontentment that lead to intentions of quitting. To help mediate the induced stress from the multiple tasks and requirements of serving as a teacher, Eberhard et al. (2000) recommended providing teachers with specific stress-busting strategies. The practice of equipping teachers with strategies to combat stress needs to begin with preservice teachers, so they are prepared to identify stressors and then utilize effective strategies to overcome the stress instead of feeling overwhelmed and helpless (De Stercke et al., 2015; McLaurin et al., 2009).

In addition to being able to name and combat specific and known stresses, such as but not limited to time management, paperwork, and meetings, the welcoming of the new teacher to the campus must be done by all staff members to integrate them into the community and culture of the school (Coyle, 2018; De Stercke et al., 2015; Eberhard et al., 2000; Gasner, 1995). When required tasks are not able to be reduced, De Stercke et al. (2015) outlined the use of mindfulness training to foster teacher well-being. As teachers can process their own emotions, they also model for students how to self-regulate their emotions. Steiner and Woo (2021) shared strategies for consideration, such as providing teachers with short breaks, assisting teachers with finding appropriate childcare services, and communicating systematically with staff. Hence, they are aware of what can be accessible for mental health support and to collect data to continue building more comprehensive support. Practicing these strategies is essential as “satisfied teachers are less susceptible to stress and burnout,” thus maintaining higher percentages of teacher retention (Toropova et al., 2020, p. 71). In the end, teachers' perceived stress is born out of the imbalance of negative emotions and provided resources (Cupit, 2019). Thus, the support, including both tangible and intangible resources, provided by campus

administrators is crucial; as Kukla-Acevedo (2009) reported, teacher turnover is "reduced by 16.9% for every standard deviation increase in perceived support from the school's administrative staff" (p. 448).

Support levels can vary and be provided by various leadership roles within a campus community. A common method to provide direct support to teachers, especially new-to-the-field teachers, is through induction programs and mentoring. For clarification purposes, simply having a mentor structure meets the compliance of the need and is a technical strategy; however, implementing a well-organized program and personal mentoring interactions are adaptive and more effective. As Brill and McCartney (2008) explained, mentoring programs with a high organization of purposeful activities, meaningful communication, and well-planned schedules to allow for training and observations demonstrated the most consistently successful outcomes, including teacher retention. Research conducted in Montana showed that "97% of mentored teachers were active in the profession one year after participating in the program as compared to 71.5% of non-mentored teachers" (Brill & McCartney, 2008, p. 764).

Again, just having an induction or mentoring program is not what generates positive outcomes; it is the opportunities provided for novice teachers to observe mentor teachers modeling instructional practices and structuring guidance-oriented interactions between beginning teachers and their experienced mentors that increase the likelihood of teachers remaining in the classroom (De Stercke et al., 2015; Eberhard et al., 2000; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). In regards to supporting new teachers, it is also contingent upon other teachers within the building, in addition to assigned mentors, to embrace and offer guidance to beginning teachers in learning the

culture of the campus as they become more acclimated and can weather seasons of challenging circumstances and resulting stress (Casely-Hayford et al., 2022; Johnson et al., 2004). Paris (2013) and Johnson et al. (2004) warned that inadequate mentoring, including insufficient time available to conduct needed mentoring activities such as meetings to discuss current challenges and relationship-building opportunities, lack of trained mentors to lead, and thus the overuse of others that have demonstrated success in the past, and the danger of overall fatigue of both mentors and mentees due to lack of administrative support would cause frustration and ultimately the decision to leave the classroom. Eberhard et al. (2000) stressed the importance of making mentoring a priority due to its potential impact and ripple effect in keeping and developing high-quality teachers, increasing student achievement, and improving financial outcomes due to the stability of teachers remaining in the classroom.

As support structures positively impact teachers, the support quality must also "measure up" to meet the teachers' perceived adaptive needs. To address adaptive issues, one must step out on the balcony, as Heifetz et al. (2009) described, to "gain a clearer view of your company's structures, culture, and defaults (its habitual ways of responding to problems)" (p. 49). The resources and support provided through relationships, positive working culture, and strong adaptive leadership are crucial elements in developing systems that emphasize effective teacher retention.

Like the genuine relationships established with students, teachers benefit from fostering cooperative relationships with their peer teachers. When teachers feel they can count on their teammates for support, they do not want to disappoint their colleagues, and as a result, teachers demonstrate a more profound commitment to shared goals, the

campus staff, and to teaching overall; however, the lack of cohesion within the team members breeds dissatisfaction and ultimately creates the desire to leave; to increase teacher retention, school leaders must provide opportunities for high levels of teacher collaboration (Chambers Mack et al., 2019; Nguyen, 2021). In doing so, teachers see overlapping relationships that can be leveraged as a resource to better understand and navigate the school context in a supportive and safe manner, creating additional reasons to remain teaching where they are (Casely-Hayford et al., 2022).

As leaders support teachers' collaboration, they facilitate trust-building opportunities and create school working conditions that build teachers' efficacy, both of self and as a collective. Effective campus leadership is a key element in providing positive, supportive campus environments that meet the adaptive needs of teachers by providing the safety desired to be vulnerable, a sense of belonging as all voices have the opportunity to contribute, and a place where teachers are esteemed and recognized for their efforts and excellence. When working within these standards and with supportive leadership, teachers are more inclined to stay and continue to grow and fulfill their desire to do meaningful work (Nguyen, 2021). Overall, as Toropova et al. (2020) summarized, the social aspect of one's working conditions is more valuable than materialistic resources and facilities.

Working conditions are initiated through the physical working environment via provided support and are continually facilitated through the established relationships and meaningful work accomplished. The feeling of success when accomplishing meaningful tasks drives motivation and fulfills many teachers' need for self-actualization (Ryu & Jinnai, 2021). Effective leadership can enhance motivation through increasing connection



to intrinsic factors such as loyalty and commitment when teachers can have ownership in the work through collaboration, shared voice, and autonomy (Baroudi et al., 2022; Brill & McCartney, 2008; Eberhard et al., 2000). Toropova et al. (2020) explained, "Schools with higher levels of leadership support, better student discipline, and higher degrees of autonomy and decision-making opportunities had lower rates of teacher turnover," (p. 75). Terry (1997) and Glazer (2018) reported teachers in a low-stress group felt they had more control over their work and thus were more apt to stay in the classroom due to the autonomy provided to them by leadership and the resulting self-efficacy that was developed. To address the lower technical needs that produce stress, a factor for considering attrition or migration by teachers, Klassen and Chiu (2011) explained stress can be mediated through one's sense of self-efficacy. According to Gu and Day (2013), self-efficacy is strengthened by resilience; resilience is not fixed as it can be developed and is impacted by one's social working environment, specifically the support provided by both colleagues and leaders, intermixed with one's internal strengths. Thus, team spirit, or a positive working culture, is "an essential condition to survive and thrive in a challenging workplace" (Gu & Day, 2013, p. 29). Grissom et al. (2021) confirmed that effective leadership provides positive teacher working conditions and significantly decreases the turnover of effective teachers.

Leadership, especially the role of the campus principal, is complex and definitively shapes teachers' attitudes about teaching, so the expectations and responsibilities to be carried out need to be clear to be successful and maintain teacher retention (Terry, 1997; Weiss, 1999). Such responsibilities include creating, shaping, and transforming school cultures into collaborative, secure working environments through

support and recognition that, in effect, decreases stress and encourages teachers to maintain in the profession (Baroudi et al., 2022; Eberhard et al., 2000; Gu & Day, 2013). With leadership being a prime factor associated with work satisfaction, and thus intentions to remain or leave, it is vital to also understand that “job satisfaction results from the difference between expectation and reality of the job and the extent to which a job fulfills individual needs and matches individual values” (Cupit, 2019, p. 23). When teachers, especially novice teachers, are told upfront what to expect in their roles, the reality they experience will not be as surprising when their perceived notions of what teaching is do not come to fruition; by knowing in advance what to expect, teachers have an opportunity to determine if this profession aligns with their core values and will sufficiently fulfill their needs. Despite titles of leadership, such as the title principal, remaining reasonably constant among various schools, the effectiveness of each campus leader, or principal, varies per their experience, strengths, and values. In short, district leaders must be vigilant in hiring and placing the most fitting leaders in campus leadership roles to provide effective support, develop a positive campus culture, and assist teachers in meeting their needs to improve teacher turnover because the “dominant factor, by far, is the quality of school leadership” (Ladd, 2011, p. 256).

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

To answer the research questions, a case study design was adopted to "analyze contextual conditions in relation to the 'case'" (Yin, 2009, p. 46). Yin (2009) continued, "The single case can represent a significant contribution to knowledge and theory building" (p. 47). The purpose of this study is to provide in-depth understanding for other

school district leaders to understand how one Texas school district decreased its teacher turnover rates in 5 years.

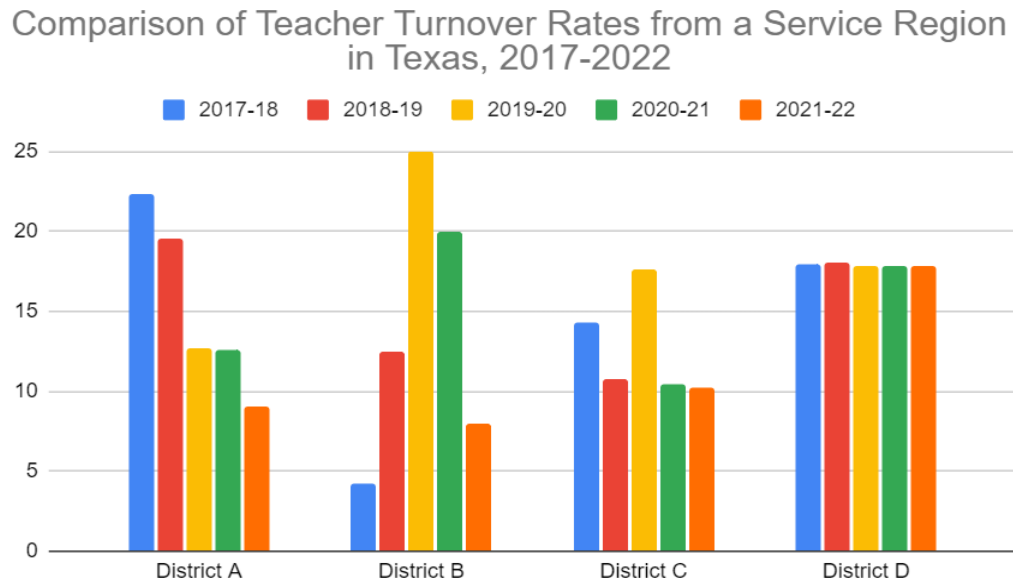
The qualitative research methods used included a review of public-facing artifacts on the district website, observations of daily district operations when visiting the district for events and interviews, as well as the interviews conducted with district-level leaders, campus administrators, and teachers. These methods were used to identify the strategies used by the district and examine if and how the strategies targeted specific teacher needs.

### **Case Selection**

The school district to be used in this study is a public school district within one of the 20 service areas of Texas. The district selected was chosen due to its decreasing teacher turnover rates over 5 years. Teacher turnover rate data were obtained from the Texas Performance Reporting System (TPRS) between 2017-2018 and 2021-2022. In Figure 4, the district of focus is labeled as District A, and the other three districts represent the only other districts in the same service area that have teacher turnover rates that decreased for 3 to 5 years (Districts B and C) or were stable (District D). The other districts within the same service center area had no consistent trends in their teacher turnover rates over the 5 years.

**Figure 4**

*Comparison of Districts: Teacher Turnover Rates*



*Note.* Data represented in Figure 4 was collected from the Texas Performance Reporting System for the districts

### **Data Collection**

To better understand the district and its context, data about District A were downloaded from state data repositories and compiled to better understand the school district's characteristics and context of operation as can be viewed in Table 1. Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR) data included student demographics, teacher demographics, and information related to years of experience (salary, in-district, leadership). The data assisted in developing a clearer picture of factors that might influence teacher turnover trends. This information subsequently informed the interpretation of interview data.

**Table 1***District A Demographic Data, 2017-2022*

|                          | 2017-2018 | 2018-2019 | 2019-2020 | 2020-2021 | 2021-2022 | <i>SD</i> |
|--------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Student enrollment       | 5797      | 5818      | 5899      | 5816      | 5999      | 84.18     |
| % African American       | 12.6      | 12.4      | 12.8      | 13        | 13.1      | 0.29      |
| % Hispanic               | 56.5      | 56.4      | 55.6      | 56.4      | 56.6      | 0.40      |
| % White                  | 28.6      | 28.9      | 29.2      | 28        | 27.5      | 0.69      |
| % Other                  | 2.3       | 2.2       | 2.5       | 2.6       | 2.9       | 0.27      |
| % Eco Dis                | 70.7      | 73.1      | 69.5      | 63.5      | 100       | 14.22     |
| % of BIL/ESL Students    | 12.6      | 14.5      | 15.2      | 14.2      | 16.1      | 1.30      |
| % of SPED Students       | 10.3      | 10.3      | 11        | 11.2      | 11.8      | 0.64      |
| Total Staff              | 704       | 708       | 726.4     | 752.6     | 772.4     | 29.35     |
| Teachers                 | 380       | 382       | 390       | 397       | 428       | 19.44     |
| % African American       | 4.2       | 3.7       | 3.6       | 3.8       | 4.2       | 0.28      |
| % Hispanic               | 9.7       | 10.3      | 12.6      | 13.8      | 14.4      | 2.09      |
| % White                  | 84.5      | 84.7      | 82.3      | 80.2      | 79.3      | 2.45      |
| % Other                  | 1.6       | 1.3       | 1.5       | 2.3       | 2.2       | 0.44      |
| Principal Exp with ISD   | 7 years   | 6.9 years | 8.6 years | 8.7 years | 7.2 years | 22.87     |
| Beginning Teacher Salary | \$43,846  | \$45,181  | \$50,087  | \$51,826  | \$49,648  | 3422.10   |
| Average Teacher Salary   | \$51,062  | \$52,510  | \$56,991  | \$58,402  | \$58,744  | 3528.29   |
| % Teacher Turnover Rate  | 22.3      | 19.6      | 12.7      | 12.6      | 9.1       | 5.48      |

*Note.* Demographic data were obtained from the Texas Performance Reporting System (TPRS) for District A for the years 2017-2022

An optional pre-interview survey (see Appendix B) was paired with the informed consent form and sent to district personnel and additional participants were recruited via snowball sampling. Interviews were conducted with district personnel, including the assistant superintendent, a director of instructional programs, two campus principals, and three teachers who were believed to have information regarding the district implementation of strategies used to reduce teacher turnover rates (see Table 2). The objective of the interviews was to identify the specific strategies utilized and why these strategies were selected. Three interview protocols were used: one for the district-level personnel, one for campus administrators, and another for the classroom teachers as each participant had different perspectives of the implemented district strategies. Interviews

with district-level personnel were used to understand the district's procedures and methods used to address teacher retention and turnover. Campus personnel interviews focused on teachers' perceptions of the implemented strategies.

**Table 2**

*District A Personnel Interviewed*

| Identifier Assigned | Role                               | Number of Years in District A |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| DA1                 | Assistant Superintendent           | 20+                           |
| DA2                 | Director of Instruction            | 20+                           |
| CA1                 | Campus Principal, Secondary Level  | 15+                           |
| CA2                 | Campus Principal, Elementary Level | 20+                           |
| T1                  | Secondary Level Teacher            | <5                            |
| T2                  | Secondary Level Teacher            | 5 to 10                       |
| T3                  | Elementary Level Teacher           | 15+                           |

The interviews were recorded and lasted about 30 minutes. Each interview was open-ended, asking the following main questions:

- From your perspective, how would you describe your district's teacher turnover rates for the past 5 years?
- From your perspective, describe how your school district addresses teacher retention.
- What feedback from teachers do you receive about strategies used related to teacher retention?

Probing questions were utilized to clarify and encourage interviewees to elaborate/expand on their initial answers; such questions are listed in Appendix A. Interviews were recorded, and after each interview, the audio file was transcribed and then uploaded into the ATLAS.ti software for coding.

## **Data Analysis**

In addition to conducting interviews with personnel, artifacts from District A's website were collected to review district goals, district improvement plan strategies, and public-facing information. To experience the district first-hand, observations were made on three occasions: when visiting District A for a school board meeting, conducting interviews, and attending a sports event. The data analysis focused on determining if and how the school district addressed specific teachers' needs, how the teachers' perceived needs were met or not met, and perceptions regarding how this affected district turnover rates.

A codebook (see Table 3) was used in the ATLAS.ti software to label quotes from transcribed interviews, collected artifacts, and memoized observations. These documents were coded for themes represented in the interview questions and conceptual framework (i.e., types of needs/strategies—technical or adaptive). Through the coding process, a few codes were added to the initial codebook as a result of these additional themes being repeated by several interviewees; these included codes about family/community connection, school pride, grit, visibility, and wellness.

**Table 3***Codebook Codes by Quadrant*

| <b>Technical High</b> |                             | <b>Adaptive High</b> |                                    |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|
| Needs                 |                             | Needs                |                                    |
| TH 1                  | Content assignment          | AH 1                 | Recognition                        |
| TH 2                  | Feedback                    | AH 2                 | Voice/autonomy                     |
| TH 3                  | Climate                     | AH 3                 | Opportunities to grow              |
| Strategies            |                             | Strategies           |                                    |
| FDBK 1                | Written feedback            | REC 1                | Recognition-not financial          |
| FDBK 2                | Verbal feedback             | REC 2                | Recognition-district level         |
| FDBK 3                | Formal feedback             | REC 3                | Recognition-campus level           |
| FDBK 4                | Informal feedback           | AUV                  | Teacher voice                      |
| CL 1                  | Positive climate            | PD                   | Professional development           |
| CL 2                  | Negative climate            |                      |                                    |
| <b>Technical Low</b>  |                             | <b>Adaptive Low</b>  |                                    |
| Needs                 |                             | Needs                |                                    |
| TL 1                  | Salary                      | AL 1                 | Balance of time                    |
| TL 2                  | Workload                    | AL 2                 | Feeling of security                |
| TL 3                  | Class size                  | AL 3                 | Behaviors                          |
| Strategies            |                             | Strategies           |                                    |
| Pay 1                 | Increased salary            | SCH                  | Flexible schedule                  |
| Pay 2                 | Incentives - financial      | BEH 1                | Team events                        |
| WKLD 1                | Teacher preps               | BEH 2                | Campus events                      |
| WKLD 2                | Extracurricular assignments | BEH 3                | Teammate behaviors                 |
| WKLD 3                | Certification               | BEH 4                | Leader behaviors                   |
| WKLD 4                | Resources available         | SUP                  | Support                            |
| WKLD 5                | Imbalance of student groups | <i>VIS</i>           | <i>Visibility</i>                  |
| Staff 1               | Hiring additional staff     | <i>WELL</i>          | <i>Wellness</i>                    |
|                       |                             | <i>PRIDE</i>         | <i>School pride</i>                |
|                       |                             | <i>GRIT</i>          | <i>Determination in hardship</i>   |
|                       |                             | <i>FCOM</i>          | <i>Family/Community connection</i> |

*Note.* Italicized codes were added to the codebook after initial coding had begun

Through the coding process, a codebook was utilized to label perceived teachers' needs as outlined in Figure 1, and strategies were implemented to address the identified needs. The needs and strategies were organized into the quadrants of the framework as previously illustrated in Figure 3: technical low, technical high, adaptive low, and adaptive high. Using the ATLAS.ti software, the codes were then analyzed based on the



groundedness, or frequency, of each code and were sorted in order based on the most grounded codes as illustrated in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Top 25% Codes Used Organized in the Order of Frequency Used*

| <b>Code</b>         | <b>Need / Strategy</b> | <b>Groundedness</b> | <b>Quadrant</b> |
|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Feeling of security | Need                   | 102                 | Adaptive Low    |
| Behaviors           | Need                   | 90                  | Adaptive Low    |
| Esteem              | Need                   | 87                  | Technical High  |
| Love/Belonging      | Need                   | 83                  | Adaptive High   |
| Climate             | Need                   | 78                  | Technical High  |
| Workload            | Need                   | 68                  | Technical Low   |
| Safety              | Need                   | 67                  | Adaptive Low    |
| Feedback            | Need                   | 57                  | Technical High  |
| Leader behavior     | Strategy               | 125                 | Adaptive Low    |
| Support             | Strategy               | 120                 | Adaptive Low    |
| Positive climate    | Strategy               | 63                  | Technical High  |
| Autonomy/Voice      | Strategy               | 58                  | Adaptive High   |
| Informal feedback   | Strategy               | 56                  | Technical High  |

*Note.* The top 25% was determined by sorting codes with the most groundedness (frequency) in ATLAS.ti; sorted by need and strategy

Then the data were analyzed using the co-occurrence coefficient to determine the strength of the relation between the need and strategy codes (ATLAS.ti, 2023). This data are shown in Table 5. The higher c-coefficient values are shaded darker to indicate the greater the relation between the two codes.

**Table 5***Co-occurrence of the Top 25% of Need and Strategy Codes*

| NEEDS                                | STRATEGIES               |       |                           |       |                           |       |                               |       |                   |       |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------|---------------------------|-------|---------------------------|-------|-------------------------------|-------|-------------------|-------|
|                                      | Autonomy/ Voice<br>Gr=58 |       | Leader Behavior<br>Gr=125 |       | Positive Climate<br>Gr=63 |       | Informal<br>Feedback<br>Gr=56 |       | Support<br>Gr=120 |       |
|                                      | count                    | coeff | count                     | coeff | count                     | coeff | count                         | coeff | count             | coeff |
| <b>Feeling of Security</b><br>Gr=102 | 30                       | 0.23  | 56                        | 0.33  | 34                        | 0.26  | 33                            | 0.26  | 61                | 0.38  |
| <b>Behaviors</b><br>Gr=90            | 19                       | 0.15  | 41                        | 0.24  | 30                        | 0.24  | 23                            | 0.19  | 46                | 0.28  |
| <b>Esteem</b><br>Gr=87               | 26                       | 0.22  | 41                        | 0.24  | 29                        | 0.24  | 20                            | 0.16  | 42                | 0.25  |
| <b>Love/Belonging</b><br>Gr=83       | 12                       | 0.09  | 30                        | 0.17  | 34                        | 0.30  | 11                            | 0.09  | 34                | 0.20  |
| <b>Safety</b><br>Gr=67               | 20                       | 0.19  | 31                        | 0.19  | 26                        | 0.25  | 12                            | 0.11  | 42                | 0.29  |
| <b>Feedback</b><br>Gr=57             | 24                       | 0.26  | 38                        | 0.26  | 13                        | 0.12  | 30                            | 0.36  | 35                | 0.25  |
| <b>Climate</b><br>Gr=78              | 25                       | 0.23  | 48                        | 0.31  | 38                        | 0.37  | 29                            | 0.28  | 39                | 0.25  |
| <b>Workload</b><br>Gr=68             | 18                       | 0.17  | 23                        | 0.14  | 16                        | 0.14  | 28                            | 0.29  | 35                | 0.23  |

*Note.* “Gr” is the groundedness, or frequency, of code; the range of the c-coefficient values is 0 to 1

A normalized code-document analysis process was utilized as the number of quotations in each document coded varied in length and number of quotations. To normalize the data, the largest quotation count for a single code is then divided by the number of codes for each of the other codes to determine the adjustment factor; then the original count for each code is multiplied by the determined factor to calculate the normalized, or adjusted, value. Normalization of data provides "relative rather than absolute frequencies" as "absolute frequencies are not a valid measure for comparison" due to the differences in length (ATLAS.ti, 2023). This normalized code-document analysis process was conducted for the perceived teachers' needs by quadrant and source/interviewee type (Table 6), to review the strategies implemented by quadrant and source/interviewee type (Table 7), and the adaptive low strategies by interviewee type to

determine which were most impactful (Table 8). Using a heat-map visualization the findings are emphasized by darker shading showing more relation and the lighter colors showing less relation between the quadrant and source/interviewee type.

## **Findings**

### **Context**

District A's community is located approximately 30 miles outside of a major Texas metroplex area; it was established in the 19th century after the railroad established a terminal in the area. According to the World Population Review website, the number of residents totals about 20,000, and the growth is estimated to continue with a 5% annual growth rate to reach about 30,000 residents within 10 years. Approximately 85% of the population is equally Hispanic and White, with the remaining 15% of the population composed of mostly African Americans with a few other ethnic backgrounds represented as well.

The school district's student demographic data (Table 1) reflect more than half of the student population is Hispanic, almost a third White, and the remaining student population is composed of African American and other backgrounds. The student demographic data have remained stable over the past 5 years. The stability of data reiterates there are no changes in population or other contextual factors as observed in Table 1 that would cause a decrease in teacher turnover rates.

District A serves about 6,000 students across multiple campuses: eight campuses serving early childhood through elementary-aged students, two campuses serving students in sixth through eighth grades, and one high school, with ninth through twelfth

grades. Approximately 800 total staff members work in District A in various roles with approximately half of the employees serving as teachers.

The current superintendent joined District A in 2019 and the teacher turnover data declined by 7% as a result of the initiatives implemented (Table 1). One principal emphasized the positive leadership of the current superintendent by stating:

there was a superintendent in the past who was here and during their time I did not jump into [administration]...I waited because I wanted to be part of somebody's admin team that I thought a lot of because...you've got to be one hundred percent in.

The principal continued, “[District A employees] do have a good understanding and feeling of who we are ... [administrators] really do care about the individual person and know that if [the teachers] are not happy...that is going to bleed into their job [performance] and they're not going to be effective there.”

To answer the presented research questions related to which strategies were used to address teacher needs to positively impact teacher turnover rates in District A, the technical/adaptive framework was reviewed by quadrant in the context of the data collected.

### **Technical Low**

According to the literature reviewed, three of the most often shared reasons teachers cite for leaving the profession include low salaries, large class sizes, and overwhelming workloads (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Harmsen et al., 2018; Mason & Poyatos Matas, 2015). These reasons are classified as technical low in the framework pictured in Figure 3. Technical issues have known solutions, and per the hypothesis at the

onset of this study would be able to be directly addressed by district leaders, thus an important set of needs on which to focus to reduce teacher turnover. However, through reviewing the collected data from District A, Table 6 shows that the needs listed within the technical low quadrant had fewer references made to these specific types of needs as compared to the other types of needs. From the teachers' perspective, no teachers interviewed referenced their pay or class sizes. Both district-level administrators interviewed shared that they believe District A has competitive salaries and benefits, so pay was not an issue in their district. Both district administrators also referenced how they partner with campus personnel to monitor class sizes to help maintain instructional focus; DA1 also shared that their projected growth is "making it a little more challenging," but they are committed to maintaining their set class sizes. DA1 explained that "we cap [class size] at 30 [students]" for secondary non-core classes, and "our core, most of them are probably 18 [students] and less." DA1 reported that elementary classes are growing to 22 students per classroom, and if they begin to exceed this cap, students are moved to other campuses with available seats.

**Table 6***Code-document Analysis for Needs by Quadrant Label and Source of Information*

|   | <b>Need: AH</b><br>Gr=166; GS=6 | <b>Needs: AL</b><br>Gr=177; GS=5 | <b>Needs: TH</b><br>Gr=168; GS=5 | <b>Needs: TL</b><br>Gr=84; GS=5 | <b>Totals</b> |
|---|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------|
| <b>ALL Admin</b><br>Gr=245; GS=4          | 92                              | 91                               | 90                               | 47                              | 320           |
| <b>ALL Teachers</b><br>Gr=122; GS=3       | 83                              | 95                               | 97                               | 45                              | 320           |
| <b>Artifacts</b><br>Gr=12; GS=3           | 192                             | 96                               | 32                               | 0                               | 320           |
| <b>Observations</b><br>Gr=30; GS=2        | 78                              | 128                              | 71                               | 43                              | 320           |
| <b>Campus: Admin</b><br>Gr=119; GS=2      | 89                              | 103                              | 79                               | 50                              | 320           |
| <b>Central: Admin</b><br>Gr=126; GS=2     | 96                              | 75                               | 106                              | 43                              | 320           |
| <b>Teacher: Elementary</b><br>Gr=41; GS=1 | 88                              | 94                               | 91                               | 46                              | 320           |
| <b>Teachers: Secondary</b><br>Gr=81; GS=2 | 78                              | 95                               | 103                              | 45                              | 320           |
| <b>Totals</b>                             | 797                             | 776                              | 670                              | 318                             | 2560          |

*Note.* “Gr” is the groundedness, or frequency of codes used; GS= is the number of documents associated with the code; AH is adaptive high, AL is adaptive low, TH is technical high, and TL is technical low

Within the technical low quadrant, workload was the specific need that was most mentioned from the teachers' perspective. More specifically, all three teachers and the elementary principal commented that the paperwork associated with teaching, such as required documentation for special populations such as English as a Second Language (ESL) and special education, grades, lesson planning, and data talks was cumbersome and time-consuming. A teacher, T3, shared:

It has gotten a lot harder and there's more workload, and we just feel like our plate is getting piled and piled, and if [administration] does take something off, [teachers] feel like something else is put on to replace that.

Teacher, T1, explained, referencing response to intervention (RTI), Section 504, and ESL paperwork:

It is a lot of stuff that I need to keep up with and keep up to date. So it's not that [administration] is asking me to do this, it's that I need to keep everything up to date as the year progresses.

The three teachers shared they feel supported despite the increasing workload. T3 continued, "[teachers] have actually brought that to our principal's attention, and [the principal] has taken that to [district administration] and they are thinking about what we can do."

### **Technical High**

The technical high quadrant of needs contains identified needs such as teachers' content assignment, feedback, and climate. When these higher-level needs go unmet, dissatisfaction results (West, 2022). In the technical high quadrant, these needs are aligned with teachers' work environments. The interviews showed that all personnel types (administrators and teachers) focused on the strategies of building and maintaining a positive climate and being open to and providing informal feedback. All interviewed teachers referenced the committees that their respective campuses have to help support positive interactions with teachers and staff. T1 said it is "just little things that [teachers] get to do as a campus that really make us feel appreciated." Examples of the "little things" named included group luncheons, administrators sending surveys asking for teachers' input, and monthly comradery-builders such as administrators bringing teachers snacks/drinks. Due to workloads, an elementary teacher shared that to build a positive climate at an elementary campus, the principal provides flexible scheduling and coverage

for dismissal duty so teachers can meet once a week as a team to plan and coordinate weekly events.

CA1 shares how the superintendent “is familiar with a large majority of our district employees...[the superintendent] is on the campuses and is accessible. [The superintendent] speaks and jokes around” while visiting campuses. This campus administrator emphasized the family-like atmosphere within the district. DA1 also reiterated that “if you don’t have a campus that is truly built around loving on your staff, they will go somewhere else.” Multiple District A personnel that were interviewed mentioned how district-level administrators are on campuses every morning to greet staff and students with smiles and friendly words of encouragement. CA2 shared “[district administrators] know that the most important thing about a school is the people who are in it;” thus, CA2 also believes “that if you want to run a good campus, you have to be willing to do just about anything” to show support.

Informal feedback was explained as two-way communication between teachers and both campus and district-level leaders. DA2 explained, “[the superintendent] hosts little town hall meetings with every campus a couple of times a year to just hear what they’ve got to say and offers what he can as feedback.” CA2 shared that as a principal it is important to hear from everybody and to provide time for “teachers to get together and talk about what they are doing and why they are doing it.” Some examples of seeking feedback included T1 explaining how an instructional coach asked teachers what they wanted to see in professional development, and T2 explained how the principal provided a “digital parking lot where [teachers] could put in questions and [campus administrators] would collaborate and come back to us with answers.” T1 also shared how campus



administrators "immediately give us feedback" after walkthroughs so they feel encouraged and supported to grow. T3 gave an example of how a district-level support personnel, after listening to teachers explain some hardships about testing schedules and protocols, explained their department would discuss this further and seek solutions to help support the teachers; T3 said, "Even if it doesn't change, at least we feel better that we got to tell [them]."

### **Adaptive High**

Through the review of literature, it was explained when extrinsic job factors, as discussed in the technical high quadrant, were addressed, "intrinsic factors had a stronger effect on motivation" (Baroudi et al, 2022, p. 130). The needs found in the adaptive high quadrant include recognition, autonomy/voice, and opportunities to grow, which are desires driven by intrinsic forces. According to the data illustrated in Table 6, the artifacts reviewed show a high concentration of public-facing materials laden with adaptive high content. The materials included the district's vision and mission statements, the district improvement plan, and the principals' messages on their campus websites. This data articulates that what is "verbally" promoted by the district is also practiced in action by the district; this alignment of words and actions is focused upon in interviews with personnel.

When reviewing the collected data from interviews, it was interesting to note that district-level recognition was not emphasized by any District A personnel; however, if recognition was noted, it was at the campus level. The lack of district-level recognition, other than the end-of-year celebrations with named teachers of the year and milestone years of service, was noted in observation when the district office was visited, and the

wall of honor was observed. At the school board meeting attended there were no public recognition presentations. There are some notable acts of recognition by district-level administrators, as DA1 explained, each upper-level district administrator begins each workday on a campus greeting staff and students; then each week those administrators send one staff member and one student a hand-written card that is mailed to their home address. The personalized hand-written cards were one actionable strategy that supports the district's values, vision, and goals.

The greatest emphasis within the need for recognition was the strategy of recognizing great talent and having campus principals personally encourage strong teachers with leadership qualities to consider joining the district's grow-your-own leadership pathway. This practice of identifying talent is not isolated to leadership roles; CA2 described District A's grow-your-own teacher pathway that begins in high school, called Ready, Set, Teach. Within this program, high school students go to a campus to observe and participate in classroom activities. Paraprofessionals who demonstrate strong instructional practices are encouraged to also pursue their teaching credentials through the grow-your-own teacher pathway. CA2 explained how principals reach out to strong teachers to consider the grow-your-own leadership pathway; "You start encouraging them, 'Have you thought about getting your mid-management [degree]?' The same campus administrator also provided an example, "I have a second-grade teacher right now who did the Ready, Set, Teach program, and then she also did the work program...she graduated, became a paraprofessional, got her teaching degree, and is now teaching her fourth year in [District A]." T2 shared that leaders in District A "promote within instead of going outside of the district" as often as possible; T3 reported how one

teacher was promoted to an instructional coach role, to assistant principal, and now serves as a campus principal in District A.

The grow-your-own pathways are not the only ways District A supports growth; CA1 emphasized, "We have to invest in [teachers]; we have to try to develop them and to become better, stronger teachers." To do so, as DA2 explains, [District A] had instructional coaches on all campuses" which provided a "huge opportunity for professional development that was embedded on each campus." T1 shared that instructional coaches are available and provide resources to teachers to help them be successful in the classroom and grow professionally.

As previously mentioned, district curriculum staff have sent surveys out to teachers asking for their input into what is needed during professional development sessions, and T1 mentioned campus-based surveys ask "questions for our input on what we believe about something or what we want to see" on the campus or within the district. T2 reiterated the use of campus and district committees to share teachers' voices. T3 said that due to the strategies implemented, "[teachers] do feel supported and backed up even by [district administration]." The teachers interviewed repeatedly focused on the openness in communication they felt with their campus administration. One specific example T3 provided was "this year our superintendent set aside funds [to hire] behavior paraprofessionals" as the previous year student misbehavior was a topic of concern for most teachers. The superintendent heard and took action. This is the desired result of having a voice and feeling recognized as valuable in your work; you are respected.

## Adaptive Low

The needs addressed in the adaptive low quadrant of the framework, balance of time, feeling of security, and behaviors, are mostly connected with a teacher's personal concerns related to safety/wellness and the behaviors of others. These needs align with Maslow's hierarchy of needs in safety and love/belonging. Table 4 shows the codes for the three needs associated with the adaptive low quadrant were all listed in the top 25% of codes, and the two highest strategies of focus are also aligned within the adaptive low quadrant. When viewing the code-document analysis of the strategies discussed by personnel and their corresponding quadrants, the frequency of the adaptive low strategies exceeds the frequency of other quadrant strategies as seen in Table 7. To dive deeper into what strategies are of most importance, the adaptive low strategies were also analyzed using the code-document analysis to determine the frequency of each strategy; Table 8 illustrates that the two prominent strategies were leader behaviors and support.

**Table 7**

*Code-document Analysis for Strategies by Quadrant Label and Source of Information*

|   | Strategy: AH<br>Gr=115; GS=5 | Strategy: AL<br>Gr=198; GS=6 | Strategy: TH<br>Gr=116; GS=6 | Strategy: TL<br>Gr=64; GS=8 | Totals |
|---|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------|
| <b>ALL Admin</b><br>Gr=245; GS=4          | 66                           | 118                          | 58                           | 45                          | 287    |
| <b>ALL Teachers</b><br>Gr=122; GS=3       | 73                           | 107                          | 84                           | 24                          | 287    |
| <b>Artifacts</b><br>Gr=12; GS=3           | 64                           | 128                          | 0                            | 96                          | 287    |
| <b>Observations</b><br>Gr=30; GS=2        | 52                           | 125                          | 88                           | 22                          | 287    |
| <b>Campus: Admin</b><br>Gr=119; GS=2      | 58                           | 124                          | 71                           | 33                          | 287    |
| <b>Central: Admin</b><br>Gr=126; GS=2     | 78                           | 108                          | 38                           | 63                          | 287    |
| <b>Teacher: Elementary</b><br>Gr=41; GS=1 | 73                           | 97                           | 80                           | 38                          | 287    |
| <b>Teachers: Secondary</b><br>Gr=81; GS=2 | 73                           | 119                          | 88                           | 8                           | 287    |
| <b>Totals</b>                             | 535                          | 926                          | 507                          | 328                         | 2296   |

*Note.* Data are normalized due to the difference in the number of interviews/codes; “Gr” is the groundedness, or frequency of code used; “GS” is the number of documents associated with the code; AH is adaptive high, AL is adaptive low, TH is technical high, and TL is technical low

**Table 8**

*Code-document Analysis for Adaptive Low Quadrant and Source of Information*

|   | Team<br>Events<br>Gr=12 | Campus<br>Events<br>Gr=9 | Teammate<br>Behaviors<br>Gr=33 | Leader<br>Behaviors<br>Gr=125 | Flexible<br>Scheduling<br>Gr=9 | Support<br>Gr=120 | Visibility<br>Gr=23 | Totals |
|---|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|--------|
| <b>ALL Admin</b><br>Gr=245; GS=4          | 6                       | 4                        | 10                             | 78                            | 4                              | 71                | 17                  | 190    |
| <b>ALL Teachers</b><br>Gr=122; GS=3       | 7                       | 9                        | 36                             | 62                            | 7                              | 62                | 7                   | 190    |
| <b>Artifacts</b><br>Gr=12; GS=3           | 0                       | 0                        | 0                              | 0                             | 48                             | 142               | 0                   | 190    |
| <b>Observations</b><br>Gr=30; GS=2        | 14                      | 0                        | 14                             | 77                            | 0                              | 70                | 14                  | 190    |
| <b>Campus: Admin</b><br>Gr=119; GS=2      | 8                       | 5                        | 15                             | 84                            | 5                              | 64                | 9                   | 190    |
| <b>Central: Admin</b><br>Gr=126; GS=2     | 3                       | 3                        | 0                              | 66                            | 3                              | 83                | 32                  | 190    |
| <b>Teacher: Elementary</b><br>Gr=41; GS=1 | 3                       | 6                        | 32                             | 58                            | 13                             | 71                | 6                   | 190    |
| <b>Teachers: Secondary</b><br>Gr=81; GS=2 | 11                      | 11                       | 41                             | 67                            | 0                              | 52                | 7                   | 190    |
| <b>Totals</b>                             | 52                      | 38                       | 149                            | 493                           | 79                             | 617               | 93                  | 1520   |

*Note:* Data are normalized due to the difference in the number of interviews/codes; “Gr” is the groundedness, or frequency of code used; “GS” is the number of documents associated with the code; AH is adaptive high, AL is adaptive low, TH is technical high, and TL is technical low

Brown and Wynn (2009) shared in their study, "Lower levels of teacher attrition and migration have consistently been found in schools with more administrative support for teachers" and decisions to remain are most influenced by the campus principal's leadership and the campus climate (p. 42). Per the data collected, it is evident that in this case study leader behaviors and support of teachers were the most prevalent strategies

associated with teacher retention. The district administrators interviewed associated support with on-site accessibility of coaching/mentoring, especially focusing on new teachers, opportunities to advance professionally through the different grow-your-own pathways offered, and leaders of all levels being visible and accessible to teachers. In short, as DA1 stated, "Whatever you need from us, that's what we're going to do. It's all about support. We're here to help. People want to stick around because they are supported." DA1 also gave the example, "We added [staff] this year, just to add layers of support, we now have behavior specialists." DA2 emphasized the mentoring and coaching support provided to new teachers; this is reiterated by CA1, "We have to invest in them. We have to try to develop them to become better, stronger teachers."

Overall, support can mean different things at different times, but in short, it is providing solutions to current needs. The campus principals interviewed articulated this as CA1 stated, "We address it, and we speak to it. Then we also try to give them a solution. What we do is provide systems to support people with discipline, learning, and coaching." Ultimately, as CA1 said, "I'm here to help them do their jobs." Support as CA2 described, "is not [the principal] being out in front. It's [the principal] clearing the way so [teachers] can make progress. . . Leading is not about leading as much as it is about giving people a path that they can follow."

The teachers agreed and explained they all have weekly teacher collaboration time to discuss data, lesson planning, and solutions to issues presented. T1 elaborated:

The collaboration is big for me. If there's not any collaboration, I feel almost defeated because then it's all put on me, and I don't have anyone to discuss it

with... I need someone to tell me that you're doing a good job, or let's do something different.

T3 shared, "Our team is so close...and is just amazing; we just all feel so comfortable with each other that we have support within each other too."

The behaviors demonstrated by both district and campus leaders are also important to teachers feeling supported. District administrators commented on their visibility, seeking feedback from teachers, and providing professional development as the main behaviors they demonstrate as leaders. Campus administrators listed building relationships, having open communication, and seeking solutions as the most important behaviors they provide for teachers.

Teachers explained they most value the leaders' behaviors that are associated with communication, solution-seeking, and mentoring/developing teachers. T1 described how the superintendent "would come and walk the hallways and tell us good morning" and the campus principal requests teachers' input through the use of surveys and a digital parking lot. T2 reiterated how campus and district committees are "meeting with the principals and talking about what's going on, so we have a lot of input" in decision-making processes. Due to the open communication, T3 explained, "You feel comfortable because you have a relationship" with the leaders. The campus leaders, after hearing from teachers, have proven they listen and advocate for their teachers, as T3 recounted, "We've actually brought that to our principal's attention and [the principal] has taken that to central office." T2 described how campus leaders "push you, and they are going to help you and groom you to where you need to be" to help teachers reach their professional goals. T3 explained teachers stay in District A because teachers are "moving [their] way

up" and receive continual encouragement to grow per their interests, whether that is teaching, counseling, or administration.

## **Discussion**

### **Summary**

This case study focused on how District A illustrates the use of various strategies to decrease teacher turnover rates based on perceived teachers' needs. This study is important, as Tran and Smith (2020) explained, "two-thirds [of teachers] leave the profession before retirement age" (p. 85). As the Charles Butt Foundation reported in 2022, 77% of the Texas teachers surveyed had seriously considered leaving the teaching profession, and of these, 93% had taken steps to separate from their classrooms. This case study highlights how the conceptual framework helps the reader understand what and why certain strategies worked in District A; by utilizing a case study model, readers may use this case to analyze their context, needs, and possible gaps. The framework is about meeting teachers' needs, and it highlights how to think about what to do to meet identified needs. Through the interviews conducted and analyzed, it was determined the strategies that focused on the adaptive low needs of teachers, such as teachers' feeling of security and behaviors of others, especially leaders' behaviors had the most positive impact on teachers choosing to stay in District A.

### **Conclusion**

This study sought to answer three research questions regarding what and how strategies were used to meet teachers' needs to positively affect teacher turnover rates. The research questions are addressed through the perspective of the conceptual framework of technical and adaptive needs (see Figure 3).



**RQ1: What strategies have been implemented to address the teacher turnover rates in the selected school district?**

District administrators stated there were specific strategies that were used to retain teachers; however, according to both district and campus-level personnel, there was no overall plan formalized specific to retaining teachers in District A. Despite the various suggestions to retain teachers as presented by previous research, such as significant salary increases and extended pre-service preparations, the data collected from District A showed that the most successful strategies for teacher retention were associated with the adaptive side of the conceptual framework (see Table 7) most directly related to the needs of safety and love/belonging on Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Charles Butt Foundation, 2022; Williams et al., 2022). There were a few strategies within the technical quadrants of the framework that were of note, more specifically within the technical high quadrant: informal feedback shared between both leaders and teachers as well as a positive climate, or working environment. These two strategies work together as when teachers are provided specific feedback allowing them to feel esteemed and continue to grow, the climate of the campus is positively impacted as teachers feel valued and supported. CA2 even noted that due to the positive climate experienced, one of her teachers, "has recruited several others who graduated [college] with her who now all work [in District A]." The teacher simply said, "You should come work with me in [District A]; we are super happy here."

When looking at the data through the lens of "All Admin" and "All Teachers," the adaptive low strategies were most prevalent. When looking more specifically at strategies through the different types of administrators and teachers, the most focused strategy type

was still the adaptive low strategies, as seen in Table 7. Looking deeper into the comparison table, the campus-level personnel (principals and teachers) have the same order of focus (adaptive low, technical high, adaptive high, and technical low) while the district-level administrators focus on adaptive low strategies followed by adaptive high, technical low, and technical high. The campus-level personnel's order of focus presents the teacher's needs most relevant to their own influence (adaptive low) is of greatest importance to them with the principal's area of influence (technical high) being next of importance. The campus-level personnel then focus on the adaptive high and technical low, or the areas most influenced by district-level administrators as the least vital factors for deciding to stay or leave the district. This finding speaks to the importance of the leader/teacher relationships established at the campus level. T1 shared that the administrators show genuine care about other people, and she articulated, "There are just little things that we get to do as a campus that really make us feel appreciated." T3 offered, "I've always felt supported by [the] administration."

When determining the reasoning behind the order of focus, it appears all personnel acknowledged the need to focus on teachers' basic needs (Maslow's hierarchy) through adaptive strategies as it is understood there is no standard, one-size-fits-all solution as may be suggested by a technical solution such as a set salary, a predetermined workload, or specific teacher to student ratio. DA1 shared that the district leaders monitor salaries and benefits to remain competitive with other area school districts; however, they choose to use the "same approach that we do with kids: get them to work for you and support them." DA2 emphasized teachers "are not chasing the dollar; this is the community they want to be in. They can make more money in [the metroplex area], but

they do not want to teach [there]." The interviewees reiterated community pride and the sense of belonging felt in the school district were more important factors than the salary amount earned.

The workload concerns that were mentioned were balanced with commentary identifying how the concerns were being addressed by the principals and/or district leadership. Responses from teachers such as T3 said:

So, with the workload we have, it's a lot ... we've actually brought that to our principal's attention, and she has taken that to [district-level administration].

They're thinking about what we can do, [such as] give assessments once every other unit and not have one every unit just to take that load off."

Another workload solution presented by T3 was addressed by teachers and principals collaborating to determine a schedule to help teachers "get some things done...to help give us some extra time."

The two predominant strategies that surfaced for all interviewee types were leader behaviors and support. District-level administrators and elementary teachers referenced support as the most important strategy while campus-level administrators and secondary teachers referenced leader behaviors as the most important strategy to retain teachers. The campus-level personnel felt teammates' behaviors were the third most important factor related to teacher turnover, while district-level personnel felt visibility of leadership was the third most important strategy implemented, as depicted in Table 8.

The top three leader behaviors named within the interviews were communication, solution-seeking practices, and mentoring and development of teachers. The top three types of support provided within District A reflect the leader behaviors named: listening

to teachers, providing and maintaining organized systems, and demonstrating care for teachers.

The leader behaviors that were most noted included two-way communication between teachers and administrators. All interviewees named various ways communication transpires between leaders and teachers, including the opportunities for teachers to share their voice in multiple formats (directly, surveys, committees, etc.) and leaders providing follow-up/updates to shared questions/concerns (informally, in meetings, etc.). As this open communication can take place between teachers and administrators, the communication often centers around how to problem-solve concerns that have been presented.

**RQ2: How are teachers' needs met or not met by the district's chosen retention strategies?**

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is the center of the conceptual framework presented in this study. The premise is that when teachers' needs go unmet they become stressed and dissatisfied, therefore, they leave the district and/or the profession altogether. Thus, leaders need to know what their teachers' needs are to best meet their needs. District A's data related to teachers' needs, as illustrated in Table 6 was interesting as three of the quadrants had darker shading and one quadrant's data had little shading, reflective of the lack of relation from the need to the focus of those interviewed.

Within the technical low quadrant, district administrators referenced addressing several teachers' needs, such as monitoring teacher pay, hiring additional staff, and in general, verifying teachers have correct certifications so as not to overload select teachers with additional students in specialized subgroups such as special education and ESL.

However, the campus personnel (principals and teachers) called upon workload, or teacher preparation, as the most significant need in the technical low quadrant. More specifically, this need for preparation directly correlates with teachers' workloads regarding classroom content preparation, required paperwork for specialized student populations, and data talk/collaboration preparation. As one teacher, T3, referenced, "[teachers] relayed the information of, 'Hey, this is way too much.' So [campus and district administrators] are talking about it...and [the administrators] are going to see what we can do to help you." Campus principals reported they work to help balance the workloads to help meet this need of teachers. CA2 stated, "I usually transition that around" referencing how specialized student groups are rotated through different certified teachers' rooms each year so specific teachers do not always carry the majority of the workload consistently year to year. This principal also referenced being an advocate for teachers and reassuring them, "I'm here. I know you all are teaching. I've got you" when teachers share concerns over how district-level administrators may view their testing data. In short, due to the lack of relation from the needs within the technical low quadrant to the needs most often addressed by those interviewed, it would be assumed that the teachers' needs within this quadrant are being met and thus, are of no major concern to them.

In the technical high quadrant, campus personnel (principals and teachers) all referenced informal feedback and positive climate as the most prevalent needs to address. District-level administrators also showed informal feedback as a need to address; however, it was not at the same level of recognition as campus-level personnel provided. The opportunities to receive and give feedback speak to the need for esteem in Maslow's

hierarchy of needs. To be esteemed by others means, you are valued, and thus your insight/voice is sought after and then listened to when received. This would be an important need to be met at the campus level as personnel are doing crucial work at this level (with students and parents), and thus principals giving teachers feedback on the work they do is vital to growing and feeling accomplished in the work they do. Baroudi et al. (2022) explained the sentiment of teachers desiring accomplishment and acknowledgment for the meaningful work they do to gain satisfaction, and when satisfied, teacher turnover rates decrease.

For the adaptive high quadrant, it is interesting that this was the second most important set of needs from the perspective of the campus and district-level administrators but third for teachers. These needs include recognition, autonomy/voice, and opportunities to grow. It is hypothesized that the administrators, especially district administrators, would focus on these needs as they are more apt to provide direct support and/or resources for these needs. However, it must be noted, that just "blind" attempts to provide for these types of needs would be more technical, such as a one-size-fits-all recognition program or a purchased online professional development program that is sold in bulk to campuses and districts with different contexts. Hence the reason these needs are more suited for the adaptive side of the conceptual framework. For these needs to be met, the teachers must have a voice in how these needs are met and what strategies are used.

This was noted when the teachers shared how campus principals, district leaders, and even the superintendent provide various means for teachers to share their input: committees, surveys, and town hall meetings. This may also attest to why the teachers

viewed these needs as third in importance as it appears these needs are met through these means. The teachers feel listened to. T3 reported, "[District A] has good administration, and [teachers] do feel supported and backed up even by central office," and T2 noted, "Our principal is accessible."

The adaptive low quadrant includes needs such as balance of time, feeling of security, and behaviors; these are aligned with the physiological, safety, and love/belonging needs from Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The needs of this quadrant are adaptive as the teacher must be personally involved to meet the needs or find a resolution. For example, each person will differ in their sensitivities as to what defines balance or safety. Thus, at the onset of this study, it was hypothesized that the teachers themselves had the most direct influence on this quadrant.

**RQ3: Why have the implemented strategies had a documented effect on teacher turnover rates for the school district?**

When all administrators were grouped together, and all teachers were combined in a second group, the needs within the technical high, adaptive low, and adaptive high quadrants had the most concentrated focus, as evidenced in Table 6, with the "All Admin" group having a greater concentration on the adaptive high needs and the "All Teachers" group, technical high. The hypothesis is that the adaptive high quadrant is most impacted by the district-level leadership's influence, and the technical high quadrant, the campus administration. Thus, the "All Admin" group's focus on the adaptive high needs indicates an awareness of the district's leaders' role in addressing these needs. The "All Teachers" group's focus on technical high needs illustrates the importance of the role of the campus principal in addressing teachers' perceived needs. When the groups were

separated by type of administrator and teacher the results showed district-level administrators and secondary teachers focused on technical high needs and campus principals and elementary teachers focused on adaptive low needs, as shown in Table 6. As stated previously, the technical high needs can be influenced by the behaviors of the campus administrator. The adaptive low needs are hypothesized to be best addressed by the teachers individually as they ultimately determine how to balance their time by setting boundaries, what provides the feeling of security, and what behaviors are acceptable versus not based on their individual preferences and past experiences. So, the campus principal and elementary teacher groups' focusing on the adaptive low quadrant as important demonstrates their understanding these needs require open two-way communication which builds trust and provides encouragement and opportunities for collaboration and solution-seeking practices.

Upon starting this study, the hypothesis was that districts have the most influence on meeting teachers' needs within the technical low and adaptive high quadrants, and if districts would implement strategies to meet these specific needs, teacher retention would increase. However, through this study it has been revealed that leveraging the adaptive practice of collaboration with those whose needs need to be met is the most important overall strategy for District A. Collaboration demonstrates trust and respect while allowing administrators to model high-quality leader behaviors and ultimately provide desired support to teachers thus meeting the needs of love/belonging and esteem. In doing so, teachers in District A remain in the district and recruit other teachers to join their team which are the two routes to address teacher turnover concerns.



## **Strengths and Limitations**

By using a case study qualitative research method, specific strengths were able to come to light through the deeper dive into situations presented in District A that exhibited exemplary data related to decreasing teacher turnover. In a case study method, personal interactions through interviews and observations were available that provided perspective and insight into the contextual situations in real-time.

In contrast to the strengths presented, there were a few limitations in this study. Due to the timing of the year, summer into the start of the fall semester, it was difficult to acquire participants. The limited participation equated to seven people being interviewed, yet provided the perspective of two district administrators, two campus principals (one elementary and one secondary), and three teachers (one elementary and two secondary). Of those interviewed, six of the seven interviewees were born and raised in District A's community; therefore, their perspective could be slightly biased. The snowball recruitment method may also have contributed to some bias since administrators recommended the next participant: district administrators shared the names of campus administrators who shared the names of teachers. Due to higher authority making recommendations to participate, the same participants may not have participated without the recommendation or connection of their supervisors. By opening participation to a wider group, different perspectives may provide additional insights. This study was limited due to focusing on District A only; however, if a review of state data was conducted to determine if any other Texas school districts had five consecutive years of decreased teacher turnover rates, a broader review of potential regions of Texas may produce new insights.

## **Implications**

This case study of what and how strategies are implemented to meet teachers' needs provided insight into a few implications. First, it is important to know what teachers' needs are by name. The more specific our understanding of the need is, the more aligned the strategies can be to address the need. Needs can be learned through surveys, focus groups, and/or stay and exit interviews. The collection of data cannot be the only step forward as collaboration regarding solution-seeking is also relevant. Collective collaboration, an adaptive strategy (by including the teacher with the named needs), builds efficacy and according to Chambers Mack et al. (2019), "Experiencing high efficacy is a factor related to higher rates of commitment by teachers" (p. 3). When the teachers have the opportunity to be part of the solution, they are invested and have ownership. Also, as the literature review emphasized, strong leaders must provide an organizational culture of collaboration (Brown & Wynn, 2009; Chambers Mack et al., 2019; Gu & Day, 2013). Since district leadership has direct control over who is hired for campus principal positions, district administrators influence the development of the needed culture to positively impact teacher retention. The culture of collaboration cannot be emphasized at individual campuses alone; this must be a district-wide culture modeled by the district-level leaders themselves. Collaboration provides pathways for open communication that is also vital for acknowledgment of solving issues and meeting needs. Teachers need the opportunity to share their thoughts without fear of being ignored or chastisement. When teachers are part of the solution-seeking process, they assist in growing satisfaction among others as the involved teachers communicate

positively about solutions and systems of support being considered and potentially implemented.

Secondly, leadership is crucial. Leadership must have aligned values and be strategically placed in the most fitting positions and campuses. District level leaders cast the vision and uplift the district values through modeling and celebrations/recognition of values in action. Campus level leaders demonstrate district values through supportive behaviors with teachers, students, and families. It is imperative when hiring for leadership positions, there is opportunity in the hiring process for candidates to demonstrate their core values. This might be through specific questioning strategies, providing a scenario-based exercise, or making observations in a job-related task completion within the interview process. Leadership is more than a set of qualifications on a resume, and a leader's actions articulate the values of highest regard. District A, having established a core set of values, recognizes the importance of all staff being in harmony and like-minded around these values; thus, their grow-your-own program is a strength to their district as leaders are promoted internally. The servant leader model has best served District A in reducing teacher turnover rates as the leaders and teachers focus on others before self.

Last, the theory of how technical and adaptive strategies meet teachers' needs differently within a school district's unique context is to be evaluated. Despite the hypothesis that district leaders would be able to most impact teacher retention through low technical and high adaptive strategies as those quadrants contained teachers' needs that are most directly influenced by district initiatives, the findings suggest the most impactful influence to stay in District A was through the opportunity for teachers to join

leaders in collaborating about solutions and support for the needs teachers currently face. Despite teachers, in the literature reviewed, claiming the technical needs of pay and workload as causes for leaving, this case study illustrated that these reasons are easy to name and are understood by non-educators; however, more accurate reasons for staying are more aligned with the feelings of being loved and cared for through provided support leaving teachers feeling secure and safe in their roles. Needs are ever-changing based on legislative mandates, community influence, and political focus; thus, the use of the conceptual framework provides a template for districts to review their own characteristics, needs, and strategies. The conceptual framework in itself does not provide a list of specific steps to follow to meet teachers' needs; however, it provides a framework of how to think about what strategies to implement and next steps to take to determine context-specific solutions.

Future research studies should examine state data to determine other districts with exemplary data related to decreasing teacher turnover rates to determine the reliability of the conceptual framework presented. This could include using the framework to determine areas of need and opportunities to provide aligned strategies resulting in improved teacher retention rates. Experiments using the framework may be of value to determine effectiveness of different technical and adaptive strategies implemented based on the needs being addressed. Others may also desire to use the framework with districts who have increasing teacher turnover rates to determine how to address needs and develop strategies: technical or adaptive.

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## Appendix A

### Case Study Interview Questions for School District Personnel

#### District Administrator Personnel:

- **Your district teacher turnover data shows...**
  - Do you see a difference in teacher turnover between campuses?
    - Of those campuses with lower teacher turnover rates, what do you attribute this to?
      - How are teachers involved in decision making opportunities at district/campus level?
      - How are teachers recognized by district/campus leadership? (not financial/technical)
      - How are teachers provided opportunities to grow professionally at district/campus level?
      - How are teachers impacted by campus climate?
      - Do teachers receive consistent feedback from supervisors? What does “consistent feedback” look/sound like?
      - Do teachers have equitable teaching assignments (i.e., number of different preps; related to certification; available resources)? Explain.
      - Can you tell me more?
    - Do you think campuses with higher workloads have higher teacher turnover rates? (i.e., SPED, ESL/BE)
    - Is there anything else about student subgroups that plays a role in teacher turnover?
- **How does your district work to increase teacher retention?**
  - Do you have a specific plan addressing teacher retention?
    - If so, can you describe it?
      - What informed the development of the plan?
      - What do you think of this plan?
        - Would you like to see changes? If so, what kind? Why? If not, why?
    - Do you have a specific area of focus? Why/why not?
    - How do you recognize teachers?
      - For what?
      - How?
      - Frequency?
    - Do you use performance pay incentives? How does that

- work?
- Does your district offer childcare?
- How does your district communicate to staff?
  - Topics? mental health support, stress busters, etc.?
  - Frequency?
- How do teachers know what to expect and what is expected of them?
- **How does the district decide what approach to use to decrease teacher turnover?**
  - Do you utilize exit surveys or stay interviews?
    - Stay interviews?
      - How do you select who will be interviewed?
      - How are the interviews conducted?
      - How often are the interviews conducted?
      - Do you find the data to be valuable?
      - How is the data collected from stay interviews utilized?
      - What data trends, if any, have you observed from these stay interviews?
    - Exit interviews?
      - When and how are the exit interviews conducted?
      - What data trends have you observed from these exit interviews?
      - How is the data collected from exit interviews utilized?
- **What feedback (from teachers) do you receive about the strategies used related to teacher retention?**
  - What methods are used to hear teachers' voices regarding initiatives used?
  - Was this expected feedback or was there anything surprising or unexpected?
  - As a result of this received feedback, will any changes be made to your plan or use of strategies to retain teachers? Why/why not?
  -

Campus Principal:

- **Your district teacher turnover data shows...**
- **How does your district work to increase teacher retention?**
  - Do you have a specific plan addressing teacher retention?
    - If so, can you describe it?
      - What do you think of this plan?

- Would you like to see changes? If so, what kind?
- Is there concern regarding the teacher turnover rate? Why/why not?
- Do you track teacher turnover for your campus?
- Of those with lower teacher turnover rates, what do you attribute this to?
  - How are teachers involved in decision making opportunities at campus level?
  - How are teachers recognized by leadership? (not financial/technical)
  - How are teachers provided opportunities to grow professionally?
  - How are teachers impacted by campus climate?
  - Do teachers receive consistent feedback from supervisors? What does “consistent feedback” look/sound like?
  - Do teachers have equitable teaching assignments (i.e., number of different preps; related to certification; available resources)? Explain.
  - Do grade levels/subjects with higher workloads have higher teacher turnover rates? (i.e., SPED, ESL/BE) Why?
  - Do campuses with higher/lower student misbehaviors have higher/lower teacher retention rates? Why?
  - Do student misbehaviors impact teacher retention rates?
    - How?
    - Is there a district/campus-wide approach to student discipline?
  - Do teams/types of collaboration impact teacher retention rates? How?
- **What is your highest priority/concern as it relates to teacher retention? Why?**
  - Is this concern able to be addressed by campus and/or district leadership?
    - If so, is it being addressed and how?
    - If not, why not?
- **What are the teachers’ greatest stressors related to their role as teachers as communicated to you?**
  - What strategies are implemented to address said stressors?
    - For example, are there induction and/or mentoring programs for teachers?

- How are these programs structured?
  - How are teachers able to receive these supports?
  - Are there strategies to address teacher stress such as mindfulness training, yoga classes, etc.?
  - Are these campus or district-level strategies?
  - Are the implemented strategies effective? How do you know?
- **What else would you like to share about teacher turnover that I have not asked?**

Teacher:

- **Your district teacher turnover data shows...**
- **Does your district work to increase teacher retention? If so, how? What do their efforts look like?**
- **Clarifying questions to try to determine reasons for consistent decline in teacher turnover rates...**
  - How are teachers involved in decision making opportunities at campus level?
  - How are teachers recognized by leadership? (not financial/technical)
  - How are teachers provided opportunities to grow professionally?
  - Describe your campus climate.
  - Do teachers receive consistent feedback from supervisors? What does “consistent feedback” look/sound like?
  - Do teachers have equitable teaching assignments (i.e., number of different preps; related to certification; available resources)? Explain.
  - How would you describe your workload? (ie, SPED, ESL/BE)
  - Describe student misbehaviors? Does this impact teacher retention rates?
    - Is there a district/campus-wide approach to student discipline?
  - Describe your teams/collaboration.
- **What are the teachers’ greatest stressors related to their role as teachers?**
  - What strategies are implemented to address said stressors?
    - For example, are there induction and/or mentoring programs for teachers?
      - How are these programs structured?
      - How are teachers able to receive these supports?
    - Are there strategies to address teacher stress such as



mindfulness training, yoga classes, etc.?

- Are these campus or district-level strategies?
- Are the implemented strategies effective? How do you know?
- **What else would you like to share about teacher turnover that I have not asked?**

## **Appendix B**

### **Pre-Interview Survey**

Questions are intended to have yes/no responses in order to prepare for the interview with the district-level personnel. If the response is “no” there is no need in the interview to seek more information on that topic; however, if the response is “yes” I can ask clarifying questions to get more information about strategies/effectiveness.

- Do you have a specific plan addressing teacher retention?
- Do you use performance pay incentives?
- Does your district offer childcare?
- Do you utilize exit surveys or stay interviews?
- Is there a district-wide (or campus-wide) approach to student discipline?
- Are there induction and/or mentoring programs for teachers?
- Are there strategies to address teacher stress such as mindfulness training, yoga classes, etc.