

**Recommendations to Solve the Problem of High Teacher Attrition at  
Pence Elementary School**

by

Antoinette S. Scott

An Applied Research Report Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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APPROVED BY:

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to provide recommendations to solve the problem of high teacher attrition at Pence Elementary School. The problem was Pence Elementary School is experiencing difficulty in retaining certified teaching staff (L. Noll, personal communication, March 13, 2022). The rationale for this study was that it is critical for Pence Elementary School to implement strategies to retain certified teachers to fill needed certified positions as failure to do so could adversely impact student achievement, contribute to larger class sizes, and thereby exacerbate teacher working conditions. In alignment with the purpose and problem of the study, the central research question was, how can the problem of high teacher attrition at Pence Elementary School be solved? Data collection consisted of three methods. The first data collection method was semi-structured interviews with teachers and administrators at Pence Elementary School and Fairfield Community School District. The second form of data collection was a survey administered to 16 teachers currently employed at Pence Elementary School. The third form of data collection was a focus group comprised of five certified staff who have been employed as teachers for at least one year in the Fairfield Community School District. Data were analyzed using quantitative and qualitative methods. As a result of the data analysis, three recommendations were presented to solve the problem of high teacher attrition: develop a culture of shared decision-making, offer professional development options for district, building, and individual goals, and decrease teacher workload.

*Keywords:* teacher attrition, teacher retention, retention strategies

### **Role of the Researcher**

Antoinette Scott is a former special education teacher at Pence Elementary School in the Fairfield Community School District. Her tenure at the school began during the 2018-2019 school year and continued until the start of the 2022-2023 school year. She has taught in the Iowa public school system for 21 years. She earned a bachelor's degree in special education from Western Illinois University and a Master of Education from Olivet-Nazarene University. She is currently pursuing a doctorate in curriculum and instruction from Liberty University with an emphasis on elementary education. Antoinette has held various teaching positions in multiple states including Arizona and Illinois. Her extensive experience in education has provided the opportunity to gain both interest and insight into the importance of retaining quality teaching staff. Although she is currently employed by a school district other than Fairfield Community School District, the former affiliation with the district and Pence Elementary School may potentially result in bias and assumptions in the study. However, potential bias was limited through a systematic research approach and multiple forms of data collection.

### **Permission to Conduct Research**

The research setting was Pence Elementary School, a rural public elementary school in Southeast Iowa. Permission to conduct the research was secured from the superintendent of Fairfield Community School District, Dr. Laurie Noll. See Appendix A for the permission letter.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical practices for applied research should ensure the study is beneficial and presents a limited risk to participants (Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022). Through ethical considerations, the researcher ensured that as compared to the potential benefits of the study, participant risk was minimized. Research participants were solicited via personal communication. Participants included Pence Elementary School certified classroom teachers and administrators as well as Fairfield Community School District administrators. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants in both the semi-structured interviews and the focus group. Semi-structured interviews and a focus group were conducted on campus, outside regular school hours, to protect participant confidentiality. Identifiable participant information was not collected during the survey process.

All documents collected for the study were obtained from a public website. Research materials were stored electronically with password protection. The information contained in the report is intended to solve a specific problem at a distinct school site and is not generalizable to a broader population. Information acquired through the research will not be shared or distributed outside of Pence Elementary School and the Fairfield Community School District. For this reason, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was not required to conduct the study.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this study was to provide recommendations to the administration at Pence Elementary School with possible solutions to solve the problem of high teacher attrition. The problem was Pence Elementary School is experiencing difficulty in retaining certified teaching staff (L. Noll, personal communication, March 13, 2022). The introduction provides an organizational profile of the study site, an introduction to the problem, the significance of the problem, the purpose of the study, the central research question, and key terms and definitions relative to the research.

### **Organizational Profile**

Pence Elementary School, a rural public elementary school in Southeast Iowa, was the educational site for the study. Pence Elementary School's mission statement is aligned with the Fairfield Community School District's mission statement as follows: "to support students, staff, administrative team and teachers of the Fairfield Community School District in preparing all students to be life-long learners through participation in a comprehensive educational program characterized by mutual respect, pursuit of excellence, personalized instruction, a challenging and diverse curriculum and a safe, healthy environment" (Fairfield Community School District, 2022a). Pence Elementary School has an enrollment of 350 students from Jefferson County as well as parts of Wapello and Henry Counties (Fairfield Community School District, 2022b). The student population is comprised of predominately Caucasian and 17% minority enrollment. Forty percent of the student body is considered economically disadvantaged.

School administrators include one principal, a school counselor, and an instructional specialist. A total of 28 teachers serve the school, resulting in a 14:1 student-to-teacher ratio

(Fairfield Community School District, 2022a). The teaching staff is primarily comprised of 16 general education teachers in grades two through five, two visual and performing arts teachers, and one physical education teacher. Teachers also include four special education teachers, one Talented and Gifted (TAG) teacher, two Title One math teachers, and two Title One reading teachers. Sixteen Pence Elementary staff members have been employed at the school site for five or more years. Three teachers have worked at the school for four years and two teachers have taught at Pence for three years. One teacher has taught at Pence for two years. Over 35 percent of the staff, six teachers, were new teachers in their first year of employment at Pence during the 2022-2023 school year.

### **Introduction to the Problem**

The problem was Pence Elementary School is experiencing difficulty in retaining certified teaching staff (L. Noll, personal communication, March 13, 2022). Before the 2021-2022 school year in the Fairfield Community School District, twelve teaching positions were unfilled, and five teaching positions were filled by long-term substitutes. Long-term substitutes are required to hold emergency certifications in the subject areas they are assigned to (Fairfield Community School District, 2022a). Further, additional second and third-grade teacher positions could not be fulfilled as planned in the 2021-2022 school year due to the lack of qualified certified staff applicants (Fairfield Community School District, 2022a).

The inability to hire certified staff to fill all available teacher positions at Pence Elementary emerged in the 2021-22 school year (L. Noll, personal communication, July 10, 2022). As a result of multiple teacher vacancies, classroom enrollment capacity was increased from 20 to 25 students in grades two and three. Classroom capacity is defined as the number of students that can be enrolled per class before another classroom is opened to accommodate the



enrollment of students (Blatchford & Webster, 2018).

The increase in classroom capacity from 20 to 25 students adversely impacted the student-to-teacher ratio (Blatchford & Webster, 2018) and teacher workload (Perryman & Calvert, 2020). To mitigate potential challenges in the retention of current educators, teachers were offered a three-year contract instead of the traditional two-year contract (Fairfield Community School District, 2022a). In addition, the salary schedule was revised to include monetary incentives such as increased starting pay for new teachers in the district. Despite the additional teacher retention and attraction strategies, Pence Elementary School continues to experience difficulty in retaining certified teaching staff.

### **Significance of the Research**

Identifying solutions to address the problem of high teacher attrition at Pence Elementary School benefits the education profession, educators, students, and parents. Previous research has established that teacher attrition impedes school improvement initiatives and strains available resources including veteran teachers serving as mentors and funding for professional development (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Sutchter et al., 2016). Schools, educators, and students experience educational disadvantages as the institution is destabilized by increased teacher attrition (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

The retention of certified teachers supports a functional and optimized education system in which students are prepared for college or career readiness (Comprehensive Center Network, 2021). Elementary students who have been educated in classrooms with lower teacher-to-student ratios perform better academically beyond primary levels (Argaw & Puhani, 2018). Retaining a stable, certified teacher workforce ensures a solid educational foundation and positively impacts student achievement.

Further, teacher retention extends beyond student achievement to relationships with educational partners. Research conducted by Geiger and Pivovarova (2018) asserted that teacher retention was perceived by parents and guardians as contributing to improved student learning and student-teacher relationships. A skilled teacher workforce comprised of certified, veteran teachers is better prepared to establish trusting relationships and partnerships with families (Barton et al., 2021). Identifying solutions to high attrition rates at Pence Elementary School will benefit all stakeholders at the site.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to provide recommendations to solve the problem of high teacher attrition at Pence Elementary School in Southeast Iowa. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection approaches were implemented in the applied research. The first data collection approach was semi-structured interviews conducted with three Pence Elementary School educators with teaching experience in other districts, the Pence Elementary principal, and the Fairfield Community School District superintendent, who also serves as the personnel director. Participants were selected based on experiences regarding the retention of certified teachers at Pence Elementary School. The second approach employed was a closed-ended Likert scale survey administered to a purposeful sample of 16 Pence Elementary School teachers with varying years of teaching experience through the Survey Monkey platform. A focus group protocol was the third data collection approach. The focus group consisted of five to eight Pence Elementary School teachers.

### **Central Research Question**

The central research question which guided the study was: How can the problem of high teacher attrition be solved at Pence Elementary School in Fairfield, Iowa?

### **Definitions**

Terminology relevant to the research has been provided. The provision of key definitions allows the reader to understand the context of the problem and the purpose of the research. Scholarly citations support the definitions.

1. *Educator Self-efficacy* – The self-efficacy of teachers is rooted in a belief in the ability to impact student success (Barni et al., 2019) and the sense of self-satisfaction with professional accomplishments (Renbarger & Davis, 2019).
2. *Classroom Capacity* – The maximum number or capacity of students in a classroom utilized to determine if another classroom and teacher should be established to accommodate student enrollments beyond the classroom capacity (Blatchford & Webster, 2018).
3. *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* – Federal law, IDEA, established that students with disabilities are entitled to free and appropriate education through inclusion in less restrictive educational settings when possible (IRIS Center, 2019).
4. *Migration* – Teacher migration is a form of attrition, specifically attributed to moving to other school sites (Zavelevsky & Lishchinsky, 2020).
5. *Performativity* – In the context of K-12 public education, performativity refers to the work of educators increasingly directed toward student performance through assessments and progress monitoring measures as opposed to the individualistic and creative aspects of teaching (Perryman & Calvert, 2020).
6. *Sensemaking* – Sensemaking is the process of organizational actors, such as school administration, making sense or meaning of uncertain phenomena and determining how to best respond (McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019).

7. *Teacher Attrition* – Teacher attrition refers to the rate of teachers leaving the profession or moving to other school sites or districts (Tolin, 2020).
8. *Workload* – The number of tasks a teacher is expected to complete during their employment is the respective workload (Perryman & Calvert, 2020).

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to provide recommendations to solve the problem of high teacher attrition at Pence Elementary School in Southeast Iowa. The problem was Pence Elementary School is experiencing difficulty in retaining certified teaching staff (L. Noll, personal communication, March 13, 2022). Presented in this section of the report were the organizational profile, an introduction to the problem, the significance of the research, the purpose statement, the central research question, and the key definitions of terms utilized in the research.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this study was to provide recommendations to solve the problem of high teacher attrition at Pence Elementary School. The problem was Pence Elementary School is experiencing difficulty in retaining certified teacher staff (L. Noll, personal communication, March 13, 2022). This portion of the report examines literature related to the research problem. Discussed are the scale of the problem, the impact of teacher attrition, the causes of teacher attrition, and solutions to the problem.

### **Narrative Review**

#### **The Scale of the Teacher Retention Problem**

In the 21st century, the United States public education educator workforce has been adversely impacted by teacher shortages, a reduced pipeline of new, credentialed teachers, and increased attrition rates from the profession (García & Weiss, 2019). A focus on teacher retention is necessary due to two contributing factors in education: teacher attrition, or leaving the profession entirely, and migration, teachers moving from one school to another (Zavelevsky & Lishchinsky, 2020). The first significant event in the 21st century that precipitated the teacher retention problem was the Great Recession. The economic crisis destabilized public education budgets and funding for multiple years. As a result, a historically unprecedented layoff of nearly 350,000 teachers occurred between 2008 and 2012 across the United States (Evans et al., 2019; García & Weiss, 2019; Sutch et al., 2016).

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the average attrition rate of educators leaving the profession was approximately eight percent (Kena et al., 2016). At the onset of the pandemic in 2020, concern regarding the anticipation of increased teacher retirements and attrition emerged.

Despite the anticipated teacher retention challenges, United States labor statics indicate that teacher attrition rates remain similar to levels before the COVID-19 pandemic (Bleiberg & Kraft, 2022). However, identifying solutions to the problem of teacher retention is necessary to address persistent staffing shortages which are expected to rise.

### ***Teacher Retention as a Global Issue***

The problem of retaining certified teachers extends beyond the United States. Teacher attrition is a staffing challenge identified across the globe (Alexander et al., 2020; Fessehatsion & Peng, 2021; Perryman & Calvert, 2020). The average annual teacher turnover rate reported in the majority of international countries is 13% to 15% (Räsänen et al., 2020) as compared to the United States average of approximately 8%. Singapore, Finland, and Canada report lower teacher attrition rates of 3% to 4% annually (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018).

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development Education (2021) report on international teacher attrition rates identified common factors which contribute to educators exiting the profession as compensation and working conditions such as stress. Research conducted by Geiger and Pivovarova (2018) about international teacher attrition rates indicated similar factors including low salaries, poor working conditions, and teacher workload. In addition, Perryman and Calvert (2020) found that the perceived constant changes in education practices policy increased teacher stress and was a factor in teacher attrition. Globally, teachers cite similar reasons for leaving the teaching profession.

### ***Teacher Retention as a National Issue***

Teacher attrition remains a relatively less examined aspect of the teacher retention and shortage crisis in the United States. On average, teacher attrition rates in the United States have averaged approximately 8% (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Kena et al., 2016). If

the national attrition rate could be reduced to 4% as Canada, Finland, and Singapore have, the impact on teacher retention and shortages would be substantial (Sutcher et al., 2019).

As teacher attrition rates are comparatively higher than similar high-achieving nations, an analysis of attrition in the United States is essential to both understanding the problem of teacher retention and identifying possible solutions. An examination of 2011-2013 national school staffing and educator survey data revealed that the majority of teacher attrition, 67%, was attributed to voluntary, pre-retirement (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Whereas 18% of teacher attrition was attributed to retirement and 14% was attributed to involuntary layoffs (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). A meta-analysis of the literature on the factors of teacher attrition and retention conducted by Nguyen et al. (2019) found that the majority of teachers leave the profession within the first five years of experience. Subsequent recommendations for solving the problem of teacher attrition should be ideally targeted toward teachers within the first five years of their career trajectory.

While the impact of attrition rates is evident throughout the United States, rates vary by geographical region and by urban and rural settings. The prevalence of attrition rates in the United States is concentrated in the South with approximately 17% attrition (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). The Northeast region maintains the lowest attrition rates across the U.S. with an average of 10% attrition (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). In terms of settings, broadly categorized as city, suburb, town, and rural, attrition rates vary by region. In the South, city and urban settings report the highest levels of attrition, at an estimated 16%, whereas the Northeast averages approximately 10% attrition in the same city and suburb settings (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). The variation in attrition rates in the context of geographical region and setting should be factors that are considered

when examining the problem of teacher attrition.

### ***Subject Matter***

Another significant variable contributing to attrition rates is the specific subject matter. Educators who teach subjects including math and science or teach in specialized roles such as English language development and special education leave the profession at higher rates comparatively (Nguyen, 2021; Reitman & Dunnick Karge, 2019) and contribute to teacher shortages. In addition, math, science, and specialized services teaching positions are difficult to fill (Denton et al., 2021). Research conducted by Galloway (2020) about special education teacher recruitment indicated that in approximately 30% of public schools, special education vacancies have persisted. Relative to other subject areas, the difficult-to-fill positions are staffed by educators who do not have the proper certifications, education, or experience to teach effectively (Cardichon et al., 2020; García & Weiss, 2019). Administrators and policymakers continue to identify solutions to attract and retain educators for math, science, and specialized areas. Developing an understanding of how subject matter areas may contribute to attrition will inform the critical work of addressing teacher retention in the United States.

### **Impact of Teacher Attrition**

The adverse impact of teacher attrition on multiple facets of the education system is widely documented in the literature. Teacher attrition is identified as the primary contributor to teacher shortages throughout the United States (Carver-Thomas et al., 2020). Further, high rates of teacher attrition are negatively associated with student achievement (Adnot et al., 2017; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Fuchsman et al., 2020; Gibbons et al., 2021; Henry & Redding, 2020; Kaniuka & Kaniuka, 2019). In addition, teacher attrition rates present a detrimental monetary impact on school and district budgets (Gui, 2019; Sutchter et



al., 2019). The constant cost of replacing educators contributes to both economic and human capital challenges (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; García & Weiss, 2019; Sutch et al., 2019). Understanding the adverse impact of teacher attrition is fundamental to the examination of root causes and potential solutions (Kaniuka & Kaniuka, 2019; Sutch et al., 2019).

### ***Teacher Shortages***

Teacher attrition is the most significant contributor to teacher shortages with an attrition rate of 8% annually, representative of 90% of the annual teacher demand (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). García and Weiss (2019) posit that the teacher shortage has increased and is more acute than previously estimated. Further, teacher demand is projected to increase while teacher attrition rates are estimated to remain at approximately 8% annually, creating a job market plagued by teacher shortages (Sutch et al., 2019). Mitigating teacher shortages have resulted in hiring unqualified educators who are temporarily certified through emergency permits (Carver-Thomas et al., 2020). However, multiple studies indicate that less qualified educators are more likely to leave the profession, thereby contributing further to teacher shortages.

### ***Student Achievement***

Scholars attribute the impact of teacher attrition on student achievement to several factors. Adnot et al. (2017) found that the change in teacher effectiveness was the primary factor in determining the impact of teacher attrition on student achievement. A constantly changing teaching staff can lead to a decrease in adequate instruction for the impacted student population (Miller & Youngs, 2021). When novice teachers, alternately prepared teacher program graduates, or teachers who lack the specific credentials to teach in the subject matter

are placed in a teaching position vacated by a highly qualified teacher, students generally receive less effective instruction (Gui, 2019). The lack of continuity disrupts gains in achievement, affects student behavior negatively, and lowers professional trust (Miller & Youngs, 2021).

The entry and exit rates of teachers change the composition of the school staff (Gibbons et al., 2021) and thereby disrupt the collective efficacy maintained by the former staff composition (Berry et al., 2021). Gibbons et al. (2021) asserted that educator turnover affects student achievement as the new staff lacks knowledge about the school and the student population served. The exiting educator retains the institutional knowledge, and the incoming educator is tasked with developing the industry and site-specific human capital (Gibbons et al., 2021; Tolin, 2020). The collective efficacy of the staff is recalibrated to reflect the experiences and expertise of the staff composition.

### ***Monetary Cost***

The challenges of teacher attrition are coupled with monetary costs. The education system must continuously invest in recruitment efforts and professional development to fill educator vacancies (Gui, 2019; Sutchter et al., 2019). Filling a teacher vacancy can result in an estimated \$5,000 in a rural district to \$21,000 in an urban district to advertise the position, hire personnel, and support the new teacher (García & Weiss, 2019; Sutchter et al., 2019). If the annual attrition rate remains at the projected average of 8%, approximately 300,000 vacancies will need to be filled at \$8 billion nationally (García & Weiss, 2019; Sutchter et al., 2019).

Secondary monetary costs are also incurred as districts do not recover dividends from the substantive investments in new hires (Sutchter et al., 2019) especially underqualified

educators without credentials. Gui (2019) posited that despite the financial contributions to address teacher attrition, the workforce is destabilized. Further, veteran teachers are frequently enlisted to support new hires through informal and formal mentorship models (Sutcher et al., 2019). Financial and human resources are depleted with little return on the investment of supporting new educators (Sutcher et al., 2019).

### **Causes of Teacher Attrition**

A wide body of educational research has been dedicated to examining the causes of teacher attrition to inform practical and effective solutions (Harris et al., 2019). Understanding the contributing factors of teacher attrition is a complex phenomenon. Some assertions in the literature indicate teacher attrition and retention are interconnected phenomena (Fessehatsion & Peng, 2021). A comprehensive review of the literature revealed that teacher attrition and retention factors have been categorized into three broad areas: organizational (work conditions, workload, administrative support, salary), personal (qualifications, education, beliefs), and social (school culture, relationships, professional development) (Alexander et al., 2020; Fessehatsion & Peng, 2021; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Harris et al., 2019). An analysis of the causes attributed to teacher attrition in the literature is examined through organizational, personal, and social categories to establish the context of the research problem and prior solutions.

### ***Teacher Work Conditions***

In multiple studies, the term *teacher work conditions* (TWCs) was cited as a common cause of teacher attrition (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). A homogenous definition of the term *teacher work conditions* is not found in the literature but is described in the context of overlapping elements that are both confined to the workplace and affect teaching (Merrill, 2021). Teacher work conditions have been correlated to teacher retention (Berry et al., 2021;

Shuls & Flores, 2020; Sutchter et al., 2019). As teacher perceptions of working conditions improve, teacher attrition decreases (Merrill, 2021). Harris et al. (2019) asserted that if teacher work conditions are not improved, teacher attrition will persist.

Teacher work conditions are comprehensive and interconnected in terms of teacher perceptions (Masoom, 2021). Work conditions include facilities, administrative support, school climate and environment, parental involvement, student behavior, resources, compensation, professional development, and any other factor impacting the teaching experience (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Harris et al., 2019; Mabeya et al., 2019; Masoom, 2021). Supportive working conditions play a critical role in both teacher and student success (Kraft et al., 2020; Shuls & Flores, 2020).

Several studies indicated that teacher perceptions of favorable working conditions are associated with higher job satisfaction (Mabeya et al., 2019; Renbarger & Davis, 2019; Toropova et al., 2020). Further, job satisfaction was identified as an intermediate step between working conditions and teacher retention (Sims & Jerrim, 2020). According to a study conducted by Brezicha et al. (2019), 53% of teachers who left the teaching field reported that they did so because their new position offered better working conditions.

Improving working conditions to retain teachers can be achieved on two fronts: providing resources and improving the working environment (Sutchter et al., 2016). Teacher stress can be alleviated when provided with the necessary resources and materials to teach effectively. Adequate resources include textbooks, teaching aids, materials, technology access, sufficient classroom seating, and storage. Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) proposed states consider the creation of new funding formulas to equitably fund schools and staff. Inequitable funding formulas result in disparities and resource management challenges (Darling-Hammond et al.,

2020).

In multiple studies, teacher perception of administrative support was the most predictive indicator of teacher attrition (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; DeMatthews et al., 2021; Kaiser & Thompson, 2021; Learning Policy Institute, 2017; Masoom, 2021; Nguyen, 2021; Reitman & Dunnick Karge, 2019). Some researchers posit that administrative support is a critical factor in teacher retention because of the influence on other factors such as positive school climate and environment, allocation of resources including professional development, and management of student behavior.

As administrative support can positively affect teacher retention, residency programs, as well as state leadership academies for principals, have also been suggested as a way to address teacher attrition and migration (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Espinoza et al., 2018). These programs provide training to the administration that will improve their ability to support and encourage teacher collaboration, offer mentoring to administrators by leadership experts, and also create programs to promote administration from within the school system to fill positions in high-poverty or low-achieving schools (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Espinoza et al., 2018).

Another recommendation to improve work conditions identified in the literature was addressing collegiality and collaboration (Ortan, et al., 2021). Ensuring work conditions that foster relationship-building, collegiality, and collaboration has been shown to improve teacher retention (Miller & Youngs, 2021; Nguyen, 2021; Ortan, et al., 2021). Perryman and Calvert (2020) asserted that teachers who were provided with mentorship and induction programs that leveraged collegial support experienced lower rates of attrition as compared to other beginning or novice teachers. To retain and cultivate high-quality teachers, opportunities for teachers to

develop strong connections with each other should be a priority in improving teacher work conditions (Miller & Youngs, 2021). Beginning or novice teachers may not have developed agency or trust with the administration and benefit from informal, collegial support and mentorship (Zavelevsky & Lishchinsky, 2020).

### ***Perception Disparity of Teacher Work Conditions***

A wide body of research indicates working conditions affect teacher retention and attrition. Contributing to the challenges of work conditions is the perception disparity identified among teachers, administrators, and parents (Harris et al., 2019). A study conducted by Harris et al. (2019) examined the difference in stakeholder perceptions of teacher work conditions which influenced teacher attrition. Teacher perceptions indicated unreasonable work expectations, lack of trust and support, and inadequate compensation as the most significant factors which contribute to teacher attrition (Harris et al., 2019). Whereas principal perceptions about the factors which influence attrition included a change in educator lifestyle such as starting a family and student behavior (Harris et al., 2019). Understanding the difference in teacher work condition perceptions contributes to understanding the problem and informing solutions (Berry et al., 2021).

Teacher attrition and the subset of work conditions remain a complex challenge. As solutions are sought by policymakers and educators, the root causes of attrition must be examined. Increasing compensation will not alleviate the myriad of work conditions identified in the literature (Berry et al., 2021). However, isolation and treatment of multiple variables that cause teacher attrition as perceived teachers should drive potential solutions.

### ***Student Behavior***

Student behavior, as an aspect of work conditions, is cited in the literature as a

contributing organizational factor, rather than a cause of teacher attrition (Perryman & Calvert, 2020). The behavioral climate of the school is a significant factor in job satisfaction and teacher attrition as teachers are much more likely to leave a school with disruptive student behaviors (Farmer, 2020). When student behavior is regulated, student engagement increases as does teacher job satisfaction and therefore teacher retention (Kengatharan, 2020). Teacher attrition is correlated to dysfunctional work conditions rather than student behavior (Brezicha et al., 2019). Further, identifying solutions to student behavior in the context of teacher attrition should be focused on improving work conditions and school climate.

### ***School Characteristics***

Factors that further compound teacher retention related to work conditions are school characteristics. Regardless of region or setting, schools that serve low-income student populations experience increased attrition rates (Holmes et al., 2019). Title One schools, which receive supplemental federal funding to improve the academic achievement of low-income students, experience 50% higher attrition rates as compared to non-Title One schools (Sutcher et al., 2019). Retention rates are also lowest among those who serve at-risk populations and minority schools (Reitman & Dunnick-Karge, 2019; Tolin, 2020). School characteristics that impact work conditions are an integral aspect of the challenges associated with teacher attrition.

Teacher attrition rates are comparatively higher in low-income schools, which has a significant impact on the most vulnerable students (McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019). Low-income schools with underserved students typically have several work conditions challenges such as lower levels of support from administration and colleagues (Nguyen, 2021). According to García and Weiss (2019), teachers in high-poverty schools are less likely to remain at a school

site beyond one year due to unfavorable school characteristics. Working conditions with high student absentee rates, lack of parental involvement and support, student apathy, poverty, and personal and student safety concerns contribute to the demoralization of teachers (Nguyen, 2021) and dissatisfaction with the profession (Brezicha et al., 2019). When considering solutions for addressing attrition, school characteristics should be examined.

### ***Job Satisfaction***

Teacher job satisfaction was also identified in the literature as a cause of attrition. Toropova et al. (2020) asserted that job satisfaction is not only a contributing factor to teacher retention rates but also contributes to educator and student well-being thereby impacting the educational system. Educator job satisfaction is a complex and multifaceted element of attrition (Torres, 2019). Internal factors such as personal characteristics and expectations and external factors such as work conditions contribute to job satisfaction. Renbarger and Davis (2019) defined job satisfaction as a product of the commitment a teacher has to the profession, influenced by occupational expectations and the extent to which needs are met in the working environment. Further, Renbarger and Davis (2019) posited that low job satisfaction among preservice and novice teachers may result from optimistic and unrealistic expectations of the teaching profession (Renbarger & Davis, 2019). Teacher job dissatisfaction related to testing and accountability pressure, lack of administrative support, the teaching career in general, and working conditions were identified by 55% of educators who have left the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Prior solutions were identified in the literature regarding teacher job satisfaction. Multiple studies indicated teacher self-efficacy as the most significant indicator of job satisfaction (Barni et al., 2019; Ortan et al., 2021; Renbarger & Davis, 2019; Toropova et al.,



2020; Zakariya, 2020). Barni et al. (2019) defined teacher self-efficacy as an educator's "beliefs in their ability to effectively handle the tasks, obligations, and challenges related to their professional activity... and well-being in the working environment" (p. 1). Teachers experiencing lower levels of self-efficacy have diminished professional engagement and are at higher risk of teacher burnout and attrition (Räsänen et al., 2020).

Recommendations from Zakariya's (2020) study of self-efficacy include supporting teachers in the areas of classroom management and instruction to improve job satisfaction. Similar to classroom management support, Toropova et al.'s (2020) study about work conditions and job satisfaction indicated successful experiences in improving student behavior were attributed to higher levels of self-efficacy and increased levels of job satisfaction. Whereas other recommendations to positively impact self-efficacy and job satisfaction were related to support from educators through mentorship (Renbarger & Davis, 2019), collegial collaboration (Ortan et al., 2021), and professional development.

Another recommendation identified frequently in the literature was professional development. Professional learning increases teacher and leader job satisfaction and reduces educator turnover (Evans et al., 2020). Professional development pertains to professional learning or training which is sustained (rather than stand-alone or workshops), intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom-focused (Evans et al., 2020; George, 2020). Teachers benefit from shared leadership in the decisions about professional development content, collaboration, and implementation support from the administration (Canaran & Mirici, 2019). Impactful professional development requires teachers to be both teachers and learners in the process of institutional change (Canaran & Mirici, 2019) thereby increasing job satisfaction and self-efficacy.

Educators who receive job-embedded professional development and ongoing support are equipped to improve instructional practices and improved outcomes for students. When student outcomes improve, teachers feel a sense of job satisfaction and are less likely to leave the profession. Therefore, those who make educational policies should concern themselves with initiatives that ensure that all teachers receive high-quality professional learning opportunities (Evans et al., 2020).

An additional recommendation prevalent in the literature related to professional development as a teacher retention factor is the practice of collaboration (Berry et al., 2021; Kraft et al., 2020). Collaboration is broadly defined as a group of educators who work interdependently to identify and share effective instructional and behavioral practices and ensure the practices are implemented consistently among all practitioners to benefit student outcomes (DeHartchuck, 2021). Collaboration varies in format and includes two teachers working together on a variety of job-related issues, professional development, teacher leadership, mentoring relationships, or professional learning communities (Brezicha et al., 2019). Teacher collaboration increases job satisfaction and feelings of self-efficacy as educators work in collegial cooperation rather than isolation (Brezicha et al., 2019). Job satisfaction through collaborative practices is more predictive of teacher attrition than teacher autonomy, poor school performance, and accountability measures (Erichsen & Reynolds, 2020). As teacher job satisfaction factors are contextual and various, prior recommendations in the literature should be applied to similar factors at Pence Elementary School.

### ***Workload***

Several studies identified workload as the primary cause of teacher attrition (Doherty, 2020; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Wood, 2019; Worth et al., 2018). Excessive workload is

attributed to the continuous increase in professional responsibilities beyond the scope of providing instruction (Creagh et al., 2023; Jomuad et al., 2021; Kaiser & Thompson, 2021). According to Zydziunaite et al. (2020), only approximately one-third of the teacher workload is directed toward teaching while the remainder of the time is appointed to professional duties. Zydziunaite et al. (2020) define teacher workload into two categories, work spent inside the classroom and work that is characterized as “invisible work” (p. 950). Invisible work is comprised of responsibilities that occur outside of classroom instruction including preparation time, student supervision, meetings, and reporting student progress (Zydziunaite et al., 2020).

Workload has impacted teacher retention across all levels of experience including pre-service, novice, and veteran educators. In a study conducted by Perryman and Calvert (2020), pre-service teachers reported that they were aware of the workload requirements in teaching, while novice teachers indicated that the reality of the teaching workload was worse than expected. In addition, novice teachers have indicated that the financial compensation does not align with the workload and increasing demands (Bonato, 2019). Veteran teacher attrition rates have increased with some educators electing to retire early, citing unreasonable workloads and stress (Jomuad et al., 2021).

Further, the demands of teacher workloads have contributed to mental and physical health problems (Räsänen et al., 2020). The teaching workload has been reported to be both emotionally and intellectually exhausting (Alexander et al., 2020; Farmer, 2020). Research conducted by Räsänen et al. (2020) revealed that teachers feel their work is never done and experience a sense of guilt in setting work boundaries to achieve a work-life balance. Work-life balance was also identified in the literature as an aspect of teacher workload which has negatively impacted retention and attrition. Work-life balance is defined as the balance between

work duties and the pursuit of personal interests (Perryman & Calvert, 2020). Perryman and Calvert's (2020) study of teacher survey responses related to why educators have chosen to leave the profession, 75% of respondents indicated the top reason given for leaving the teaching profession was to improve work-life balance. Among respondents who considered leaving the teaching profession in the future, 73% indicated improving work-life balance was the motivation.

Previous recommendations for potential solutions to teacher workload and work-life balance varied in the literature. Jomoad et al. (2021) recommended that educators and administrators systematically review teacher workload and collectively determine what adjustments should be made. Other recommendations included limiting the number of hours teachers could work outside of instruction and developing a workload framework to guide and monitor practices (Doherty, 2020). Whereas Perryman and Calvert (2020) and Wood (2019) suggested the root causes and solutions were related to educational culture and should be addressed through this lens. Solutions previously recommended in the literature may be considered informative in the context of Pence Elementary, dependent on research findings.

### ***Performativity and Accountability***

Also identified in the literature as a contributing factor to teacher attrition was performativity and accountability culture (Ackah-Jnr et al., 2022; Kaiser & Thompson, 2021; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Podolsky et al., 2019; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Increased emphasis on systems of school accountability has been regarded as necessary to ensure student achievement (Jerrim & Sims, 2022; Ryan et al., 2017). In the United States, school accountability established by education policy utilizes student assessment scores as a measure of educator effectiveness (Ryan et al., 2017). Performativity is defined as the work of educators directed primarily toward assessments and progress monitoring for the evaluation of student

performance and educator evaluation (Perryman & Calvert, 2020). Multiple studies indicated that the increased pressures of performativity in education may lead to a loss of teacher autonomy and a sense of de-professionalization (Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Podosky et al., 2019; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). The heightened emphasis on accountability devalues individual teaching skills and subject knowledge, diminishes educator enthusiasm, and demotivates the educational professional (Erichsen & Reynolds, 2020).

An aspect of performativity and accountability that contributes to teacher attrition is accountability pressures related to high-stakes testing. High-stakes testing is defined as the use of assessment outcomes to inform decisions about student performance and teacher effectiveness (Jones & Ennes, 2018). Testing accountability is perceived by teachers as a significant cause of stress levels (Erichsen & Reynolds, 2019). Farmer's (2020) study indicated that nearly 30% of teachers have experienced clinical levels of anxiety related to test-based accountability. Further, the increased collection, analysis, and documentation of assessment data have added to teacher workloads (Erichsen & Reynolds, 2020). The results of Farmer's (2020) study of the impact of teacher stress on attrition suggested that although middle and high school teachers are affected most by high-stakes testing, elementary school teachers also experience stress related to math and reading assessments. However, a study conducted by Fuchsman et al. (2020) about high-stakes testing and its impact on teacher satisfaction and attrition in Georgia found that the elimination of high-stakes testing did not result in decreased teacher attrition.

Recommendations for potential solutions to performativity and accountability stressors were identified in the literature. Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) recommended a shift in the types and purposes of assessments. Rather than focusing on performativity and accountability, educators should prioritize focusing on student learning and assessments as "of, for, and as

learning” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020, p. 24). Assessments of learning allow teachers to determine the extent the material has been mastered and identify areas of reteaching. Whereas assessments for learning provide a feedback loop and ongoing communication from the teacher to the student about strengths and needs. Formative assessments serve a different purpose than high-stakes testing which is summative and evaluative. Assessment before, during, and after learning provides multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery beyond percentile scores and are a more equitable measure of student progress in terms of teacher accountability (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Educators should be involved in the development of accountability metrics and policies as teachers are tasked with the implementation of requirements (Ackah-Jnr et al., 2022). Further, increasing teacher autonomy and inclusion in instructional decision-making improves teacher perception of professionalization (Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Prior recommendations to address the impact of performativity and accountability on teacher attrition should be considered in the specific context of Pence Elementary’s retention of certificated staff.

### ***Administrative Support***

Another cause of teacher attrition identified in the review of the literature was the role of principal leadership and perceived lack of administrative support (DeMatthews et al., 2021; Kaiser & Thompson, 2021; Learning Policy Institute, 2017; Nguyen, 2021; Reitman & Dunnick Karge, 2019). Multiple studies indicated that teacher perception of administrative support was the most predictive indicator of teacher attrition related to work conditions (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; DeMatthews et al., 2021; Kaiser & Thompson, 2021; Learning Policy Institute, 2017; Masoom, 2021; Nguyen, 2021; Reitman & Dunnick Karge, 2019). Teacher perceptions of effective and supportive administrators are the most impactful influence on new

teacher retention as compared to veteran educator retention (Bartanen et al., 2019; Miller & Youngs, 2021).

One of the most important relationships to mitigate the problem of low teacher retention is the relationship between school administration and teaching staff. Nguyen (2021) found that when teachers perceived school administration as supportive, encouraging, and appreciative of their efforts in the classroom, teachers were less likely to leave the school or the teaching profession. Effective administrators foster positive work conditions through school cultures that support teacher success and retention (DeMatthews et al., 2021; Urick, 2020; Zavelevsky & Lishchinsky, 2020).

Miller and Youngs (2021) identified the leadership style of the principal as having the highest correlation to teacher retention and migration. More specifically, Urick's (2020) study examined three administrator leadership styles: managerial (management of resources and physical environment), transformational (promotion of mission and vision and development of professional relationships such as professional learning communities, and instructional (curriculum, instruction, pedagogy). Teachers who perceived administration as sharing leadership and decision-making influenced decisions to remain at the site and in the profession (Urick, 2020). Cunningham and Grooms' (2019) study about teacher absenteeism and retention and principal leadership style indicated principals who ensured teachers had the resources needed to provide effective instruction and worked in well-maintained buildings positively influenced teacher retention.

Prior recommendations to address teacher perceptions about administrative support were identified throughout the literature. Most recommendations were directed toward principal leadership preparation programs and professional development (Cunningham & Grooms, 2019;

DeMatthews et al., 2021; Gui, 2019; Learning Policy Institute, 2017). Teacher perceptions about administrative support and leadership should be considered in addressing Pence Elementary's retention of certificated staff.

### ***Compensation***

Another organizational cause of teacher attrition identified in the literature is compensation (Hansen & Feng, 2020; Harris et al., 2019; Patrick & Carver-Thomas, 2022; See et al., 2020). As educator compensation comprises most school district budgets, implications for who is attracted to and retained in the teaching profession are extant (Evans et al., 2022). Financial incentives are a common recruitment and retention strategy (See et al., 2020). Adequate teacher compensation is premised on the assertion that if educator compensation is attractive, teacher retention will increase, and conversely, teacher shortages will be amended (See et al., 2020).

Compared to salaries that require a similar amount of education, weekly educator compensation is approximately 20% less than comparable professions (Allegretto & Mishel, 2016; Patrick & Carver-Thomas, 2022). As teacher compensation has not kept pace with similar professions, the teaching occupation has decreased in a viable career pathway for college graduates (McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019). In addition, teachers perceive that the teaching profession's status has declined in the public view, while the demand for high-quality teachers has grown increasingly urgent (Zavelevsky & Lishchinsky, 2020).

A related factor in the discussion about teacher compensation is workload (Perryman & Calvert, 2020). Educators perceive that salaries fail to sufficiently compensate educators for increasing workloads. Some of the workloads include tasks related to performativity such as continuous data collection and progress monitoring and behavior management. Analyses are



needed to evaluate the adequacy of teacher workload and compensation.

Recommendations to address teacher compensation were identified in the literature. Compensation packages should be calibrated with those of other occupations which require similar levels of education (Allegretto & Mishel, 2016; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Patrick & Carver-Thomas, 2022). Another strategy may be to remove financial barriers including scholarships for teacher preparation programs and loan forgiveness programs upon teacher certification completion (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Hansen & Feng, 2020). As teacher salary schedules are determined at the district level, the site and district administration at Pence Elementary School has the responsibility to address the problem in the local context (McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019) to compensate teachers commiserate with attracting and retaining certified teachers.

### ***Alternative Certification Programs***

Teachers who have obtained certification through alternative programs contribute to attrition rates. In response to the teacher shortage, over 50% of states have developed alternative certification pathways to fill vacancies and remove potential teacher preparation barriers (Hegwood, 2018; Van Overschelde & López, 2019). Alternative certification programs allow candidates to earn teacher qualifications in an accelerated amount of time (Newton et al., 2020) and require less coursework and student teaching experience. An estimated one-third of new teachers have alternative certifications (Hegwood, 2018).

Multiple studies have indicated that teachers who have completed an alternative certification pathway have higher rates of attrition (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Guthery & Bailes, 2019; Harris et al., 2019; Van Overschelde & Wiggins, 2019). Early career teachers and experienced teachers prepared through alternative certification programs are more

likely to migrate to a different school site or exit the profession (Miller & Youngs, 2021). In a Texas study of teacher preparation pathways and retention rates, teachers certified through traditional preparation programs were 66% less likely to leave the profession compared to alternative program preparation (Van Overschelde & Wiggins, 2019). The findings were consistent with an analysis of national educator statistics which indicated that teachers who enter the profession with an alternative certification program are 25% more likely to leave the profession than traditionally prepared program educators (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

Prior solutions to educator attrition attributed to alternative certification programs generally centered on providing support through internship programs, professional development, and mentorship (Bowling & Ball, 2018; Cishe, 2017; Larios et al., 2022; Miller & Youngs, 2021; Rose & Sughrue, 2020). The provision of quality in-service learning programs is pivotal to alternately certified teacher retention (Miller & Youngs, 2021). Teachers in states such as Delaware and Iowa have multi-year induction programs for novice teachers. The induction programs require formal, job-embedded mentorship and observations to earn a standard teaching license (Espinoza et al., 2018). Weekly mentor-mentee meetings address real-time issues the novice teacher may be experiencing, monitor progress, and provide evidence-based and actional feedback for improvement (Canaran & Mirici, 2019). In Delaware, 70% of induction program participants agreed that the initiatives improved instructional practices and student learning, which influenced teacher decisions to remain at their current school (Espinoza et al., 2018). Ongoing support through formal mentors and professional development increases the retention rates of teachers who did not receive training in traditional programs (Miller & Youngs, 2021) by filling gaps in instructional practices.

Rose and Sughrue (2020) identified the need for differentiated professional development, particularly in the area of pedagogy for alternatively certified teachers. Teachers assigned to teach in more specific settings or content areas that require formal skill sets such as special education, world language, and mathematics have reported a lack of proper, advanced preparation. Access to differentiated professional development may prevent frustration arising from the lack of preparation for these specific challenges (Zavelevsky & Lishchinsky, 2020).

Further, professional development has been recommended for principals to increase support of alternatively certified educators (Rose & Sughrue, 2020). To effect change and influence teacher retention administrators need to have a sense of locus of control and agency concerning the problem (McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019). According to McHenry-Sorber and Campbell (2019), site leaders may not possess a sense of agency over the problem of teacher retention. Through administrative professional development, administrators will be better equipped to support teacher retention.

Larios et al. (2022) asserted that intensive and differential mentorship is needed to support teachers who are alternatively certified, especially educators in special education. In addition, ensuring administrator support and providing actional feedback was indicated as a contributor to teacher self-efficacy and retention of teachers who have completed an alternative program (Wilhelm et al., 2021). Prior recommendations to examine the impact of alternative certifications on teacher attrition should be considered for Pence Elementary's retention of certificated staff.

### **Solutions to the Problem**

The problem of teacher attrition is complex as multiple factors converge including both practical and theoretical themes (Harris et al., 2019). In response, state legislatures have enacted

several laws to boost teacher recruitment and mitigate the effects of teacher attrition. In 2017, 47 bills were enacted in 23 states to attract teachers to the profession, especially to high-poverty and low-achieving schools (Aragon, 2018). Strategies included recruiting college graduates to fill teacher vacancies, developing programs to attract employees from other professions into the education field, and providing alternative certification programs (Aragon, 2018; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Other legislation focused on an increase in beginning teacher salaries, teacher preparation loan forgiveness, hiring bonuses, and incentives to support teacher retirees in returning to the profession (Aragon, 2018).

Another approach to retaining teachers that has proven to be effective is school-level hiring procedures that ensure a better *fit* between teachers and their schools. School administrators who implement a more comprehensive hiring process for prospective teachers may increase retention rates. Comprehensive practices include a question-and-answer component, a tour of the school, and a demonstration lesson (Miller & Youngs, 2021). An extensive candidate screening process may ensure a better organizational “fit” and assist in teacher retention.

To address the teacher shortage, states have also developed “grow your own” programs through partnerships between education departments and community colleges. For example, the Iowa Department of Education is developing a program in which high schools and community colleges could offer a paraprofessional generalist certification as a gateway for classified staff into the teaching profession (Roche, 2022). This “grow your own” strategy recruits classified educational staff and community members into the teaching field, as these groups are more likely to remain in their respective communities (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Another strategy promoted by states is a teacher residency program in which future teachers are hired and

trained in high-needs schools and receive tuition assistance and living expense stipends in exchange for a three-to-five-year commitment to teaching (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Espinoza et al., 2018).

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to provide recommendations to solve the problem of high teacher attrition at Pence Elementary School. The problem was Pence Elementary School is experiencing difficulty in retaining certified teaching staff (L. Noll, personal communication, March 13, 2022). This portion of the report examined literature related to the research problem. Included in this chapter were the scale of the problem of teacher retention, the impact of teacher attrition, the causes of teacher attrition, and solutions to the problem.

## **Chapter Three: Procedures**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this study was to provide recommendations to solve the problem of high teacher attrition at Pence Elementary School. The problem was Pence Elementary School is experiencing difficulty in retaining certified teaching staff (L. Noll, personal communication, March 13, 2022). Pence Elementary School is a rural, public elementary school situated in southeast Iowa. This portion of the report includes the semi-structured interview procedures, quantitative survey procedures, focus group procedures, and a summary.

### **Interview Procedures**

The first approach used to collect data in this study was semi-structured interviews. This approach allowed the researcher to construct interview questions based on specific topics related to the research problem of how teacher retention can be solved at Pence Elementary School in Fairfield, Iowa located in southeast Iowa. A semi-structured interview protocol allowed the researcher to format questions in a progression that supported capturing participant experiences in a rich and detailed manner. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants (Claxton & Michael, 2020) based on experience at Pence Elementary. The five participants consisted of one administrator and four teachers.

The interviews were conducted off-campus in a one-to-one, face-to-face format. Consent to participate in the interview was obtained from each staff member before beginning the semi-structured interview. A standard interview protocol was utilized during the interviews (Claxton & Michael, 2020). Throughout the interview, the researcher documented participant body language concerning the progression of topics (Claxton & Michael, 2020). Each interview was recorded with the researcher's cell phone. Interviews were completed in

approximately one hour and were immediately transcribed for data analysis.

Data were collected qualitatively via 10 semi-structured questions formulated to answer the central research question. Transcripts were reviewed and similar phrases and words were identified. Codes were ascribed to patterns across the data set. A table of codes was developed to organize the data into specific themes representative of participant responses (Claxton & Michael, 2020). A thematic analysis method was selected as the approach allowed the researcher to align participant responses with the literature review (Claxton & Michael, 2020).

### **Interview Questions**

The semi-structured interview protocol consisted of 10 questions related to the exploration of participant perspectives about teacher retention at Pence Elementary School. The rationale for each question has been provided. Scholarly resources supported the rationale for the semi-structured interview questions.

#### **1. What are your professional qualifications?**

This question aimed to determine how the respondent obtained teaching certification, a prerequisite of professional qualification. The purpose was to establish professional qualification through a traditional certification program or an alternative certification program. Educators who are fully certified in the subject matter area and have obtained teaching certification through a traditional certification program fulfill the definition of a highly qualified teacher (García & Weiss, 2019). As identified in the literature review, educators certified through a traditional program are less likely to leave the profession as compared to educators certified through an alternative certification (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Guthery & Bailes, 2019; Harris et al., 2019; Van Overschelde &

Wiggins, 2019). Perryman and Calvert (2020) attribute higher rates of traditionally certified teachers to the level of self-efficacy developed through vetted programs.

2. How would you describe the support and encouragement you receive from the teaching staff at Pence Elementary School?

This question aimed to determine how participants described collegial support from educators. Relationships between teachers in the school were cited as a factor that can lead to a sense of partnership, belonging, and support and increase teacher retention (Zavelevsky & Lishchinsky, 2020). Teachers who participate in high-quality teacher preparation and receive ongoing support from colleagues are more likely to continue their employment and less likely to leave the teaching field (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Further, educators who are certified through alternative programs benefit from mentorship and collaboration embedded into the school site (Miller & Youngs, 2021).

3. Please describe the level of personal support and assistance you offer to/receive from Pence Elementary School staff/administration.

The question is written to be presented based on whether the participant is a teacher or administrator and receives or offers support. This question aimed to determine participant perception of support assistance from the school site and district administration. One of the primary reasons teachers attribute to leaving the teaching profession is the lack of support from the administration (DeMatthews et al., 2021; Kaiser & Thompson, 2021; Learning Policy Institute, 2017; Nguyen, 2021; Reitman & Dunnick Karge, 2019). When teachers perceive school administration as supportive, constructive in feedback, and encouraging, educators are less likely to migrate from the school or the teaching profession (Nguyen, 2021).

4. How would you describe the level of parental involvement at Pence Elementary



School?

This question aimed to determine to what extent parent participation and community support play regarding teacher retention. Research conducted by Harris et al. (2019) indicated that parental support was highly predictive as a consideration for teachers remaining in the teaching profession. The rationale is that parental support and involvement contribute to positive work conditions and school climate. As teacher perceptions of working conditions improve, retention of teachers is more likely (Merrill, 2021).

5. How do federal guidelines and policies impact teaching?

This question aimed to determine if federal and state mandates which increase the demands of accountability and performativity. Teacher retention is negatively impacted as the focus of education is centered on mandated assessments and progress measurement. Multiple studies indicated that teacher autonomy and professionalization are diminished in accountability and performativity culture (Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Podosky et al., 2019; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Educator enthusiasm and autonomy are diminished, thereby increasing attrition (Erichsen & Reynolds, 2020).

6. How does financial compensation impact how long a teacher retains their position?

This question aimed to determine to what extent compensation is a factor in teacher retention at Pence Elementary School. There is evidence that salary level significantly affects teacher retention (Tolin, 2020). Further, the low salaries of teachers contribute to the stigma of teaching as a lesser-valued profession, which then in turn affects teacher retention (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). The rationale for this question was to determine how participants perceived financial compensation as a factor in teacher retention at Pence Elementary School.

7. Describe the importance of professional development in your decision to stay at Pence

Elementary School.

The question was presented to ascertain the role of professional development in retaining employment at Pence Elementary School. Research indicates that teachers who believe they were able to make meaningful educational impacts on the students through continuing professional development are more likely to continue in the profession (Renbarger & Davis, 2019). Districts and schools that provide opportunities for professional learning including best instructional practices and inclusive teaching strategies have higher retention rates (Reitman & Dunnick Karge, 2019). Professional development contributes to educator development of self-efficacy and increased competency.

8. How do the school's climate and culture impact teacher retention?

This question was presented to determine the role of school climate and culture in Pence Elementary School teacher retention. Factors such as student apathy, absenteeism, poverty, and concern for personal safety were found by García and Weiss (2019) to be reasons for teachers to leave their current schools or the teaching profession altogether. Adverse school characteristics and work condition factors decrease teacher job satisfaction and impact teacher retention. The rationale for the question was to determine participant perceptions about school climate and culture and the impact on teacher retention.

9. Identify any other factors that are part of your decision to stay at Pence Elementary School.

The question was formulated to identify any other factors not yet solicited from participants which impacted decision-making to remain employed at Pence Elementary School. Multiple studies indicated that factors that may relate to the individual, organization, community, or policy are multi-faceted and may overlap in determining whether to remain at a school site or

in the profession (Torres, 2019; Zavelevsky & Lishchinsky, 2020). The rationale for this question is to determine if there are other considerations, not adequately explored by literature that may factor into a teacher's decision to continue employment with a specific school or district.

10. How does your experience at Pence Elementary School compare with another teaching experiences you have had?

This question aimed to determine how other teaching experiences compared to a continuing teacher's experience at Pence Elementary School. The question was strategically presented at the end of the interview to mitigate interview bias regarding participant perceptions and experiences. The majority of teachers leave the profession within the first five years of experience (Nguyen et al., 2019). Novice teachers have also been shown to move or transfer to different schools more often than veteran teachers (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Novice teachers may have unrealistic perceptions of teaching, and coupled with the demands of teaching, may cause low job satisfaction rates (Renbarger & Davis, 2019).

### **Survey Procedures**

The second approach used to collect data in this study was a quantitative survey. This approach explored Pence Elementary School staff perceptions and experiences about the problem of high teacher attrition. A closed-ended Likert scale survey was administered electronically using Survey Monkey, a web-based survey administration program. The use of a quantitative survey for data collection provided participants with the opportunity to indicate a singular response to each question (Claxton & Michael, 2020). Participant responses were then quantifiable and appropriate for numerical analysis.

A purposeful sampling method was used to ensure participants were selected with requisite knowledge and experiences regarding Pence Elementary School and teacher retention (Claxton & Michael, 2020). Participants included 16 teachers at Pence Elementary School. The participants received an email with a reminder of voluntary participation and consent, instructions regarding how to complete the survey, and a link to the survey. Participants were provided a two-week period in which to complete the survey. However, if participants needed additional time, the timeline was extended by one week to complete the survey.

The survey was comprised of three demographic questions and 10 statements developed from the literature review to which survey participants responded using a five-point Likert scale rating (Claxton & Michael, 2020). The Likert scale consisted of five possible answers from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). Survey results were analyzed by calculating the frequency of Likert scale responses per question. Data analysis also included the calculation of averages for each question by adding the results and dividing the results by the total number of participant responses to the question (Claxton & Michael, 2020). The prompts on the survey included the following demographic questions and survey prompts.

### **Demographic Questions**

The survey included four demographic questions. Demographic data were collected to record participant information. Questions documented participant race, gender, age range, and years of teaching experience.

1. What is your race?

White

Black/African American

Asian

Native American/Pacific Islander

Two or more races

Other

2. What is your gender?

Male

Female

Prefer not to answer

3. What is your age?

18-24

25-34

35-44

45-54

55-64

Over 64

4. How many years of experience working as a teacher do you have?

Less than 1

1-5

6-10

11-15

More than 15

Teachers who are new to the profession are more likely to leave their current employment or the teaching field altogether. Transition patterns include novice teachers

within the first five years of teaching or veteran teachers toward the end of their teaching careers (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Teachers who have invested many years in the profession are more likely to stay in teaching (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018).

### Survey Questions

The survey was comprised of 10 statements developed from the narrative literature review. Each statement required a response based on a 5-point Likert scale from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). Statements are supported by the rationale for selection and scholarly resources.

1. I have the materials I need to successfully teach in my subject area.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

A factor that impacts teacher job satisfaction and retention is having adequate job resources such as instructional materials to teach effectively (Cunningham & Grooms, 2018; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). Teachers with low job satisfaction indicate a lack of proper materials (Cunningham & Grooms, 2018). This question was presented to determine the adequacy of the instructional materials of respondents.

2. I receive recognition for my good work.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

The question was included to ascertain participant perceptions about recognition. Teacher recognition has been cited as a reason for increased motivation in the profession (Zhang et al., 2021). A sense of belonging through social recognition of peers and administrators is an indicator of teacher retention (Kelchtermans, 2017).

3. My principal cares about me as an individual.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Administrative support has been identified as the most predictive indicator of teacher attrition (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Further, educators who perceive administration as capable of cultivating positive relationships and work environments are more likely to remain at the site and in the teaching profession. The question was presented to determine participant perception of administrative support and caring relationship.

4. I have someone at my school I can go to who supports me.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Teachers who have a connection to at least one other colleague at their school indicate satisfaction with a positive work environment and collegial relationships. Collaboration has been identified as an integral component of social and professional support (Torres-Blue, 2019). The question was included to determine participant perception of support and connectedness with other staff.

5. My opinion matters at my school.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

In the context of a Professional Learning Community, educators share expertise and feedback to improve instructional practices. Teachers experience increased professionalism as colleague perspectives are solicited and valued (Cansoy & Parlar, 2017). By contrast,

educators may experience unprofessional interactions if colleagues do not value or respect the opinions of others. Teachers who feel valued by colleagues and educators and have agency in contributing to school decisions are more likely to stay employed in those districts (Torres-Blue, 2019). The question was posed to determine participant experiences about being valued.

6. I receive feedback about my teaching.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

The question was developed to identify participant perceptions about receiving instructional practice feedback. Providing actional feedback was indicated as a contributor to teacher self-efficacy and teacher retention (Wilhelm et al., 2021). Educators benefit from feedback provided by administrators and colleagues to improve practices and increase self-efficacy.

7. My financial compensation is sufficient for the work I do each day.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Teacher compensation is a determinative factor in attracting and retaining educators. Financial compensation and perceived workload is also an indicator of teacher retention. If educators perceive workload is misaligned with financial compensation, they may seek other employment opportunities or exit the profession (Perryman & Calvert, 2020). The question was presented to identify participant perceptions about financial compensation in the context of workload.

8. I receive training or professional development that supports my ability to do my job.



5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Quality professional development improves both professional practice and growth. Teachers who receive quality professional development opportunities report high levels of confidence and self-efficacy (Reitman & Dunnick Karge, 2019). Educators who are not provided with professional development opportunities may lack the necessary support to improve practices. This question was included to identify the professional development opportunities provided to participants.

9. My grade-level coworkers are committed to providing quality teaching.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

A supportive learning environment is one in which all participants, teachers, and students are working to their potential. Educators who perceive colleagues and grade-level teachers are not providing effective instruction may feel an obligation to fill in gaps (Torres-Blue, 2019). Teachers may have workloads unfairly increased and become demoralized. Collegial support is necessary to manage workload and stress. The question was included to ascertain participant perspectives about colleagues and concerted efforts to provide quality instruction.

10. The school environment allows me to do my best every day.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

The question was presented as another measure of participant perceptions about

the school environment and its impact on performance. Research indicates that work conditions and school environment can affect a teacher's decision to continue to be employed at a specific school site or district. Educator perceptions of favorable working conditions are associated with higher job satisfaction (Mabeya et al., 2019; Renbarger & Davis, 2019; Toropova et al., 2020) and teacher retention (Cunningham & Grooms, 2019).

### **Focus Group Procedures**

The third approach utilized to collect data was a focus group. The focus group protocol was implemented to examine possible solutions to address the problem of high teacher attrition at Pence Elementary School. Focus group participants were purposefully selected based on the criteria of teachers who did not participate in the semi-structured interview and had at least one year of Pence Elementary teaching. Focus group participants included a second-grade teacher with over ten years of experience at Pence Elementary School, a third-grade teacher also with over ten years of experience at the school, a Title One teacher with eight years of experience, a fourth-grade teacher with seven years of experience, and a special education teacher with six years of experience at Pence Elementary School.

The focus group interview was conducted on campus in a face-to-face format. Consent was confirmed verbally for each participant before the focus group interview began. A standard interview protocol was utilized during the interviews (Claxton & Michael, 2020). The researcher's cell phone was used to record participant responses. The focus group interview was limited to 90 minutes to avoid participant fatigue (Claxton & Michael, 2020). The audio recording was immediately transcribed for data analysis.

Focus group transcripts were read a minimum of two times to understand the data set as a whole. Similar phrases and words were identified throughout the transcripts. Codes were

ascribed to categorize groups of codes into themes. A thematic analysis allowed the researcher to align the participant responses with the literature related to the study (Claxton & Michael, 2020).

### **Focus Group Questions**

The focus group interview consisted of five questions related to the central research question, how can the problem of high teacher attrition at Pence Elementary School be solved? Each focus group question is presented with a purpose, rationale, and scholarly resource.

1. Describe how you would improve in-school support for teachers at Pence Elementary School.

This question was presented to solicit teacher perspectives about how school site support can be improved. Regardless of whether educators obtain certification through a traditional or alternative program, teachers require support. Teacher work conditions, including inadequate administrative support, contribute to higher teacher attrition rates (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Harris et al., 2019; Sutchter et al., 2019). Understanding how to improve in-school support and teacher work conditions contributes to possible solutions to address the problem of high teacher attrition at Pence Elementary School.

2. In what ways can the Pence Elementary School administration support your professional development to make the experience more beneficial to you?

Teachers who receive relevant professional development and have some agency in the selection of training report higher levels of job satisfaction (Reitman & Dunnick Karge, 2019). Professional development must be a thoughtful process where teachers are permitted to advance or learn new skills. This question was asked to determine if current practices of

professional development enhance job satisfaction at Pence Elementary School and what improvements can be made to make the training more meaningful.

3. What tasks could be removed from your workload at Pence Elementary that would allow you to concentrate on providing high-quality instruction?

An excessive teacher workload consists of professional tasks beyond the scope of providing instruction (Jomoad et al., 2021; Kaiser & Thompson, 2021) which result in stress. Teacher workload has been cited as a cause of teacher attrition (Doherty, 2020; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Worth et al., 2018). The rationale for this question was to identify tasks in teacher workload which could be alleviated to improve instruction and reduce stress.

4. What specific changes can be made to improve the working conditions at Pence Elementary School?

Working conditions play a significant role in teacher job satisfaction (Mabeya et al., 2019; Renbarger & Davis, 2019; Toropova et al., 2020). Among considerations that affect working conditions are the availability of technology, updated facilities, adequate resources, and instructional materials (Cunningham & Grooms, 2019; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Teacher attrition may persist if work conditions are not addressed (Harris et al., 2019). This question was presented to identify specific work conditions at Pence Elementary and what changes are recommended.

5. Describe how much of an impact standardized testing as the determination of student success as a factor in your continued employment at Pence Elementary School?

Government mandates as well as state and school board policies have become increasingly more prescriptive in directing how and what teachers teach. Perryman and Calvert (2020) assert that it is not the workload that causes teachers to leave the profession, but the

nature of the work that impedes their autonomy and creativity. Emphasis on accountability measures and standardized testing diminishes teacher autonomy and motivation (Erichsen & Reynolds, 2020). The question was intended to determine how standardized testing impacts teacher attrition at Pence Elementary.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to provide recommendations to the administration at Pence Elementary School with possible solutions to solve the problem of high teacher attrition. The problem was Pence Elementary School is experiencing difficulty in retaining certified teaching staff (L. Noll, personal communication, March 13, 2022). Included in this chapter were the semi-structured interview procedures, survey procedures, and focus group procedures.

## **Chapter Four: Findings**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this study was to provide recommendations to solve the problem of high teacher attrition at Pence Elementary School in Southeast Iowa. The problem was Pence Elementary School is experiencing difficulty in retaining certified teaching staff. This section of the report presents the findings from the three data collection methods which included a semi-structured interview, quantitative survey, and focus group.

### **Interview Findings**

The first approach used to collect data was a semi-structured interview comprised of 10 questions. A semi-structured interview protocol allowed the researcher to develop a progression of questions that captured participant experiences about specific topics related to solving the problem of high teacher attrition at Pence Elementary School in Southeast Iowa. Further, the semi-structured interview yielded rich and detailed participant responses to inform recommendations.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted off-site at a local restaurant. The interviews were conducted in a one-to-one, face-to-face format. Consent to participate in the interview was obtained from each staff member before beginning the semi-structured interview. A standard interview protocol was utilized during the interviews (Claxton & Michael, 2020). Throughout the interview, the researcher documented participant body language concerning the progression of topics (Claxton & Michael, 2020). Each interview was recorded with the researcher's cell phone and a backup BestoOne Keychain Voice Recorder device to ensure the interview was captured in the event of a cell phone malfunction. Interviews lasted approximately one hour and were immediately transcribed for data analysis.

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants (Claxton & Michael, 2020) based on experience at Fairfield Community School District and Pence Elementary. The semi-structured interview participant criteria were based on employment with the Fairfield Community School District for at least three years and Pence Elementary School for at least one full academic year. The five interview participants consisted of one administrator and four teachers.

### **Interview Description of Participants**

Participant A was an administrator at Pence Elementary School with five years of experience in administration. Prior to serving in administration at Pence Elementary, Participant A was an instructional coach for two years at the site. Previous educational experiences include being a special education teacher for nine years in the Fairfield Community School District and a high school special education coordinator in a large, rural district. Participant A holds a special education teaching credential and a K-12 principal/special education director endorsement.

Participant B, a special education teacher with three years of teaching special education at Pence Elementary School, was the second semi-structured interview participant. In addition to teaching experience at Pence, Participant B has taught special education at another school site within the district. Participant B holds a K-6 elementary education certification, a K-8 reading endorsement, and a K-8 math endorsement. She earned a master's degree in special education with certifications to teach students with learning disabilities, behavior disorders, and intellectual disorders.

The next semi-structured interview was conducted with Participant C, an educator with over five years at Pence Elementary School and 15 years of experience in the Fairfield School District. Experiences include providing Title One services in two different schools within the district. Participant C holds a K-6 elementary endorsement, a K-8 reading endorsement, and an

Instructional Strategist I: Mild/Moderate endorsement. Additionally, Participant C possesses a master's degree in education.

Participant D began working in the Fairfield School District as a paraprofessional. Participant D has eight years of teaching experience at Pence Elementary School, with the most recent role as a fourth-grade teacher for five years. Other teaching experiences in Fairfield School District include assignments at three school sites. Participant D's teaching certifications include K-6 general elementary education and K-8 reading.

The final semi-structured interview was conducted with Participant E, whose career in education has been at the elementary level serving students with special needs. During the 2022-23 school year, the teaching assignment was in a third-grade, general education classroom. Participant E holds elementary education certifications, including a K-6 general elementary education and a K-8 reading endorsement. Participant E also holds special education certifications in behavior disorders, mild/moderate learning disabilities, and a temporary certification for students with intellectual disabilities.

## **Interview Results**

Interviews were conducted with one administrator and four teachers at Pence Elementary School. Data were collected qualitatively via 10 semi-structured questions formulated to answer the central research question, how can the problem of high teacher attrition be solved at Pence Elementary School in Fairfield, Iowa? The interview transcripts were reviewed, and similar phrases and words were identified. Codes were ascribed to patterns across the data set and categorized into themes based on similarity. A thematic analysis method was selected as the approach that allowed the researcher to align participant responses with the literature review (Claxton & Michael, 2020). A table of codes was developed to organize the data into specific



themes representative of participant responses (Claxton & Michael, 2020). An analysis of the semi-structured responses yielded themes related to solving the problem of high teacher attrition at Pence Elementary School. Three themes were developed as representative of participant responses: supportive, policy, and climate and culture. Participant quotes representative of codes and themes were identified. Table 1 illustrates the themes, codes, and significant participant quotes. Table 2 indicates the themes, codes, and code frequency identified across the semi-structured interview transcripts.

**Table 1**

*Semi-Structured Interview Themes, Codes, and Participant Quotes*

Themes	Codes	Participant Quotes
Support	Supportive	I just feel like the staff cares about each other genuinely and want to make sure everyone is doing OK (emotionally).
		There are always suggestions from the outside and I feel like (the principal) really understands what happens on the inside. She always has my back in that regard.
	Important	If your administration doesn't support you or you don't feel like you're important to them, that's why people leave and that's exactly what you're saying is (the principal) is the reason why I stay.
	Available	(The principal) is incredible. I feel like she is always available.
Mandates	Standardized Testing	I get that (federal guidelines/specifically Common Core) are there because they want everybody to learn the same thing. However, just because you're teaching it doesn't mean it's taught the same way, or it's graded on the same way.
	Compensation	For me, giving up the compensation that I could get at a bigger school in a bigger city wasn't

		worth the education and the childhood that my children are experiencing.
	Professional Development	It's like we get PD, but there is no push to implement it or no help to get it implemented. Then we move on to the next PD, where it's the next thing that we don't get to implement.
Climate and Culture	Professional	So, climate and culture depend on who I'm around and what is being discussed I can be friendly and professional with everyone, but there are some (people) I would rather just turn around and walk away from because they never have a positive thing to say.
	Positive	No matter where you're at you find a bunch of people that that if you want to go to the negative and deal with the negative and be in the negative because that's who you are then that's what's going to happen.
	Respect	I have had some bad experiences, and it just like, gives me a bad taste. It does. In general, for education. It does.

**Table 2***Semi-Structured Interviews Themes, Codes, and Frequency*

Themes	Codes	Frequency
Support	Supportive	33
	Important	9
	Available	2
Mandates	Standardized Testing	21
	Compensation	11
	Professional Development	11
Climate and Culture	Professional	16
	Positive	7
	Respect	3

## **Survey Findings**

The second data collection approach was a quantitative survey. A closed-ended Likert scale survey was administered electronically through Survey Monkey to a total of 16 Pence Elementary teachers. The survey contained four demographic questions and 10 Likert scale statements. The five-point Likert scale consisted of responses ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1).

### **Survey Description of Participants**

Sixteen participants from Pence Elementary School completed the survey. Of the 16 participants, one educator was in the 18 to 24 age range, five were in the 25 to 34 age range, and one was in the 35 to 44 age range. The majority of participants were in the 45 to 54 and 55 to 64 age ranges, as four educators indicated ages in the 45 to 54 range and five educators reported ages in the 55 to 64 range. All participants identified as white and female which is consistent with the race and gender demographic makeup of the school. Two participants reported that they have one to five years of teaching experience, five participants reported six to ten years of experience, two participants reported 11-15 years of teaching experience, and the final seven participants reported that they have more than 15 years of classroom teaching experience.

### **Survey Results**

The quantitative survey was comprised of 10 statements to which respondents indicated a range of agreement to disagreement on a five-point scale as follows: 5-Strongly Agree, 4-Agree, 3-Neither Agree nor Disagree, 2-Disagree, and 1-Strongly Disagree. A total of 15 Pence teachers completed the survey. Table 3 illustrates the frequency and average of survey responses.

**Table 3**

*Survey Statement Response Frequency and Average of Survey Responses*

Survey Statements	Frequency					Average
	1	2	3	4	5	
1. I have the materials I need to successfully teach my subject area.	1	2	4	7	2	3.4
2. I receive recognition for my good work.	1	0	5	7	3	3.7
3. My principal cares about me as an individual.	0	0	1	3	12	4.7
4. I have someone at my school I can go to who supports me.	0	1	0	3	12	4.6
5. My opinion matters at my school.	0	1	1	10	4	4.1
6. I receive feedback about my teaching.	0	1	2	8	5	4.1
7. My financial compensation is sufficient for the work I do.	4	6	3	2	1	2.4
8. I receive training or professional development that supports my ability to do my job.	0	0	5	9	1	3.5
9. My grade-level coworkers are committed to providing quality teaching.	0	0	1	7	8	4.4
10. The school environment allows me to do my best every day.	0	2	1	9	4	3.9

*Note.* Averages were calculated by multiplying each response value by the corresponding Likert scale value, summing the results, and dividing the results by the total number of participant responses.

### Focus Group Findings

A focus group was the third data collection approach. The focus group protocol with five questions was implemented to examine possible solutions to address the problem of high teacher attrition at Pence Elementary School. Focus group participants were purposefully selected based on the criteria of teachers who did not participate in the semi-structured interview and had at least one year of teaching experience at Pence.

The focus group interview was conducted on campus in a face-to-face format. Consent was confirmed verbally for each participant before the focus group interview began. A

standard interview protocol was utilized during the interviews (Claxton & Michael, 2020). Both the researcher's cell phone and a second recording device were used to ensure all responses were captured. The focus group interview was limited to 90 minutes to avoid participant fatigue (Claxton & Michael, 2020). The audio recording was immediately transcribed for data analysis.

### **Focus Group Description of Participants**

The focus group included five participants. Participant F is a second-grade teacher with over 10 years of teaching experience at Pence. Participant G is a third-grade teacher with over 10 years of teaching experience at Pence. Participant H is a fourth-grade teacher with seven years of experience. Participant I is a special education teacher with six years of experience at Pence. Finally, Participant J is a Title One teacher with eight years of experience at Pence.

### **Focus Group Results**

The goal of the focus group was to explore participant perspectives on improving teacher retention at Pence Elementary School. Focus group transcripts were read a minimum of two times to understand the data set as a whole. Similar phrases and words were identified throughout the transcripts. Codes were ascribed to categorize groups of codes into themes. A thematic analysis allowed the researcher to align the participant responses with the literature related to the study (Claxton & Michael, 2020).

Two salient themes related to solving the problem of high teacher attrition at Pence Elementary School were developed: support and workload. Participant quotes were identified throughout the focus group transcripts that are representative of the themes and codes. Table 4 presents the themes, codes, and significant participant quotes.

**Table 4***Focus Group Themes, Codes, and Participant Quotes*

Themes	Codes	Participant Quotes
Support	Problem	Well, I'm trying to make things positive by saying, if this is an issue, how can we solve it? You understand problems just don't magically go away; they just get worse if you leave it alone.
	Feedback	If that's not what I need, I need to be allowed to go to a different place and get the development that I need because I am in a different place.
	Strengths	If you're really going to get better support, you have to be allowed to communicate strengths and weaknesses, but then it also can't be exploited or used against you.
Workload	Time	As soon as our contract time starts, the kids come to our classrooms and eat breakfast from 8:00 to 8:30. We supervise them do the Pledge of Allegiance, greet them in the circle, do an activity, [and] we're supposed to have attendance done.
	Duties	Yeah, so, I don't have any before or after school duties, but the worst part of my day that I absolutely hate is 3:20-3:35. It should not take 15 minutes for me to dismiss my class, I have to stop teaching at 3:20.
	Testing	It was almost [winter break] before we saw the [standardized testing] scores from last year. We're already so far into the school year, you can't adjust your teaching to make a more impactful grade year.

Table 5 reports the two themes, support and workload. The codes which support the development of the themes and the frequency across participant responses are also indicated.

**Table 5***Focus Group Themes, Codes, and Frequency*

Themes	Codes	Frequency
Support	Problem	15
	Feedback	4
	Strengths	2
Workload	Time	65
	Duties	6
	Testing	3

### Discussion of the Findings

A discussion of the themes, findings, and interpretations relative to the central research question is presented in the following section. Three overarching themes were developed from the semi-structured interview data analysis: support, mandates, and climate and culture. Evidence which supports the themes and related findings is provided.

The first theme that emerged from the conducted interviews was support. As indicated in Table 2, the code, supportive, had the highest frequency of 33. Overall, interview participants perceived the staff and administration at Pence Elementary School as supportive. Participants identified support from colleagues as both positive and encouraging. Specifically, teachers described emotionally supportive grade-level teachers. Participant A reflected, “I just feel like the staff cares about each other genuinely and want to make sure everyone is doing OK [emotionally].” Participant E observed, “I got along great with the [grade level] team. I don’t think there was anybody that I [could not] go to and talk to. They would help in any way they could and [are] always offering support.” Participants perceived collegial support as a retention factor. Educator collegiality improves work conditions which remains a significant factor in teacher retention (Ortan, et al., 2021).

Most interview participants identified the administration as supportive in a variety of areas. Participant E reported, “[The principal provided] a hundred percent support like in

anything I went to like I could open [the principal's] door and talk to her about whatever I'm thinking [and the principal would be] supportive and fair." In terms of administrative support regarding student behaviors, one participant identified the principal as able to manage external recommendations to improve student success while understanding both the reality and challenges of implementing recommendations. Participant B observed, "I have a [student] that takes a lot of time and energy. There are always suggestions from the outside, and in that regard, I feel like [the principal] really understands what happens on the inside. She always has my back in that regard." In addition, Participant E identified supportive district administration and described, "[You could go] to the superintendent and [be] 100% supported." Participant E provided further insight into teacher retention and administrative support by asserting, "But ultimately the reason most people leave is the administrator. How supportive they are, how they treat you, and how they feel about you as an individual. The administration [doesn't] even realize what impact they have on retention." Teachers perceived the Pence administration as supportive, thereby positively impacting teacher retention (Nguyen, 2021).

The code with the next highest frequency, important, was identified nine times across the interview responses. Participants perceived administrative support as both feeling valued by the administrator and a factor in teacher retention. Participant C stated, "If your administration doesn't support you or you don't feel like you're important to them, that's why a lot of people leave." The administrator shared a similar perspective about the importance of developing support and shared leadership among staff. Participant A commented, "[support includes] having that shared leadership piece always providing the support, what do you need from me? I'm a doer. But at the same time, letting others know I am here to help, but I don't want to micromanage people, because I think that's detrimental." Participants also perceived supportive



administration in terms of availability. The code available occurred twice in participant responses. Administrator accessibility to staff remains a challenge as student behavior, policy implementation, and instructional leadership consume administrative time. Participant B stated, “[The principal] is incredible. I feel like she is always available.” Both teacher and administrator perceptions about the importance of support were consistent with other study findings which indicated that teachers who feel valued and supported are less likely to leave a school, district, or the teaching profession (Nguyen, 2021).

The second theme that emerged from the interview data analysis was mandates. Public education mandates from state and federal governments are defined as policies and subsequent requirements, including special education, academic standards, testing for accountability measures, funding, and professional development (Jennings, 2018). The code with the highest frequency was testing, which occurred 21 times in the interviews. Participant B described testing as a government mandate which does not inform or improve practices as “the government [requires testing] and is [testing] even working? I’m just jumping through the hoop.” Participant D, a general education teacher, reflected, “I feel like federal guidelines and Common Core [are necessary] because that’s literally the standards that we are having to teach and they want everybody to learn the same thing.” A special educator, Participant C asserted that “I spend so much of my energy testing that I could be spending teaching them or creating good lessons.” Increased mandates which burden teachers with performativity measures and diminish autonomy contribute to educator burnout and may negatively impact retention (Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Räsänen et al., 2020).

The code with the next highest frequency was compensation which occurred 11 times across the interview responses. State and federal funding mandates impact the compensation

afforded to educators. For some educators, compensation is a significant factor in the determination of continuing in the teaching profession. Conversely, compensation is regarded as an important, but indeterminant factor in teacher retention. Interview responses reflected a continuum of the compensation factor in teacher retention. Participant C reported compensation as a deciding factor, “When you are paid half of what anybody else with your level of education has, it’s ridiculous.” Participant B reflected on the minimal impact of compensation, “This is where I grew up, so finances really didn’t play a part.” Participant A described compensation as one aspect of an investment, “New teachers [are] investing in their future as a family here and the relationships and the community that you build. Because you can have all the money in the world, but if you’re miserable it doesn’t matter.” Participant responses indicated that compensation may improve teacher retention thereby lessening teacher turnover and shortages (See et al., 2020).

Professional development was the last code identified under the mandates theme with a frequency of 11 across the interview data. Iowa Code 284.1 (2001) defines professional development as a required or mandated element of student achievement and teacher quality. Participant responses about professional development offered by Pence Elementary as a factor in remaining in the teaching profession ranged from insignificant to contributive. Participant E posited that professional development “doesn’t play a big part, basically [what is offered] is the same from district to district and not very valuable. They don’t give you what you need.” Whereas Participant C observed that “We do a good job with professional development. Most of the time I think it is worthwhile. I think that is how you retain teachers. Make professional development relevant to what you’re doing.” Research suggests that professional learning contributes to educator job satisfaction and reduces attrition (Evans et al., 2020). Participants

identified professional development as a factor in teacher retention at Pence.

The third theme which emerged from the interviews was climate and culture. The codes which informed the climate and culture were professional, positive, and respect. The code, professional, had a frequency of 11 occurrences in participant responses. Several participants asserted that maintaining a professional approach and demeanor contributes to a positive climate and culture. Participant D explained professionalism as an aspect of friendliness to all staff: “I can be friendly to all, and I can be professional with everyone [although some staff] never have a positive thing to say.” Participant A described professionalism as the recognition that each staff member brings various talents to the team. Participant A reflected, “Everyone brings a different gift to the table, and we may not always agree with how that person does it, but we have to appreciate that I can’t meet [the needs] of all 350 kids. We’re a team for a reason.” Professionalism embraces staff differences as strengths and contributes to a climate and culture of success for staff and students.

The code positive occurred seven times across the climate and culture data set. Participants expressed negativity as a contaminant of school climate and culture. Participant B commented, “If you want to go to the negative and be in the negative, that’s who you are and that’s going to happen. But you can get away from [negativity] because there is positive, too.” Participant B articulated that Pence Elementary has “a really good culture and climate, but I feel like I also kind to try to stay away from the negative.” Climate and culture impact job satisfaction and work conditions which are factors of teacher retention. Participant E stated, “A school’s culture and climate impacts retention. I think it’s huge.”

The final code, respect, appeared three times in the data set related to climate and culture. Respect for the teaching profession and mutual respect among staff contribute to climate and

culture. Participant E described collegial respect as an issue in teacher retention noting “When you think that people are talking about you behind your back it’s awful. Ultimately, you either get fired or you leave because you just can’t take it anymore.” Participant statements indicated that climate and culture are important to attaining and retaining staff. The potential impact of negativity on climate and culture can be mitigated by fostering professionalism, positivity, and respect. Recommendations to solve the problem of high teacher attrition at Pence Elementary School should be inclusive of factors that improve climate and culture.

Three main themes emerged from the survey data, response frequency, and average rating per statement: caring principal, having someone who supports me, and commitment to providing quality teaching. Statements 3, 4, and 9 resulted in the highest averages above 3.5, indicating agreement. Statement 3, regarding the principal at Pence Elementary School caring for staff as individuals, yielded the highest agreement average of the survey, 4.7. Twelve of the participants strongly agreed with the statement, three agreed, and one participant was neutral about the statement. Statement 4 responses resulted in an average of 4.6, indicating agreement with the statement about having someone at school who is supportive. Fifteen of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, while one participant disagreed. Statement 9 responses averaged 4.4 indicating that respondents believe that their grade-level coworkers are committed to providing quality teaching. Survey respondent data corroborated the theme of support identified in the semi-structured interview findings. Recommendations to improve teacher attrition at Pence Elementary School should include supporting educators in various capacities.

Statements 1 and 7 resulted in the lowest averages of the survey, with statement 1 averaging 3.4 and statement 7 averaging 2.4, indicating disagreement. Although the average response of 3.4 for statement 1 about having materials needed to successfully teach a subject area

was 3.4, most participants agreed or strongly agreed about having needed materials. The average response of 2.4 for statement 7 indicated strong disagreement that financial compensation is sufficient. Ten of 16 survey respondents disagreed with statement 7 about receiving appropriate compensation commensurate with teacher workload. Based on the survey findings, recommendations to improve teacher attrition should include financial compensation.

Two overarching themes were developed from the focus group transcript analysis: support and workload. The themes support and workload were identified as factors related to teacher retention at Pence Elementary. Participant perceptions about support focused on various concerns and problems concerning support. The code, problem, was documented 15 times across the data set. Although both semi-structured interviews and survey participants reported satisfaction with the level of support received from staff and administration, focus group participants indicated that if teachers brought up concerns or needed support to address a problem, the teachers could be perceived as negative. Participant I elaborated, “When we have our team meetings, [administration] want to know what’s positive happening; but if you ever want to bring up a concern, it’s like, well, you’re being negative, we just want to focus on the positive.” Participant H reflected further on challenges related to communicating about support, “Well, I’m trying to [get support] and make things positive by saying, if this is an issue, how can we solve it?” Participant J explained, “When we have a problem, they need to help us fix it instead of just commiserating with this ‘yeah, we know your job is hard.’” Research indicates a primary factor teachers attribute to leaving the teaching profession is the lack of administrative support (DeMatthews et al., 2021; Kaiser & Thompson, 2021). Recommendations to solve the problem of high teacher attrition at Pence Elementary should focus on improving various strategies to support teachers.

Regarding support, focus group participants asserted that feedback is an underutilized form of support. The code feedback was identified four times in focus group responses.

Participant F explained that support could be improved by “[receiving] feedback [about] lessons. I mean we have meetings, you know, but where are we going? We are not looking back.”

Participant F commented further, “I learn by getting feedback from others and reflection. I wish there would be more opportunities to reflect on how we built our lessons and the hierarchy level of learning. Is it a knowledge level or higher order thinking skills?” An aspect of increasing teacher support through feedback is facilitating educator reflection to inform improvement.

The code, strengths, appeared two times in participant responses. Participant I elaborated, “If you’re going to get better support, you have to be allowed to communicate strengths and weaknesses.” Participant H reported, “So I don’t need professional development in what [another grade level team] does. If that’s not what I need, I need to be allowed to go to a different place and get the development I need because I am in a different place.” Participant responses indicated that support such as professional development would be more relevant and impactful if aligned with the strengths and needs of the individual teacher.

Workload was another theme that emerged in the focus group discussion. Participants were asked to reflect on what impacts teacher workload and what could be done to lessen the workload to provide high-quality instruction. The most discussed topic about workload was time. The code time was identified 65 times in the focus group transcript analysis. Time was often referenced in terms of a lack of time to accomplish the expected workload. Participant I suggested, “I think we [as special education teachers] should have double planning periods. A planning period to plan, for instruction, and a planning period to work on IEPs.” Participant F identified a lack of time in relation to instruction, stating “I want to do projects [to address] a lot

of standards and build upon those skills; but then that takes time [and] it's hard because you don't have a lot of time." Participant G reported, "There's no time to do the paperwork or prepare for anything."

The code with the next highest frequency was duties, which was identified six times across the interview responses. Participant J observed, "You know, we have so many duties. I'd like five minutes to set up supplies, but we have none of that." The teachers in the focus group suggested that lessening some of the required duties would decrease the workload. Participant H described, "Our time is eaten up by having to go get them [the students] from recess, or escorting them to specials, and then getting them from specials and escorting them to lunch." Multiple studies have cited unreasonable duties and increased stress as factors in teacher attrition rates (Jomuad et al., 2021).

The final code identified in the workload theme was testing. Testing was identified three times in the focus group transcript analysis. Participant I reported that "It was almost [winter break] before we as teachers saw our [standardized testing] scores from last year. There's not enough time to make a big impact to show more growth [with receiving scores so late in the year]". Teachers are expected to address the standardized test scores which increases the workload of the grade levels that are required to administer accountability assessments. Some of the focus group participants indicated that standardized test scores determine a school's "academic health", and the workload is unfairly distributed. Recommendations for potential solutions to testing and accountability workloads should be considered to address teacher attrition.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to provide recommendations to solve the problem of high

attrition at Pence Elementary School. The problem was Pence Elementary School is experiencing difficulty in retaining certified teaching staff (L. Noll, personal communication, March 13, 2022). This chapter presented findings yielded from three sources of data collection including a semi-structured interview, survey, and focus group.



## **Chapter Five: Recommendations**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this study was to provide recommendations to solve the problem of high teacher attrition at Pence Elementary School. The problem was Pence Elementary School is experiencing difficulty in retaining certified teaching staff (L. Noll, personal communication, March 13, 2022). Three recommendations are presented to solve the research problem: increase administrative support to foster a positive culture and climate, improve professional development by providing an opportunity for more teacher input, and provide non-compensation benefits to compensate for pay scale shortcomings. Additionally, the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, the resources necessary to implement the recommendations, and the timelines are described.

### **Recommendations**

The purpose of this study was to provide recommendations to the administration at Pence Elementary School with possible solutions to solve the problem of high teacher attrition. The problem was that Pence Elementary School is experiencing difficulty in retaining certified teaching staff (L. Noll, personal communication, March 13, 2022). The central research question for this study was, how can the problem of high teacher attrition at Pence Elementary School be solved? Following an analysis of the data collected in this study, the three recommendations which may have the most impact in solving the problem are:

1. Develop a culture of shared decision-making.
2. Offer professional development options for district, building, and individual goals.
3. Decrease teacher workload.

### **Develop a Culture of Shared Decision-making**

Based on the literature review, interviews, focus group, and survey analyses, the first recommendation to solve the problem of high teacher attrition at Pence Elementary School is to develop a culture of shared decision-making. Prior research indicates that one of the most significant factors in teacher retention was school culture (Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Wood, 2019). Further, educators who are empowered and supported in their roles by administrators through shared decision-making opportunities are more likely to remain in the teaching profession (Sulit, 2020; Urick, 2020). Developing a culture of shared decision-making in which administration and staff can address problems collaboratively will establish an environment that improves teacher retention at Pence Elementary School (Urick, 2020).

Interview Participant E described the importance of culture as “A school’s culture and climate impacts retention. I think it’s huge.” Pence teachers suggested that more could be done to support staff to positively impact the school’s overall climate and culture. Teacher concerns were related to the lack of educator participation in problem-solving. Focus group Participant J explained, “When we have a problem, they need to help us fix it.” Pence teacher perspectives about improving culture through shared decision-making are consistent with a study conducted by Shuls and Flores (2020) which found that teacher retention was increased through a culture of trust and respect. Focus group participants indicated that the administration may view staff members who bring up concerns or problems as negative. Participant I articulated, “When we have our team meetings, if you ever want to bring up a concern, it’s like, [the administration thinks] you’re being negative.” The recommendation to develop a culture of shared decision-making would potentially increase trust and respect and address one of the factors in teacher retention at Pence Elementary (Shuls & Flores, 2020; Sulit, 2020).

The purpose of shared decision-making is to collaboratively address problems through a clear and fair process that captures the voice of educators (Maral, 2022). Developing a culture of shared-decision making could be achieved by increasing the capacity of teachers on various committees or advisory teams. Capturing teacher perspectives and input about critical site decisions about issues including professional development, instructional materials, classroom management, or discipline policies may improve trust between teachers and administrators (Shuls & Flores, 2020). Further, teacher inclusion in decision-making improves teacher self-efficacy and perception of professionalization which has a positive impact on school culture (Wronowski & Urick, 2019). The majority of survey participants, 14 out of 16 agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that staff opinions matter at school. Providing opportunities for shared decision-making through increased participation on committees will be beneficial in improving culture and teacher retention.

Another benefit to shared decision-making is the opportunity for Pence administrators and teachers to develop a solution-based protocol. An example of a solution-based decision guide is the Dewey Sequence Problem Solving Strategy developed by John Dewey in 1933 (Martorella, 1978). The process is comprised of six steps: define the problem, analyze the problem, determine criteria for optimal solutions, propose solutions, evaluate, and choose the best solution, implement the solution, and test for success (Rott et al., 2021). Applying a solution-based approach to perceived problems will serve two purposes: proposers of challenges will engage in solution-finding rather than problem-identifying. Further, if the approach is implemented, the administration will shift from decision-making in isolation to a collaborative approach where teacher perspectives are integral to determining solutions.

While developing a culture of shared decision-making may improve work conditions and

job satisfaction, there are potential adverse implications. The capacity of committees and members may need to be increased to purposefully obtain teacher input and perspectives on critical site decisions. In addition, shifting to shared decision-making may slow down the pacing of decisions that may need to be made in a limited amount of time. Further, teachers may perceive participation in shared decision-making as an increase in workload and may decline opportunities to be involved (Maral, 2022). Although challenges may limit the feasibility of shared decision-making in the majority of site issues, the benefits may outweigh the risks. Evidence of the impact of developing a culture of shared decision-making would be an increase in the number of committees, teacher participation in committees and decision-making, and teacher perceptions of a positive school culture that fosters trust and respect.

### **Offer Professional Development Options for District, Building, and Individual Goals**

Based on the literature, interviews, focus groups, and survey analyses, the second recommendation to solve the problem of high teacher attrition is to offer professional development options for district, building, and individual goals. The recommendation would encompass a four-pronged approach: accomplish district-wide development goals, focus on building-wide needs, allow for personalized professional growth, and support the completion of necessary tasks (Canaran & Mirici, 2019). The recommendation is supported by Evans et al.'s (2020) research regarding professional learning and job satisfaction in which teachers experience alignment with larger initiatives but maintain autonomy in individual development goals.

Teacher interviews revealed professional development to be an area of need regarding job satisfaction. Interview participants expressed that what professional development is offered is generally sufficient, but it does not necessarily align with individual teacher needs. Interview Participant E asserted, "They don't give you [the professional development] you need." In

addition, focus group participants expressed the need for more feedback regarding instructional practices. Participant F stated, “I learn by getting feedback from others and reflection. I wish there would be more opportunities.” Acquiring feedback from the administration or instructional coaches would support the implementation of professional development. Survey participant agreement with the statement about receiving professional development that is supportive was comparatively lower with an average of 3.5. Research suggests that when teachers have agency in professional learning job satisfaction is positively impacted (Reitman & Dunnick Karge, 2019). The recommendation to offer professional development options for district, building, and individual goals would support the identified needs.

A strategy to implement this recommendation is to modify the professional development systems already in place. The first step would be to establish a professional development schedule that allows for development on a district, building, and individual level. Currently, Pence Elementary School dismisses early on Wednesdays to provide professional development during work hours. It is recommended that the district implement a professional development system in which every Wednesday of each month is dedicated to fulfilling either district goals, building needs, individual goals, or workload tasks.

For example, the first Wednesday of each month would focus on district goals for professional development. Every year the Fairfield Community School District is directed by Iowa statute to submit a professional development plan as a component of the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) as required by Iowa Code 256.7(21)(a) (2001). The CSIP is reported in the Consolidated Accountability and Support Application (CASA) each year by September 15 (Iowa Code 256.7(21)(a), 2001). On the first Wednesday of the month, professional development should focus on the CSIP components that have been submitted to the

state.

The second Wednesday of every month could focus on building goals. Building principals must submit a site professional development plan that is centered around the perceived need within the building. In alignment with Iowa Code 256.7(21)(a) (2001), professional development should support instruction, identified student learning goals, and the Iowa Teaching Standards. Further, the third Wednesday of every month could allow teachers, as part of their required Individualized Professional Development Plan, to work with grade-level teachers or individually to achieve professional development goals. This approach to professional development provides teachers with some autonomy over individual or shared professional development needs (Brezicha et al., 2019).

As workload was cited as a concern in the focus group responses, the fourth Wednesday of every month could be reserved for tasks required to be completed by teachers as part of their professional duties. Workload or tasks may range from grading, collaboration with other teachers, creating new bulletin boards, or developing communication such as a parent newsletter (Perryman & Calvert, 2020). This element of professional development may serve to bridge the gap between the increased volume and intensity of tasks and the number of contractual work hours. The last Wednesday of the month could be reserved for teachers to be able to accomplish tasks that cannot be accomplished without extending beyond work hours.

The implications of offering professional development options to support district, building, and individual goals are beneficial to work conditions and job satisfaction. A four-pronged professional development approach would allow district, building, and individual goals to be accomplished without increasing compensation (Canaran & Mirici, 2019). In addition, teachers who have autonomy in the selection of relevant professional development will have

greater buy-in into district and building goals. Further, the increasing workload will be relieved thereby increasing job satisfaction and reducing attrition.

While beneficial implications of implementing the recommendation have been presented, challenges should also be identified and considered. Developing a new professional development schedule utilizing the early-release Wednesdays may require district approval and revisions to the bargaining agreement. Additionally, there may be an initial increase in administrator and teacher workload as building and individual professional development goals are established under the new model. Further, additional resources including fiscal may be required for the under the new model. All implications should be evaluated prior to implementation.

### **Decrease Teacher Workload**

The final recommendation to solve the problem of high teacher attrition at Pence Elementary School is to decrease the teacher workload. Teacher workload was identified in the literature review and the focus group findings as a contributing factor to job satisfaction. Focus group participants described teacher workload in the context of time, duties, and testing responsibilities. Participant perspectives on the increase in teacher workload and the lack of time to complete tasks within the workday were similar to multiple studies which found that the scope of professional responsibilities outside of instruction continues to grow without additional time or compensation (Jomuad et al., 2021; Kaiser & Thompson, 2021). Creagh et al. (2023) identified the workload phenomenon as both work intensification and time poverty. Despite the wide body of research which attributes teacher workload to attrition rates, few solutions have been determined. The recommendation to decrease teacher workload through developing a workload analysis is supported by the research of Doherty (2020), Churches et al. (2022), and Jomuad et al. (2021).

Decreasing teacher workload through an analysis of the current workload would contribute to solving the problem of high teacher attrition by improving job satisfaction. The focus of this recommendation is to identify the workload issues at the site by conducting a workload survey (Churches, 2020). The workload survey could be modified from a sample workload survey developed by the Department for Education in England to address teacher workload (Churches, 2020). Key elements of the survey would identify the types of workload activities, the time attributed to completing the activities, and teacher perceptions about the workload. A decrease in teacher workload by identifying areas that can be addressed by building administration will improve time poverty, workload intensification, and job satisfaction (Creagh et al., 2023).

Additionally, the administration could utilize the *Workload Reduction Toolkit* (Churches, 2020) for evidence-based strategies to address the workload survey results. Further, the administration could also develop a teacher workload advisory team with representatives from the general education grade levels and special education. The advisory team could review the survey results and engage in elements of the recommendations to partner in shared decision-making and professional development for individual teacher goals and workload. As a result of implementing this recommendation to decrease teacher workload, teachers would be supported by colleagues and administrators in improving working conditions and job satisfaction thereby decreasing attrition.

Positive implications of implementing the recommendation to decrease teacher workload are evident. With a reduction in teacher workload, teachers will have increased time to focus on instruction rather than administrative tasks (Perryman & Calvert, 2020). Teacher autonomy would also be improved as teacher voice in mitigating teacher workload is advanced.



Additionally, teachers may experience less stress and potentially improve both mental and physical health (Räsänen et al., 2020). Through a reduction of workload and stress, work conditions and job satisfaction may be positively impacted.

Despite the positive implications, other potentially conflicting implications should also be recognized. Through an analysis of teacher workload, adjustments to the site schedule or other duties as assigned may occur. Some aspects of the workload held by teachers may be reassigned or shifted to other personnel as appropriate. These implications may result in resentment in administration or other staff as teacher workload is decreased. Both positive and conflicting implications should be analyzed before implementation to address potential barriers.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Stakeholders**

Recommendations to address the problem of high teacher attrition at Pence Elementary School were presented as follows: develop a culture of shared decision-making, offer professional development options for district, building, and individual goals, and decrease teacher workload. Clearly defined and articulated roles and responsibilities are critical to implementing the recommendations effectively (Berry et al., 2021). The roles and responsibilities necessary to implement the recommendations are described in the following section.

#### **Develop a Culture of Shared Decision-making**

To solve the problem of retaining certified teaching staff at Pence, it is recommended to develop a culture of shared decision-making. Developing a culture of shared decision-making is a significant change in site practice which may include additional committees and protocols. The roles and responsibilities of administrators and teachers in the recommendation implementation are described in the next section.

### *Administrators*

The role of administrators would be to conduct an inventory of committees and committee composition to identify opportunities for teacher participation and potential areas of shared decision-making. In addition, administrators would be responsible for investigating possible decision-making protocols such as the Dewey Sequence Problem Solving Strategy and determining the protocol to facilitate shared decision-making. Administrators would then present the philosophy and benefits of shared decision-making in improving school culture and the proposed protocol to Pence teachers. Administrators would also communicate committee opportunities to teachers. The administrators would be responsible for instructing teachers and committees in implementing the shared decision-making protocol in staff meetings and committee meetings.

### *Teachers*

The primary role of the teachers in developing a culture of shared decision-making would be to provide input into the selection of the protocol and constructive feedback to administrators. Further, teachers would be responsible for participating on committees to contribute to shared decision-making. Teachers would also be responsible for implementing the selected decision-making protocol and supporting the administration in identifying the best solutions to site needs. As potential solutions are applied to the problem, it will be the responsibility of teachers to provide ongoing feedback to the administration regarding the impact and effectiveness of the decision.

### **Offer Professional Development Options for District, Building, and Individual Goals**

To solve the problem of high teacher attrition, it is recommended to offer professional development options for district, building, and individual goals through a four-pronged approach

(Canaran & Mirici, 2019). Offering professional development options will improve job satisfaction and alleviate workload concerns while supporting district, site, and individual goals. The roles and responsibilities of administrators and teachers in the implementation of professional development are described in the next section.

### ***Central Office and Building Administration***

The role of the central office and building administration would be to evaluate the proposal to utilize the early-release Wednesdays to support professional development options that support district, building, and individual goals as well as teacher workload. Following the review of the proposal, central office administration would be responsible for determining district goals and building administration would be responsible for determining site goals and priorities. In addition, the role of both the central office and building administration is to evaluate potential resources for district and site professional development. The central office administrators would also be responsible for developing and community the professional development calendar. Building administrators would be responsible for implementing the site's professional development goals into the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP). Finally, building administrators would be responsible for supporting teachers in their respective Individualized Professional Development Plans and approving all plans.

### ***Teachers***

The role of teachers would be to provide feedback on the building's professional development goals in the development of the building's Comprehensive Support Improvement Plan. In addition, teachers would be responsible for drafting and submitting their Individualized Professional Development Plan to the building administration. This plan could be a teaching strategy or identified area of improvement that a grade-level team or content area team.

Following the administration's approval of Individualized Professional Development Plans, teachers would be responsible for making progress toward goals during the third Wednesday of the month reserved for individualized professional development. Lastly, during the fourth Wednesday of the month reserved for teacher tasks and workload, teachers would be responsible for completing approved duties including but not limited to grading, collaboration, special education paperwork, or contacting parents.

### **Decrease Teacher Workload**

In order to solve the problem of high teacher attrition, it is recommended to decrease teacher workload. As the recommendation to decrease teacher workload may impact the tasks and responsibilities held by teachers and administration, defining roles and responsibilities is paramount to implementation. The roles and responsibilities of administration and teachers are presented in the following section.

#### ***Building Administration***

The role and responsibility of the building administration would be to conduct a study of the *Workload Reduction Toolkit* (Churches, 2020). Based on the study and sample workload survey, the administration would be responsible for developing a draft survey with tasks and workload reflective of Pence Elementary Teachers. The administration would then consider convening a teacher workload advisory team to capture teacher perspectives and support in administering the survey and identifying strategies to reduce teacher workload. Lastly, the administration would hold the work of reviewing the survey results and implementing teacher workload reduction within their scope of authority and resource availability such as the proposed professional development plan which would afford the fourth early-release Wednesday for task completion.

### ***Teachers***

Teachers would hold the role of completing the workload survey and providing honest and actionable feedback. Teachers would also be responsible for serving on the teacher workload advisory team. The responsibilities of teachers include continuing to complete the expected workload activities and tasks. Additionally, teachers would support the identification of strategies and resources to reduce workload. Finally, teachers would be responsible for communicating needs and concerns to the administration as shifts in practices and workload are adapted.

### **Resources Needed**

To solve the problem of high teacher attrition at Pence Elementary School, recommendations have been made that include the necessary resources for implementation. Resources may include personnel, fiscal support, or additional work hours. The resources are described in the context of each recommendation in the following section.

#### **Develop a Culture of Shared Decision-making**

A recommendation to address the problem of high teacher attrition at Pence Elementary School is to develop a culture of shared decision-making. One of the resources needed is a list of the current committees, teacher leadership roles, and other leadership opportunities at the site. The purpose of the list is to conduct an audit of opportunities to further develop a culture of shared decision-making. To support the professional learning of administrators and teachers in shared decision-making, it is recommended that the administration consider a book study for the staff. The purchase of a digital text, *School-Based Management/Shared-Decision Making* (Bonilla, 2014) at \$2.99 per copy and 31 staff members including administrators, would result in a projected cost of \$92.69. The source of funding would be the district's site budget. In addition,

a resource that should be considered are 31 printed copies of Dewey's Sequence Problem Solving Strategy to allow administration and staff to practice and documentation of shared decision-making. The estimated cost of the printed material is minimal and projected at one ream of paper, approximately \$8.49. There are no projected costs for staff meeting times as the learning and shared decision-making will occur during staff meetings during regular work hours.

### **Offer Professional Development Options for District, Building, and Individual Goals**

The recommendation to offer professional development options for district, building, and individual goals will require minimal resources. Anticipated resources will include revised professional development goals. The calendar and respective goals are digital and will not require additional costs. In addition, planning time will need to be reserved for the central office and building administration to plan. However, planning will occur during the administration's work calendar and workdays. As such, no costs are associated with planning time. Further, teachers will need time within the workday to complete Individualized Professional Development Plans to submit to the administration. Lastly, the professional development plan is embedded into the early-release Wednesdays model and no additional costs are estimated for implementation.

### **Decrease Teacher Workload**

The recommendation to decrease teacher workload will require resources such as Google Forms for the workload survey and printed copies of the *Workload Reduction Toolkit* (Churches, 2020) for the administration's study. There is no cost associated with the usage of the Google Platform for survey administration. The *Workload Reduction Toolkit* (Churches, 2020) is publicly accessible on England's Department for Education's website. The anticipated cost of printing the *Workload Reduction Toolkit* (Churches, 2020) is a ream of paper approximately

\$8.49. In addition to administering the survey and printing the toolkit, time will be needed to hold the proposed teacher workload advisory team meetings. However, it is anticipated that advisory meetings will be held within professional work hours which will not result in additional compensation for participants.

### **Timeline**

Three recommendations were presented to solve the problem of high teacher attrition at Pence Elementary School: develop a culture of shared decision-making, offer professional development options for district, building, and individual goals, and decrease teacher workload. In addition to the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders and the resources needed to implement the recommendations, timelines are essential to effective communication and execution of action items. The projected timelines generally span from August 2023 to June 2024.

#### **Develop a Culture of Shared Decision-making**

The implementation of developing a culture of shared decision-making will occur throughout the 2023-2024 school year. One staff meeting per month will be reserved for the selected book study and presentation of the problem to address with shared decision-making and the problem-solving strategy. Table 6 outlines the recommended dates and actions to implement the recommendation to develop a culture of shared decision-making.

**Table 6**

*Timeline of Developing a Culture of Shared Decision-Making Implementation*

Date	Action Item
July 31-August 4, 2023	Administrators compile a list of committees and teacher leadership opportunities on campus.

August 7, 2023	Administrators identify resources needed for the book study. Order selected books for staff members. Print 31 copies of Dewey's Sequence Problem Solving Strategy for staff.
August 14, 2023	Administrators present philosophy and vision for shared decision-making. Committee list and leadership roles/opportunities presented to staff. Selected book and copies of Dewey's Sequence Problem Solving Strategy are provided to staff.
August 21, 2023	Administrators provide training and practice scenarios with staff.
September 5, 2023	Continue with book study and presentation of a site problem for staff shared decision-making.
October 2, 2023	Continue with book study and presentation of a site problem for staff shared decision-making.
November 6, 2023	Continue with book study and presentation of a site problem for staff shared decision-making.
December 4, 2023	Continue with book study and presentation of a site problem for staff shared decision-making.
January 8, 2024	Continue with book study and presentation of a site problem for staff shared decision-making.
February 5, 2024	Continue with book study and presentation of a site problem for staff shared decision-making.
March 4, 2024	Conclude book study. Conduct staff discussion on the impact of the shared decision-making initiative. Consider input for addressing other problems of practice for the 2024-2025 school year.

### **Offer Professional Development Options for District, Building, and Individual Goals**

The implementation of the recommendation to offer professional development options for district, building, and individual goals will span from August 2023 to June 2024. The review and planning portion will take place in August 2023. Implementation will begin in September 2023 and conclude in May 2024. In June 2024, a review of the impact of implementation will occur. See Table 7 for the timeline implementation of professional development options for district, building, and individual goals.



**Table 7***Timeline of Offering Professional Development Options Recommendation*

Date	Action Item
August 7, 2023	Site administration meets with central office administration to review the four-pronged early-release Wednesday professional development (PD) model.
August 11, 2023	Central office administration and site administration draft 2023-2024 early-release Wednesday PD model.
August 14-18, 2023	Central Office develops district PD goals. Site administrators develop building PD goals.
August 21, 2023	2023-2024 Professional Development Calendar communicated to district and building staff. Site administration communicates the timeline and expectations for the Individualized Professional Development Plan (IPDP) development and submission.
August 21-25, 2023	Staff develops IPDP drafts. Administration begins review of IPDP submissions.
August 28, 2023	Central Office and Site Administration identify potential resources and vendors to support and implement the plan.
August 30, 2023	IPDPs submitted for administrative review and approval. Pence administrators draft Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP).
September 6, 13, 20, 27, 2023	Implement 2023-24 PD plan: District-6th, Building-13th, Individual Teacher-20th, Workload-27th
September 15, 2023	Administration submits site Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) in Consolidated Accountability and Support Application system.
October 2023	Continue implementation.
November 2023	Continue implementation.
December 2023	Individualized Professional Development Plan moved from initial to finalized for submission
December 18, 2023	Central Office and Site Administration review the implementation and identify resources for January-May implementation.
January 2024	Continue implementation.
February 2024	Continue implementation.

March 2024	Continue implementation.
April 2024	Continue implementation.
May 2024	Continue implementation.
June 3, 2024	Central Office and Site Administration review 2023-2024 implementation and determine continuance or revision to plan in 2024-2025.

### Decrease Teacher Workload

The implementation of the recommendation to decrease teacher workload will take approximately one to two months of surveying and planning. The implementation of reducing workload tasks will occur throughout the 2023-2024 school year. See Table 8 for the timeline for decreasing teacher workload implementation.

**Table 8**

#### *Timeline of Decrease Teacher Workload Recommendation*

Date	Action Item
August 7-9, 2023	Administrators conduct a study of the <i>Workload Reduction Toolkit</i> (Churches, 2020)
August 10, 2023	Administrators develop the initial draft of the teacher workload survey.
August 14, 2023	Administrators communicate the intent to analyze teacher workload through a survey. Request participants to serve on a Teacher Workload Advisory Team.
August 18, 2023	Finalize Teacher Workload Advisory Team Members.
August 23, 2023	Convene first Teacher Workload Advisory Team. Review the draft survey and finalize the survey with teacher input.
August 28-September 1, 2023	Communicate window to complete workload survey to staff.
September 6, 2023	Administrators and Teacher Workload Advisory Team Members review survey results. Begin recommendations to reduce teacher workload activities.
September 13, 2023	Finalize teacher workload activities recommendations.

September 20, 2023	Present survey results and advisory team recommendations to staff. Receive staff input. Adjust recommendations as appropriate.
September 25, 2023	Begin fall and winter implementation of recommendations.
October 25, 2023	Meet with the Teacher Workload Advisory Team to monitor implementation.
November 22, 2023	Meet with the Teacher Workload Advisory Team to monitor implementation.
December 20, 2023	Meet with the Teacher Workload Advisory Team to monitor implementation. Determine if another survey will be administered in January and the January-May 2024 meeting schedule.

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### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to provide recommendations to solve the problem of high teacher attrition at Pence Elementary School. The problem was Pence Elementary School is experiencing difficulty in retaining certified teaching staff (L. Noll, personal communication, March 13, 2022). This chapter presented three recommendations to solve the high teacher attrition problem at Pence Elementary School as follows: develop a culture of shared decision-making, offer professional development options for district, building, and individual goals, and decrease teacher workload. The roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, the suggested resources for implementation, and related timelines were provided.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A



**FAIRFIELD** *Dream . Think . Lead . Act*  
COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

403 South 20<sup>th</sup> Street, Fairfield, IA 52556

Phone: 641 472 2655 fax: 641 472 0269 website: [fairfieldsfuture.org](http://fairfieldsfuture.org)

Dr. Laurie Noll, Superintendent

RE: Toni Scott's survey with teachers for dissertation

To Whom it May Concern:

Fairfield Community School District allows Antoinette Scott to conduct her survey within our district for her dissertation research.

Thank you,

[Redacted Signature]