A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF ONBOARDING PRACTICES: MID-ATLANTIC REGION PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES

by

Tiffany Marie Draper

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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Abstract

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand the lived experiences of Mid-Atlantic region public high school teachers participating in onboarding practices, which provides insight into best practices to increase teacher self-efficacy and decrease attrition rates. The theory guiding this study is Albert Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, as it links ineffective and effective onboarding practices for new high school teachers with their levels of teacher self-efficacy, aligning with teacher retention and attrition rates. Bandura's theory of self-efficacy provided a framework with which to answer the central research question and three sub-questions: (CRQ) What are the lived experiences of new high school teachers who participate in onboarding practices? Selected through purposive, heterogeneous sampling, fourteen public high school teachers from the Mid-Atlantic region participated in this study. Data was collected through letter writing prompts, individual interviews, and a focus group. The data was analyzed through the four stages of Moustakas' 1994 transcendental phenomenological design process. From the triangulation of the three collected data types that were coded and synthesized, three universal themes arose to tell the story of the Mid-Atlantic public high school teachers' onboarding experience, leading to three critical findings from the research analysis: (a) new teachers need support through effective peer mentoring; (b) teachers need administrative support; (c) effectual student engagement is needed to sustain teacher self-efficacy. Empirical, practical, and theoretical implications of the data analysis and recommendations for future research are included and described.

Keywords: onboarding, teacher self-efficacy, burnout, retention, attrition, secondary education

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Cameron Draper, who is always by my side and has supported me through every step of this academic journey. I also dedicate this dissertation to my beautiful children, Corben, Beckham, Sidney, and Claire; may you continually pursue learning and your dreams.

Acknowledgments

In acknowledgment of all those who have helped make this dissertation possible: my committee chair and methodologist, Dr. James Sigler; my second committee member, Dr. Traci Eshelman; the participants who helped make the research possible; my supportive academic and professional peers; the many reviewers who helped to improve my manuscript; and my excellent professors—thank you all for your encouragement, guidance, and dedication to academia.

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List of Abbreviations

Central Research Question (CRQ)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Mid-Atlantic Region Public Schools (MARPS)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

National Education Association (NEA)

Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS)

Sub Question One (SQ1)

Sub Question Two (SQ2)

Sub Question Three (SQ3)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

As student enrollment increases nationwide, teacher retention is decreasing, with 567,000 fewer educators in the American public school system today than before the COVID-19 pandemic (Jotkoff, 2022; NCES, 2022; Wiggan et al., 2021). Although teacher retention is not a new issue, and the reasons for teacher attrition are varied, onboarding practices can and should be examined for improvement so as not to contribute to the decline in teacher self-efficacy and retention (Podolsky et al., 2016; Thrasher & Walker, 2018). Although academically prepared for the teaching profession upon graduation and certification from higher education, new teachers are often ill-prepared for success at their school of hire (DiCicco et al., 2019; Lewitzky, 2020; Wiggan et al., 2021). Onboarding practices ought to provide new teachers with tools for success, including communication of expectations, student and teacher resources, policies, procedures, and training for technological platforms and tools (Aarts et al., 2020; Boman et al., 2013; DiCicco et al., 2019; Han, 2023; Howe, 2006). Better preparation can equate to higher teacher self-efficacy, and greater teacher self-efficacy can lead to increased teacher retention rates (Lewitzky, 2020). This qualitative transcendental phenomenological study seeks to provide an understanding of new public high school teacher self-efficacy, leading to retention, while reviewing onboarding practices in Mid-Atlantic region public schools. Chapter One includes an examination of the problem background and an introduction to the problem statement, purpose statement, significance of the study, research questions, definitions, and summary.

Background

The background for this study is an exploration and analysis of the historical, social, and theoretical context of onboarding practices that seek to sustain self-efficacy for teacher retention

and how it relates to addressing the problem and purpose statements. The historical context reviews the increasing concern and reasons for teacher attrition rates, particularly in relation to teacher self-efficacy and onboarding practices. The social context illustrates the importance of teacher preparation for self-efficacy (Lewitzky, 2020), which leads to teacher retention—increasing student success and cultivating educated communities (Black, 2020; Center on Education Policy, 2020; Kidd, 2023; Monticello, 2023). The theoretical context describes the theories related to teacher retention. It places this study into current research regarding onboarding practices for public high school teacher self-efficacy as it relates to retention, describing how this research helps bridge the gap within the literature.

Historical Context

Teacher staffing issues are not new (Granziano, 2005; KRQE, 2018; Nix, 2015; Strauss, 2017; Whitaker, 2015). Articles from as early as the mid-1930s discuss shortages in the teaching profession following the Great Depression (Sutcher et al., 2019). As such, a large body of research examining the reasons for teacher shortages and analyzing the concerns in education is available (Bichu, 2022; Horn, 2021; Lieberman, 2022; Madigan & Kim, 2021; Pressley, 2021). These analyses seek to find the root and magical solution to *the* problem, but the research continues to show the persistence of multiple problems (Camera, 2022; Kini, 2022; Natanson, 2022; Räsänen et al., 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the headlines painted an uncertain picture for public education, stating that schools nationwide were facing appalling teacher shortages, even to the point of placing thousands of uncertified teachers in the classrooms and shelling out millions of dollars to make sure the doors could remain open at the start of the school year (KRQE, 2018; Nix, 2015; Strauss, 2017; Whitaker, 2015). The post-pandemic headlines for public education

and teacher shortages have only worsened, stating in many instances that we have reached catastrophic teacher shortages (Natanson, 2022). School districts are, in some areas, turning to four-day work weeks, hiring teachers without college degrees, offering hefty sign-on bonuses, and asking the National Guard and parents to fill in as substitute teachers (CNN, 2022; Lieberman, 2022; Shivaram, 2022; Will, 2022). According to the 2022 Bureau of Labor Statistics, there are 567,000 fewer educators in the American public school system today than before the COVID-19 pandemic (Jotkoff, 2022), but that does not mean there are fewer students. On the contrary, many districts nationwide have had an enrollment increase (NCES, 2022; Wiggan et al., 2021).

In January 2023, the National Education Association (NEA) released its most recent survey results to determine educators' concerns. One result of their survey revealed that over half (55%) of NEA members were preparing to leave their educational careers sooner than planned (Jotkoff, 2022). Not only was this situation dismal before the pandemic, but the pandemic also brought additional issues for retention: more teachers retiring early, additional workloads for educators, health and safety concerns, new technology for many, more policies and procedures, and an increase in stress, exhaustion, and burnout (Bichu, 2022; Jotkoff, 2022). We have fewer teachers, and we continue to lose more teachers due to a shrinking pool of teachers from which to hire (Bichu, 2022; Folk, 2015). While the teacher unions are fighting for better working conditions and pay (Jotkoff, 2022), and the United States Education Department is working to solve the shortage issues from their end (Camera, 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2022), the school districts need to work toward creating sustainable environments for educators, including the provision of adequate and comprehensive preparation (Kini, 2022; Podolsky et al., 2016).

Social Context

The Founding Fathers believed America's newly formed and delicate democracy would not thrive without a competent society (Black, 2020; Center on Education Policy, 2020; Kidd, 2023; Monticello, 2023). Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, James Madison, and John Adams claimed that protecting democracy would require a society of individuals who were educated politically, socially, and civically and who would vote wisely to resist tyranny and defend their liberties (Black, 2020; Center on Education Policy, 2020; Kidd, 2023; Monticello, 2023). With this goal in mind, public education was established nationwide, and despite continued educational reform and the ever-changing role of educators, the definitive goal of public education has remained consistent: increase competency within society. Consequently, if teachers leave the field of education at an alarming rate, the backlash for society, according to the founding fathers, is a crash of democracy. Education is that vital. If teachers are not in the classroom, schools cannot function, and society suffers the consequences of uneducated communities, including poverty, poor health, higher infant mortality rates, reduced interpersonal trust, slower economic growth, and low political efficacy (Roser & Ortiz-Ospina, 2016). The multiple and complex problems with the public education system coincide with the various reasons for teacher attrition (Bichu, 2022; Horn, 2021; Lieberman, 2022; Madigan & Kim, 2021; Pressley, 2021), but if new teachers can be provided with the tools and support they need for success from the moment they are hired, teacher self-efficacy increases, decreasing attrition rates, and promoting student success for a better society (Lewitzky, 2020).

Theoretical Context

Teacher retention has been at the forefront of educational research and reform, and multiple theoretical frameworks have been used to examine teacher retention and self-efficacy.

Among the teacher retention theories is Mason and Poyatos Matas (2015) established theoretical framework and model for teacher attrition and retention composed of four interrelating theories of non-economic capital: human capital, structural capital, social capital, and positive psychological capital (Karalis Noel & Finocchio, 2022; Mason & Poyatos Matas, 2015). These four theories have helped to provide a foundational understanding of the multifaceted issues for teachers leaving the field of education—quantifying, qualifying, and illustrating the concerns of educators in public education. The human capital and structural capital theories highlight tangible issues such as teacher training and preparation, employment conditions, policies, and resources (Kenton, 2023; Rose, 2014). The theories of social capital and positive psychological capital pertain to intangible educator concerns such as inclusion, belonging, motivation, and job satisfaction (Luthans & Broad, 2022; Waters, 2022). These four theories have provided an all-encompassing look at teacher retention for educational researchers.

In addition to Mason and Poyatos Matas' (2015) retention and attrition theories, Bandura's 1960s social learning theory was foundational for the theory of self-efficacy, which emerged in 1977 and gave way to a specific educational self-efficacy: teacher self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). Social learning theory claims that people can learn new behaviors through observation and imitation, described in five essential steps for learning: observation, attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. Through these learning steps, self-efficacy becomes critical for successful learning and implementation (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy affects all aspects of human endeavor and is based in determination and motivation (Claxton & Dolan, 2022). Teacher self-efficacy is relatively new in educational research; however, since its introduction in 1977, there has been a multitude of research applying the theory of teacher self-efficacy as a means to understand teacher retention and attrition concerns (Kini, 2022; Pajares,

1997; Pfitzner-Eden, 2016; Räsänen et al., 2020; Yost, 2006).

Problem Statement

The problem is that the teacher shortage across America is increasing at an alarming rate (Kini, 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2022; Will, 2022). Teachers are leaving the field of education within their first 3-5 years of hire for a myriad of reasons (Bichu, 2022; Camera, 2022; García & Weiss, 2019; Wiggan et al., 2021), including a lack of self-efficacy (Alibakhshi et al., 2020; Corry & Stella, 2018; Ma et al., 2021; Ozeren et al., 2020; Pressley, 2021), often driven by poor onboarding practices (Aarts et al., 2020; Han, 2023; Howe, 2006; Lewitzky, 2020; NIET, 2021). Therefore, new teachers must receive the preparation, information, and support they need to be successful at their new school of hire (Frey et al., 2023; Lewitzky, 2020; Podolsky et al., 2016; Totaro & Wise, 2018). Generally, new teachers are well prepared in the collegiate system to begin a teaching career in the K-12 system, starting their careers with a teaching license and a high level of self-efficacy (Wiggan et al., 2021). However, upon entry into the field, teacher self-efficacy plummets (Baroudi & Shaya, 2022; Pressley, 2021; Richter et al., 2022). So even though teachers are well prepared to be teachers, the onboarding practices at each school are lacking in the preparation tools necessary to increase teacher success in relation to the policies, procedures, expectations, technology, resources, and student demographics specific to each school (Boman et al., 2013; DiCicco et al., 2019; Lewitzky, 2020; Podolsky et al., 2016). Without this preparation, new teachers flounder, regardless of their educator abilities (DiCicco et al., 2019; Kini, 2022).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand the lived experiences of Mid-Atlantic region public high school teachers participating in onboarding

practices, which provide insight into best practices to increase teacher self-efficacy and decrease attrition rates. Throughout this research, onboarding experiences are generally defined as the induction programs school districts provide for new high school teachers. The theory guiding this study is the self-efficacy theory developed by Albert Bandura in 1977, linking ineffective and effective onboarding practices for new high school teachers with their levels of teacher self-efficacy, aligning with teacher retention and attrition rates.

Significance of the Study

This study adds to the existing body of teacher burnout, onboarding, and self-efficacy research by helping researchers understand the lived experiences of high school teachers participating in onboarding practices. The findings of this study can benefit teachers, administrators, students, and society as a whole by presenting identified connections between effective onboarding and teacher self-efficacy for retention. The theoretical, empirical, and practical implications for this study are outlined within this section; however, the underlying need for this study remains: if we cannot retain good teachers in our high schools, we will not have a competent society capable of maintaining a productive democracy (Black, 2020; Center on Education Policy, 2020; Kidd, 2023; Monticello, 2023).

Theoretical

This study contributes to the theoretical principles of Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy by studying and analyzing the experiences of high school teachers who participate in new-teacher onboarding through the lens of Bandura's teacher self-efficacy theory. This study contributes to understanding teacher burnout and attrition by confirming the relationship between effective onboarding practices and teacher self-efficacy, leading to teacher retention. While exploring the experiences of new-teacher onboarding among high school teachers, a data

analysis helped to identify common themes contributing to a theoretical understanding of effective onboarding practices influencing self-efficacy, as theorized by Bandura (1977), to reduce burnout, decrease attrition, and increase retention.

Empirical

The empirical significance of this study is exemplified through the addition of literature on new-teacher onboarding practices, teacher self-efficacy, and teacher retention and attrition. Current literature includes a wide range of research supporting the connection between low teacher self-efficacy and attrition rates (Alibakhshi et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2021; Ozeren et al., 2020; Pressley, 2021; Richter et al., 2022) in addition to an extensive amount of literature on the concerns for teacher retention and attrition (Lieberman, 2022; Natanson, 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2022; Wiggan et al., 2021; Will, 2022). Additionally, some literature on the need for better teacher preparation, education, and professional development has been published (Horn, 2021; Jotkoff, 2022; Lewitzky, 2020; Madigan & Kim, 2021). This study helps to fill the gap in the literature regarding the significance of effective onboarding practices for teacher self-efficacy, influencing retention.

Practical

The practical significance of this study is realized through the knowledge gained from the participants who have articulated how current onboarding processes affect teacher self-efficacy and retention. This data and insight can help the Mid-Atlantic region public schools as well as provide insight into how all schools could and should do better to prepare their newly hired teachers, providing them with as much support as possible for success from the start—potentially influencing the global market in which teacher retention can and should be addressed and strengthened. Additionally, this research insight can provide practical significance for all

onboarding practices, no matter the type of employment. In any industry, onboarding practices prepare new employees for success within a company; effective onboarding practices should include all the information and administrative and peer support needed to increase self-efficacy and retention.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study, consisting of a central research question and three sub-questions, were used to bridge the knowledge gap regarding the connection between onboarding practices and teacher self-efficacy as illustrated by the shared experiences of high school teachers in Mid-Atlantic public schools. The central research question is an essential starting point from which all other research questions within this study have developed, providing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon that describes the shared onboarding experiences of new high school teachers. The sub-questions are derived from the central research question and provide additional insight into the phenomena, allowing the data to reach saturation in discovering the essence of the phenomena of the new high school teachers' onboarding experience in relation to their teacher self-efficacy levels, leading to their retention or attrition. It is thus imperative to describe and understand the central research question leading to sub-questions for saturation of content of the shared experiences.

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of new high school teachers who participate in onboarding practices?

Sub-Question One

What experiences influenced teacher retention during the onboarding process?

Sub-Question Two

What are the educator experiences that influenced change in teacher self-efficacy for teacher participants?

Sub-Question Three

What preparation and support do teacher participants use from their onboarding experiences to sustain teacher self-efficacy?

Definitions

1. *Behavior management* – Behavior management is a series of behavior modification steps educators may use to help students make better choices and alter bad habits (ScholarChip, 2019).
2. *Burnout* – Burnout is a psychological condition in which one becomes detached and less productive within their working environment, often due to emotional exhaustion and feeling overwhelmed and underappreciated (Brouwers et al., 2000; Maslach, 1996).
3. *Classroom management* – Classroom management is the maintenance and guidance of a classroom by which teachers ensure a productive learning environment for their students, promoting learning and minimizing or eliminating disruptive behavior (Mulvahill, 2018).
4. *Human capital* – Human capital, a term social scientists use to describe functional, personal attributes, includes characteristics and qualities such as experience, resilience, technical skills, communication skills, education, problem-solving skills, and creativity. Employees develop and use these traits to produce economic value (Kenton, 2023; Mason & Poyatos Matas, 2015).

5. *Induction program* – Induction programs are comprehensive orientations that initiate new teachers into their careers, providing the tools and guidance they need for success (Kaufmann, 2007).
6. *Onboarding* – Onboarding is a formalized process for integrating and supporting new employees into an organization, presenting organizational values, beliefs, processes, and expectations of the position (Thrasher & Walker, 2018). Onboarding is an ongoing process that can last through the first year of hire, beginning at the time of interview.
7. *Orientation* – Orientation is a process or event in which new employees are introduced to their new place of hire before beginning work within the organization. Orientations can last a few hours, a day, a few days, or even a week. Orientations provide the core information (organizational culture, policies, and expectations) employees need to transition smoothly to their new jobs (Barowski, 2021).
8. *Positive psychological capital* – Positive psychological capital is a theoretical focus on the positive characteristics that enable an individual's productivity, asking the questions, "Who are you?" and "Who can you become?" (Luthans & Broad, 2022).
9. *Self-efficacy* – Self-efficacy, a theory introduced by Albert Bandura in 1977, is the belief one has in one's capabilities to accomplish a given task (Bandura, 1977).
10. *Self-esteem* – While self-efficacy is one's belief in one's capabilities, self-esteem is one's belief in one's value and self-worth (Cherry, 2022).
11. *Social capital* – Social capital is the potential, positive product of social interaction and networking linked to retention (Kenton, 2022; Waters, 2022).

12. *Structural capital* – Structural capital is the framework created by a place of employment that promotes employee success, including a company's processes and systems (Rose, 2014).
13. *Teacher burnout* – Teacher burnout is an extension of burnout specific to teachers in which teachers become detached and less productive within their academic working environment, often due to the emotional exhaustion that frequently comes with being a teacher and feelings of being overwhelmed and underappreciated. Teacher burnout is sometimes called "a crisis in self-efficacy" (Leiter, 1992).
14. *Teacher self-efficacy* – Teacher self-efficacy is an offshoot of self-efficacy that focuses on educators' beliefs in their capabilities to teach effectively in the classroom and positively affect student performance (Brouwers et al., 2000).
15. *Teacher attrition* – Teacher attrition, synonymous with teacher turnover and no different from any other employee attrition or turnover, occurs when employees choose to leave their current employer (Qualtrics, 2023).
16. *Teacher retention* – Teacher retention, the opposite of attrition, is when employees do not quit but choose to stay with their current employer rather than look for another job. Additionally, retention includes the efforts of the employer to keep the employees by providing valuable and enticing work environments and wages (Qualtrics, 2023).

Summary

The problem is that the teacher shortage across America is increasing at an alarming rate (Kini, 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2022; Will, 2022). Teachers are leaving the field of education within their first 3-5 years of hire for a myriad of reasons (Bichu, 2022; Camera, 2022; Lieberman, 2022; Natanson, 2022; Wiggan et al., 2021), including a lack of self-efficacy

(Baroudi & Shaya, 2022; Corry & Stella, 2018; Ma et al., 2021; Ozeren et al., 2020; Richter et al., 2022), often driven by poor onboarding practices (Aarts et al., 2020; Han, 2023; Howe, 2006; Lewitzky, 2020; NIET, 2021). Therefore, the purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand the lived experiences of Mid-Atlantic region public high school teachers participating in onboarding practices, which provides insight into best practices to increase teacher self-efficacy and decrease attrition rates. Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy was used as the lens through which to view the data. Moustakas' transcendental phenomenological methodology was used to process and analyze the data, helping to bridge the gap in the literature by finding themes in the research that can help not only teachers and administrators in the Mid-Atlantic region public high schools to retain their teachers through better onboarding, but also to help other employers by providing insight on how to strengthen their onboarding practices to retain their employees better.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A literature review was conducted to explore the onboarding experiences of teachers in public high schools in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, analyzing the onboarding experiences and best practices related to teacher self-efficacy and teacher retention. This chapter presents a review of the current literature as it pertains to the topic of study. First, in relation to public high school teacher onboarding practices affecting attrition rates, the self-efficacy theory by Albert Bandura is described, followed by a synthesis of recent literature reviewing teacher attrition issues and new public high school teacher onboarding practices. Then, an examination of literature illustrating how a lack of preparation and understanding of expectations can reduce teacher self-efficacy and increase attrition rates is described. Finally, the need for the current study is addressed by identifying a gap in the literature regarding effective onboarding practices sustaining self-efficacy for retention of public high school teachers in the Mid-Atlantic region.

Theoretical Framework

Psychologist Albert Bandura was born in 1925 and passed away at the age of ninety-five. Known for his outstanding contributions to education and psychology, Bandura's research included social cognitive theory, moral disengagement, social learning theory, and self-efficacy theory. Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy originated with social cognitive theory, which began taking root in the 1970s as a paradigm shift took place in psychology from behaviorist learning theories to cognitive learning theories (Luszczynska & Schwarzer, 2015). According to social cognitive theory, forethought motivates actions (Bandura, 1986). A person may review several expectations and potential outcomes before acting, including concerns with the likelihood of failure or success, what success or failure looks like, and individual capabilities. With self-

efficacy, to attempt something new or to continue learning, one must believe one can accomplish the task or understand the new concept (Pfitzner-Eden, 2016).

Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy is based on individuals' belief in their capabilities for specific actions or events. An individual's sense of self-efficacy affects all areas of performance, welfare, and motivation (Claxton & Dolan, 2022). Self-efficacy is grounded in psychology and behaviorism; self-efficacy increases when an individual is able to persist through seemingly threatening tasks or situations that are relatively safe, promoting behavioral accomplishments and extinguishing fear arousal (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy decreases when an individual cannot perform, creating discouragement and increasing a lack of motivation to persist (Bandura, 1977).

Bandura's *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control* has obvious applicability to educators (Pajares, 1997; Pfitzner-Eden, 2016). After completing the educational requirements to obtain a teaching license, teachers are generally excited about finally being able to begin their teaching careers (Cole & Knowles, 1993; Manuel & Hughes, 2006). Their self-efficacy starts high since they have just accomplished the difficult task of their college degree and generally believe they have been adequately prepared to teach within their field (Chestnut & Cullen, 2014). However, after they are hired at their first school, if they are unaware of the teacher expectations specific to their new school of hire, how to use the classroom technology, the student demographic needs and resources, and the rules, regulations, and policies of the school, they are at an incredible disadvantage to becoming successful in their new teaching position (Boman et al., 2013; Ewing & Smith, 2003). With every frustration, self-efficacy decreases, increasing discouragement and reducing motivation to persist in teaching, which increases teacher attrition rates (Yost, 2006). When new teacher hires are provided with robust onboarding experiences that address the

teacher expectations, student demographic needs and resources, technology training and use, and rules, regulations, and policies specific to the school, the school can capitalize on the initially high self-efficacy levels of brand-new teachers, helping to maintain those levels by increasing the teachers' likelihood of success and reducing the attrition rates (VanLone et al., 2022). This makes Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy, specifically teacher self-efficacy, a fitting lens through which to view and analyze the onboarding experiences of high school teachers.

Related Literature

According to the past and present literature on teacher retention issues, there is no one reason for the teacher shortages in the U.S., and there is no one solution to retain teachers (Camera, 2022; García & Weiss, 2019; Natanson, 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2022; Will, 2022). However, some supports can be implemented to help alleviate the problems until more drastic changes can be agreed upon and applied. According to the literature, some supports include higher pay, for which the U.S. Department of Education and many districts are working to achieve, increased safety and improved working conditions, and funding for added professional development opportunities (Horn, 2021; Jotkoff, 2022). Teacher self-efficacy has also been addressed in the research, including a need for better-prepared teachers for an increase in efficacy (Kini, 2022; Podolsky et al., 2016; Räsänen et al., 2020), but the lack of research surrounding onboarding practices for new teachers—particularly the effects of onboarding practices for increased self-efficacy leading to retention—indicates that teacher preparation at the onset of the school year, when hired for that first year of teaching, has been overlooked (Frey et al., 2023).

Teacher Retention and Attrition

An analysis of school teachers in the public education system shows a drastic concern for teacher retention rates (Lieberman, 2022; Natanson, 2022; Will, 2022). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers were already leaving the field within three to five years of being hired, creating this teacher shortage (Granziano, 2005; Merod, 2023). Since the pandemic, public education has seen many teachers retire, the number of college students choosing an educational degree shrink, and more new teachers leaving within that three-to-five-year time frame (Bichu, 2022). Multiple reasons regarding the exodus of teachers within the education profession have been documented, including low wages, lack of support, and poor conditions (Camera, 2022; García & Weiss, 2019; Natanson, 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2022; Will, 2022). Other noteworthy contributions to teacher attrition rates include a lack of autonomy for teaching, a social cognitive view that places the teaching profession within a lower social status, and test-based accountability (Kini, 2022; Wiggan et al., 2021). Teachers also note frustration with increased educator expectations without including additional support or pay (Räsänen et al., 2020). These problems have contributed to low teacher morale, low motivation, and low teacher self-efficacy, increasing teacher attrition rates (Jotkoff, 2022; Merod, 2023).

Low Wages. Teacher pay has increased over the years (Lathan, 2023). For example, in Mississippi, a historically low-paying state for educators, the average salary for teachers in 1969-70 was $5,798 (NCES, 2022). In just one year, 1979-80, it doubled to $11,850 (NCES, 2022). In 2021-22, the most recent statistics from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the average teacher salary in Mississippi jumped to $47,162 (NCES, 2022). Every pay increase is a win; however, teacher wages are still low—with an average salary of $66,397 across the U.S., teachers are barely above federal poverty levels (dependent upon household size) (Department of

Health & Human Services, 2023; Lathan, 2023), requiring many teachers to work extra hours when offered or to take on a second job (Diliberti et al., 2021). Moreover, while the average numbers already look dim, the big picture is even worse (Allegretto, 2022); the salary numbers are too often presented as averages instead of means. The average is calculated by adding all the wages and dividing by the number of teachers, but that average number then includes the outliers (Allovue, 2022). As with most careers, the longer a teacher works, the more they are paid, and teacher attrition concerns are among the teachers who have been working for less than five years, meaning the teachers who are leaving are the ones who are making well below the average teacher salary (Patrick & Carver-Thomas, 2022). Additionally, the salary increases over the years are not enough to compensate for inflation (Allegretto, 2022). When inflation is added to the average teacher salary calculation, teacher pay has decreased for several years (Walker, 2023).

Lack of Autonomy. The amount of control teachers have over their school environment and level of decision-making ability is reflected in the amount of autonomy teachers have or do not have (Kengatharan, 2020; Somech, 2016). Though relatively new to the literature, research supporting the strong connection between teacher autonomy and teacher job satisfaction is available (Kengatharan, 2020). Unfortunately, teachers are losing more and more autonomy over their jobs, reducing job satisfaction and increasing attrition rates (Kengatharan, 2020; Kini, 2022; Wiggan et al., 2021). When teachers are part of the decision-making process, they have ownership in the direction of the school, support the administrative decisions, and are more willing to implement change (Madigan & Kim, 2021).

Negative Social Cognitive View. The lack of teacher autonomy goes hand-in-hand with the most recent negative social cognitive view of public education (Olenick, 2022). Teacher

restrictions have increased as parents and politicians infiltrate the classroom, demanding curriculum changes, book bannings, and speech restrictions (Olenick, 2022). Moreover, as school districts desperately seek to fill vacant teaching positions with unlicensed individuals (Richman & Crain, 2022), the image of teaching decreases—making it appear, simultaneously, as though anyone could do the job and no one wants the job (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973). In essence, American society is devaluing the teaching career (Egelkrout, 2021). Additionally, as a capitalistic society, we place greater value on higher-paying jobs and careers directly tied to the market, of which teaching does not (Wiggan et al., 2021). This lack of capitalistic value adds to the negative social cognitive view, pushing more students to seek degrees in other fields (Wiggan et al., 2021).

Test-based Accountability. Demonstration of one's understanding is vital in education; however, when incentives for achievement are incorporated into that demonstration and the demonstration of knowledge becomes a blanketed, standardized test of question and answer, accurate interpretation of student understanding becomes muddy, especially when schools begin to inflate scores (Hamilton et al., 2002; Koretz, 2018). The accountability movement in the U.S. began in the 1970s when curriculum standards became a political talking point for educational reform (Labaree, 2021). Then, in 1983, the Nation at Risk Report was published, eventually creating the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002 (Labaree, 2021) and the 2015 updated version: Every Student Succeeds Act (Berwick, 2019). This educational reform flooded schools with standardized tests and accountability measures, creating a global phenomenon (Berwick, 2019; Labaree, 2021). Standardized testing gave rise to a ranking system, basing a school's desirability on testing scores and pitting each school and district against one another, creating an environment ripe for test inflation and teacher dissatisfaction (Carver-Thomas & Darling-

Hammond, 2017; Koretz, 2018). According to the NCES, the number one reason in a 2012-2013 survey for factors leading to teacher attrition was dissatisfaction regarding assessments and accountability measures (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Basing student achievement on standardized tests often leads to teaching to the test and concerns with over-testing, which reduces teacher autonomy and increases teacher frustration, leading to burnout and attrition concerns (Berwick, 2019).

Poor Conditions with a Lack of Support. When Googling "most stressful jobs in the U.S.," "teacher" appears on nearly every list, including the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Stressful Professions Rankings (Paprocki, 2022). Teachers need support and safe working conditions; however, they are not necessarily receiving the support required for retention (Steiner et al., 2022). According to a 2022 RAND survey, teachers (and principals), compared to other working adults, reported drastically worse well-being (Steiner et al., 2022). Some open-ended responses in the survey included frustrations in managing student behavior, taking on additional work due to staffing shortages, working extra hours, supporting students' mental health, and struggling to meet unattainable school goals and expectations (Steiner et al., 2022). Additional issues regarding poor teaching conditions and needed administrative support include safety concerns (Jalongo, 2021; Walker, 2022). Since the COVID pandemic, teachers have been more concerned about their health and the time off work available to maintain their health and the health of their families (Jalongo, 2021). Another distressing safety concern for teachers has been the ever-increasing threat of violence in U.S. schools (Walker, 2022). Schools regularly perform lockdown drills for potential incidents. In the first six months of 2022 alone, there were a total of 1,458 school-related shootings that led to 482 fatalities and 1,365 injuries (CHDS, 2023). Teachers (and students) need safer schools, better working conditions, and better administrative,

political, and societal support (Wolf, 2023). A perceived lack of support is among the highest predictors of teacher turnover (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

The Role of the Teacher and Public Education

The role of a teacher within public education is extensive. If teacher expectations are undefined from the start, it only adds to the chaos and frustration of first-year teachers. New teachers are burning out because they are overwhelmed (Madigan et al., 2023). The system may be broken, but the difficulty in fixing the broken system is that it is broken into many pieces: there are too many problems (M. Mangleson, personal communication, January 22, 2022). When asking different teachers what the "problem" is with the school system, not only would many of the responses be similar, but there would likely be a multitude of different problems mentioned: communication from administration, testing problems, over-testing, teaching to the test, too many students in the classroom, dealing with challenging students, dealing with difficult parents, no prep time, not enough pay, teacher and substitute shortages, technology issues, no funding, expectations to work overtime, the need to work beyond contract hours because prep times have been removed to cover for staffing shortages, meeting student needs, etc. (Kim et al., 2022). Teachers are required to do so much more than teach (Kalynychenko et al., 2021).

Teachers as Student Mental Health Support. During licensure classes, teacher candidates often participate in classes that discuss classroom behavior, student emotional and mental health, and introductory child psychology, but unbeknownst to teachers when they enter the classroom for the first time is the need to be an improvised psychologist or therapist (Miller et al., 2023). Teachers are not prepared for the extent of emotional strain with which their jobs entail (Miller et al., 2023). With students from various backgrounds and home lives filling the classrooms, teachers work with students dealing with family trauma or other significant

emotional concerns daily (M. Mangleson, personal communication, January 22, 2022). As with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, if a student is hungry, tired, emotionally distraught, etc., it can be difficult for academic learning to take place (Kenrick et al., 2010). A student's basic needs must be met to move on to the next level of growth (Kenrick et al., 2010). In a classroom of thirty-eight third graders, how is an elementary school teacher expected to meet all her student's needs, teach them the curriculum, and stay mentally healthy? With five classes totaling one hundred and fifty students who are each dealing with their own trauma, how is a high school teacher expected to teach the curriculum, stay mentally sane, and meet the needs of the students? So, in considering the definitions of education, the role of the teacher, and teacher burnout, the "problem" in the educational system is likely the unrealistic expectations placed on one individual to achieve an ever-changing goal that is out of reach (Juvonen & Toom, 2023).

The Role of Technology. One significant contributing factor to the change and expansion of the seemingly unrealistic job description for educators is the advancements in technology (Haleem et al., 2022). Over 20 years ago, Bertram (1999) was referencing the Y2K scare and technological advancements in the classroom when he echoed United States Secretary of Education, Richard Riley, who stated that technology is transforming how we learn, even predicting that by the year 2000, every classroom would be connected to the internet and every student would be technologically literate (Bertram, 1999). Bertram and Riley, among others (Cloete, 2017; Raja & Nagasubramani, 2018), saw how technology would vastly change the face of education. The classroom does not look or function the same way it used to. A math teacher does not need to spend as much time teaching students to memorize numerical facts and formulas because students almost always have a calculator in their hands via their cell phones. An English teacher does not need to spend as much time teaching spelling and grammar rules

because our computer systems often correct our spelling and usage. A history teacher does not need to spend as much time teaching historical facts and date memorization because students can quickly and easily look up such facts online. So, what do these teachers teach now in an age of advanced technology? If a student can look up all the answers online, what is the purpose of the teacher? Today, math teachers can spend more time in the classroom explaining why we need math and how to use it. An English teacher can spend more time teaching communication and critical thinking skills, helping students to navigate the infinite hordes of information on the World Wide Web to decipher fake news from "truth." A history teacher can discuss the ethics of war and events from the past. Because of technology, the role of the teacher has shifted from teaching basic skills and memorization to critical thinking and character development; technology has essentially created a systemic paradigm shift in academic pedagogy (Haleem et al., 2022). One concern with this shift in instruction is that the ideals integrated into the adjusted curriculum are incredibly broad, making it difficult to determine what a teacher should be doing, leaving the teacher job description open to interpretation and conflict.

The Role of Public Education. To fully comprehend the role of the teacher and whether the public education system is failing teachers, it is essential to understand what the school system is supposed to be accomplishing. With the political system throwing so many different expectations and restrictions at teachers, including a request to post curriculum before the beginning of the school year, restricting what can be mentioned in school (i.e., critical race theory, pronouns, slavery), removing certain books from schools that are considered offensive, threatening the privacy of students by asking to place cameras in every classroom, and creating a governor's tip line for community members to "tattle" on teachers, the purpose of the school system is becoming even more challenging to determine (Alleyne, 2022; Gross, 2022; Modan,

2023; Pollock et al., 2022; Zimmerman, 2022). Horn (2021) sought to understand the purpose of public education and the teacher shortage by utilizing a regular teaching strategy: beginning with the end in mind. In his article, Horn (2021) provided a brief history of the role of public education as he illustrated the drastic changes through time, noting that today's definition and purpose are vague. Additionally, in defining the purpose of public education, scholars, through the ages, have subsequently altered the role of the teacher with each new public education definition. As Horn (2021) imparted the necessity for schools to look to the end goal in determining its purpose and for achieving success, he offered some solutions, including his definition of the purpose of public education: the goal of public education at a high level is to maximize human potential by creating a desire for individuals to participate civically, contribute meaningfully to society, cultivate passion for life, and learn that differences merit respect (Horn, 2021). To clarify his definition, Horn (2021) suggested five domains for schools as they create, build, and articulate their central purpose and priorities: (a) content knowledge; (b) skills; (c) habits of success; (d) real-world experiences and social capital; and (e) health and wellness. This extensive definition of public education elucidates the extended role of educators, adding to the repeated expectation of educators—teachers, by definition of the purpose of public education, are expected to do much more than teach a subject.

Even though the expectations, roles, and definitions have changed through the years, teachers have always done more than teach academic subjects—they teach students. Teachers are role models and guides for students through the learning process, and thankfully, educators are required to participate in courses that teach ethics, classroom management, child behavioral psychology, etc., while working toward a teaching licensure. However, this licensure education is not enough to prepare teachers for the specific schools for which they are hired (Wiggan et al.,

2021). Each school has specific expectations, different classroom tools, and diverse cultures for which teachers must be trained once hired during their onboarding process. Räsänen et al. (2020) emphasize this point, stating that even though teachers cite multiple reasons for wanting to leave the profession, the factors contributing to persistent turnover intentions reflect the disconnect between the educator and their working environment. The disconnect has translated over time into dissatisfaction and dysfunctional coping strategies. Furthermore, instead of pointing out all the burnout prevention tools and coping strategies for professional development, researchers like Lynch (2021) hope to break down the problems in the broken educational system. In this sense, "broken educational school system" is not defined by one aspect. The educational system is not functioning effectively because multiple facets must be addressed. Lynch (2021) lists twenty concerns for America's educational system, some of which include lack of parent involvement, crowding, lack of funding, poor teacher education, assessment done wrong, digital inequity, and diversity concerns. With a list this long, Lynch (2021) is unable to expand on each reason. Still, his list provides a glimpse into the difficulties teachers have when trying to be successful in their educational careers by illuminating the broken aspects of our educational system, as opposed to focusing on the teacher and teacher burnout alone.

Teacher Burnout

Teacher burnout has been an issue for many years now. Granziano (2005) provided staggering statistics on teacher attrition rates, concluding that we lose nearly half of all new teacher hires within five years. These statistics have not improved (Goldhaber & Theobald, 2023; Sabina et al., 2023). Granziano (2005) cited several reasons for this loss, and while including the lower teacher salary as a reason, she does claim that salary is not a driving reason for teacher attrition rates. Some key reasons include emotional toll, lack of influence within the

school system, inadequate time, classroom intrusion, and poor administrative support (Granziano, 2005; Nguyen & Springer, 2023; Sabina et al., 2023). Granziano's (2005) recommendation for resolving the problem is mentorship. She provided examples and listed supportive programs, illustrating how effective teacher mentorships help new teachers succeed. Although Granziano's (2005) article was written nearly seventeen years ago, her information is still relevant, if not more so relevant today, with an even greater nationwide teacher shortage since the pandemic (Jotkoff, 2022; Merod, 2023). The emotional toll and expectations on teachers to teach virtually or face-to-face with pandemic accommodations in low-income, urban schools with technology gaps are overwhelming educators (Kim et al., 2022).

Granziano (2005) sought to resolve the teacher attrition rates by suggesting the implementation of teacher mentorships; however, in a more recent article by Lindqvist et al. (2021), the authors found that mentorships might not be enough. Lindqvist et al.'s (2021) article regarding teacher burnout from a student-teacher perspective is illuminating. Student-teachers are not in their professions yet and are already discussing burnout. The reason for this discourse, the authors note, is that as the student-teachers teach, they hear about the stress, burnout, and attrition from current teachers in the educational field with whom they are mentored during their practicum. Thankfully, these student-teachers are learning from their situations and striving to combat burnout. The causes of burnout identified by the student-teachers in Lindqvist et al.'s (2021) study include institutional negativity, systemic concerns, personal discrepancies, and individual work ethics (Lindqvist et al., 2021). Some coping strategies listed in Lindqvist et al.'s (2021) article include changing teacher education and schools, changing individual approaches, and striving to be part of a group (Lindqvist et al., 2021). These new and upcoming teachers are learning to change the narrative for teacher burnout and attrition rates. There has been extensive

literature on teacher burnout over the years (Brouwers et al., 2000; Comerchero, 2008; Folk, 2015; Granziano, 2005; Maslach, 1996), but nothing has changed; if anything, the situation has only gotten worse (CNN, 2022; Kalynychenko et al., 2021; Kim & Burić, 2020; Madigan et al., 2023; Merod, 2023). So, to see new teachers striving to fix their situations is one step in a positive direction, even though it is not enough. Student teachers do not deal with all the same stressful problems regular teachers must resolve (Miller et al., 2023). So, even though it is a great thing for new teachers to come into the field with eyes open to the issues and coping strategies ready, it is not enough to combat the underlying problems in the system that will likely wear the new teachers down (Miller et al., 2023).

The literature review of teacher burnout today is remiss if it does not include a look at the effect of COVID-19 on education. Pressley's (2021) research focuses on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teacher anxiety and burnout. His article speaks specifically to anxiety related to COVID-19 and the additional demands on teachers, communication with parents, and the need for better administrative support. Additionally, with the pandemic, teachers have had to learn and implement alternative teaching strategies, including hybrid classes, virtual instruction, and socially distanced classrooms with masked students (Amin et al., 2022; Baroudi & Shaya, 2022). Teachers have had new job expectations and requirements; they have had to learn new platforms and skills (Boland et al., 2021; Ma et al., 2021). Teachers were already overloaded, and these new demands have made the weight heavier on top of teacher and substitute shortages that existed prior to the pandemic and have now been exacerbated due to the pandemic (VanLone et al., 2022). With all the research available about the issues in the education system and teacher burnout (Brouwers et al., 2000; Ford et al., 2019; Madigan & Kim, 2021; Merod, 2023; Pressley, 2021), the pandemic brought an additional layer of research to illustrate the

growing concerns with teacher burnout, attrition rates, and the broken educational system (Kim et al., 2022; Schmitt & deCourcy, 2022).

Several attempts have been made to address the problems with the educational system and teacher burnout (Ansley et al., 2021; Hill-Jackson & Lewis, 2023; Summers, 2023; Wexler, 2020). Unfortunately, these attempts have yet to resolve the problems. Madigan and Kim (2021) found that burnout, job satisfaction, and teachers' intentions to quit were all connected and that the risk of teacher attrition from burnout may be increasing over time (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Therefore, burnout prevention must be addressed to stave off the continuous concerns in public education. Ideally, burnout intervention should be applied at all levels, including individual and organizational. At the organizational level, changes should be made to reduce workloads, and at the individual level, educators should be given greater autonomy, support, and decision-making power (Madigan & Kim, 2021).

Additionally, increasing resources for professional development programs that equip teachers with the coping tools and knowledge they need to recognize burnout symptoms early and combat burnout before it leads to attrition has been a recently and widely adopted suggestion for burnout reduction (Beuchel et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2021; Madigan & Kim, 2021; Roeser et al., 2022; Ye et al., 2023). Some of the coping resources that have been implemented include programs such as mindfulness training, stress management workshops, and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy-based intervention education (Beuchel et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2021; Roeser et al., 2022; Ye et al., 2023). While studies show mindfulness is effective in helping teachers cope with the stressors of classroom life (Beuchel et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2021; Roeser et al., 2022; Ye et al., 2023), researchers worry that emphasizing the need for teacher resilience reduces the pressure needed on policy and system changes that cause teacher stress (Berdik, 2019). Teachers may appreciate

resources and opportunities to reduce stress, but ultimately, teachers want the funding used for these mindfulness trainings and intervention-administrative-positions to go toward fixing the problems causing the stress and mental health concerns (DiCicco et al., 2019; Sokal et al., 2020). Teachers do not want to be "fixed"; they want the system to be fixed.

The research is evident regarding the relationship between the need for educational reform and teacher burnout (Avidov-Ungar & Arviv-Elyashiv, 2020; Folk, 2015; Ford et al., 2019; Madigan & Kim, 2021). Even though the purpose of education varies, the issues in education vary, and the reasons for teacher burnout are vast, the correlation and literature regarding the connections are abundant (Avidov-Ungar & Arviv-Elyashiv, 2020; Folk, 2015; Ford et al., 2019; Madigan & Kim, 2021). In Folk's (2015) pre-pandemic dissertation, she discusses the correlation between teacher burnout, teacher self-efficacy, and teachers' responses to three reform measures for an urban school district in Indiana: performance pay, teacher effectiveness ratings, and the A – F student grading system. While Folk's (2015) findings did not produce a significant, statistically predictive relationship between teacher burnout, self-efficacy, and attitudes about reform or evaluation, her research adds to the awareness of the issue, addressing both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as well as the good and bad of the remaining teachers in the school—just because a teacher decides to stay, it does not mean the teacher is happy, which potentially decreases the chances of having well-educated students. Folk (2015) also found that the concerns are not just affecting attrition rates; burnout and frustration are also affecting the potential candidate pool—fewer teachers are receiving their first-year teaching licenses. So, not only are we losing current teachers, but fewer college graduates want to go into education, according to her study. Folk's (2015) dissertation does not resolve any problems or offer solutions to problems. Still, she does present another voice of warning for the current

concerns and future implications of any issues, especially since her research was pre-pandemic and educational and teacher shortage concerns have only persisted post-pandemic. The addition of Folk's (2015) research to the teacher burnout conversation is similar to the squeaky wheel receiving the oil. Perhaps the voice of the masses, as we add to the conversation and create greater awareness, will help make change for the better—as long as we provide solutions, not just complaints.

Unlike Folk's (2015) research, Ford et al.'s (2019) article does include some ideas for resolution. The authors discuss the need for school leaders to provide a positive working environment for teachers to prevent burnout and reduce attrition. To do this, Ford et al. (2019) suggest meeting the psychological needs of teachers through intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organizational levels. Like Folk (2015), Ford et al. (2019) found that one of the biggest detriments and costs to a school is when a teacher intends to leave, as opposed to the actual attrition numbers. When a teacher intends to leave but has not yet, the relationship with other faculty members, administration, staff, and students often turns negative or strained. A teacher "on his or her way out" often becomes complacent or inattentive in lesson planning and teaching, which is harmful to student learning. This hostile environment, created by the teacher who intends to leave, can be a drain on everyone at the school, which in turn can cause more burnout for other teachers, staff, and administrators. Administrators must consider the psychological needs of teachers as they consider educational reform and other decisions that affect teachers because, unfortunately, the psychological needs of teachers can positively and negatively affect the other teachers and students in the building.

One helpful way administrators should work to make sure teachers are happier and the school system is running smoother to meet the needs of the students is to include teachers in the

decision-making processes (Avidov-Ungar & Arviv-Elyashiv, 2020; Gouëdard et al., 2020). Avidov-Ungar and Arviv-Elyashiv's (2020) article takes a universal look at the educational reform process and how teachers implement reform in their schools. The authors recognize that reform is constant but not always accepted or implemented the same (Avidov-Ungar & Arviv-Elyashiv, 2020). Although reform may be "decided" from a national or an administrative level, it is executed at the ground level, and not all teachers at the ground level are willing or able to implement reform, let alone implement the reform the same as other teachers (Gouëdard et al., 2020; Haug & Mork, 2021). Teachers are more willing to implement reform if they are part of the reform decision-making process, including teacher roles in leadership (Avidov-Ungar & Arviv-Elyashiv, 2020; Haug & Mork, 2021). Current research is beginning to address the concerns of the "broken" educational system and teacher burnout by discussing reform options and understanding that teachers are the conduit for change in the system as long as they are part of the reform decisions (Avidov-Ungar & Arviv-Elyashiv, 2020; Gouëdard et al., 2020; Haug & Mork, 2021). Society needs to move from research to implementation. If teachers could help fix the problems, perhaps the system would be less broken, teacher shortages would be reduced, and teachers would be less burned out (Mahmoodi-Shahrebabaki, 2019). The shortage and the burnout are cyclical; as teachers burn out, they leave the teaching profession. As more teachers leave, the remaining teachers who must pick up the slack become increasingly burned out and end up leaving (Duncan, 2022). So, as the problems in the educational system are fixed, the teachers will be less likely to leave, especially if the teachers are deciding what problems need to be fixed, which, according to Avidov-Ungar and Arviv-Elyashiv (2020), means teachers are more willing to implement the reform.

School Teacher Onboarding Practices

Teachers need strong and effective preparation to strengthen efficacy and increase the likelihood of remaining in the profession (Han, 2023). Studies have found that inadequately prepared teachers who enter the teaching field have attrition rates two to three times higher than comprehensively prepared teachers (Podolsky et al., 2016; Ronfeldt, 2021). Educators receive higher education preparation before entering the classroom, but they are still ill-prepared for the transition from their college courses to their school of hire (Lewitzky, 2020). Every school and district is unique; transitional challenges for new teachers include learning to successfully navigate the unique culture and politics of a school in addition to the norms and procedures for job tasks associated with their new schools, individual departments, grade levels, and subject areas (Pelser, 2023). Learning how to navigate the school web services and online platforms for things like calling in sick and getting a substitute, learning the safety procedures and guidelines for emergencies, and learning the classroom technology takes time and training. Once the school year begins, teachers are generally isolated in their classrooms and have little time to seek guidance and training (Shanks et al., 2022). Administration must clarify the scope of an educator's position, responsibilities, and expectations essential for success (Smith et al., 2020). Teachers have multiple responsibilities, roles, and obligations, so understanding and defining success and accomplishment when the roles are challenging creates an uncomfortable amount of pressure for new teachers. The pressure placed on teachers by administration, students, parents, and the community as a whole to be effective teachers can be demoralizing, creating an imposter syndrome in which success is experienced externally and failure internally, significantly decreasing self-efficacy (Lacey & Parlette-Stewart, 2017).

One way to increase self-efficacy, decrease stress, and enhance the transition to practice is through onboarding: a formalized process for integrating and supporting new employees into an organization, presenting organizational values, beliefs, and processes as well as expectations of the position (Carlos & Muralles, 2022; Thrasher & Walker, 2018). Onboarding is an ongoing process that can last through the first year of hire, beginning at the time of interview (Thrasher & Walker, 2018). After being hired, teachers usually participate in an orientation wherein they are introduced to staff and administrators, learn policies and procedures, and tour the facility (Barowski, 2021). Unfortunately, because onboarding is often misconstrued with orientation, the onboarding too frequently ends there (Barowski, 2021; Winterman & Bucy, 2019); however, onboarding must continue through at least the first year of hire for teachers to experience the best transitional success at their new school (Thrasher & Walker, 2018). Educational modules, peer mentors, evaluation and feedback, training opportunities, and continued support with clear expectations are essential during the first year of teaching (Boman et al., 2013).

Ineffective Onboarding Practices

Literature regarding onboarding practices for public school teachers scarcely exists, as though onboarding were an afterthought or a term seemingly interchangeable with orientation (Carlos & Muralles, 2022; Thrasher & Walker, 2018), which turns a year-long transitioning, training, and supportive process into a one-day event of paperwork and introductions. An orientation is not enough to help transition new teachers and expect them to be successful in their first year (Carlos & Muralles, 2022; Graybill et al., 2013). Additionally, onboarding is not simply a box-checking process, and although technology helps orient new employees, onboarding should not just be a list of mandatory videos with quiz questions (Graybill et al., 2013). Onboarding needs to be interactive, methodical, relationship-oriented, and productive

(Winterman & Bucy, 2019). Teachers do not want their valuable time wasted. They do not want another meeting that could have been an email. They do not want to see resources misused when teachers are typically paid less than optimal wages (DiCicco et al., 2019; NEA, 2023). Moreover, as much as pep-rally style meetings and team-building exercises sound uplifting and motivational, if the resources are not used purposefully, teachers will perceive the resource as a waste; teachers need and seek purposeful training and resources that reduce burnout (Sokal et al., 2020).

In seeing a need for better onboarding practices in the U.S., Frey et al. (2023) created an *Onboarding Teachers* playbook. And while the content is helpful information and a start to addressing self-efficacy and teacher attrition concerns, with sections such as "Are we teaching with clarity," "How are we using evidence-based instruction to foster student ownership of their learning," and "How do we teach responsively," the book's message is how to be a better classroom teacher. The message misses the effective-onboarding-mark of helping teachers adjust to their new surroundings: training for classroom tools and school platforms, creating relationships with colleagues, learning teacher expectations, and acculturating to the environment (Boman et al., 2013; Colognesi et al., 2020; Dixon, 2019; NIET, 2021; Totaro & Wise, 2018). Teachers already receive detailed information on how to be effective teachers while taking the required college courses for licensure; it is not necessary to reiterate this information in an onboarding course when teachers need the time spent on learning tools and information on how to be successful in their new work environment (Lewitzky, 2020; Podolsky et al., 2016; Totaro & Wise, 2018).

Additionally, in determining teacher readiness and in reaction to recent demands for teacher accountability, some schools are adding standardized teacher performance assessments to

their onboarding processes as a means of evaluating potential educators' readiness and effectiveness to teach in the classroom (Swars Auslander et al., 2020). The edTPA is one such teacher performance-based assessment created by educators to address the preparedness of new teachers (edTPA, 2022). However, there is concern as to whether an assessment can determine the classroom success of a first-year teacher. Collegiate preparation and licensure testing prior to entering the teaching field are vital. Additionally, an assessment may highlight areas of strength and weakness for a teacher. However, like a one-day orientation, it is also not enough or practical to rely solely on an assessment to determine teacher preparedness and the likelihood of retention (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2013; Greenblatt & O'Hara, 2015; Swars Auslander et al., 2020).

Effective Onboarding Practices

Some onboarding models are worth replicating; however, very few are found in the United States (Howe, 2006). Onboarding programs, often referred to as induction programs outside of the U.S., have been comprehensive and successful throughout much of Germany, Japan, and New Zealand (Aarts et al., 2020; Howe, 2006). According to Howe's (2006) international study, all effective induction programs include mentorship opportunities (Howe, 2006). New teachers need time with experienced teachers during the first year of teaching (Han, 2023). This is helpful for new teachers and provides meaningful professional development for older teachers, as it often introduces the older teachers to current practices being taught in the universities. These mentorships should include time for acculturation into the teaching and school environment, deliberation, and collaboration (Howe, 2006). And although many U.S. school districts are aware of mentorship programs and have even implemented them, little is being done to prioritize, maintain, and support those mentorship opportunities (NIET, 2021),

especially with the increased demand on teacher's time as the teacher shortages continue to create strain on remaining teachers. Excellent induction programs include a focus on assisting rather than assessing through specialty mentors, professional development opportunities school-wide and district-wide, prolonged internship programs, and reduced teaching loads for new teachers (Howe, 2006). Additionally, according to Aarts et al. (2020), induction programs should work toward enhanced development in teaching skills, helping new teachers become self-directed, capable, and effective educators (Aarts et al., 2020).

One school district in New Jersey has turned onboarding into an immersion experience (Totaro & Wise, 2018). While the West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional School District includes year-long onboarding experiences as part of their induction program with mentors and cohorts, as suggested by Aarts et al. (2020) and Howe (2006), this New Jersey school district's immersion experience starts with a four-day intensive introduction to the school's culture and expectations, before classes begin, away from the students, the curriculum, and the school (Totaro & Wise, 2018). Modeling their professional development after the golden rule, the West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional School District believes it is essential to treat their teachers the same way they want their teachers to treat their students: providing engagement, real-world problem-solving opportunities, clear expectations, creativity, choice, and community (Totaro & Wise, 2018). And though their immersion onboarding is relatively new, West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional School District attributes their increase in talented educator retention to a comprehensive professional development process (Totaro & Wise, 2018).

In addition to intensive orientations and structured year-long onboarding practices that have proven to be successful (Aarts et al., 2020; Howe, 2006; Totaro & Wise, 2018), Colognesi et al. (2020) found the most effective form of mentoring for new teachers is to allow new

teachers to choose their mentors (Colognesi et al., 2020). In their dual quantitative and qualitative studies seeking to understand how to support new teachers, reduce the attrition rates of newly qualified teachers, and overcome "practice shock," Colognesi et al. (2020) determined that informal knowledge sharing with a "teacher friend" throughout the first year is preferred by new teachers, as opposed to principals or other authoritative figures within education providing professional development. The new teacher partnerships for informal knowledge-sharing opportunities should be with experienced teachers within the same grade levels, teaching the same subjects (Colognesi et al., 2020). These mentorships help to build relationships of trust, enhance the school culture, increase job satisfaction, and strengthen the perseverance of the new teachers and the experienced teachers (Colognesi et al., 2020). It is a critical step for school districts like West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional, who are emphasizing creativity, choice, and community (Totaro & Wise, 2018). However, as Colognesi et al. (2020) illustrate, the next level is to provide teachers with grade level, subject level, and informal partnerships for teacher success.

The literature has shown that mentorships are important for teacher growth (Aarts et al., 2020; Colognesi et al., 2020; Howe, 2006; NIET, 2021), acculturation is necessary for relationship development and job satisfaction (Dixon, 2019; Totaro & Wise, 2018), and education and preparation are necessary prior to the start of the school year for new teachers entering the profession (Lewitzky, 2020; Podolsky et al., 2016; Totaro & Wise, 2018), but comprehensive and effective onboarding practices are still rare within the U.S. (Aarts et al., 2020; Howe, 2006). So, even though teachers are generally well prepared to be educators through their college courses and licensure examinations, the onboarding practices of many school districts are deficient in the initial training essential to increase teacher self-efficacy and

success (Lewitzky, 2020). The basics cannot and should not be ignored: initial training on communication tools and platforms, school policies, procedures, expectations, classroom technology, and student demographics and resources. Because this portion of training in the onboarding process is being overlooked, it needs to be added to the literature. School districts need to start their teachers off with the greatest chance for self-efficacy, success, and retention.

School Teacher Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy, also referred to as efficacy expectations, is a fundamental component of social cognitive theory and refers to individuals' beliefs about their capacity to learn and perform tasks satisfactorily (Schunk, 2020). Teachers' levels of burnout can be directly correlated to their level of self-efficacy (Brouwers et al., 2000; Comerchero, 2008; Ozeren et al., 2020). A teacher may have a high level of self-esteem or self-worth, but the level of confidence a teacher may have in performing effectively in a classroom can significantly hinder success and create doubt among students. For example, a teacher with low self-efficacy in classroom and behavior management will struggle to keep the classroom under control for an effective teaching environment. The lower the self-efficacy and the greater the number of cases of low self-efficacy for a teacher, the higher the exhaustion. When teachers worry about their ability to teach effectively, it can be emotionally overwhelming (Bottiani et al., 2019). And when teachers are emotionally overwhelmed for long periods, it is only a matter of time before they are burned out (Sokal et al., 2020).

According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy in relation to teaching ability is indisputably connected to teacher success (Bandura, 1997; Glackin & Hohenstein, 2018). Efficacy is broadly defined as an individual's belief in and perception of their ability to accomplish something or perform effectively. Teacher self-efficacy is a sub-category of self-efficacy that details a

teacher's belief in their abilities to be an effective teacher (Dellinger et al., 2008; Glackin & Hohenstein, 2018; Klassen & Durksen, 2014). Teacher self-efficacy has been copiously studied and documented to include many factors affecting teacher self-efficacy (Alibakhshi et al., 2020; Baroudi & Shaya, 2022; Ma et al., 2021; Pressley, 2021; Richter & Idleman, 2017), including student success (Almog & Shechtman, 2007; Caprara et al., 2006; Chacon, 2005; Chaplain, 2008; Guo et al., 2010), job satisfaction (Moe et al., 2010), emotional intelligence (Moafian & Ghanizadeh, 2009; Rastegar & Memarpour, 2009), perfectionism (Comerchero, 2008), and burnout (Brouwers et al., 2000; Comerchero, 2008; Ozeren et al., 2020). Teacher self-efficacy and its associated behaviors have been used to identify and predict retention expectancy in relation to teacher attrition. A teacher with high levels of self-efficacy will demonstrate behaviors consistent with productivity and job satisfaction, whereas a teacher with low self-efficacy will present behaviors exhibiting resignation and an attitude of defeat and apathy (Bandura,1997; Glackin, 2019; Glackin & Hohenstein, 2018; Ozeren et al., 2020). These behaviors demonstrate a teacher's motivation to persist, firmly linking teacher self-efficacy to retention.

Negative Teacher Self-Efficacy

Although some controversy exists as to which comes first—the chicken or the egg (i.e., burnout or negative teacher self-efficacy) (Han, 2023; Kim & Burić, 2020)—negative teacher self-efficacy is among the top reasons for teacher attrition rates (Han, 2023; Huang et al., 2020). New teachers often begin with high levels of motivation and self-efficacy; however, if new teachers do not adjust well and quickly to their new teaching environment, those self-efficacy levels drop, motivation depletes, and persistence wanes (Richter et al., 2022). This adjustment is known as organizational socialization, a process in which new teachers, or any other employees,

transition from outsiders to insiders within the organization (Richter et al., 2022). In defining organizational socialization theory, Fisher (1986) describes three characteristics of organizational social adjustment: role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance (Fisher, 1986). The organizational socialization process is onboarding. And since self-efficacy is an internal factor affected by external concerns, the role clarity and social acceptance that should be addressed in an effective onboarding process through preparatory training, introductions to policies and procedures of the school, and connections to peer mentors, negative teacher self-efficacy can be avoided (NIET, 2021).

Research within psychology has shown three examples of low self-efficacy affecting health across a range of domains, including teaching: low self-efficacy and depression, low self-efficacy and pain management, and low self-efficacy and career development (Celestine, 2019). Low self-efficacy has been a powerful indicator of depression (Sharma & Kumra, 2022). When individuals believe they are incapable of accomplishing a task, depression may seep in and increase a perceived incapability for multiple tasks, creating an impaired perception of the self (Sharma & Kumra, 2022). According to Wolcott (2022), even though our mindset may not resist all adversity, low self-efficacy can affect our ability to heal. If individuals have little belief in the interventions for pain management or recovery, i.e., a fixed mindset, they may be slow to recover from illness or hardship (Wolcott, 2022). And finally, low self-efficacy has been known to reduce career development, particularly for women (Burnette et al., 2020). When women have less access to information and role models in any career field, developing a sense of capability can prove challenging.

Negative teacher self-efficacy has a spiral effect, significantly affecting the decisions educators make and the actions they pursue (Bandura, 1977; Baroudi & Shaya, 2022). The less

self-efficacy a teacher has, the more difficult it is to maintain a classroom, apply effort, connect with peer teachers, administrators, or students, persist through disappointment and limitations, adapt, and achieve (Bandura, 1977; Baroudi & Shaya, 2022). And since the academic upheaval of the COVID-19 pandemic, administrators have asked educators to be more and more flexible. Negative teacher self-efficacy drastically reduces a teacher's ability and motivation to develop and sustain flexibility (Bandura, 1977; Baroudi & Shaya, 2022). These concerns reduce positive teacher self-efficacy, and the depletion of teacher self-efficacy increases these concerns.

Positive Teacher Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy develops through mastery of experiences, vicarious experiences (seeing others succeed), verbal persuasion, and physiological arousal (Bandura, 1986). Increasing teacher self-efficacy for retention means focusing on these four categories to provide ways for teachers to increase persistence. According to Celestine (2019), four principles for improving and sustaining self-efficacy include stepping out of the comfort zone, setting SMART goals, stepping back to look at the bigger picture, and reframing obstacles (Celestine, 2019). The first principle for increasing self-efficacy, getting out of our comfort zone, can initially seem counterintuitive to self-efficacy. Making life more difficult may seem discouraging, reducing our self-efficacy. However, stepping out of our comfort zone, trying something new, and stretching ourselves just a little can help us learn and grow, helping us combat new obstacles, which increases self-efficacy. According to the literature, practical goal setting, the second principle for improving self-efficacy, increases perseverance, performance, and health (Penno et al., 2022). Presented first by George Doran in 1981, SMART goals (specific, measurable, assignable, realistic, timebound) have become the popular and effective goal-setting process. When goals are set in incremental and achievable steps, progress can be achieved and self-efficacy increases

(Penno et al., 2022). The third principle for improving self-efficacy, taking breaks to step out of the details to look at the big picture occasionally, can help to reduce frustration and stress, maintaining necessary levels of self-efficacy for success. Looking at the big picture allows us to move beyond small failures to focus on the bigger goals, increasing perseverance (Celestine, 2019). The fourth and final principle for improving self-efficacy, reframing obstacles, takes practice. Obstacles will always be part of growth, but to maintain momentum in motivation, it is helpful to shift perspectives when facing obstacles. Looking at obstacles from a constructive point of view can serve as a means of overcoming challenges. One way to combat challenges is by analyzing possible setbacks when setting goals to determine how to overcome the setback if and when it occurs. This if-then process allows individuals to be preemptive in facing challenges: "if this occurs, then I will do this." Another way to shift perspective to overcome challenges is through thinking of obstacles as tests, systematically designing solutions, and calmly putting those plans into action (Irvine, 2019). And lastly, by recalling previously overcome challenges, self-efficacy increases to overcome current challenges (Celestine, 2019).

As Ralph Waldo Emerson, philosopher, poet, essayist, and leader of the mid-nineteenth-century transcendentalist movement, has often been credited with stating, "that which we persist in doing becomes easier to do, not that the nature of the thing has changed but that our power to do has increased" (Pincus, 2021, para. 4). As a transcendentalist, Emerson understood self-efficacy. The key to self-efficacy is understanding persistence. We persevere when we believe we can. And as we believe we can, we do, and then we gain additional self-efficacy to continue persevering. Teacher persistence comes from teacher self-efficacy. And the vital ingredients needed for teachers to believe they can be successful include the confidence that stems from obtaining a degree in their field of education (Lewitzky, 2020), the licensure that states they have

gained the necessary knowledge and completed the required steps for teaching in their state (Lewitzky, 2020), the continued support from administration to accomplish all that is asked of a teacher (Baroudi & Shaya, 2022; Totaro & Wise, 2018), the camaraderie of peer teachers and mentors within the educator's school of hire (Baroudi & Shaya, 2022; Colognesi et al., 2020; NIET, 2021), the knowledge and ability to use the platforms, tools, and classroom technology for instructional delivery and student success (Baroudi & Shaya, 2022), and an understanding of the resources and expectations for students and teachers within the educator's school of hire (Totaro & Wise, 2018). Among the studies of education, teacher self-efficacy has been one of the most surveyed and analyzed subjects (Baroudi & Shaya, 2022; Ma et al., 2021; Poulou et al., 2018). Nevertheless, we have struggled to make the connection between the causes of positive teacher self-efficacy, effective onboarding, and retention.

Summary

K-12 public school teacher retention has been an issue across the United States and continues to be a growing concern (Camera, 2022; Lieberman, 2022; Natanson, 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2022; Will, 2022). Attrition rates have been rising over the last several years, and fewer college students are electing education as a career choice (Bichu, 2022). Generally, new teachers are prepared in the collegiate system to begin a teaching career in the K-12 system, starting their careers with a teaching license and a high level of self-efficacy (Wiggan et al., 2021). However, upon entry into the field, teacher self-efficacy plummets. And though multiple reasons for teacher attrition rates have been documented, teacher self-efficacy is a contributing factor that remains a concern (Lacey & Parlette-Stewart, 2017). So even though teachers are well prepared to be teachers, the onboarding practices at each school are lacking in the preparation tools necessary to maintain teacher self-efficacy and increase teacher success in

relation to the policies, procedures, expectations, technology, resources, and student demographics specific to each school (Lewitzky, 2020). Without this preparation, new teachers flounder, regardless of their educator abilities.

Using the theory of self-efficacy to guide in understanding this topic, the reviewed literature discussed teacher attrition, teacher onboarding practices, and teacher self-efficacy. This study seeks to fill the existing gap in the literature pertaining to effective onboarding practices for new public high school teachers as it relates to increasing teacher self-efficacy for retention. By examining the onboarding experiences of Mid-Atlantic region public high school teachers, administrators from any school, and potentially any business onboarding employees, can better understand the preparatory needs of new teachers to help increase self-efficacy and reduce attrition rates.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand the lived experiences of Mid-Atlantic region public high school teachers participating in onboarding practices, which provide insight into best practices to increase teacher self-efficacy and decrease attrition rates. The research design applied to this study is Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological design process. The methods used for data collection include letter-writing, individual interviews, and focus groups. This chapter discusses the research design, methods used for data collection and analysis, and validity assurances enacted during this study.

Research Design

A phenomenological qualitative research study analyzes how individuals offer significance for their lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The research design for this qualitative study is transcendental phenomenology. While quantitative studies provide valuable information based on numerical data, qualitative studies seek to understand society through individual choice and response (Moustakas, 1994). Heavily based in behavioral science, psychology, and sociology, qualitative studies seek to understand why people do what they do, helping society to develop corresponding solutions to concerns (Moustakas, 1994). To solve a problem, it is essential to understand the problem entirely. A phenomenological qualitative study is reflective and retrospective while exploring the unifying knowledge gained through individual perspective, environment, education, exposure, and practice (Moustakas, 1994).

Qualitative phenomenology, originating with Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), is derived from the Greek words phainomenon (appearance) and logos (logic), meaning a rational account of the various ways in which things appear. Through transcendental phenomenological study, we

create meaning through our understanding of what appears, extending our knowledge of reality (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental studies emphasize the inseparable connection between self and world, idealizing the consciousness through which we intentionally perceive and judge the phenomena around us. Transcendental phenomenological studies synthesize perceptions of an object, event, or phenomenon to build an understanding of reality (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental inquiry is a qualitative design research process that, like all good research, begins with a question; however, once this question is asked, the transcendentalist researcher begins to wallow in the complexities of the question, utilizing the researcher as the processing instrument through which the question is studied, leaning on reflection and intuition while examining all the angles of the question as data is gathered. As we dwell upon experiences, questions, and phenomena, we are led to discovery, knowledge, and understanding of ourselves, the world around us, and how we fit within the world. A transcendental phenomenological study fits well with an analysis of teacher onboarding, as the hope is to find meaning within the rational account of teacher experiences to understand the potential influence of onboarding practices on teacher self-efficacy.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study, consisting of a central research question and three sub-questions, were used to bridge the knowledge gap regarding the connection between onboarding practices and teacher self-efficacy as illustrated by the shared experiences of high school teachers in Mid-Atlantic public schools. The central research question is an essential starting point from which all other research questions within this study have developed, providing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon that describes the shared onboarding experiences of new high school teachers. The sub-questions are derived from the central research

question and provide additional insight into the phenomena, allowing the data to reach saturation in discovering the essence of the phenomena of the new high school teachers' onboarding experience in relation to their teacher self-efficacy levels, leading to their retention or attrition. It is thus imperative to describe and understand the central research question leading to sub-questions for saturation of content of the shared experiences.

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of new high school teachers who participate in onboarding practices?

Sub-Question One

What experiences influenced teacher retention during the onboarding process?

Sub-Question Two

What are the educator experiences that influenced change in teacher self-efficacy for teacher participants?

Sub-Question Three

What preparation and support do teacher participants use from their onboarding experiences to sustain teacher self-efficacy?

Setting and Participants

The setting in this study includes public high schools within two public school districts in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The two districts include high schools in rural and urban areas, diversifying the experience of the participants recruited for this study. Since the research shows that many teachers are leaving the teaching profession within their first three to five years of teaching (Bichu, 2022; Jotkoff, 2022), there was a focus on seeking public high school teacher participants who have taught less than five years; however, recruitment included

teachers who have taught any number of years in the Mid-Atlantic region. These variations in setting and participants encourage a complete description of new public high school teachers' onboarding experiences.

Setting

The setting for this study includes two public school districts in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The focus of the study's setting is on the eight public high schools within the two districts. The high schools are located in different areas of the region, including both rural and urban districts, various neighborhoods, and areas with families from differing economic, cultural, and political backgrounds. The urban versus rural districts are segregated and represent very different populations within the region, making it important to include both city and county schools to provide a broader and more accurate depiction of the phenomenon. Some of those segregating differences include political, racial, and economic differences, with the city schools being more politically Democrat and predominately attended by minority students. In contrast, the rural schools are more politically Republican and predominately attended by white students. Additionally, the city schools have a higher percentage of crime and gang-related violence associated within their communities compared to the county schools. Between the two districts, the schools have a range of ratings from the Great Schools rating system, including two schools with an 8/10 rating (above average) all the way down to one school with a 2/10 rating (well below average). Both districts are organized similarly, with governing school boards, administrators, principals, resource officers, and departmental structures. The differences and similarities between these two districts create unique experiences for the educators who teach within their respective locations. All high schools have been issued pseudonyms.

Participants

Fourteen public school teachers from county and city schools in the Mid-Atlantic region participated in this study. During participant recruitment, there was a focus on seeking public high school teacher participants who had taught less than five years; however, recruitment included teachers who had taught any number of years in the Mid-Atlantic region. Participants who no longer work for the MARPS Districts, with a requirement of having recently quit teaching in the region within the last two years, were also sought for recruitment in this study; one participant of the fourteen who joined the study met this particular qualification. The suggested number of participants for qualitative research studies varies among research scientists; however, according to Polkinghorne (1989), an accurate estimate of research participants to reach saturation is between twelve and twenty-five. A large participant sample was sought to reach adequate research saturation, which occurs when enough data has been gathered to the point where new data no longer provides value-added insight (Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 2005). Fourteen public high school teachers within the MARPS Districts were recruited to participate in this study, bringing the data to saturation levels to support an accurate picture of the public high school teacher's lived onboarding experience.

Recruitment Plan

The recruitment plan for this study consisted of employing a purposive, heterogeneous sampling method (Lavrakas, 2008; Patton, 2002). This sampling method provided a broad spectrum of participants with differing perspectives who met the identified criteria (Lavrakas, 2008; Patton, 2002). Purposive sampling is an effective recruitment technique within qualitative research that allows the researcher to analyze the experiences of a smaller sample size within a greater sample pool (Gall et al., 2007; Lavrakas, 2008; Patton, 2002). The participants for this

study were recruited through networks of mutual friends and colleagues by recommendation and word of mouth (Lavrakas, 2008). The individual school websites within each district were used to identify and contact teachers who teach within the districts' high schools. After the participants responded via email or phone call to the invitation to participate in the study (see Appendix D for the participant recruitment email), participants were then asked about other colleagues within their districts who would be willing to participate in this study. This referral aspect was crucial in obtaining the necessary number of participants.

Researcher's Positionality

This section describes my interpretive framework and philosophical assumptions, which form the basis of my worldview, to provide readers with a more comprehensive understanding of my positionality and the transcendental phenomenological methodology I used to conduct this study. With discovery and experience at the root of a transcendental phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994), my experience as a teacher and desire to discover a better path for new teacher preparation and self-efficacy encouraged my quest for truth and understanding. Having gone through the onboarding process within the Mid-Atlantic region public school district, I understand my lived experience regarding the positive and negative effects of a robust versus a weak onboarding program. By interviewing other teachers within the MARPS Districts, I hoped to paint a vivid picture of the teacher experience and perhaps better understand what teachers need during their first year to increase preparation and self-efficacy to reduce attrition rates.

Interpretive Framework

My interpretive framework, like John Dewey's, is that of a pragmatist. Pragmatism is practicality—the idea of nurture over nature; we learn and progress by doing and learning from our actions. Our experiences shape our reality. Gutek's (2014) text on philosophical, ideological,

and theoretical perspectives describes pragmaticism, stating that, like evolution, the experiences demonstrating good results will continue, and the decisions resulting in negative consequences will reduce action—behavior shaping (Gutek, 2014). A pragmatist believes the world is ever-changing. It is neither perfect nor imperfect, nor is there a universal truth. Common sense and a scientific method of hypotheses and probability are valued over religious or spiritual beliefs. Quality of life is a ruling factor. Pragmatists believe learners should not be passive observers; they should be proactive in their education to improve their lives and environments. Consequently, a teacher's role in pragmatism is that of a guide instead of an advisor. The teacher is there to answer questions while helping students experience and experiment to answer their questions and grow. As a teacher, I often like asking my students questions. I want them to learn how to think critically. The curricular focus of a pragmatist is questioning, using the scientific method, social integration, uncensored information available to all, and experiential learning with growth as the goal. The pragmatist methodology often uses statistics and the scientific method along with experiential learning, which generally coincides with a quantitative research design; however, the root of pragmatism is placed in human discovery, and therefore, a qualitative study that illuminates the human experience fits fantastically with a pragmatic view.

My worldview is secular, which is in line with a pragmatist framework. My truth lies in experiential learning and the scientific method. It lies in learning from our actions and natural consequences. My goal as a teacher is to provide a practical and purposeful education. My students must understand the purpose behind why they should learn something. Understanding the purpose of a concept leads to retention and application of concepts. When lessons and subjects have purpose, practicality, and application, students are more willing to learn and retain knowledge. They begin to understand the value of a good education, and, as with the pragmatist

philosophy, a good education is of utmost value to being a good and productive person within society.

Philosophical Assumptions

Qualitative research is grounded in philosophical assumptions that reinforce it (Bleiker et al., 2019). Philosophical assumptions create the theoretical framework that justifies the decisions made by researchers as they collect, evaluate, and interpret the data gathered during their study (Hays & Singh, 2012). Philosophical assumptions are the belief systems researchers use during analysis and interpretation to create meaning (Hays & Singh, 2012). This philosophical perspective is constructed and influenced by our experiences, environments, and values (Bradt et al., 2013), shaping the research we choose to study, questions we ask, and types of data we collect (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The three philosophical assumptions addressed here include ontological, epistemological, and philosophical. As a phenomenological study uses the researcher as the tool through which data is analyzed, the researcher's assumptions must be clearly identified and stated within the study to help elucidate the interpretations within the study's results.

Ontological Assumption

Ontology is the branch of metaphysics related to one's belief regarding existence or reality (Hays & Singh, 2012). As a pragmatist, my experiences have shaped my reality, and as such, I believe everyone else's realities have been shaped by their experiences. My shaped reality is that of an atheist. Even though I do not believe in a God, I believe everyone has a right to their beliefs so long as someone else's belief does not cause harm to another. I am practical, but I hope for the good in everyone. As a researcher, particularly within the transcendental research design, I strive to have an unbiased and open mind. I seek diversity of opinion, culture, and ideas to

create progression for an enriched society.

Epistemological Assumption

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that relates to knowledge and how knowledge is gained and perceived (Hays & Singh, 2012). My pragmatist epistemological perspective is that knowledge gained through experience is similar to evolution, meaning we will continue to do things that result in positive outcomes and discontinue actions that result in adverse consequences. Knowledge gained through experience is nurture versus nature for a pragmatist (Hays & Singh, 2012). With this perspective comes a never-ending ability to continue learning; we are limitless in the knowledge we can gain if we keep seeking knowledge, understanding, and experiences. As such, a person's subjective opinion can be considered knowledge so long as fact and knowledge are separately understood and bias is considered. As a pragmatist researcher performing a qualitative study, it is imperative to understand that people's opinions are part of their lived experiences and must be considered with the whole of their perspectives when adding to the data.

Axiological Assumption

Axiology is the philosophical study of value (Hays & Singh, 2012). As a pragmatist, I believe the world is ever-changing; it is neither perfect nor imperfect, nor is there a universal truth (Hays & Singh, 2012). Therefore, I value common sense and a scientific method of hypotheses and probability over religious or spiritual beliefs (Hays & Singh, 2012). Quality of life is a ruling factor within my axiological assumption (Hays & Singh, 2012). Additionally, as my qualitative research sought to find answers for new high school teacher retention, it is essential to note that I have worked in public education as a teacher and an administrator, both in higher education and high school education, for over eight years, and I have concerns for the

future of public education. Teachers are facing multiple challenges, including political decisions that negatively affect public education, funding shortages, teacher shortages, and societal concerns for pedagogy (Horn, 2021; Jotkoff, 2022). As a teacher, I have seen and dealt with many of these issues firsthand, and I worry for the students in public schools who will be the ones most affected by these problems.

Researcher's Role

As the human instrument in this study, the researcher gathers and analyzes the data. Due to the nature of a transcendental phenomenological study, which uses the researcher as a conduit for examining the phenomenon in which she shares a lived experience with her participants, I focused on being open with my interpretations and analysis of the data gathered from each participant regarding their experiences with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Qutoshi, 2018). As a high school teacher in the Mid-Atlantic region, I present bias as a person who has completed the onboarding process and taught for three years in one of the region's public school districts, sharing similar experiences with my research participants regarding the shared phenomena of new-teacher onboarding in MARPS. As such, I am a member of the teacher community in the Mid-Atlantic region; I have my thoughts about new teacher hire onboarding practices and the effects they have on teacher self-efficacy, teacher attrition, and teacher retention. Some of my thoughts and beliefs may or may not coincide with the thoughts and beliefs of my participants. Other than being a co-worker within the district, I have no pre-existing relationship with any of the participants of this study and have no authority over them. I identified an adequate sample of participants, scheduled interviews, read the procedures and consent forms aloud to the participants, and reminded all participants that their participation was voluntary. Also, throughout the study, I reminded participants that they may rescind their offer to

participate at any time. I read the pre-written interview questions to each participant during their interviews. If clarity was needed regarding any of the participants' answers, I probed the participants by asking them to expound on their responses. I remained aware of my bias as I included my understanding of the phenomenon in my analysis, but I also remained open to the individual interpretations and perspectives of each participant; I monitored these differences in thought and analysis in a research journal to more accurately understand the lived experiences of the participants involved in the study (Hays & Singh, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). In the journal, I recorded personal thoughts and viewpoints on information shared. Additionally, I reviewed my thoughts during the data collection and analysis process, making sure to follow Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological process for data collection and analysis, abstaining from bias within the epoche for a fresh perspective on the data, bracketing out my prejudice to create an accurate representation of the participants' responses and experiences, furthermore, asking participants for reviewal of their data transcripts, a practice known as member checking, which helped to ensure verification and accuracy of the data and research results.

Procedures

The procedures section of this research study details the steps taken to conduct and potentially duplicate the research process chosen for this study, including permissions, recruitment, data collection, and data analysis plans. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is the authority that ensures ethical standards in a human research study as stipulated by the American Education Research Association (Gall et al., 2007). Upon successfully defending the dissertation proposal for this study, approval from Liberty University's IRB was sought and obtained (see Appendix A for IRB approval). Site permissions from both MARPS Districts were also obtained to conduct this study (see Appendix B & C for site applications and approvals). The individual

school websites within each district were used to identify and contact teachers who teach within the district high schools. After the participants responded via email or phone call to the invitation to participate in the study (see Appendix D for the participant recruitment email), participants were asked about other colleagues within their districts who would be willing to participate in this study, employing a purposive, heterogeneous sampling method. The referral aspect of participant recruiting was crucial in helping to obtain the necessary number of participants. Each participant was asked to review and sign a participant consent form prior to their participation in the study (see Appendix E for participant consent form). The consent form included an invitation to participate, information about the study, and details regarding requirements (i.e., benefits, compensation, potential risks, researcher contact information, faculty chair contact information, IRB contact information, voluntary and withdrawal information, protections, and data handling). Three forms of data were collected for triangulation analysis: letter responses, individual interview transcripts, and a focus group transcript. The letter-writing prompts were sent to participants via Google Forms immediately after consent forms had been signed. Participants were given two weeks to complete the letters. After letters were received, individual interviews were scheduled. Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes each and were conducted in a private room at the teacher's school or through the Zoom virtual platform. Following the completion of the individual interviews, a focus group of five participants was held via a Zoom meeting that lasted approximately 70 minutes. Interviews and focus groups were recorded, and all data was transcribed for analysis, utilizing Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological design process.

Data Collection Plan

In qualitative research studies, data is gathered through human connection and discourse, including the use of interviews, observations, document and artifact analysis, focus groups, and journal or diary prompts (Moustakas, 1994). The data gathered for this phenomenological transcendental inquiry into the attrition rates of Mid-Atlantic region public high school teachers and their onboarding experiences, expectations, and self-efficacy include letter writing, interviews, and focus groups. The interviews and focus group meetings were recorded. The recordings were transcribed and coded for analysis. All documents were gathered and stored electronically for accurate coding and analysis.

Where hermeneutic and heuristic phenomenological design studies encourage researchers to integrate their experiences and predispositions into the research and analysis, transcendental phenomenological studies emphasize personal detachment of previous perceptions for a fresh new look at the phenomenon and participant experience. Moustakas (1994) lists four detailed steps in the transcendental phenomenological model, including the stages of epoche (bracketing for reduction and removal of researcher bias), phenomenological reduction (horizontalization, organization of themes, comparison of data, and textualization), imaginative variation (construction of individual and composite textural descriptions), and essence (synthesis of data). The first step in the process is epoche. This crucial beginning is when the researcher intentionally lets go of prejudgments, allowing for a fresh perspective of the participants' experiences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The second step is the phenomenological reduction. Within the reduction phase, the researcher dives into the text of the data, describing what they see in great detail, reflecting upon the phenomenon, and continuing the use of epoche while organizing the research to refrain from bias (Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenon can be more wholly understood

if it can be copiously described. Additionally, while textualizing, collecting, and organizing data, the researcher uses horizontalization, allowing every statement to have equal value before grouping and coding the statements into themes (Moustakas, 1994). The horizons are then reduced as repetitive statements are aligned, and nonrepetitive ideas are thematically linked to create, first, individual textural descriptions of each participant's experience with the phenomenon, and second, composite textural descriptions of all the participants' experiences with the phenomenon for wholistic understanding and knowledge of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The third step of Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological design process is imaginative variation. During this phase of the process, the researcher can freely consider the various meanings from all vantage points, synthesizing the "textural and structural meanings and essences of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 182). The fourth and last step of the process is the final synthesizing and summarizing of the study results, illustrating the implications and outcomes related to the self and potentialities for society (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenology is about connection and relationships, diving deeply into a problem or question to better understand the human experience and ultimately make our experiences better (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenology is a research design process that provides detailed insight into phenomena and pathways for transformation (Moustakas, 1994). By utilizing Moustakas' transcendental phenomenological design process for data collection and analysis to understand the lived experiences of high school teacher onboarding, the hope is that the information gathered from this study has helped to paint a detailed picture of the phenomenon so onboarding improvements can be made for teacher self-efficacy, leading to teacher retention—ultimately helping to solve the problem of teacher shortages across the nation.

Letter-Writing

Letter-writing responses are effectual documents for transcendental analysis. The letter-writing process can often enrich participant perspectives due to the extended time for contemplation, drafting, and editing prior to submitting (Moustakas, 1994). Additionally, letter writing is ideal for qualitative studies because the results often provide a rich description of participants' experiences from their perspectives and narrations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). According to Kralik et al. (2008), the letter-writing method provides "an emotional safety zone" where participants can write comfortably in their own space and on their own time, taking time to reflect on how they feel and what they genuinely wish to share (Kralik et al., 2008; Stamper, 2020). The purpose for collecting the letter-writing data first in this study was to give the research participants a chance to reflect on their experiences for a couple of weeks before attending their one-on-one interviews, where they were asked multiple questions about their experiences. The hope was that the research participants would be better prepared to answer the in-depth interview questions after reflecting on their experiences when responding to the letter-writing prompt. The purpose for letter-writing in this study was to provide participants an opportunity to reflect on their experiences, utilizing a prompt that focuses on what they learned and how they learned during their time as new teachers (Moustakas, 1994). Each research participant was asked to respond to the letter-writing prompt, given two weeks, focusing on the "what I have learned" letter format (see Table 1 and Appendix G).

Table 1

Letter-Writing Prompt

- In approximately 300 – 500 words, please respond to the following prompt: As a now-experienced teacher here at MARPS, what have you learned within your first few years of being a teacher?

Individual Interviews

Interviewing is essential in qualitative research data collection (Seidman, 2013). One-on-one interviews, primarily face-to-face and in-person (as opposed to a virtual meeting), allow for conversation and connection. Not only does the interviewer ask the prescribed questions, but the interviewer can take note of facial expressions and body language. Meaning and emotion are often conveyed with information as it is delivered through delays, deliberate pauses, tone, volume, and fluctuations in voice. All interviews for this study took place in person when possible, utilizing a private room at the participant's school. Interviewees were also given an option for a virtual interview meeting through the virtual Zoom platform when an in-person meeting was not possible. The individual interviews for this research were semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews allow interviewees to elaborate, helping the interviewer paint a complete picture of the research participants' experiences regarding the phenomenon. Semi-structured interviews also enable the researcher to ask follow-up questions for clarification during the interview process. The interview questions for this phenomenological study were generated from the study's research questions, noted below with the designated CRQ and SQ annotations (see Table 2 and Appendix H). The interview questions were reviewed by field experts and approved by the IRB before beginning the interviews. Each interview question was meticulously written to help articulate each research participant's experience with the phenomenon. The questions started with a big-picture invitation and built from there to expand on each portion of the research questions, helping to identify the connections between

onboarding, retention, and self-efficacy of new high school teachers in the MARPS Districts. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for coding and analysis. After their interviews, the participants were given copies of their interview transcripts to check for accuracy and clarity.

Study participants who reside or work in either school district were asked to meet face-to-face in a private room at their high school or through the Zoom virtual meeting platform. Meeting with participants in their choice of location—at their place of employment or through a virtual platform—helped to ensure they were physically and emotionally comfortable during the interview. The use of virtual technology to conduct research has become increasingly popular since the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (Boland et al., 2021). Virtual meeting platforms like Microsoft Teams and Zoom are cost-effective and offer convenience, flexibility, and security (Archibald et al., 2019; Boland et al., 2021). Additionally, virtual platforms allow researchers to record interviews and transcripts for detailed review.

Table 2

Individual Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your teaching experience up to this point. (CRQ)
2. Please describe your onboarding experience from when you were hired to teach here at MARPS. (CRQ)
3. What prepared you most for the school year? (SQ1 & SQ3)
4. What information or training would have helped you to feel more prepared for your first year of teaching? (SQ1 & SQ3)
5. What experiences throughout your first year (or first few years) of teaching helped you to persist to the next year(s) of teaching? (SQ1)

6. Self-efficacy is defined as one's belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task. Describe how your self-efficacy has perceivably changed since being hired here at MARPS. (SQ2)
7. What would perceivably increase your level of self-efficacy for teaching here at MARPS? (SQ3)
8. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with your first year of teaching here at MARPS concerning teacher onboarding, preparation, and self-efficacy that we have not discussed? (SQ1, SQ2, & SQ3)

Focus Groups

Teachers are often isolated during the school day as they remain tucked away in their classrooms, teaching students (Vangrieken & Kyndt, 2020). When given an opportunity to gather and discuss, whether face-to-face or in a virtual situation, it is not unusual to see teachers complaining together, sharing ideas with one another, or providing support for each other (Carpenter & Willet, 2021). Focus groups allow participants to discuss their experiences regarding the phenomenon with each other and the researcher. The focus group discussion provides an opportunity for participants to react to one another's responses, bounce ideas off of each other, respond to additional research questions, and ask any questions of the researcher (Kitzinger, 1995). By using a focus group option for this research study, a solid third piece of data collection was added for the triangulation of information and illustration of a complete picture of the participants' experiences with the phenomenon, helping to answer the research questions (Denzin, 1978; Flick, 2004; Noble & Heale, 2019). Prior to interviewing participants, a preliminary set of focus group questions was drafted based on the central research question and sub-research questions (see Table 3 and Appendix I); however, the focus group questions were

adjusted slightly to include an additional question based on the responses from the individual interviews. The focus group lasted approximately one hour. It was recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) transcendental analysis process. The focus group was conducted virtually through the Zoom video conference platform to accommodate participant schedules and provide greater flexibility.

Table 3

Focus Group Questions

1. What is it like to be a first-year teacher? (CRQ)
2. How have your experiences perceivably influenced your outlook on teaching and education? (SQ1)
3. What experiences have helped you to be successful? (SQ2)
4. What support would you like to see offered by administration to increase teacher retention? (SQ1)
5. What support would you like to see offered by administration to increase teacher self-efficacy? (SQ3)
6. What support would you like to see from society to increase teacher self-efficacy and retention? (SQ3)

Data Analysis

In studying the lived experiences of others and utilizing the researcher as the instrument through which data is analyzed, it is imperative to note that phenomenological research acknowledges that researchers cannot entirely eradicate their biases (Moran, 2008). However, through Moustakas' (1994) transcendental process, the researcher works to view the phenomenon through an open mind and fresh insight. This first step of the transcendental inquiry

process is called epoche, meaning to abstain. In the epoche, the researcher intentionally transcends beyond ego to abstain or set aside presumptions before gathering and analyzing data for a fresh look at the question and phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). After the researcher has set aside her experience and bias, she enters a transcendental phenomenological reduction phase in which she views and describes the phenomenon; all observations from every angle are documented in detail, utilizing the senses to see and listen with a fresh perspective. Through this reduction phase, the researcher remains focused on the object, the phenomenon, and not what is alleged of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher reflects over and over in observation before looking inward for self-reflection of the observation, highlighting and clustering horizons to find themes that appear in the data. Finally, through the step of imaginative variation, the researcher triangulates the data, looking for connections in themes and important elements of the textural observations to create meaning and understanding of the phenomenon, answering the research question through an explanation of the phenomenon: "How did the experience of the phenomenon come to be what it is?" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97).

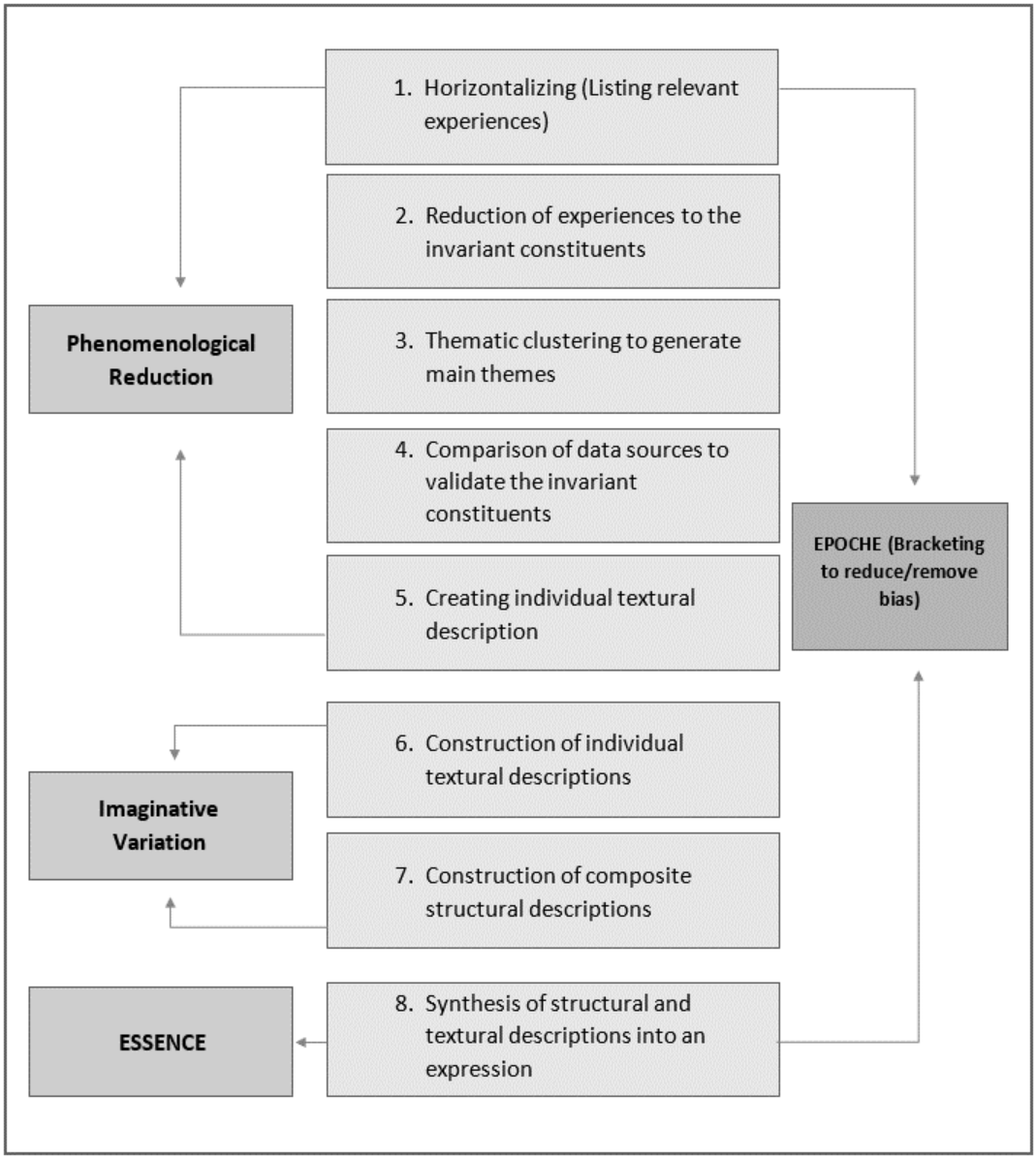
This qualitative transcendental phenomenology research study examined the lived experiences of high school teachers in the Mid-Atlantic Region Public School Districts (MARPS). The goal was to identify the experiences and interpret the general nature of the common experience. In this study, fourteen public high school teachers from MARPS were identified, observed, and interviewed to describe their hiring, onboarding, and first-year teaching experiences. Through interviews and observations, phenomenology works to discover meaning by examining commonalities in individuals' lived experiences (Byrne, 2001). In phenomenological qualitative research, the principal source of knowledge is participants' shared experiences (Moustakas, 1994). This phenomenological study allowed the fourteen public high

school teacher participants to use their lived experiences to contribute to a shared understanding of their phenomenon: their shared experience of onboarding and first years of teaching.

The data analysis plan used for this study followed Moustakas' (1994) four steps for transcendental design (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Moustakas' Transcendental Phenomenological Design Process



(Khaef & Karimnia, 2021)

First was the epoche phase, in which the researcher's bias was set aside for a fresh perspective of the phenomenon. This allowed the evaluation of the letter response, interview, and focus group data to be textualized freely and without prejudgment (Moustakas, 1994). During this initial epoche phase and throughout the entire data collection and analysis process, the researcher maintained a data journal to bracket emotions and interpretations, separating them from the problem and participant responses to refrain from bias. The interviews and focus group responses were recorded and transcribed. While transcribing the interviews and focus group responses, the researcher abstained from bias by focusing strictly on documenting and organizing responses. Next, during the phenomenological reduction phase, the researcher's bias was continually set aside (bracketed) while the letter responses, interview question responses, and focus group question responses went through a horizontalization in which statements were given equal value (Moustakas, 1994). From there, as individual textural descriptions were created for each participant's response, the statements were organized to identify themes (Moustakas, 1994). A composite textural description was then created before moving into the imaginative variation phase, in which the letter responses, interview responses, focus group responses, and their textural descriptions were analyzed from every possible perspective to identify possible meanings of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Utilizing Delve, a qualitative analysis software tool, for the reduction and thematic identification phases and the data journal for individual and composite textural descriptions and synthesis, the material was finally synthesized, summarized, and combined for triangulation.

Data Synthesis

Moustakas' (1994) data analysis process for transcendental design separates itself from other designs by focusing on naivety and imagination, working through the phases of epoche,

phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and textural/structural descriptions. The researcher views the participants' experiences from an unbiased and free perspective and then scrutinizes the comprehensive texts from a state of creativity to allow for all possibilities of interpretation and understanding. All three data sources for this research, including letter-writing documents, individual interviews, and focus groups, were textualized, comprehensively analyzed, synthesized, and summarized. Through this analysis process, the results of this study provided a greater understanding of the onboarding experiences of the Mid-Atlantic region public high school teachers and how their experiences affect their levels of teacher self-efficacy, leading to retention or attrition.

Trustworthiness

To establish trust, a qualitative researcher must demonstrate strict and repeatable data collection and analysis processes, detailing every aspect of the research process with transparency and accuracy. Furthermore, because phenomenological qualitative studies use the researcher as the tool for data analysis, the researcher must maintain and exhibit integrity throughout the study. In response to the quantitative terms for trustworthiness in research studies (internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity), Lincoln and Guba (1985) offered synonymous terms for qualitative studies to address trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Although the reader determines the level of trustworthiness within the research study, this section describes the measures taken to ensure a proper and meticulous study was conducted.

Credibility

Credibility is the measure of truth within a researcher’s study and the extent to which the findings are correct and accurate (Earnest, 2020; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility within

qualitative research is achieved through techniques that ensure rigor: saturation, crystallization, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, broad representation, and peer review (O'Leary, 2020). Additionally, credibility is achieved through techniques used to obtain verification: triangulation, member checking, and full explication of the method (O'Leary, 2020). This research study relied on multiple credibility measures and techniques to help strengthen the integrity and, by extension, the trustworthiness of this study.

Saturation

Saturation in research is attaining the highest level of data needed to show every perspective, to the point that no additional data is required because it no longer adds to the understanding or richness of the research (Polkinghorne, 2005). Saturation of data is complete data. And although the idea of "complete data" has been argued due to inconsistent definitions of what constitutes "complete" (Saunders et al., 2018), the data gathered from the participants in this study provided a rich and broad understanding of the phenomenon and response to the research questions. To add to the credibility of this research study, saturation levels of data collection and analysis were reached by recruiting a large, fourteen-person, diverse group of research participants within the Mid-Atlantic region public high school system.

Prolonged Engagement

Prolonged engagement is an investment of time. To add credibility, a researcher should learn as much as possible about the culture and context of the participant's experiences and shared phenomenon, building trust and rapport (Earnest, 2020; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A transcendental study abstains from prejudgment for a fresh perspective of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994); however, for this study, the researcher's connection to the phenomenon is important for credibility and connection with the participants. The primary researcher for this

study has spent three years within the participant's community, sharing the same experiences and phenomena. This prolonged engagement has added to a greater understanding of the culture, which aids in the credibility of this research and analysis.

Peer Review

Throughout the dissertation process, peer reviews of this research have been included to help ensure the accuracy and integrity of the research methodology, process, and results. Peer reviews are a process in which colleagues are asked to provide a fresh "set of eyes" on the research to increase validity and truth (Earnest, 2020; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peer reviews help to reduce errors and maintain accountability, increasing the trustworthiness of the study and the researcher (Earnest, 2020; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Triangulation

According to Denzin (1978), triangulation is used as a validation strategy and is categorized into four tenants: triangulation of data, investigator triangulation, triangulation of theories, and methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1978; Flick, 2004). Methodological triangulation in research is using multiple data collection methods to help create a complete picture of a phenomenon—positing each method against each other to maximize perspective and validity of research efforts (Flick, 2004; Noble & Heale, 2019). This study used three data collection methods: letter-writing, individual interviews, and focus groups. Collecting and synthesizing data from different perspectives helps to reduce bias and increase truth for validity, credibility, and trustworthiness.

Member Checking

Member checking, an essential aspect of credibility, was included in this study. Member checking allows research participants to view transcriptions, interpretations, and data analyses to

determine if the research accurately represents what is being conveyed (Earnest, 2020; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This participant approval for accuracy is critical in a transcendental study. While a researcher's interpretation is vital to a transcendental methodology, it is imperative that the research participants' voices are identified and their experiences are accurately told. Frequent member checking allows for this verification throughout the research process. Quotes intended for use and publication in this study, transcribed from the letter-writing prompt responses, interviews, and focus group, were emailed to participants. Participants were given a week to respond if they disapproved of the quotes being used. Though not required to respond if approval was granted, all fourteen participants responded with approval of the selected quotes from their transcripts.

Full Explication of Method

A full explication of the method provides the necessary details of a study to allow for reproduction and auditability (O'Leary, 2020). The complete details of this research study, with participant anonymity, have been provided. This study is auditable for authenticity and reproducible for any school district. Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological methodology was closely followed; data collection and analysis were meticulously documented, and the findings of all journal notes for bracketing, interpretation, thematic coding, and data synthesis have been provided for potential reproduction and audit.

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research refers to the level at which the research results apply to similar contexts, settings, times, places, and studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While a researcher cannot guarantee transferability, she can provide readers with the evidence and content needed for transferability through thick descriptions of the research process and findings.

The onboarding experience of new high school teachers is similar to the onboarding experiences of many teachers within education. The transferability of this study is illustrated through the detailed descriptions of the research methodology.

Dependability

Qualitative research dependability is achieved by demonstrating that a researcher's findings are consistent and repeatable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This is done by creating a decision or audit trail that is easy to follow, makes sense, and can be repeated (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). The trail is established by providing a complete description of the study's purpose, including information on how participants were recruited for the study, providing a detailed explanation of the data collection and analysis process, including details of the research interpretations and findings, and describing the methods used to maintain credibility of the data (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011, p. 153). This study provided a detailed and comprehensive description of the research methodology and findings so that this study can be replicated for other school districts or any other teacher population. As per the dissertation review process at Liberty University, the dissertation committee for this study and the qualitative research director for the School of Education conducted an inquiry audit to review the procedures and results of the study thoroughly.

Confirmability

Confirmability in qualitative research is neutrality, similar to objectivity in quantitative studies. Confirmability is achieved when credibility, transferability, and dependability have been demonstrated, illustrating that the researcher's interest and bias are not shaping the study's findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). This study employed three techniques to ensure confirmability: triangulation, audit trails, and reflexivity. As discussed in

the description for research credibility, triangulation of the research was achieved by incorporating three data collection forms. As discussed in the description for research dependability, thick descriptions of the research process and findings were provided, including an easy-to-follow and replicate decision or audit trail. Reflexivity, similar to validity within quantitative studies, is a process for acknowledging and identifying the researcher's preconceptions to avoid guiding the interests of the research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A transcendental phenomenological research methodology abstains from bias throughout the study, bracketing the researcher's views to keep the researcher's experience separate from the observations and analysis of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). As such, the researcher needed to be self-critical during individual interview data collection, making a conscious effort to follow the lead of the interviewee instead of leading the interview with personal assumptions; in doing so, participants were asked for clarification of responses as needed. Additionally, copious notes of personal opinions and insights were kept throughout the process in the researcher data journal to track personal interpretations separately from research participant responses, working to keep a clear perspective and detailed report of the participants' experiences. Transparency through the combination of these techniques has been a priority to increase confirmability and strengthen the trustworthiness of this study.

Ethical Considerations

Researchers ought to consider ethical considerations throughout their studies (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018); as such, in this qualitative, phenomenological research study, all possible ethical considerations were respected, including IRB and site approval before the start of conducting research (see Appendix A for IRB approval & Appendix C for site approval). Additionally, participants were informed of the risks and benefits of this study and their

voluntary participation (see Appendix E for the participant consent form). All participants signed an informed consent notice stating their willingness to participate in this study and understanding that they may leave the study at any time for any reason (see Appendix E for participant consent form). All participants in this study remain confidential through the use of pseudonyms for the sites and participants, and all data collected from participants has been secured electronically through password protection and will be destroyed three years following this study. To mitigate any additional risk, all collected data is electronic; no physical data was collected during this study. The potential risks from participating in this study were minimal, which means the risks from this study are equal to the risks an individual would encounter in everyday life. The participants were reminded during their interviews that they had the power to end their interview or refrain from participation in the focus group at any time. Honesty, transparency, and clear communication were a priority throughout this research study.

Permissions

Site approvals were obtained from both the county and city districts in the Mid-Atlantic public schools region for this study (see Appendix C for research site permission approvals). Additionally, IRB approval was received through Liberty University (see Appendix A for Liberty University IRB approval). After site and data collection were authorized, potential participants were sent recruitment emails (see Appendix D for participant recruitment email). The participant email addresses were found on the MARPS Districts' websites. After participant responses were received and study participants were identified, each participant was contacted with information for next steps, including (1) a copy of the consent form to sign and return, (2) an explanation of the study, (3) an opportunity to ask questions, and (4) a time frame from which to select a date and time for their individual interviews. A letter-writing document analysis, semi-

structured interviews, and a focus group were conducted during this study. After collecting the letter-writing responses and completing the interviews and focus group, participants were provided with transcripts of their interviews for member checking and verification of intent. The informed consent letter each participant was asked to sign was approved through IRB and included an invitation to the study, the potential risks of the study, possible benefits of the study, confidentiality of records, and contact information (see Appendix E for participant consent form). The letter was written in English but was available in additional languages for further clarity of the informed consent letter as needed for teachers whose first language is not English (Gall et al., 2007; Seidman, 2013).

Summary

This chapter outlined the methods used for researching the shared onboarding experiences of high school teachers in the Mid-Atlantic region public school system to determine preparation and self-efficacy conditions for increased retention. This transcendental phenomenological theory design follows Moustakas' (1994) four critical steps in transcendental data collection and analysis, utilizing the researcher—including the researcher's conscience—as a conduit for understanding and interpretation while intentionally abstaining from bias and meticulously documenting all the details of each participant's experience with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This chapter also outlined the recruitment plan and the steps taken to ensure the research's permissions and validity, addressing the researcher's bias and need for transparency and accuracy while synthesizing the data to illustrate the phenomenon in its entirety (Shenton, 2004). Lastly, ethical considerations were detailed as an essential factor of this qualitative study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand the lived experiences of Mid-Atlantic region public high school teachers participating in onboarding practices, which provides insight into best practices to increase teacher self-efficacy and decrease attrition rates. This chapter includes the descriptions of participants, data analyses in narrative themes, outlier data, and research question responses. Following the data analysis plan for this study, Moustakas' (1994) four steps for transcendental design were used to analyze the data and present the findings from the letter-writing prompt responses, the individual participant interviews, and the focus group.

Participants

The fourteen participants selected for this study were obtained through purposive, heterogeneous sampling. Purposive sampling allowed for an intentional, diverse recruitment of participants from seven high schools within the county and city Mid-Atlantic public school districts. Since the research shows that many teachers are leaving the teaching profession within their first three to five years of teaching (Bichu, 2022; Jotkoff, 2022), there was a focus on seeking public high school teacher participants who have taught less than five years; however, recruitment included teachers who have taught any number of years in the Mid-Atlantic region. Additionally, according to the recruitment criteria, public high school teachers who had taught in the MARPS districts and had left within two years were also invited to participate in the study—one participant of the fourteen no longer works within either MARPS school district and left within the last year. The demographic data of participants collected for the study include years of teaching in MARPS, licensure route, city or county district, and whether or not the participant

taught elsewhere prior to teaching in MARPS—illustrated in Table 4 below. Pseudonyms for the schools and participants were used for confidentiality.

Table 4

MARPS High School Teacher Participant Demographics

Teacher Participant	Years Taught in MARPS	Licensure Route	District	Taught elsewhere prior to joining MARPS
Andrew	3	Alternative	City	Yes
Angela	9	Alternative	County	Yes
Carissa	6	Traditional	City	Yes
Darby*	2	Alternative	City	Yes
Emery	21	Alternative	County	No
Felicity	1	Alternative	City	No
Lanaya	6	Traditional	County	Yes
Maggie	2	Traditional	County	Yes
Melissa	3	Traditional	County	No
Nora	3	Traditional	County	No
Roland	3	Traditional	County	No
Sarah	4	Traditional	County	Yes
Steven	7	Alternative	City	Yes
William	5	Alternative	City	No

*This teacher no longer works within either of the MARPS districts.

Andrew Marvel

Andrew is a science teacher at Fairview High School, a city school in the Mid-Atlantic region public schools system. Andrew is in his third year of teaching at Fairview. Prior to his MARPS contract, he taught for one year in another region. Andrew is a non-traditional or alternative route teacher, having attended college for a degree other than teaching and then

earned his teaching license after being hired to teach. Andrew teaches high school science to all grade levels, ninth through twelfth grade. In reflecting on his experience as a newer teacher, Andrew stated, “There is a major disconnect between what admin and central office personnel believe can be done versus what can actually be done, and there are expectations placed on teachers by people who have no idea what it takes to teach.”

Angela Fairmore

Angela is a Spanish teacher at Belmont High School, a county school in the MARPS system. Angela is in her ninth year at Belmont and, prior to her contract with MARPS, taught for nine years as a middle school teacher in another region. Teaching all high school grade levels nine through twelve, Angela is an alternative route licensed teacher, having received her teaching license after being hired to teach secondary education. Reflecting on her years of teaching, she stated, “Whether it be infrastructure issues, scheduling conflicts, overcrowded classrooms, and crazy off-the-wall student behavior, it is easy to be overwhelmed and disappointed even if this is your career calling."

Carissa Southerland

Carissa is in her sixth year as a special education teacher at Fairview High School, a city school in the MARPS system. Prior to teaching at Fairview High, Carissa was a high school science teacher in a school district outside the MARPS region. After teaching science for several years, Carissa decided to take classes for a special educator certification. In reflecting on her teaching experience within the MARPS system and comparing it to her previous teaching experience, she stated, “What I have learned while working for [MARPS] is that what is being perceived is more important than what is actually happening. I find it frustrating.”

Darby Fitzgerald

Darby was a career and technical education (CTE) teacher at Glenbrook High School, a city school in the MARPS system. Darby taught CTE courses at all grade levels, nine through twelve, at Glenbrook for one year, taught as a long-term substitute teacher at another MARPS school for one year, and then left the MARPS system to teach CTE at a different high school in another region. Darby has only been gone from the MARPS system for one year; the 2023-2024 school year is their first year teaching in their newly contracted region. Darby is an alternative route licensed teacher. In their reflection on teaching thus far, Darby lamented, "Being in the CTE department, there are not a lot of PLC meetings or teacher collaboration. If I have questions or concerns, I have to seek out the answers on my own."

Emery Arnold

Emery has been a teacher for over twenty-one years, all within county schools in the MARPS system, starting in Huntsville Middle and High Schools and currently working at Crescent Valley High School. Emery began working as a special education coordinator at Huntsville. As an alternative route educator, she completed her coursework and tested for licensure to teach English while working at Huntsville. She now teaches English to students in all grade levels, nine through twelve, at Crescent Valley. In reflecting on her teaching experience, Emery stated, "I wish education classes were taught with interims in mind where students shadow teachers to see how it's done. The essays and research projects on how to teach were a lesson in futility. I learned more on the job."

Felicity Navarro

Felicity is a first-year English teacher at Fairview High School, a city school in the MARPS system. As a career switcher, Felicity is an alternative route licensed teacher. Before

entering the field of education and coming to Fairview High, Felicity was a social worker for the Department of Social Services. In reflecting on moving from a social worker to a high school teacher, Felicity stated, “The realization that teaching is, perhaps, more generally challenging than working child abuse and neglect cases has been the most shocking to have come to in my first year of teaching.” She enjoys teaching her students but feels overwhelmed in her first year. Due to faculty shortages, Felicity’s school has reduced the number of teacher planning periods to one block every other day. As Felicity reflected on her concerns about this reduced amount of planning time, she stated, “I am expected to complete my planning for six classes, respond to emails, and also, somehow, care for the emotional, physical, and academic needs of myself and my students.” Felicity enjoys teaching but, unfortunately, plans to leave her current employment by the end of the school year.

Lanaya Carter

Lanaya is an English teacher at Belmont High School, a county school in the MARPS system. Lanaya is a traditional route licensed teacher, having earned her teaching license prior to being hired to teach. Lanaya taught for four years in another region before she was hired to teach at Belmont High. She is in her sixth year in the MARPS system and has taught all grade levels at Belmont, ninth through twelfth. In reflecting on her teaching experience, Lanaya explained, “As rewarding as teaching is, I’d never recommend it.” Lanaya talked about the positives of being an educator, loving the creativity and freedom in high school teaching, and having the opportunity to create meaningful relationships with her students. She also explained how she is rarely bored and does not find herself watching the clock. However, the downside that causes her frustration, she said, is that “students, parents, and faculty can cut you down. It’s hard not to take it

personally. The pay is insufficient and unsustainable. Admin have no clue what's going on at the ground level. [And] morale is low."

Maggie Wawrzyniak

A traditionally licensed educator, Maggie teaches English at Huntsville High School, a county school in the MARPS system. Maggie is in her second year of teaching in the MARPS region but taught for ten years in another region before transferring. In reflecting on her teaching career thus far, Maggie appreciates the changes she has seen in herself and the differences between her first school district and her current district, stating, "There's a lot of pressure when you first start teaching to be perfect." The vision of a perfect teacher she initially had as a first-time teacher has changed over time. Maggie has enjoyed working at Huntsville, affirming that the support she has been given at Huntsville has made all the difference, adding, "I think that a mentor at the site level, that's really just there as a support, is really valuable."

Melissa Matthews

Melissa is an English teacher at Crescent Valley High School, a county school in the MARPS system. A traditionally licensed educator, Melissa is in her third year of teaching and feels like she is finally out of survival mode: "Everyone told me your first year is focused on surviving, and that could not be more true." Melissa reflected on her onboarding process and how she felt that being a new teacher was daunting, stating, "As much as I felt like my education was great, nothing would have prepared me more than just being here." She remembered being "thrown into Class Link with twenty apps downloaded on it" and expected to know how to use Canvas, Synergy, E-hall Pass, and all the other technological platforms specific to her new school and district. "I thought I was teaching English," she stated; "I didn't know I had to learn all this other stuff."

Nora McAlister

Nora is a math teacher at Belmont High School, a county school in the MARPS system. A traditionally licensed educator, Nora is in her third year of teaching all grade levels of math at Belmont. In reflecting on her teaching experience, she said teaching math is the easiest part of her job. However, she explained that being an educator was different, comparing it to a circus act in which you are required to spin multiple plates. And while spinning plates, you cannot drop any. However, if you drop a plate, she said, "You need to clean it up while keeping the other plates spinning and not letting the students see you've dropped a plate!" Nora loves teaching but has also found that it can be incredibly stressful, and she is unsure if she wants to continue teaching. She has considered moving to a virtual teaching position.

Roland Carmichael

Roland is an English teacher at Washington High School, a county school in the MARPS system. A traditionally licensed educator, Roland is in his third year of teaching. In reflecting on his teaching experience thus far, Roland focused on his self-efficacy for teaching, stating, "It is disheartening and frustrating when students check out, give up, or don't take the lessons seriously because I feel like I have failed, and they are not learning." Roland talked about how he feels responsible for his students' learning, blaming himself for their perceived academic failures. Additionally, Roland worried about his students' engagement with his classroom lessons, attributing the lack of engagement to his inability to create engaging and effective lesson plans and not having enough time to design effective lessons for his students. Roland added his concern regarding the respect his students may or may not have for him as their teacher, wondering if he is "not projecting [himself] as a person worthy of respect." Roland enjoys teaching English but has wondered if teaching is worth the emotional toll.

Sarah Farnsworth

Sarah is a special education teacher at Lincoln High School, a county school in the MARPS system. Sarah is a traditionally licensed educator who has taught for twenty-nine years, the last four years stationed at Lincoln High. Having an extensive number of years teaching, Sarah's experience has taught her what works and what does not work for teachers, students, and administrators in public education. Sarah found that collaboration is essential for the success of a school, explaining how teachers and students benefit from diverse ideas and personalities. She stated, "Team playing is an enormous way to help others in the teaching profession. When you work with others and share lessons, etc., teaching can be fun! This also makes it exciting for the students." After finding her niche and "calling" in the teaching profession, Sarah has no plans to leave and will continue teaching until she retires.

Steven Borrowman

Steven is a special education teacher at Glenbrook High School, a city school in the MARPS system. Steven is an alternative route teacher who received his teaching and special education license after receiving a degree in English, working in a career field outside of education, and obtaining a teaching position. Steven worked in three different school districts prior to receiving his contract to teach in the MARPS city schools. Now in his seventh year at Glenbrook, Steven offered his reflection on his teaching experience within the city,

> We regularly have students who are dealing with poverty, loss, abuse, and other terrible things. […] I had a student literally today tell me about watching paramedics unsuccessfully try to rescue his neighbor who had been stabbed last night. I've had students come to me and tell me about their parents throwing them out of their homes. I know kids who accidentally let slip that they don't have any food at home. I've noticed

> kids who wear the same clothes every day for weeks at a time. For these kids, academics are not a priority. […] Honestly, it feels cruel sometimes. I don't know what we're doing for them when they're cold, hungry, and sad, but I'm asking them to write five sentences about the importance of literature.

Steven is exhausted but did not indicate he was ready to leave his teaching position. He did, however, talk about a few of his teacher colleagues who have left the educator profession in the past couple of years and how disheartened he was to watch them go, even though he was happy they could leave the stress of teaching behind.

William Cambridge

William is a career and technical education (CTE) teacher at Fairview High School, a city school within the MARPS system. William is an alternative license educator in his fifth year at Fairview High. As William reflected on his teaching experience, he explained that his persistence to stay at his school and in his educational career has come from seeing his students succeed. However, when he is restrained from being able to do his job right, his self-efficacy plummets, explaining, "You need to have your higher-up teams working in conjunction with you and not working against you." When asked what would increase his self-efficacy for teaching, William simply stated, "Better administration."

Results

This study was designed to understand the lived experiences of Mid-Atlantic region public high school teachers participating in onboarding practices, which provides insight into best practices to increase teacher self-efficacy and decrease attrition rates. Data was gathered through three sources: letter-writing, individual interviews, and a focus group. Codes were created by analyzing the three data sets, giving equal weight to all comments while noting the

instances of each repeated idea, comment, or phrase to designate code terms. The codes derived from the transcripts of all three data sets gathered from all fourteen participants were reduced, thematically clustered, compared, contextualized, and synthesized into three themes, each with three sub-themes. These themes, noted in Table 5 below, help to illustrate the lived onboarding experiences of Mid-Atlantic region public high school teachers.

Table 5

Themes & Sub-Themes

			Number of Invariant Constituents from Data Type		
Theme	Sub-Themes	Codes	Letter-Writing	Individual Interviews	Focus Group
Holistic Support 276	peer mentoring administrative support societal support	support: peer, administrative, parental, societal, political mentoring administrative and structural concerns societal problems student behavior	49	186	41
Teacher Self-Efficacy 244	overwhelmed expectations student engagement	exhausted and overwhelmed: emotionally or physically what was expected prior to teaching what is expected of the teacher for success in the classroom (and outside the classroom) building relationships with students student demographics	102	124	18
Time & Resources	compensation technology	teacher pay, benefits, classroom supplies	31	82	25

138	policies and procedures	learning management systems; teacher, student, and parent portals; classroom systems; printers, copiers, cellphones, social media
		time during the summer to plan and prep; time during the school year for planning, prepping, grading, helping students, sharing ideas, etc.
		discipline procedures, phone policies, onboarding practices, smaller class sizes, evaluation processes, professional development, social and emotional awareness training, department meetings, school meetings, parent-teacher meetings

Holistic Support

The first and dominant theme revealed from the three data sets was holistic support. All fourteen participants across all three data points expressed how crucial support is in sustaining teacher retention and self-efficacy. Andrew summarized the common participant sentiments: "It's hard to stay on top of the Jenga Tower when your supports are constantly being pulled out from under you." While most of the teacher participants grieved the lack of support at their particular schools and the minority voiced their gratitude for their supportive schools, all agreed that support is vital for success. Nora was one of the few who felt fortunate, stating, "I speak with a lot of my friends from college who don't have the same supports. They didn't have an onboarding experience. They felt lost their first years. I feel lucky. They do a good job

supporting teachers here." In her interview, Sarah added, "Team playing is an enormous way to help others in the teaching profession. When you work with others and share lessons, etc., teaching can be fun!" Throughout the interviews, during the focus group, and written in the letter-writing responses, support was discussed from multiple perspectives, including peer support through mentors either assigned or voluntarily offered at the onset of being hired, support from administration, and support from students, parents, and society as a whole.

Peer Mentoring

Although peer mentoring was mentioned in all three data types, it was highlighted the most in the individual interviews and discussed by eleven of the fourteen participants. One-on-one support from a knowledgeable peer willing and available to answer questions can make or break an onboarding experience and can often determine whether a teacher is retained. Angela stated, "I can't stress enough how important it is to have a mentor program for new teachers, not just new teachers, teachers new to the school system. You just don't know where to begin as a new teacher." Angela has been teaching for nine years, but she remembers clearly how helpful her mentor was during that first year of teaching, exclaiming, "I truly believe I'm still a teacher because of Marie. She took me under her wing." Regarding holistic support, peer mentoring is an essential component in onboarding needed for new teacher success.

Administrative Support

The administrative support sub-theme derived from several discussed perspectives of good and essential educational leadership, including school administrators who are regularly visible and available for students and teachers, administrators who assist teachers with discipline issues, administrators who consistently follow through with policies and procedures (e.g. student cellphone policies), administrators who are clear on teacher expectations and evaluations,

administrators who are flexible and willing to work with teachers, administrators who offer positive feedback, administrators who provide time and resources for teacher success, and administrators who create opportunities for teachers to collaborate. When responding to the focus group question, “What support would you like to see offered by administration to increase teacher retention?” Maggie stated, "It’s really important that the administration is visible and that the kids know [administration] support the teachers. That's one of the most important things in making a teacher's job easier." Additionally, while administrators should be kind, teachers do not want administrators to be the students’ best friends. Reflective of the research data, teachers need and want administrators to be foundational supports that uphold policy and procedure.

Societal Support

The societal support sub-theme derived from multiple discussions of political backlash for teachers regarding legislative educational policy, antagonistic media related to education, lack of parental support for students and teachers, and concerns for observed increases in negative student behavior. As evidenced in the data from this study, solid structural support must be in place within communities and school systems to allow for success in the classroom. As Steven succinctly stated during the focus group conversation on societal support for teachers, “If society understood that teaching is a part of raising a child and not the whole thing, that would be very helpful.” Passed down by teachers, parents, and communities is a long-time phrase that states, “It takes a village to raise a child.” With the insufficient societal support lamented by the teachers in this study, it would seem that the “villagers” are turning on the teachers, expecting teachers to raise the children while removing the resources needed to teach students successfully.

Teacher Self-Efficacy

Elements of teacher self-efficacy claimed two hundred and forty-four documented instances between all three data types, most split between letter-writing responses and individual interviews. All fourteen participants had something to say about how their feelings of being overwhelmed and dealing with negative student behavior often lead to thoughts of inadequacy in their teaching profession. In contrast, nearly all participants discussed how student engagement helps teachers persist year to year and overcome feelings of inadequacy. During his interview, Roland expressed clearly what many of the teacher participants were expressing regarding self-efficacy throughout the data, explaining, "I do my best to value my students and hope any deficiencies I have as a teacher is sort of made up by that. I feel like that kind of stuff is what is getting me through." The extant literature illustrates that teacher burnout is linked to teacher self-efficacy; the thematic findings in this study are no different: teacher attrition increases as teacher self-efficacy decreases.

Overwhelmed

The overwhelmed sub-theme derived from participant comments about being exhausted and stretched beyond mental and physical capacity in their teaching career. Thirteen of the fourteen participants discussed their feelings of being overwhelmed, those feelings generally leading to thoughts and comments of negative self-efficacy and a desire to quit the educational profession. As a career switcher new to the field of education, Felicity expressed her feelings of being overwhelmed as she reflected on her first year of teaching,

> I feel the shock of realizing how challenging teaching really is when compared to a job like child protection. I worked in family assessments for most of my time [with Child Protective Services], meaning I was the one who was responding to the emergencies

> directly with law enforcement. I was going to the hospital, more or less like a first responder, and making those decisions. The difference [between social work and teaching] is the emergency stops in that line of work. And the emergencies just never seem to stop in teaching. It's very taxing.

Felicity's comparison of a job in Child Protective Services to teaching in a public high school is revealing. Her experience helps to paint a clear picture of the concerns with which teachers are struggling daily.

Expectations

The sub-theme of expectations, discussed by twelve of the fourteen participants, contributed to the theme of self-efficacy by illustrating how frustration can often ensue when expectations do not match reality. Many new teachers are often surprised during their first year of teaching to see that what they were expecting did not meet actuality; as Melissa explained when reflecting on her first year of teaching, "I didn't even know what I was doing. […] I thought I was teaching English. I didn't know I had to learn all this other stuff." Additionally, expectations are often continually placed on teachers, and for many, those expectations can seem unrealistic; as Andrew explained, "There is a major disconnect between what admin and central office personnel believe can be done versus what can actually be done, and there are expectations placed on teachers by people who have no idea what it takes to teach." In other instances, expectations cannot be met because they are not communicated clearly; as Darby explained, "It's very difficult to stay on top of tasks when there is little to no communication regarding expectations." The thematic findings of this study indicate a frequent disconnect between administration and teachers, particularly regarding expectations, which contributes to teacher burnout.

Student Engagement

Thirteen of the fourteen teacher participants indicated that student engagement is vital to increasing teacher self-efficacy and reducing teacher attrition rates. So, even though teachers are seeing an increase in negative student behavior, the joy of seeing a student grow and succeed is a driving factor for teacher fulfillment and persistence. Nora stated, “I feel like the most impactful thing I've done as a teacher is forming relationships with my students, and it sounds so cliché and PD of me to say, but it's so true. It makes the harder days better.” In Darby’s response to what helps them to persist from year to year, they stated, “It's building relationships with students. Every once in a while, you find that one, and you're just like, ‘This is the reason,’ and ‘Oh yeah, that's why I'm doing this.’ It’s just enough to keep you going.” The stereotype of a good teacher is someone who enjoys making a positive difference in a person’s life. The teacher participants in this study have echoed the sentiments of the good teacher persona: helping students succeed, in turn, helps teachers succeed, increasing teacher self-efficacy and reducing burnout and teacher attrition rates.

Time & Resources

The time and resources theme combines comments related to teacher compensation, technology, policies, and procedures. With only one hundred and thirty-eight combined instances for codes related to the theme, this theme is only half as prevalent as the other themes. However, teachers' additional concerns regarding their onboarding process, self-efficacy, and reasons for retention or attrition are worth noting. As it pertains to the effect that time and resources have on self-efficacy and retention, many seasoned teachers have gotten to the point where they “don’t need to take [their] work home with [them] to be a good teacher,” as Emery explained. Still, it takes time, building years of lesson plans and curriculum, to get to that point. As a new teacher,

Emery was “either staying at school late or working at home for hours on end.” In her interview, Carissa lamented, “I want to do my best. And that's where it gets frustrating because I physically can't do what they're asking in the time that they want.” Furthermore, in Lanaya’s interview response, she added her concerns about never having enough time to plan, develop courses, and be an effective teacher, “They should pay me over the summer to prepare and design my courses. Then I could focus on the task at hand instead of having this revolving to-do list where I’m designing what I’m doing as I’m doing it.” Teacher burnout is evident when teachers are not given the resources they need to be successful, and, according to this study’s participants, the resource needed most is time.

Compensation

The results regarding teacher compensation were enlightening. Much of the literature mentions teacher compensation as a reason for teacher attrition (Diliberti et al., 2021; Jotkoff, 2022; Lathan, 2023; Walker, 2023); however, during this study, compensation was only mentioned nine times, and when it was mentioned, it was always a secondary concern that would accompany a primary concern. For example, during the focus group conversation, pay was not mentioned until after all the questions had been responded to and before everyone said their goodbyes and logged off the Zoom meeting. Nora jumped in during the last five minutes, stating, “I didn't go into [teaching] for the money, but if all of these are my expectations, and I'm doing so much work from home, more money would be great.” With the increased workload from having to cover classes during their “free” period or, in some schools, moving from having one “free” block a day to having only one “free” block every other day, teachers do not have enough time during the school day to complete lesson plans and grade student work, so many teachers are taking work home and not getting compensated for it. After Nora’s comment, the rest of the

focus group chimed in with their comments about teacher pay for only two more minutes, including a comment from Maggie: “If they’re going to raise our health insurance rates, then they need to understand that we're always losing money. They can only expect people to continue in that condition for so long.” Compensation may not be the initial factor for teacher attrition, but it is often the final reason or last straw that breaks the camel’s back, motivating teachers to quit.

Technology

Technology, with twenty-three coding instances spread across all three data points, is a sub-theme derived from the time and resources theme because technology is a resource that can either help to preserve a teacher’s time or drain a teacher’s time. Learning new platforms for grading, attendance, and assignments can be overwhelming for new teachers. For seasoned teachers, having learning platforms changed or new platforms introduced from one year to the next can be a significant adjustment and time-consuming. In discussing time, resources, and technology during her individual interview, Lanaya commented, “I would love to have some time and better training to learn how to use an Excel sheet or to run Canvas better.” It is not just educational technology that has teachers frustrated. If the focus group had been given the entire hour to talk about student cellphone policies and social media, they would have had plenty to discuss for the entirety of the conversation. Technology can be both a help or a hindrance in the classroom, and, as Maggie mentioned regarding her technology learning curve when hired at Huntsville High, “We have a technology person, but there’s one of him and a hundred of us.”

Policies and Procedures

There were fifty-eight instances where comments regarding educational policies and procedures occurred across all three data types, with twelve participants discussing their

concerns. According to these high school teacher participants, a good administration with solid policies and procedures can make or break a school and its teachers. In his individual interview, William lamented how "some of the rules and new implementations are counterproductive to your role [as an educator]. It can add on to your burnout and decrease that self-efficacy." Additionally, when discussing policies in the focus group, Maggie explained that if policies are "left to teachers, it's doomed to fail every time. It has to be done right, not just implemented, not just put in the classrooms, but actually owned by the administration. Because as soon as one teacher stops following that policy, it's over."

Outlier Data and Findings

Two themes emerged from the data that did not align with the specific research questions or themes: teacher preps and co-teachers. Both outlier themes were discussed in the focus group. And aside from being discussed in the focus group, the outlier themes were not mentioned in the letter writing prompts and were only addressed by two participants in the individual interviews; those two participants also initiated the discussion of the two outlier topics in the focus group. Both outlier themes could be embedded in the main themes and findings; however, they were separated from the main ideas because of their limited occurrences and simultaneous importance. These two findings are outlined below.

Teacher Preps

According to the observations and experiences of the participants in this study, an issue that is burdening new teachers and increasing the teacher attrition rates for educators in the first three to five years of teaching is the difficult class load often given to new teachers. This concern may fit under the themes of administrative issues and or policies and procedures; however, it was a particular concern that came up in only one individual interview, was discussed by that same

interviewee in the focus group, and merited specific attention in this study in addition to potential research studies. Often, high school teachers with seniority at their school get to choose which classes they want to teach within their subjects each year. This "privilege" leaves the "leftover" classes for the new teachers. These new classes are commonly difficult, usually consisting of general and special education classes packed full of struggling ninth graders who all need extra help, attention, and discipline. Furthermore, many new teachers with difficult classes are also getting stuck with multiple preps (a different grade level, course, subject, etc.). For example, a new English teacher with four separate preps could be given two classes of general English ninth grade, two classes of special education English ninth grade, special education tenth grade, and general English tenth grade. Having four separate preps means having four different sets of curricula for which a teacher needs to plan and prepare weekly with little to no time to plan and prepare. Angela explained in the focus group, "New teachers are teaching what no one else wants. New teachers are given four to five preps and ridiculous amounts of work. We need a more equitable way to distribute the workload. Right now, it doesn't make sense." Every job has its learning curves, but overloading new teachers in their first year is, according to the teachers in this study, a sure way to increase teacher attrition.

Co-Teachers

Co-teacher issues was also a topic brought up in only one individual interview, discussed by that same interviewee in the focus group, and merited specific attention in this study and potentially in future studies to help reduce teacher attrition rates. Some of the significant co-teacher issues that were discussed included co-teachers having their caseload students in their classrooms, co-teachers being pulled out of classrooms to cover a class or to proctor exams, co-teachers not having planning time with their partner teachers, co-teachers not being treated as

teachers despite their credentials to teach, and co-teachers having too many preps and not enough time to work on student contracts (e.g. IEPs) or conduct student contract meetings. Maggie succinctly iterated the focus group's sentiment regarding co-teacher expertise, stating, "Co-teachers are not extra bodies that can be used for any field trip, test proctoring, or class coverage. Students have legal documents saying co-teachers need to be present. Co-teachers are a resource that needs to be protected." Co-teachers are not only a legal obligation in the classroom for students with IEPs; co-teachers have the training and credentials to support core-subject teachers with students who need extra help.

Research Question Responses

The fourteen high school teacher participants provided insight into the onboarding experiences of educators in the Mid-Atlantic region public schools system. Data was collected through letter-writing, individual interviews, and a focus group. After coding the collected data, the emerged themes were compared to the research questions to illustrate the evident relationships. The relationships between the research questions, themes, and interview questions are listed in Table 6 below, followed by a narrative response.

Table 6

Research Questions, Themes, and Interview Questions

Research Questions	Themes Addressing Research Questions	Interview Questions (individual and focus group)
CRQ: What are the lived experiences of new high school teachers who participate in onboarding practices?	support, peer and administrative, time and resources, technology, policies and procedures	• Tell me about your teaching experience up to this point. (CRQ) • Please describe your onboarding experience from when you were hired to teach here at MARPS. (CRQ) • What is it like to be a first-year teacher? (CRQ)
SQ1: What experiences influenced teacher	support: peer and administrative, time	• What prepared you most for the school year? (SQ1 & SQ3)

retention during the onboarding process?	and resources, compensation	• What information or training would have helped you to feel more prepared for your first year of teaching? (SQ1 & SQ3) • What experiences throughout your first year (or first few years) of teaching helped you to persist to the next year(s) of teaching? (SQ1) • What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with your first year of teaching here at MARPS regarding teacher onboarding, preparation, and self-efficacy that we have not discussed? (SQ1, SQ2, & SQ3) • How have your experiences perceivably influenced your outlook on teaching and education? (SQ1) • What support would you like to see offered by administration to increase teacher retention? (SQ1)
SQ2: What are the educator experiences that influenced change in teacher self-efficacy for teacher participants?	teacher self-efficacy, overwhelmed, expectations, student engagement, support, time and resources	• Self-efficacy is defined as one's belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task. Describe how your self-efficacy has perceivably changed since being hired here at MARPS. (SQ2) • What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with your first year of teaching here at MARPS regarding teacher onboarding, preparation, and self-efficacy that we have not discussed? (SQ1, SQ2, & SQ3) • What experiences have helped you to be successful? (SQ2)
SQ3: What preparation and support do teacher participants use from their onboarding experiences to sustain teacher self-efficacy?	student engagement, support, peer, administrative, and societal	• What would perceivably increase your level of self-efficacy for teaching here at MARPS? (SQ3) • What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with your first year of teaching here at MARPS regarding teacher onboarding, preparation, and self-efficacy that we have not discussed? (SQ1, SQ2, & SQ3) • What prepared you most for the school year? (SQ1 & SQ3)

- What information or training would have helped you to feel more prepared for your first year of teaching? (SQ1 & SQ3)
- What support would you like to see offered by administration to increase teacher self-efficacy? (SQ3)
- What support would you like to see from society to support teachers? (SQ3)

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of new high school teachers who participate in onboarding practices? The fourteen research participants in this study described participating in their school's basic new-hire orientation presented by their human resource departments, which included paperwork, benefits and retirement info, and introductions to administration. Eleven of the fourteen research participants indicated that their onboarding was completed after their one- to two-day orientation, checking off boxes and little to no training for new teachers. Only three of the fourteen participants said they had mentors who answered questions and provided assistance through the first year. According to Felicity, a first-year teacher at Fairview High, when asked about her onboarding experience, she replied, "There was nothing. No one told me how to do anything. And when I would ask other teachers for information, they didn't have the answers either. I'm not exaggerating when I say there truly was not an onboarding procedure." Aside from her frustrations with no help, Felicity explained many of her concerns regarding the basic information she needed: "No one showed me how to take attendance. No one showed me how to put in grades. I didn't know we had to post grades. No one has said how many tests we should have, how many quizzes." Not only has Felicity felt lost her whole first year, but she stated that her department has had only two meetings the entire year, leaving no opportunity for open discussion or questions. Felicity is not alone in her frustration. When asked to describe his

onboarding experience, Steven simply stated, “There wasn’t one.” Andrew said his onboarding “existed,” but “it wasn’t efficient.” William added, “It could have been better.” Carissa said her onboarding consisted of a couple of meetings that “checked boxes,” but “that was it. There was no additional training. There was no great beginnings.” Emery said she “had to learn it [herself],” adding that there was not any mentoring and that she “floundered for three years, not really sure what [she] was doing.” Melissa said there was information on retirement and benefits, but “there wasn’t a lot of onboarding in terms of using the apps that the county uses, which for a new teacher can be daunting.” A teacher may know how to teach, but knowing how is only part of a teacher’s job and not enough to be successful when considering each school's specific processes and policies.

Sub-Question One

What experiences influenced teacher retention during the onboarding process?

All fourteen teacher participants indicated their desire for support during the onboarding process. Peer mentors seemed to be especially influential in teacher retention for the new teachers fortunate enough to have a helpful peer, whether assigned or voluntary. Furthermore, while some participants were lucky enough to have support and indicated that support helped them through the difficulty of the first year, other participants talked about how they wished they had had a mentor and departmental support during the first year. Nora, commenting on her onboarding mentorship, explained how thankful she has been for her support system, stating, “I’ve never really felt alone. I felt overwhelmed during my first year, but not in regard to planning or making sure I had the content to teach. I had all of that because of my department and my mentor.” On the other side, Andrew explained, “Having a true mentor program would be nice. Having support systems in place and time to observe other classrooms, especially in the same subject matter,

would have been nice. Having someone check in with you would be a big thing." Teachers are not asking for someone to watch over their shoulders continually; they want someone with whom they can connect. Establishing connections helps to build commitment and self-efficacy during employee onboarding; however, connections need time and opportunity to develop, which indicates a need for more effective onboarding practices, peer mentoring, and administrative support.

Sub-Question Two

What are the educator experiences that influenced change in teacher self-efficacy for teacher participants? For all fourteen teacher participants, self-efficacy changes have been a continuous rollercoaster of ups and downs, depending on the year, day, or class. The reasons for the dips in self-efficacy include physical and emotional exhaustion, unmet expectations, a need for administrative support, a need for additional time and resources, and increases in negative student behavior. The explanations for the upturns in teacher self-efficacy include gaining support from administration, peers, students, and parents, increases in time and resources, and positive student engagement. In his letter-writing response and his interview, Roland talked about the unrealistic expectations teachers are given to solve every problem. He expressed his low teacher morale and reduced teacher self-efficacy, explaining, "I wasn't prepared for the number of issues that I would see, and not to sound like a quitter, but […] I don't want to stay in something I feel like I can't do." Similar to Roland's feelings of deflation, Felicity responded to her letter-writing prompt, stating, "I have learned that the current situation is unsustainable for me, and I will likely be leaving the division (but not the profession!) within the next one to two years." Nora mentioned that if she had been asked last year how her self-efficacy was going, she would have said she wanted out of the profession, but this year, with better classes and students,

she is feeling better. In her interview, Sarah added, “It’s difficult to think of all the positive things when you are bogged down with deadlines and paperwork. We have to remember who we are teaching and rekindle that inspiration every time.” In his letter writing response, William also explained how his “tenure has been characterized by continuous learning and growth.” And in addition to “customer service and creativity,” his “journey has underscored the importance of resilience.” Teachers are being asked to always be flexible, but that flexibility has led to exhaustion for many.

Sub-Question Three

What preparation and support do teacher participants use from their onboarding experiences to sustain teacher self-efficacy? When asked what prepared them most for their first year of teaching in the MARPS system, the overwhelming response was previous experience, even for teachers new to education. Teachers who had taught in another region prior to being hired in MARPS relied on their previous teaching experience to support their self-efficacy. Teachers new to teaching relied on their previous work experience outside of education to increase their perseverance. Little credit was given to teaching degree and certification courses. Even less credit was given to any training during onboarding since most teachers claimed to have been provided with little to no onboard training, preparation, and support. The three teachers who were provided with mentors used their peer support to sustain their self-efficacy during their first year(s) of teaching in MARPS.

When asked what information or training would have helped the teacher participants to feel more prepared for their first year of teaching, the responses were more helpful in creating a clearer image of the participants’ onboarding experiences. Carissa and Felicity mentioned in their interviews that basic information on how to do the job, like having a binder of basic info,

would have been helpful. Felicity added, “I know there is some level of baptism by fire. You don’t know how to do something until you’re doing it. But I should have known how to take attendance.” Overwhelmingly, the response from participants regarding what preparation and support was used or needed during onboarding to sustain teacher self-efficacy was simply peer support. Emery was clear that having a mentor would have been her biggest help, stating, “I think they thought I knew what I was doing. I guess I faked it so well that they just said, oh yeah, toss her in. So, having the support of a mentor would have been very helpful.” If you do not know what you do not know, a one-time orientation is not enough to be successful in a new position. Having a guide for the first year is paramount to helping teachers succeed.

Summary

Chapter four described the synthesized educator experience of the Mid-Atlantic region high school teacher participants. The fourteen teachers participated in letter-writing prompts and individual interviews, after which five teachers engaged in a focus group. From the data collected, transcribed, and analyzed, three themes emerged: (a) holistic support; (b) teacher self-efficacy; and (c) time and resources. Each of the three themes included three subthemes, helping to articulate the essence of the participants’ experiences regarding onboarding practices and how those practices and experiences might influence teacher self-efficacy and attrition. Additionally, two outlier themes—teacher preps and co-teachers—provided additional insight into the concerns of the MARPS high school teachers. The narrative derived from the synthesis of the data analysis answered the central and sub-research questions, resulting in an overwhelming response for an overhaul in teacher onboarding practices and a desire for peer and administrative support to sustain teacher self-efficacy.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand the lived experiences of Mid-Atlantic region public high school teachers participating in onboarding practices, which provides insight into best practices for increasing teacher self-efficacy and decreasing teacher attrition rates. The problem addressed in this study is the ever-increasing teacher shortage across the nation, including the concern of teachers leaving the field of education within their first 3-5 years of hire (Bichu, 2022; Camera, 2022; Kini, 2022; Lieberman, 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Moreover, despite the myriad of reasons teachers are leaving, poor onboarding practices should not be part of the teacher shortage problem. The data collected from fourteen teacher participants through letter-writing prompt responses, individual interviews, and a focus group helped to elucidate the onboarding experiences of high school teachers from the county and city districts of the Mid-Atlantic region public schools. The data was analyzed through the four stages of Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological design process. Chapter five includes discussion and interpretation of the study findings, implications for policy and practice, theoretical and methodological implications to consider, the limitations and delimitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

Discussion

Onboarding new employees is an established practice that provides new hires with the organizational socialization—knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors—required to function effectively in a company (Bauer, 2010; Carlos & Muralles, 2022). Organizations that provide formal onboarding structures for their new employees are more effective than those that do not

(Bauer, 2010; Bauer et al., 2007; Saks et al., 2007), and the field of education is no exception. Consistent with the literature, the findings of this study indicate that onboarding practices for teachers are essential for teacher self-efficacy and retention; however, as this study helped to illustrate, many teacher onboarding programs are severely lacking in practical and effective substance, contributing to the decrease in teacher self-efficacy and the increase in attrition rates (Carlos & Muralles, 2022; Han, 2023; Pelser, 2023). Teachers should be provided with robust, step-by-step onboarding processes as they adjust to their new schools for stronger connections and greater commitment, better prepared for starting the school year. (Han, 2023; Pelser, 2023). This section includes interpretations and implications of the findings of this study to provide a greater understanding of the onboarding experiences of high school teachers. Detailed interpretations of the data collected from letter-writing prompt responses, fourteen individual interviews, and a focus group of five high school teachers in the MARPS school districts, paired with Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and scholarly literature, provide a rich representation of the investigated phenomenon and study findings.

Summary of Thematic Findings

From the triangulation of the three collected data types coded and synthesized, three universal themes arose to tell the story of the MARPS high school teachers' onboarding experience: holistic support, teacher self-efficacy, and time and resources. Holistic support included sub-themes that discussed the need for peer mentoring, administrative backing, and societal encouragement. Teacher self-efficacy included sub-themes for overwhelmed teachers, understanding expectations for teachers, and student engagement. The time and resources theme included sub-themes for teacher compensation, technology, and policies and procedures. These themes are discussed in the following critical discussion as they help to clarify the research

interpretations and findings of this study.

Critical Discussion of Findings

After analyzing the codes and preparing narratives for each of the fourteen high school teacher participants, three critical findings were derived from the research analysis: (a) new teachers need support through effective peer mentoring; (b) teachers need administrative support; (c) effectual student engagement is needed to sustain teacher self-efficacy. These findings align with the literature addressing teacher onboarding (Han, 2023; Lewitzky, 2020; NIET, 2021), teacher retention (Kini, 2022; Lieberman, 2022; Natanson, 2022), and teacher self-efficacy (Baroudi & Shaya, 2022; Ozeren et al., 2020; Richter et al., 2022) in addition to filling the existing gap in the literature regarding the significance of effective onboarding practices for teacher self-efficacy, influencing retention.

New teacher mentoring

According to the data collected and analyzed from this study, support is the number one means for teacher success. Teaching can often feel like an isolating job (Shanks et al., 2022) that has pressure from multiple angles (administrative, political, societal) (Berdik, 2019; Lacey & Parlette-Stewart, 2017). As Maggie stated, “There's a lot of pressure when you start teaching.” The stress of having to help a hundred and fifty teenagers daily on top of the daily tasks of being an educator in a public school system can be overwhelming. Felicity’s experience emphasized this point as she stated,

> Quickly adjusting to the flux of human variables is a skill I acquired in my previous career as a case manager for Child Protective Services (CPS); however, exercising this skill for upwards of 150 teenagers moving in and out of my classroom every single day is in some ways more taxing than responding to emergencies as a case manager.

Therefore, as the participants stated, teachers need holistic support from every approach. Teachers need peer support from day one to help them navigate their new job and the processes of their new school of hire. Teachers need administrative support throughout their careers to uphold school policy and maintain classroom management. Teachers also need parental, societal, and political support that allows them to be successful educators.

Regarding holistic support, first-year support from effective and influential peer mentors is the first and most crucial step to starting teachers on the right foot, sustaining teacher self-efficacy, and retaining new teachers. Nora stated, “Having my mentor help me set everything up was probably what prepared me the most. I was not lost. I knew I had my mentor to go to for anything.” The leading type of support teachers crave is a peer's initial guidance and connection. “There was nothing; no one told me how to do anything,” Felicity lamented about her need for a mentor. “I thought if I could just have been in a classroom and followed a teacher around, that would have made me so much more prepared than a class on how to write a lesson plan,” Emery added regarding her first year of teaching. The literature has shown that peer mentor programs have been necessary for the success of new teachers (Aarts et al., 2020; Boman et al., 2013; Colognesi et al., 2020; Han, 2023; NIET, 2021), and consistent with this literature, the experiences of the teacher participants in this study reflect that need for peer mentorship upon being hired at a new school. Angela emphasized this point, stating, “I can’t stress enough how important it is to have a mentors’ program for new teachers and not just new teachers but teachers new to the school system.”

Sustained administrative support

Following the teacher's need for peer support is the requirement for sustained administrative support. It is imperative teachers know that administration will follow through

with policies and procedures and will protect teachers, including valuing teacher time, backing teacher decisions, providing teachers with the resources they need for success, and allowing teacher input in school-wide decisions. A sentiment shared by all in the focus group was a need for the assurance that if a teacher sends a student to the office for violating a school policy, the administration will back up the teacher. According to Maggie, “One of the most important things as far as making a teacher’s job easier is that the administration is visible and that the kids know that [administration] supports the teachers.” When asked what would perceivably increase teacher self-efficacy, Emery stated, “If I had anything that would help, it would be admin giving me support because sometimes you don't feel like you've always got their support. I think that would be the biggest boost.” William's response to that same question was, “Better administration. You need to have your high-ups working in conjunction with you and not working against you. They need to be able to understand what your role is and support it.” Even though teachers appreciate being told they are doing an excellent job by their school and district administrators, it is not enough. A successful teacher with self-efficacy has the full support of their administration through regular and clear communication, visibility, enforced policy, and collaboration.

Effectual student engagement

The third finding from this study indicates that through positive student engagement, teacher self-efficacy is sustained. With an increasing concern for student behavior, classroom management has been a focus of conversation, course offerings, and professional development for teachers (Miller et al., 2023; Prothero, 2023; Steiner et al., 2022). Additionally, technology contributes to the difficulty of student behavior concerns, acting as both a positive resource for delivering and producing scholarship and a negative, overwhelming distraction in the classroom

(Vahedi et al., 2021). Steven said, “It is not unusual to see a student with their laptop open on their desk, Face-Timing another student who is in a different classroom in the school.” Furthermore, as Sarah asserted, “Technology is bringing everything into the classroom, creating a totally different atmosphere.” Maggie clarified, adding that because of social media, the students “never get away from each other anymore. The drama they bring into the classroom is so invasive.” According to the fourteen participants in this study, negative student behavior has become a concern for teacher retention as it continues to reduce teacher self-efficacy. Steven ended his comment about the distractions of technology and negative student behavior with, “I love the kids, but oh my word, what are we gonna do? The longer I do this job, the harder it gets and the heavier the psychological burden becomes.”

On the reverse side of the negative student behavior versus positive student engagement discussion, this study found that positive student engagement is a significant source for sustaining teacher self-efficacy. As teachers were asked what helped them to persist from one year to the next despite the difficulties they faced in teaching, the response was not the increase in the support they were given because, as Andrew and Carissa both stated, “the only support teachers are receiving is lip service.” The reason for their perseverance was student success. According to William, anticipated student success includes “fostering meaningful connections with parents, understanding concerns, and working collaboratively to ensure the best possible outcomes for students.” Andrew added, “My ability to build relationships is what has really helped me to persist.” When teachers can create positive rapport with their students and break through barriers to provide their students with the knowledge and support the students need to succeed, it generates a boost of confidence and a surge in teacher self-efficacy, increasing the odds of a teacher persisting from one year to the next.

Implications for Policy or Practice

The findings of this research study, combined with the current literature, indicate a need for improving teacher onboarding practices to increase teacher self-efficacy (Baroudi & Shaya, 2022; Han, 2023; Lewitzky, 2020; NIET, 2021; Richter et al., 2022), which promotes greater retention (Kini, 2022; Lieberman, 2022; Natanson, 2022). Implementing new policy or policy changes for improvements in onboarding allows for increased buy-in from stakeholders, a better understanding of processes, greater school- and district-wide adoption of programs from educators, and a unified declaration of foundational support. Implementing effective new practices or improvements in new-teacher onboarding illustrates the prioritization of educator success. By combining effective policy and practice for educator onboarding, holistic teacher support moves from checkboxes and lip service to operative improvements in growing teacher self-efficacy and reducing teacher attrition. This section reviews identified implications for policy and practice, including recommendations for strengthening policy and implementing practices that support and retain high school teachers.

Implications for Policy

This study found two concerns regarding educational policy in the Mid-Atlantic region school districts. According to the high school teacher participants, the first concern is that there are multiple policies in place to which administrators inconsistently adhere. For example, to help show administrative support for teachers, schools with a cellphone policy should have administrators who support teachers by telling students that cell phones are not allowed out during class. Additionally, as the research participants indicated, multiple student discipline policies and procedures are inconsistently followed. Teachers and students need to be aware of the policies and processes for student discipline so that expectations are clear and communicated

effectively. Consistently adhering to these policies can encourage positive student behavior and support teachers in their classroom management.

The second concern regarding educational policy for the Mid-Atlantic region school districts is a need for solid onboarding and peer mentoring policies for new teachers. The onboarding policy, consistent with the literature and the findings of this study, should clearly state that onboarding is a year-long process that begins from the day of hire through the first year of teaching. The peer mentoring policy should indicate the use of an onboarding binder, manual, and checklist with all the information new teachers should be receiving to help them be successful in addition to the processes needed to ensure effective peer mentoring, including policy information on how mentors are compensated, trained, evaluated, and held accountable for consistently providing the new-teacher-guidance required within the new teacher's first year.

Implications for Practice

Although teacher retention is a broad issue, this study concentrated on the potential increase of teacher self-efficacy through effective onboarding practices, which leads to increasing teacher retention. Therefore, the findings of this study are focused explicitly on providing practical implications for implementation in addition to putting the practices into policy. The implications for practice highlighted by this study include the need for school administrators to be visible, available, and supportive of teachers. Additionally, according to this study and supported by the literature, best practices indicate the need for onboarding programs to move from short orientation programs to year-long onboarding programs. Furthermore, successful practices include creating and providing onboarding reference materials for new teachers. Lastly, best practice includes developing and effectively implementing peer mentoring programs for new teachers with provisions for mentor training, compensation, evaluation, and

accountability. According to the participants in this study, some high schools in the MARPS districts already have policies and practices to begin implementing better mentoring and onboarding programs. However, the programs are not functioning as they should, referring to the lip service and checkboxes discussed by several teacher participants. Some additional oversight and revamping of these new hire programs and initiatives can go a long way in boosting teacher self-efficacy and retention.

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

While exploring the problem of teacher retention, this study sought to understand the significance of effective onboarding practices for teacher self-efficacy. Part of this study's significance is found in the empirical and theoretical implications that contribute to empirical knowledge and strengthen theoretical principles. Empirical knowledge is derived from direct experience and observation. Theoretical knowledge is derived from the converged, common results of tested propositions that are professed as truthful and used as guiding principles of clarification. In addressing both the empirical and theoretical implications of this study's findings, this section clarifies the placement of this study among the extant literature on teacher retention, teacher self-efficacy, and teacher preparation, illustrating how the findings of this study address the gap in the literature and the connection between self-efficacy and effective onboarding practices for teacher retention.

Empirical Implications

The findings of this study both support and add to the empirical literature. The literature, as described in chapter two, clearly illustrates the problem of teacher burnout and attrition (García & Weiss, 2019; Natanson, 2022; Räsänen et al., 2020; Will, 2022). In corroboration with the literature, the participants in this study echoed the concern of teachers leaving the field of

education within their first three to five years of teaching, indicating either their desire to leave the field or discussing teachers they knew who had left or who were planning to leave their teaching positions. Additionally, the findings of this study align with the literature, indicating that many teachers do not feel prepared upon entering their first year of teaching (DiCicco et al., 2019; Lewitzky, 2020; Wiggan et al., 2021).

The novel findings of this study, adding to the empirical literature, include an exploration of the relationship between onboarding and self-efficacy as experienced by high school teachers in the Mid-Atlantic region. The findings of this study indicate that teacher self-efficacy increases when teachers are provided with effective onboarding, including the provision of an active peer mentor and full support from administration. Furthermore, as the literature shows, higher teacher self-efficacy generally leads to better retention rates (Lacey & Parlette-Stewart, 2017; Lewitzky, 2020; Madigan & Kim, 2021; Richter et al., 2022), which, when combining the existent literature with the findings of this study, means that if teachers have proper onboarding, the likelihood of retention increases.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical framework that grounded this study was Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy. The theory of self-efficacy is based on the belief individuals have in their capabilities for specific actions or events. Self-efficacy increases when an individual is able to persist through seemingly threatening tasks or situations that are relatively safe, promoting behavioral accomplishments and extinguishing fear arousal (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy decreases when an individual cannot perform, creating discouragement and increasing a lack of motivation to persist (Bandura, 1977). According to the existing literature and the findings of this study, self-efficacy is a clear indicator of teacher attrition (Han, 2023; Huang et al., 2020; Ozeren et al.,

2020; Sokal et al., 2020). After completing the educational requirements to obtain a teaching license, teachers are generally excited about finally being able to begin their teaching careers (Cole & Knowles, 1993; Manuel & Hughes, 2006). Their self-efficacy starts high since they have just accomplished the difficult task of their college degree and generally believe they have been adequately prepared to teach within their field (Chestnut & Cullen, 2014). However, after they are hired at their first school, if teachers are unaware of the teacher expectations specific to their new school of hire and lack support, they are at an incredible disadvantage to becoming successful in their new teaching position (Boman et al., 2013; Ewing & Smith, 2003). With every frustration, self-efficacy decreases, increasing discouragement and reducing motivation to persist in teaching, which increases teacher attrition rates (Yost, 2006).

When new teacher hires are provided with robust onboarding experiences that address the teacher expectations and provide the necessary support for success, the school can capitalize on the initially high self-efficacy levels of brand-new teachers, helping to maintain those levels by increasing the teachers' likelihood of success and reducing the attrition rates (VanLone et al., 2022). The theoretical implications of this study show that self-efficacy can be increased when teachers' onboarding needs are met. Teachers are more confident in their abilities to succeed in their educational careers when they feel supported by administrators, have a mentor to whom they can turn throughout their first year of teaching at their new school, and find opportunities for positive engagement with students.

Limitations and Delimitations

It is essential to consider the limitations and delimitations of a qualitative study, outlining the potential weaknesses and boundaries that were either uncontrollable or intentional for the study. Limitations relate to considerations that, though inadvertent, may restrain a study's

validity, reliability, or generalizability (Moustakas, 1994). Delimitations relate to the purposeful and deliberate decisions made throughout the study by the researcher to define the study's boundaries and aims, ultimately determining the direction of the phenomenological inquiry. The limitations of this study include the uncontrollable difficulties that often accompany technology. The delimitations of this study include the purposeful recruitment restrictions placed on the study to seek participants from various schools in the region.

Limitations

The fundamental limitation of this study was highlighted during the recruitment stage of the research process. In the current era of technology, where spamming, identity theft, and phishing run rampant, getting through to potential participants can be challenging. Emails from anyone outside a teacher's network are immediately suspicious, making it difficult for researchers to recruit and communicate with participants. Teachers have been trained and encouraged to ignore or delete emails from anyone outside their school district's network, making it challenging to acquire teacher participants for any study, including this research study. So, even though technology has helped in many ways to simplify the research process by making it possible to communicate with individuals instantaneously through email and virtual meeting platforms, technology can also be a hindrance as it limits the personable aspect that generally increases trust built through personal, face-to-face communication.

Delimitations

The delimitation for this study, the limitation intentionally placed on this study, is the use of a purposive, heterogeneous sampling method. The purposive, heterogeneous method allows the researcher to recruit participants selectively (Lavrakas, 2008; Patton, 2002). While this method can immediately introduce bias because the researcher is selective with the participant

sample size instead of using a blind, indiscriminate participant sample, the heterogeneous sampling method was purposely used to increase the number of perspectives within the two districts. Because the participants from this study came from two districts with a total of eight high schools, the goal was to recruit at least one to two teachers from each school to participate in the study, providing a broader perspective of the onboarding experiences of teachers in the Mid-Atlantic region. This selective sampling method, while allowing for a better, broad perspective for the region, also limited the number of individuals from each school, reducing the perspective of experiences had from the individual high schools.

Recommendations for Future Research

Considering this study's findings, limitations, and delimitations, recommendations for future research have been included. First, since this study focused solely on the onboarding experiences of high school teacher participants in the Mid-Atlantic region, future research should include an analysis of onboarding experiences for high school teachers in other areas of the United States to add to a broader narrative of the nationwide phenomenon. It is essential to have a local-level understanding of the studied phenomenon to make appropriate and positive changes at the ground level. However, it is also imperative that the phenomenon is thoroughly understood at a national level so appropriate and positive changes can be made through a nationwide effort.

Second, future research should study the onboarding experiences of teachers in the k-12 public school system who teach elementary and middle school grade levels. Teachers in the younger grades of the k-12 public school system may go through very similar onboarding experiences as public high school teachers. However, the teachers in elementary education have a completely different perspective of the phenomenon and very different teaching experiences: unlike high school teachers, elementary school educators usually teach one class of twenty to

thirty students each year; high school educators teach six to seven classes, totaling approximately one hundred and fifty students a year. High school teachers were the focus of this study because it was advantageous to thoroughly focus on one group's perspective of the phenomenon to gain greater detail for the research narrative; however, it would be beneficial to analyze the experiences of other teacher groups since the problem with teacher attrition and retention is an issue across all grade levels throughout the United States (Kini, 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2022; Will, 2022).

Lastly, the next steps for future studies to support a more comprehensive understanding of teacher onboarding experiences, teacher self-efficacy, teacher attrition, and teacher retention should be to conduct additional types of research studies such as case studies, mixed-methods research, and quantitative research. Various case studies focusing on schools or districts with effective onboarding practices and schools or districts with ineffective onboarding practices could provide greater insight into how teachers need support for better teacher self-efficacy and retention. Mixed-methods research studies could offer a diversified understanding of the teacher attrition problem through the lens of the onboarding experience and teacher self-efficacy by including inductive and deductive analysis of the phenomenon. A quantitative research study could be another option for a different perspective on this phenomenon, in which researchers test diverse onboarding methods to measure potential solutions to onboarding best practices. Ultimately, additional studies that add to the narrative of the phenomenon help to build an understanding of the teacher onboarding experience and self-efficacy, leading to potential solutions to the problem of teacher retention.

Conclusion

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to explore the lived

experiences of Mid-Atlantic region public high school teachers participating in onboarding practices, which provides insight into best practices for increasing teacher self-efficacy and decreasing teacher attrition rates. The problem addressed in this study is the ever-increasing teacher shortage across the nation, including the concern of teachers leaving the field of education within their first 3-5 years of hire (Camera, 2022; Lieberman, 2022; Natanson, 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2022; Will, 2022). Moreover, despite a myriad of reasons teachers are leaving, poor onboarding practices should not be part of the teacher shortage problem. The data collected from fourteen teacher participants through letter-writing prompt responses, individual interviews, and a focus group helped to elucidate the onboarding experiences of high school teachers from the county and city districts of the Mid-Atlantic region public schools. The data was analyzed through the four stages of Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological design process. From the triangulation of the three collected data types that were coded and synthesized, three universal themes arose to tell the story of the MARPS high school teachers onboarding experience, leading to three critical findings from the research analysis: (a) new teachers need support through effective peer mentoring; (b) teachers need administrative support; (c) effectual student engagement is needed to sustain teacher self-efficacy.

The education of society is essential for maintaining productive and cooperative societies, and without good teachers, public education crumbles, leaving many children without options for academic growth (Black, 2020; Center on Education Policy, 2020; Kidd, 2023; Monticello, 2023). Society is suffering the consequences of the continued and exacerbated teacher shortage disaster (Camera, 2022; Kini, 2022; Natanson, 2022; Räsänen et al., 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2022). And while solutions to the multiple problems are being argued, the narrative

presented in this study from the synthesized experiences of the Mid-Atlantic region high school teacher participants clearly indicates a direct path for sustaining teacher self-efficacy through effective onboarding, new teacher mentoring, administrative support, and positive student engagement.

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Appendix A

Liberty University IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 18, 2024

Tiffany Draper
James Sigler

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-715 A Transcendental Phenomenological Study of Onboarding Practices: Mid-Atlantic Region Public High School Teachers' Lived Experiences

Dear Tiffany Draper, James Sigler,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions of your study documents can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Research Site Permission Requests: Both County and City School Districts

[redacted] COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Department of Instruction

APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

PART 1: APPLICANT INFORMATION
If the proposed research involves more than one researcher, the lead researcher should complete this application. Names of additional researchers, however, should be listed below, and all participating researchers must sign the application, affirming the accuracy of the information and agreeing to the conditions imposed by [redacted]

NAME [redacted] EMPLOYER School: Liberty University

ADDRESS [redacted] JOB TITLE Ph.D. Student

CITY/ST/ZIP [redacted] WORK ADDRESS [redacted]

PHONE ( ) CITY/ST/ZIP [redacted]

CELL [redacted] WORK PHONE ( )

EMAIL [redacted]

NAME(S) OF CO-APPLICANT(S) N/A

TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY A transcendental phenomenological study of onboarding practices: southwestern virginia public high school teachers' lived experiences

A. PURPOSE OF APPLICATION (check one)
- ■ New application
- ☐ Amendment to previously approved study
- ☐ Request for extension of time for previously approved study

B. MOTIVATION FOR RESEARCH (check one)
- ☐ Master's thesis
- ■ Dissertation for doctorate
- ☐ Graduate class requirement
- ☐ Independent research
- ☐ Professional research
- ☐ Grant-funded research
- ☐ Other (explain)

C. NATURE OF STUDY (check all that apply)
- ☐ Classroom observation
- ■ Teacher/staff interviews/survey
- ☐ Student interviews/survey
- ☐ Student assessment
- ☐ Use of existing data/records
- ☐ Other (explain)

D. PROPOSED RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS (check all that apply)
- ■ Teachers/staff
- ☐ Administrators
- ☐ Students
- ☐ Parents
- ☐ Other (explain)

E. PROPOSED RESEARCH SITE(S) [redacted] County & City High Schools: a separate approval app is being submitted to the city

Application for Approval to Conduct Research *REV 8/31/2012* 1

F. PROPOSED PARTICIPANT POPULATION

Grade level(s) 9-12 Subject area(s) any

Special characteristics of population (if any) high school teachers [redacted]

Group	Number Participants Needed	Time (in min.) Required for Each Participant to Complete Research Activities
Students	0	
Teachers/Staff	15 total between ea district	180 minutes
Administrators	0	
Other (specify)	0	

G. PROPOSED START DATE January 2024 PROPOSED END DATE May 2024

H. UNIVERSITY AFFILIATION (if applicable) Liberty University

NAME OF GRADUATE ADVISOR James Sigler, Ph.D.

IRB STATUS (check one)

- ☐ IRB approval has been granted
- ■ IRB proposal has been submitted and approval is pending
- ☐ Study is exempt from IRB approval.
  Exemption rationale:

PART 2: RESEARCHER AFFIRMATIONS

Please read each of the following statements and place a check mark in the corresponding box to affirm that you have read and agree to abide each condition imposed by [redacted]

- ■ I understand that acceptance of this request in no way obligates [redacted] County Public Schools [redacted] to participate in this research.
- ■ I understand that approval to conduct research in [redacted] does not constitute a commitment of resources to carry out the study nor an endorsement of the study nor its findings by [redacted]
- ■ I understand that participation in this research by students, parents, and school staff is voluntary. I agree to preserve the anonymity of all participants in all reporting of this research. I agree to not reveal the identity or include identifiable characteristics of [redacted] schools or the school division.
- ■ I understand that students may not be interviewed, tested, or asked to do surveys during the school day.
- ■ I agree to abide by all of the policies and regulations of the [redacted] School Board and will conduct the research within the stipulations stated in the [redacted] guidelines and application.
- ■ I agree to provide [redacted] with a copy of the results of the research.
- ■ I understand that informed consent of the parents/guardians is required for student interviews, surveys, or assessments, as required by FERPA (20 USC §1232g(b)(1)(F) and §99.31(a)(6). Classroom observations, or interviews/surveys with staff, that do *not* result in data that would identify any student do not require parent/guardian consent but must be conducted in conformance with the provisions of this agreement.
- ■ I understand that data collected may only be used for the specific purpose of conducting the proposed research and the data must be destroyed within a reasonable period of time when it is no longer needed for the study.
- ■ I understand that [redacted] reserves the right to conduct audits or other monitoring activities of the applicant's policies, procedures, systems, and handling of data collected in [redacted].
- ■ I understand that I am responsible for notifying [redacted] of any breach of data confidentiality and am responsible for [redacted] financial costs associated with a breach of data within my control.
- ■ I understand that an application to amend this agreement must be submitted and approved if changes to the originally approved research protocol are made.

[redacted] 10/13/2023

Signature of Applicant Date Signature of Graduate Advisor (if applicable) Date

Signature of Co-Applicant Date Signature of Co-Applicant Date

PART 3: [redacted] RESEARCH PROTOCOL REQUIREMENTS

Consideration of requests to conduct research in [redacted] is contingent upon the review committee having sufficient information to thoroughly evaluate the merit of the research and its relevance to the educational mission of [redacted]. The application packet must include a description of each of the components below, either in the form of a separate narrative or as part of the research protocol submitted to an IRB.

- A statement of the research problem and rationale, including definitions of key terms
- An explanation of the importance of the study, including the theoretical framework and implications for K-12 school settings
- An explanation of the research design and proposed methodology
- A description of data collection instruments (a copy of the instrument is a required part of the application)
- An explanation of how and to whom the results will be reported
- A timeline for completing the research
- An explanation of steps that will be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of [redacted] employees, students, and parents; the explanation should include information regarding how and when collected data will be destroyed
- An explanation of the setting in which the proposed research will be conducted; if research activities will take place during school hours, an explanation of how instructional time will be impacted must be included

APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Name: Tiffany M. Draper

Title of Study: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study of Onboarding Practices: Southwestern Virginia Public High School Teachers' Lived Experiences

Home Address: [redacted]

Cell Telephone: [redacted] Email: [redacted]

Job Title: Research Project Coordinator at Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at Virginia Tech Carilion

Will you be conducting this research as part of your employment? No

Will you be conducting this research to fulfill a college or university requirement? Yes
If yes, identify the type of degree program, explain how this research relates to the requirements for the degree, and complete the next five items:
This research will be conducted to complete a Ph.D. dissertation for a degree in Instructional Design and Technology in the Department of Education at Liberty University.

College or University: Liberty University

College Address: [redacted]

Department: Department of Education Faculty Chair: James Sigler, Ph.D.

Faculty Chair's Telephone: [redacted] Faculty Chair's Email: [redacted]

I understand that acceptance of this request for approval of a research proposal in no way obligates [redacted] City Public Schools to participate in this research. I understand that approval does not constitute commitment of resources or endorsement of the study or its findings by the school division or the School Board.

I acknowledge that participation in the research studies by students, parents, and school staff is voluntary. I will preserve the anonymity of all participants in all reporting. I will not reveal the identity or include identifiable characteristics of schools or the school division unless authorized to do so by the Superintendent.

If approval is granted, I will abide by all [redacted] City Public Schools policies and regulations and will conduct this research within the stipulations accompanying the letter of approval. At the completion of the study, I will provide [redacted] City Public Schools' Director of Data and Analysis at least two copies of the results.

[redacted] 10/13/2023
Signature of Applicant Date

Appendix C

Research Site Permission Approvals: Both County and City School Districts

[redacted] COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS [redacted]
Department of Instruction
[redacted]

[redacted]
Executive Director of Secondary Instruction
[redacted]

1/17/24

To: Liberty University Institutional Review Board

Re: IRB Protocol Title – A Transcendental Phenomenological Study of Onboarding Practices: Mid-Atlantic Region Public High School Teachers' Lived Experiences
Student Investigator – Tiffany Draper
Site – [redacted] County Public Schools

I understand that you will be studying teacher retention through understanding the onboarding experiences of new teachers and how their onboarding can better help them to prepare for their first few years of teaching. Your study will include the recruitment of staff utilizing publicly available email information followed by a collection and analysis of staff letters, focus group questions, and individual interview questions. I have read and understand the research project proposed to be done at our school/division site. I approve of the project.

Sincerely,

[redacted]
Executive Director of Secondary Instruction
[redacted] County Public Schools

[redacted]

November 9, 2023

Tiffany Draper
[redacted]

Tiffany Draper,

Thank you for submitting your research proposal regarding "A Transcendental Phenomenological Study of Onboarding Practices: Mid-Atlantic Region Public High School Teachers' Lived Experiences".

I am pleased to inform you that your study has been approved and you may proceed with the various activities described. If you decide, in the course of your data gathering, that you wish to modify your study, please submit any proposed changes in writing for approval.

Please contact [redacted] Executive Director of Human Resources for next steps in conducting your data research or [redacted], Executive Director of Research, Accountability, and Mathematics.

I look forward to receiving a copy of your completed work and wish you success as you begin the collection and analysis of data.

Sincerely,
[redacted]
Director of Data and Analysis

cc: [redacted], Executive Director of Human Resources
Executive Director of Research, Accountability, and Mathematics

Appendix D

Participant Recruitment Email

Dear [redacted] High School Educator:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a PhD in Instructional Design & Technology. The purpose of my research is to understand the lived onboarding experiences of high school teachers, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be teachers who have taught at any of the high schools within [redacted]. Participants, if willing, will be asked to provide a five-hundred-word response to a writing prompt, given a two-week timeframe, then participate in an estimated 45-minute individual interview (reviewing their interview response transcript for accuracy after the interview—a process known as member checking), and participate in an estimated 1-hour focus group. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please contact me by replying to this email or calling/texting me at [redacted] for more information and/or to schedule an interview.

A participant consent document is provided as an attachment to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me. Once a signed consent form has been received, participants will be given a link to the Google form containing the writing prompt.

Participants will each receive a $75 Visa gift card for their participation in all three data collection points (writing prompt response, individual interview, and focus group). Not all participants will need to participate in the focus group, so if a participant only participates in the writing prompt and individual interview, a $50 Visa gift card will be given after the interview.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Draper
PhD Candidate
[redacted]

Appendix E

Participant Consent Form

Title of the Project: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study of Onboarding Practices: Mid-Atlantic Region Public High School Teachers' Lived Experiences

Principal Investigator: Tiffany M. Draper, Ph.D. Candidate, Instructional Design and Technology Program, Department of Education, Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia

Invitation to Participate in a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older and meet at least one of the requirements below:

- Currently teaching in one of the two school districts identified in the study, hired within the last five years
- Used to teach within one of the two school districts identified in the study, quit within the last two years

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand the lived experiences of Mid-Atlantic region public high school teachers participating in onboarding practices, which provides insight into best practices to increase teacher self-efficacy and decrease attrition rates. A multitude of reasons for teacher attrition rates have been documented, and teacher preparation and self-efficacy remain high on the list. By examining the onboarding experiences of Mid-Atlantic region public high school teachers, administrators from any school, and potentially any business onboarding employees, can better understand the preparatory needs of new teachers to help increase self-efficacy and reduce attrition rates.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Respond to a letter writing prompt regarding your experience as a new teacher. Participants will have approximately two weeks to respond to the prompt before beginning the individual interview process. The letter responses will be used for further data analysis in triangulation with the interviews and focus groups. All letter responses will be scrubbed for any personal identifiers, and pseudonyms will be used to protect participant privacy.

2. Participate in a 30- to 60-minute interview with the researcher. The interview will take place in a private room at either a school or virtually through a video conference platform such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams, whichever is more convenient for the participant. All interviews will be audio and video recorded and transcribed for accuracy. Pseudonyms will be used to protect participant privacy.

3. Participate in a focus group at the end of the study. The focus group will allow participants to discuss their experiences with the phenomenon, respond to additional research questions, and ask any questions of the researcher. The focus group will last approximately 60 minutes and will be audio and video recorded. Depending on group availability and accessibility, the focus group will either be in person in a private room at a school or virtually through a video conference platform like Zoom or Microsoft Teams.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect a direct benefit from participating in this study.

Benefits to society include:

- Potential to discover patterns in the onboarding practices that affect teacher self-efficacy and retention.
- Raising awareness of the effects of onboarding practices for retention in education and other institutions.
- Raising awareness of the preparatory needs of first-year teachers.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that could identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to them.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- All schools and school districts associated with the study will be kept confidential by replacing names and locations with pseudonyms.
- Any access to the data will be limited and not used for any purposes outside of this research study. All data will be password-protected on a computer, and all hardcopy records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. After three years, all digital data will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be burned.
- If being interviewed at a school, the interview will occur in a private room where others will not easily overhear the conversation. If the interview takes place over a video-

conference platform like Zoom or Microsoft Teams, the meeting will be private, free of distractions, and conducted in a place where others will not easily overhear the conversation.

- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. Because the focus group will occur with other participants, it is up to each individual to ensure their privacy and not communicate about what is discussed with anyone outside the group. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked laptop for three years and then deleted. The primary researcher will have sole access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. Upon completing all requested tasks (letter writing, individual interview, and focus group), participants will receive a $75 Visa Gift Card. The gift card will be handed to the participant at the end of the focus group. If a participant wishes, they can receive their gift card through email. Not all research participants will be needed for the focus group; for individuals who do not participate in the focus group but who participate in both the letter writing and individual interview portions of the study, a $50 Visa Gift Card will be provided for them upon completion of their interview.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Liberty University's Department of Education. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please inform the researcher using the contact information provided in the next paragraph that you wish to discontinue your participation before your scheduled interview. Should you decide after completing the letter writing prompt, individual interview, and focus group that you do not wish to be included in the study, you will still receive the $75 Visa Gift Card compensation for your time (or $50 Visa Gift Card if only the letter writing prompt and individual interview were completed). However, your responses will not be included in the study. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Tiffany M. Draper. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at [redacted] You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. James Sigler, at [redacted]

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. [redacted]

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you agree to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Participant Name

_____
Participant Signature & Date

Appendix F

Phenomenological Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of new high school teachers who participate in onboarding practices?

Sub-Question One

What experiences influenced teacher retention during the onboarding process?

Sub-Question Two

What are the educator experiences that influenced change in teacher self-efficacy for teacher participants?

Sub-Question Three

What preparation and support do teacher participants use from their onboarding experiences to sustain teacher self-efficacy?

Appendix G

Letter-Writing Prompt Question

Sent via Google Form

- In approximately 300 – 500 words, please respond to the following prompt: As a now-experienced teacher here at MARPS, what have you learned within your first few years of being a teacher?

Appendix H

Individual Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your teaching experience up to this point. (CRQ)
2. Please describe your onboarding experience from when you were hired to teach here at MARPS. (CRQ)
3. What prepared you most for the school year? (SQ1 & SQ3)
4. What information or training would have helped you to feel more prepared for your first year of teaching? (SQ1 & SQ3)
5. What experiences throughout your first year (or first few years) of teaching helped you to persist to the next year(s) of teaching? (SQ1)
6. Self-efficacy is defined as one's belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task. Describe how your self-efficacy has perceivably changed since being hired here at MARPS. (SQ2)
7. What would perceivably increase your level of self-efficacy for teaching here at MARPS? (SQ3)
8. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with your first year of teaching here at MARPS regarding teacher onboarding, preparation, and self-efficacy that we have not discussed? (SQ1, SQ2, & SQ3)

Appendix I

Focus Group Questions

1. What is it like to be a first-year teacher? (CRQ)
2. How have your experiences perceivably influenced your outlook on teaching and education? (SQ1)
3. What experiences have helped you to be successful? (SQ2)
4. What support would you like to see offered by administration to increase teacher retention? (SQ1)
5. What support would you like to see offered by administration to increase teacher self-efficacy? (SQ3)
6. What support would you like to see from society to increase teacher self-efficacy and retention? (SQ3)