All ETDs from UAB

UAB Theses & Dissertations

2022

Retention Strategies for Non-Traditional Pathway Teachers: Keeping New Teachers in the Profession

Leslie Cranford Richards
University Of Alabama At Birmingham

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/etd-collection

Part of the Education Commons

RETENTION STRATEGIES FOR NON-TRADITIONAL PATHWAY TEACHERS:
KEEPING NEW TEACHERS IN THE PROFESSION

by

LESLIE CRANFORD RICHARDS

D. KEITH GURLEY, COMMITTEE CHAIR
AMY DAGLEY
PAULETTE EVANS
DIANA GURLEY
JENNIFER SUMMERLIN

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the graduate faculty of The University of Alabama at Birmingham,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

2022

RETENTION STRATEGIES FOR NON-TRADITIONAL PATHWAY TEACHERS:
KEEPING NEW TEACHERS IN THE PROFESSION

LESLIE CRANFORD RICHARDS

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

ABSTRACT

Over the past 30 years, teacher turnover has increased significantly (Simon & Johnson, 2015), contributing to the teacher shortage in the United States. This shortage of teachers has necessitated the employment of more teacher candidates from non-traditional teacher certification pathways. Espinoza et al. (2018) found that teachers from non-traditional certification pathways are "2 to 3 times more likely to leave teaching than fully prepared teachers" (p. 1). Given that teacher retention would help solve the teacher shortage problem (Ingersoll, 2001), it is important to determine what working conditions and support would encourage these non-traditional certification pathway teachers to stay in the profession. This information is critical to educational leaders trying to maintain a faculty that is well equipped to utilize best practice instruction to meet the needs of students. Students also benefit from the stability of engaging in relationships with teachers who stay in their teaching positions over time. This study's findings indicate that strong, positive relationships are key to retaining teachers from a non-traditional preparation path, particularly those relationships with administrators, and other teachers in the building.

Keywords: teacher shortage, teacher turnover, teacher retention, non-traditional, alternative certification

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all of the teachers with whom I have served. I am so grateful for the work they do every day. Teaching is truly a labor of love, and they are tireless advocates for their students.

I also dedicate this work to all of the students who have touched me with their lives. Making a difference for them has always been my fondest goal. I include my two wonderful grandsons, Lee and Luke, in that list. They deserve to have tireless advocates to facilitate their love of learning.

Finally, I dedicate this work in loving memory of my mother, Annette Lee. I would never have begun this journey without her lifelong love, support and encouragement. I hope this work makes her very proud.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Mere words cannot express my gratitude and appreciation for the support and encouragement that has been given me throughout this journey.

First, I give my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, all of the glory. I would never have been able to complete this work without His help and inspiration.

To my husband, Fred Richards—Thank you for loving, supporting and believing in me always, even when I did not believe in myself. I could not have completed this journey without you.

To my children, Jaley and Trey—Thank you for your encouragement and your patience with me. I am grateful that you have walked this path with me, and I promise that we will make up for lost time. Your Momma loves you very much.

Thank you to my son-in-love, Will. You are the man I prayed my daughter would find. You are my bonus son.

Thank you to my best friend and accountability partner, Christy Downing. Thank you for continuing to travel this path with me. I know that I can count on you for honest feedback.

Thank you to my father, Wallace Lee, for his unfailing support. You and Momma were always there for me, and I am so grateful for the sacrifices that you made so that I could complete my education without debt.

Thank you to my outstanding committee members, Drs. Keith Gurley, Amy Dagley, Paulette Evans, Jennifer Summerlin, and Diana Gurley. Thank you

for taking the time to share your knowledge and insight with me. Your questions helped me frame my work and clarified my thinking. Dr. Gurley, thank you for your guidance and encouragement--you are my hero!

Thank you to my JEFCOED family! The passion and love that you bring every day is critical to student success. I want to support and encourage all of you, particularly those who stepped in, and stepped up to become teachers without having traditional teacher preparation. Your heart for students is inspiring!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Over the past 30 years, teacher turnover has increased significantly (Simon &

Johnson, 2015), contributing to the teacher shortage in the United States. The Economic

Policy Institute reported a shortage of teachers needed to fill 307,000 teaching jobs in

2019. The shortage of teachers has necessitated the employment of more teacher

candidates from non-traditional teacher certification pathways. Espinoza et al. (2018)

found that teachers from non-traditional certification pathways are "2 to 3 times more

likely to leave teaching than fully prepared teachers" (p. 1). Ingersoll (2002) suggested

that teacher retention is the answer to the teacher shortage and teacher turnover problem.

Comparing the teaching profession to a bucket with holes in the bottom, Ingersoll stated,

"pouring more water into the bucket will not be the answer if the holes are not first

patched" (p. 42). It will only be possible to fill the bucket when we stop losing teachers at

the current rate.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore what experiences and working

conditions would keep teachers from non-traditional educational certification pathways in

the teaching profession. Mobra and Hamlin (2020) observed, "very little is known about

the motivations of emergency certified teachers" (p. 1). Therefore, the study explored the

perceptions of alternatively certified teachers about the conditions that encouraged them to stay in the field of education, as well as those factors that would increase the likelihood of their leaving the profession.

Theoretical Framework

The perspective of collective efficacy theory is useful in examining both teacher shortages and retention strategies. Much of this theoretical work is based on previous research by Bandura (2001) and will be examined more fully in Chapter 2. Collective agency is a group's "shared belief in their collective power to produce desired results" (p. 14). Groups of educators in schools are most successful when they believe in their collective capacity. This theory provides a lens through which to view strategies to ameliorate the teacher shortage issue.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were crafted to explore what experiences and working conditions would encourage teachers from non-traditional teacher certification programs to continue in education. With this intent, the interview was unstructured, and the survey questions were open-ended and allowed participants to answer based on their own knowledge and feelings, rather than being limited to a set of options for responses.

Primary Research Question

What experiences would encourage teachers who have been certified through non-traditional pathways to continue in the teaching profession?

Sub-questions

- I am looking into the experiences of people who came into teaching from non-traditional pathways, and I chose you to find out more about what teaching was like for you. Could you tell me about your experience? After you tell your story, if I have questions about what you have said or need clarification, I can ask you. But for now, just talk freely.

Additional Probes

- How are teachers supported by the teacher induction process?

- What aspects of the mentoring process do teachers feel are necessary?

- How well-prepared do teachers feel to be successful in the field of education?

- How do teachers feel supported by administrators?

- What conditions would prompt teachers to stay?

- What conditions encourage their leaving the profession?

Method

This was a qualitative study to gain information about retaining teachers in the teaching profession who pursued a non-traditional preparation path. The use of grounded theory for this study provided a focus on the perspectives and lived experience of

participants. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), the researcher's "main goal in developing new theories is their purposeful systematic generation from the data of social research" (p. 28). The primary method for data collection in this study was an unstructured interview. This allowed participants to tell their stories in their own way, providing a glimpse into the world of education as they see it. The use of unstructured interviews encouraged participants to be thoughtful and descriptive. More detail about the research methodology is provided in Chapter 3.

Sample

The sample for this research came from a large county school district in central Alabama during the 2021-2022 school year. Participants were selected from a pool of secondary teachers who came to education through a non-traditional certification program. Secondary teachers were chosen for study because secondary school teachers seemed to have higher attrition rates than their elementary co-workers (Keigher, 2010). Participants were chosen using purposive sampling. According to Patton (1990), the power of purposive sampling "lies in selecting information-rich cases" (p. 169). Information-rich cases are participants who are chosen because they provide the researcher with a great deal of information that directly applies to the research questions (Patton, 1990).

Since this was a qualitative study, the transferability of the findings is limited to the group being studied. Limitations also include volunteer bias since participants were asked to take part in the research. The study's delimitations include the targeting of the specific population of alternately certified secondary teachers.

Data Collection

Data collection methods included in-person interviews and document review.

Interviews. In order to explore the perceptions and lived experience of study participants, a purposive sample of participants was selected from the pool of alternatively certified teachers in the district. Participants were chosen specifically to make sure that they represented the greatest variability in subject demographics and experience that was possible.

Document Review. Exit interviews conducted by the district were reviewed. Although the subjects of these interviews are no longer in the district, their exit interviews yielded valuable information about their beliefs and perceptions on teaching in the district. However, information was not available about their pathways to teacher certification. Data collection is explained in more detail in Chapter 3.

Data Analysis

Data from this study were analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding, as is typical for data analysis in grounded theory (Creswell, 2013). As the qualitative researcher, I began by coding in large categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In the final step of the coding process, I developed hypotheses and interpreted the story that the data told. According to Corbin and Strauss (2015), "the knowledge gained through grounded theory methodology enables persons to explain and take action to alter, contain, and change situations" (p. 11). More detail about data analysis follows in Chapter 3.

Definition of Key Terms

For this study, the following definitions of terms shall apply:

a. **Alternative certification:** Any teacher preparation pathway that is not a traditional teacher preparation pathway.

b. **Induction:** The process of introducing a new teacher to the organization.

c. **Non-traditional pathway:** Any teacher preparation pathway that is not a traditional teacher preparation pathway.

d. **Teacher retention:** Teachers continuing to teach in the school where they taught the year before.

e. **Teacher shortage:** An inadequate quantity of qualified individuals willing to teach under prevailing wages and conditions.

f. **Teacher turnover:** When teachers change positions in a district, leave the district, or the teaching profession.

g. **Teacher attrition:** A reduction in the number of teachers.

h. **Traditional teacher preparation pathway:** Those teachers who have attended a four-year college or university, achieving a bachelor's degree in a teacher preparation program.

Assumptions of the Researcher

The following philosophical assumptions were made by the researcher in the design and conduct of the study (Creswell, 2013). Ontological assumptions are made about the nature of the multiple realities experienced by the study participants and their perceptions. Epistemological assumptions are made about the lived experiences of the

study participants. Axiological assumptions acknowledge the values of the researcher that alter how responses are perceived. The methodological assumptions stem from the qualitative research chosen to explore this research topic. All of these assumptions are explored further in Chapter 3.

Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study are likely limited in the inherent ways that limit qualitative research. They are also limited in application to secondary teachers and may also be limited geographically to the area where the district is located. Qualitative research additionally limits the transferability of the findings. However, the information gathered through this study informs educational leaders about teacher support work as the working conditions that support non-traditional certification pathway teachers may benefit all.

Significance of the Study

According to Sutcher et al. (2019), the school-aged population will increase by roughly 3 million students over the next decade and teacher attrition rates will remain steady (8% annually). Enrollment in traditional teacher education programs has declined by more than 30% (Sutcher et al., 2019). Additionally, Sutcher and colleagues stated that the number of uncertified teachers is in the hundreds of thousands. With an increasing number of retirements during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, study findings detailing the working conditions that encourage uncertified teachers to pursue a career in education are valuable.

Conclusion

Ingersoll (2002) compared the teaching field to a revolving door "in which there are relatively large flows in, through and out of schools" (p. 42). Ingersoll suggested that a solution to that revolving door problem would be to focus on retention of the teachers in the field. Study findings to direct retention efforts for non-traditional certification path teachers would help to close the revolving door.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concerns about shortages of qualified teachers have been ongoing since well before the end of the 20th century. A shortage of teachers is a problem for all stakeholders in the public education system. This chapter outlines some of the reasons for teacher shortages and the impacts they have on the educational system. Additionally, this review of the literature examines research on teacher recruitment and retention.

Theoretical Framework

Not all grounded theory research has a theoretical framework at its onset. Corbin and Strauss (2015) said that the use of theoretical frameworks "is discouraged in grounded theory studies because the whole purpose of a grounded theory study is to construct theory" (p. 55). However, the perspective of collective efficacy theory may be useful in examining both teacher shortages and retention strategies. Much of this work is based on previous research by Bandura. This theory contributed to the theory of Academic Optimism espoused by Hoy and colleagues (2006).

Collective Efficacy Theory

It is in the context of self-efficacy that Bandura formed a theory of collective efficacy. Bandura's (2000) theory of collective efficacy attributes the necessity of collective capacity to the interdependence of the human experience. Groups of

individuals are only successful when they believe in the collective effectiveness of the group. The theory of collective efficacy has been endorsed by a number of educational researchers, including Goddard et al. (2004) and Hoy et al. (2006), whose research linked the collective efficacy of teachers to student achievement. This research indicated that collective efficacy of teachers is the belief that as a faculty group, they can positively influence student learning.

Academic Optimism

Hoy et al. (2006) expanded the research by Goddard et al. (2004) and combined theories of collective efficacy, academic emphasis, and faculty trust into a construct they termed *academic optimism.* The construct of academic optimism combines both cognitive and emotional aspects with elements of behavior. According to Hoy et al. (2006), "a strong sense of collective efficacy in a school creates a powerful set of norms and behavioral expectations that reinforce the self-efficacy beliefs of teachers" (p. 430). Hoy and colleagues further asserted, "efficacy, trust, and academic emphasis produce a powerful synergism that motivates, creates optimism, and channels behavior toward the accomplishment of high academic goals" (p. 440). The theory of collective efficacy is a lens through which to view the issue of teacher retention.

A study by McGuigan and Hoy (2006) indicated that there were actions which could be taken by school leaders that would develop a culture of academic optimism, increasing collective teacher efficacy and student achievement. Study findings indicated that "principals should do everything possible to foster teachers' collective efficacy by providing mastery experiences and vicarious experiences, using verbal persuasion, and fostering positive affective states" (p. 223). Celebrating powerful classroom practices

encourages other teachers to try them. According to McGuigan and Hoy, "there are concrete actions that educational leaders can take that enable schools to develop a culture of optimism, which facilitates academic performance for all students" (p. 224). It is possible that the collective efficacy of the culture of academic optimism would increase the likelihood that alternatively certified teachers would stay in the teaching field.

The Issue of Teacher Shortages

A shortage is defined by Merriam-Webster (n.d.) as a lack, or deficit (Definition of shortage). This definition, when applied to the teacher shortage, is inadequate. Sutcher et al. (2019) defined a teacher shortage as "an inadequate quantity of qualified individuals willing to offer their services under prevailing wages and conditions" (p. 4). Using this more precise definition, it is not merely the number of new teachers entering the profession, but also the number of those willing to serve in a particular location. Sutcher et al. (2019) noted staffing problems in the field of education are "driven by a myriad of factors, including not only production of new teachers in various fields, but also teacher turnover, changes in educational programs and pupil-teacher ratios, and the attractiveness of teaching generally and in specific locations" (p. 4). According to Sutcher et al. (2019), teacher demand

> [i]s projected to increase over the next decade, based on expectations that the school-aged population will increase by roughly 3 million students, student-teacher ratios will return to pre-recession levels (suggesting a decrease from 16:1 to 15:1) and teacher attrition rates will remain steady at 8% annually. (p. 4)

In contrast, the supply of teachers continues to shrink. According to Sutcher et al., enrollment in education programs declined by more than one-third. Their analysis estimated a shortfall of over 60,000 positions for the 2015-16 school year, increasing to 112,000 in 2017-18. A recently released data review estimated 109,000 uncertified teachers for 2017, confirming the earlier predictions.

The National Teacher Shortage

The teacher shortage exists to varying degrees around the United States (Sutcher et al., 2019). It is difficult to categorize the nation as a whole because circumstances vary from state to state. However, data suggest that it is a widespread problem. In 2017, approximately 80% of states reported shortages in a number of academic subject matters, particularly Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields and special education, and 69% of districts surveyed across the nation reported having difficulty filling open positions (Sutcher et al., 2019). When so many districts have difficulty staffing schools, there is clearly a supply problem. In 2019, Podolsky et al. noted that teacher shortages were reaching "crisis proportions in some teaching fields--such as mathematics, science and special education--and in locations where wages and working conditions are least attractive" (p. 1). The Economic Policy Institute reported a 307,000 job deficit in education in 2019 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Number of Teachers Needed to Serve the U.S. Student Population

THE TEACHER GAP

Teacher employment and the number of jobs needed to keep up with enrollment, 2003–2019

Source: EPI analysis of Current Employment Statistics public data series and U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics

Economic Policy Institute
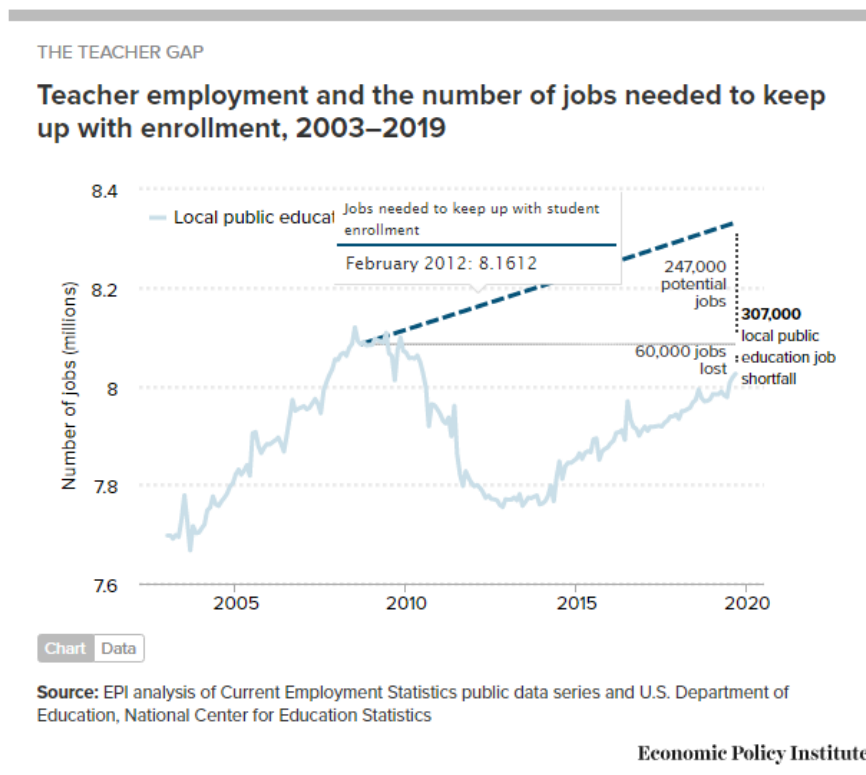
Teacher turnover drives the teacher shortage in the southern region of the United States. Turnover rates in southern cities and suburban areas are 16-17% (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). More rural areas see a teacher turnover rate close to 15%. The northeastern United States appears to be faring best, reporting the lowest turnover rates (all district types) of around 10% overall. Several western states have reported struggling to fill teacher positions. In 2017, 80% of a significant sample of California school districts (25 districts that as a whole, serve one-fourth of the students in the state) reported that they could not fill teaching positions with qualified candidates (Sutcher et al., 2018). Sutcher et al. stated that 82% of the districts in the sample hired

teachers who were underprepared and "California's ongoing teacher shortage undermines its efforts to implement new standards, to improve learning, and to close achievement gaps" (p. 1). In 2015-16, Arizona listed 4,000 positions as unfilled or filled by teachers who did not meet certification requirements (Sutcher et al., 2019). Although the teacher shortage in the United States varies in intensity from region to region, the reality may also differ from school to school. According to Sutcher et al. (2019), "Some of the greatest variation in teacher shortages is not between states, but between schools, both within and across districts" (p. 7). High-poverty schools are often those most impacted by teacher shortages (Darling-Hammond, 2003).

Increased demand for teachers contributes to the teacher shortage issue (Ingersoll, 2001). Ingersoll indicated that teacher demand began to increase as early as the mid-1980s. "Since 1984, student enrollments have increased, most schools have had job openings for teachers, and the size of the teaching workforce (K-12) has increased" (p. 4). Ingersoll also noted that the high annual turnover rate for teachers is part of the shortage problem. The workforce of teachers is twice as large as that of registered nurses and five times the number of lawyers. However, the turnover rate for teachers is much higher than that of many other occupations. Ingersoll referenced data that suggest that "after just three years 29% of all beginning teachers have left teaching altogether and after five years 39% have left (p. 4). Darling-Hammond and Sykes (2003) agreed with Ingersoll and suggested that the answer to teacher shortages is retaining teachers.

According to Darling-Hammond and Sykes (2003), "A much larger challenge than preparing new teachers is retaining existing teachers. Since the early 1990s, the annual outflow from teaching has surpassed the annual influx by increasingly large

margins, straining the nation's hiring systems" (p. 15). Public school enrollment, pupil-teacher ratios, and rates of attrition are all variables that affect teacher demand (Sutcher et al., 2019). Attrition, or the rate at which teachers leave the teaching field, is not a new problem (Ingersoll, 2001).

Sutcher et al. (2019) noted that retirement accounts for approximately one-third of teacher departures. In 2007, a policy brief by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future indicated that the cost of replacing teachers who choose to leave the profession is over $7 billion annually. In addition to the monetary cost, there is the impact of teacher vacancies or unqualified candidates on student learning and achievement. The fact that attrition rates are higher in high poverty schools adds to that impact on some of the highest need students (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Simon & Johnson, 2015).

Ingersoll (2001) found that teacher attrition rates were 50% higher in high poverty schools as compared to their more affluent counterparts. There are several reasons for these higher levels of attrition. In general, teachers in high poverty schools earn salaries that are two-thirds of the salaries provided to teachers in higher income schools. In addition to the different salary amounts, they also have fewer resources and difficult working conditions (Darling-Hammond, 2003). According to Darling-Hammond (2003), this increased attrition "consigns a large share of children in high turnover schools to a continual parade of relatively ineffective teachers," (p. 4).

Teacher Turnover

According to Ingersoll (2001), "teacher turnover is a significant phenomenon, and a dominant factor behind the demand for new teachers and the difficulties schools encounter adequately staffing classrooms with qualified teachers" (p. 501). Nationally, the overall teacher turnover rate is currently 16% (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019) and has been for more than a decade. Data collected between 2008 and 2013 indicated that approximately 18% of the total turnover during those years came from teacher retirement. Teachers who left voluntarily, but who were not retiring, accounted for 30% of the turnover for that period. Teachers who voluntarily moved from one school to another accounted for an additional 37% of turnover. Therefore, 67% of the teachers comprising the teacher turnover statistics left voluntarily and did not retire.

Current findings were similar to Ingersoll (2001), "teacher retirements are increasing, the overall amount of turnover accounted for by retirement is relatively minor when compared to that associated with other factors, such as teacher job dissatisfaction and teachers pursuing better jobs or other careers" (p. 501). Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) concurred and reported that reasons for leaving "range(d) from teaching conditions, such as class sizes and salaries, to unhappiness with administrative practices (such as lack of support, classroom autonomy or input on school decision) to policy issues, such as the effects of testing and accountability" (p. 27). Ingersoll (2001) also cited lack of administrator support, with issues that included "student discipline problems, limited faculty input into school decision-making, and to a lesser extent, low salaries" (p. 501). Issues with accountability measures and practices were cited by 25% of the teachers in the 2019 survey.

According to Carroll (2007), in 1994, then Secretary of Education Riley predicted that the nation would need to hire 2 million teachers over the next 10 years to replace retiring teachers. Carroll reported that 2.25 million teachers were hired over the course of the next decade, but 2.7 million left the profession during that same period. Carroll stated, "until we recognize that we have a retention problem we will continue to engage in a costly annual recruitment and hiring cycle, pouring more and more teachers into our nation's classrooms only to lose them" (p. 1).

Predictors of teacher turnover typically include compensation, student characteristics, teacher preparation and mentoring, age and experience, and working conditions (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). These factors affect teacher decisions to stay in or leave a school. According to Darling-Hammond and Podolsky (2019), teacher salaries in the United States are 30% lower than other occupations requiring a college degree. They added that teachers in this country "teach the greatest number of hours per week of countries and have among the lowest number of hours for planning" (p. 4). There is variation in salary amounts across the country, and this may be another reason that teacher shortages are more severe in some regions than others (Sutcher et al., 2019). Attrition rates are higher among teachers who work in districts where wages are low in comparison to other employment opportunities (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Darling-Hammond & Podolsky, 2019). Hanushek and Rivkin (2007) found regional variation in salaries for urban and suburban teachers.

"In the Northeast [United States], both starting and experienced urban teachers earn more, on average, than their suburban counterparts. In the South this pattern is reversed, with suburban teachers earning more than urban teachers" (p. 71). Teacher

salaries also varied widely across districts (Loeb et al., 2005). A study on the impact of teacher salaries and attrition (Imazeki, 2004) indicated that "for both men and women, increasing salary levels reduces exits but has no statistically significant effect on transfers" (p. 440). The study also found that salary increases could help retain beginning teachers in the teaching profession. Shen (1997) found a positive correlation between the amount of salary and whether teachers stayed. Nguyen and Springer (2021) mentioned 30 studies that indicated "that increases in salary reduce the likelihood of teachers leaving the profession" (p. 20). According to Loeb et al. (2005), reducing teacher turnover may involve raising salaries, as well as improving working conditions.

Teacher turnover is higher for teachers with particular characteristics. Stohmann et al. (2020) noted that middle-aged teachers have lower turnover rates than both those younger and older. Stohmann et al. also noted that COVID-19 may now increase teacher turnover for teachers who are older or immunocompromised. While the number of teachers of color has increased in the past 30 years, it has not kept pace with the growth of the number of students of color, nor have rising recruitment rates been able to overcome high turnover rates of teachers of color. Research by Carver-Thomas (2018) indicated that teachers of color move schools or leave the teaching profession more often than their white counterparts.

Teacher movement between schools is harmful for the students left behind. According to Carver-Thomas, "when a teacher leaves a school, it similarly impacts the school and the students as if that teacher had left the profession altogether" (p. 7). The higher movement rates of teachers of color impact students in poverty and students of color more because teachers of color teach more often in high-poverty and high-minority

schools (Darling-Hammond & Podolsky, 2019; Scafidi et al, 2007). Carver-Thomas also noted that teachers of color "are more likely to enter teaching through alternative certification pathways in which they complete teacher licensure requirements while teaching instead of beforehand" (p. 3). Andrews et al. (2019) agreed with Carver-Thomas about the challenges faced by teachers of color and noted that recruiting and retaining them "will require explicit attention to structural, institutional, and environmental factors in preservice programs and schools" (p. 8).

Some studies have found that characteristics of students in a school also affect teacher turnover. Scafidi et al. (2005) reported higher rates of attrition if teachers began their careers in high poverty schools with low test scores and large numbers of minority students. Loeb et al. (2005) concurred, stating, "the racial, ethnic, poverty and language composition of a school's student body influences a school's turnover, along with its difficulty filling vacations and proportions of beginning teachers" (p. 65). Johnson et al. (2012) stated that correlations with student demographics and teacher turnover are incidental to teacher working conditions. "The seeming relationship between student demographics and teacher turnover is driven, not by teachers' responses to their students, but by the conditions in which they must teach and their students are obliged to learn" (p. 1).

Additionally, Johnson et al. (2012) determined that positive teacher working conditions contributed to improved student achievement. They found that "favorable conditions of work predict higher rates of student academic growth, even when we compare schools serving demographically similar groups of students" (p. 2). Sutcher et al. (2019) also found that working conditions were one of the most positive predictors of

teacher turnover. They named class size, school leadership, testing and accountability, and teacher autonomy as key working conditions.

Teacher preparation and mentoring also impact teacher turnover. Kini and Podolsky (2016) found that "teaching experience is positively associated with student achievement gains throughout a teacher's career" (p. 1). Teaching experience and confidence increases more rapidly when there is support provided to teachers and when the work environment has a collegial atmosphere. Well-prepared teachers also influence student attendance. Kini and Podolsky cited the results of a North Carolina study that showed that a teacher "who obtains 21 years of experience on average reduces the incidence of high student absenteeism by 14.5 percentage points" (p. 22).

Teacher turnover negatively impacts student achievement. According to Kini and Podolsky (2016), high turnover and teacher inexperience negatively affect student achievement, including performance on standardized tests. Turnover also takes a toll on students from a social emotional standpoint. When students have built relationships with teachers, they lose those teachers as advocates when turnover occurs (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Bryk and Schneider purported that those student/teacher relationships correlate to student achievement. Ronfeldt et al. (2011) found a significant negative impact on student achievement in both mathematics and English Language Arts, particularly in high-diversity and high-poverty schools. They also found that teacher turnover negatively impacts the school as a whole. Teacher turnover affected not only the students where a teacher had left, it also impacted the students whose teachers stayed.

According to Ronfeldt et al. (2011), "findings indicate that turnover has a broader, harmful influence on student achievement since it can reach beyond just those students of

teachers who left or of those that replaced them" (p. 18). While the study did not identify just how turnover affects the school as a whole, it did propose that perhaps "turnover negatively affects collegiality or relational trust among faculty; or perhaps turnover results in loss of institutional knowledge among faculty that is critical for supporting all student learning" (p. 18). Hanushek et al. (2016) agreed that turnover harms instruction and student achievement "due to a turnover-induced loss of general and grade-specific experience that is sufficient to offset the potential gains from the departure of teachers who on average are less effective than stayers" (p. 145). These researchers found that on average, the teachers who left were less effective than those who remained. Schools and districts also have to bear the financial cost incurred from teacher turnover of training for new teachers. Carroll (2007) said, "thousands of dollars walk out the door each time a teacher leaves" (p. 3).

Turnover can impede school improvement efforts (Ingersoll, 2001). Ingersoll stated that turnover is especially harmful for schools because "such organizations are unusually dependent upon commitment, continuity and cohesion among employees, and, therefore, especially vulnerable to employee turnover" (p. 3). According to Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019), addressing teacher turnover is critically important, not only to ameliorate the teacher shortage, but to diminish "the academic and financial costs of teacher turnover to student learning and district budgets" (p. 1). Espinoza et al. (2018) agreed that turnover has high costs, saying in summary, "when schools are continually losing teachers, relationships are disrupted, professional development investments are thrown away, and curriculum and school improvement efforts are derailed" (p. 1).

Much research has found that teacher turnover negatively impacts students in a school as well as the teachers who stay (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Hanushek et al., 2016; Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Ronfeldt et al., 2011). Additionally, teacher turnover rates are higher for teachers from non-traditional pathways (Espinoza et al., 2018). More teachers from non-traditional certification pathways could increase negative impacts on student achievement.

Teachers from Non-Traditional Certification Pathways

Traditionally, most teachers have attended a four-year college or university, achieving a bachelor's degree in a teacher preparation program. According to Podolsky et al. (2019), these programs "encompass university-based undergraduate or postgraduate programs that provide both coursework and clinical training through student teaching" (p. 8). However, enrollments in those programs have declined sharply, falling by 35% from 2009-2014 (Espinoza et al., 2018). This decline resulted in a reduction of aspiring teachers entering the profession, contributing to the teacher shortage. Sutcher et al. (2019) predicted annual teacher shortages of more than 100,000 unfilled teaching positions over the next five years. As a result of the teacher shortage, more teachers are entering the field of education through non-traditional pathways.

According to Redding and Smith (2016), "alternative certification (AC) has emerged as a significant pathway into teaching" (p. 1086). The authors referred to all pathways that are not the traditional four-year education program as alternative certification. Redding and Smith cited results of the 2011-2012 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) that indicated, "Nearly a quarter of early career teachers entered the

teaching profession outside a traditional teacher preparation program" (p. 1086).

Podolsky et al. (2019) noted that while alternative certification programs can vary, most "offer a route to teaching in which participants serve as the teacher of record while undertaking their coursework at night or on weekends, often with little or no prior student teaching" (p. 8). Many of the participants have to earn a living while they train as teachers.

Non-Traditional Certification Pathways in Alabama

Mobra and Hamlin (2020) defined alternative certification as those programs which seek candidates with undergraduate degrees who then earn a teaching certificate by passing a certification examination and completing a compressed preparation program. In Alabama, there are three non-traditional certification pathway choices: a conditional certificate, a provisional certificate, or an alternative master's program. Emergency certification provides students with an *on-ramp* to the non-traditional pathways. Candidates can accept a job teaching while they are emergency certified, however, they must begin one of the three non-traditional pathways before their emergency certification expires. Programs like Teach for America recruit candidates for the teaching field, but they also must use one of the three non-traditional pathways. A conditional certificate (Conditional Certificate in a Teaching Field---CCTF) requires that a candidate pass the Praxis and complete four self-paced modules.

A provisional certificate (Provisional Certificate in a Teaching Field---PCTF) candidate must pass the Praxis and then take four classes at a college or university. An alternative master's program or Interim Employment Certificate (IEC), which is

sometimes called the Fifth Year Program, is for teacher candidates who have earned a bachelor's degree or higher in field outside of education. These candidates must pass the Praxis in the content area they wish to teach, and complete 36 graduate hours in the alternative master's program to earn a Class A teaching certificate and an alternative master's degree.

Mobra and Hamlin (2020) differentiated between alternative certification and non-traditional certification programs, such as Teach for America (TFA). TFA recruits college graduates to commit to teaching in high-poverty rural and urban schools for two years, but it is not a pathway to certification. TFA participants still have to choose one of the three non-traditional certification pathway choices. According to Mobra and Hamlin (2020), TFA recruits "must complete a five- to eight-week summer training session before entering a classroom and are then expected to work toward full certification while teaching" (p. 5). Zhang and Zeller (2016) cited research that indicated that TFA "produces the same quality teachers as the traditional university program, although student test scores sometimes show otherwise" (p. 76). However, others question the efficacy of TFA teachers (Lazcko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002).

Emergency certification is growing more popular as schools struggle to find certified candidates (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). In California, emergency certification has more than quintupled since 2012-13, according to Sutcher et al. (2018), and "represent(s) the fastest growing category of substandard teaching authorizations" (p. 3). Mobra and Hamlin (2020) considered emergency certification "one of the least restrictive approaches to becoming a teacher" (p. 5). According to Laczko-Kerr and Berliner (2002), emergency certification "allows almost anyone with a

bachelor's degree to teach without any preparation to speak of" (p. 17). Emergency certification allows prospective teachers to teach for a limited time-period if they have a bachelor's degree and have passed a certification exam (Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002).

According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2005), most states require that emergency certified teachers enter a teacher preparation program and begin coursework. For example, in Alabama, teachers may earn a Class B (bachelor's level) teaching certificate through the Provisional Certificate in a Teaching Field (PCTF) program. Currently, the state of Alabama requires that provisional teachers pass the required Teacher Performance Assessment (ed TPA). This performance-based assessment was designed by Pearson Assessments.

Preparation of Teachers from Non-Traditional Pathways

Given the popularity of non-traditional pathways (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Redding & Smith, 2016; Sutcher et al., 2018), questions have arisen regarding the preparedness of the teachers from those programs. Laczko-Kerr and Berliner (2002) determined that students from the traditional pathway were more prepared than those from non-traditional certification pathways and stated, "those who trained longer and harder to do that work do it better" (p. 40). Hanushek and Rivkin (2007) highlighted the importance of teacher preparedness on student outcomes, saying, "A string of good teachers can help offset the deficits of home environment or push students with good preparation even farther" (p. 81). They endorsed non-traditional certification pathways, suggesting that removing barriers which prevent candidates from becoming a teacher is the best way to improve instruction.

In the 2002 report on teacher quality, the Secretary of Education encouraged the restructuring of the teacher certification system and changing the emphasis in preparation programs from extensive coursework to fostering content knowledge and the ability to communicate well (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 19). However, Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) found that teacher effectiveness was strongly related to preparation. Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) mentioned TFA recruits specifically, saying that "controlling for teacher experience, degrees, and student characteristics, uncertified TFA recruits are less effective than certified teachers, and perform about as well as other uncertified teachers" (p. 2). Boyd et al. (2006) noted, "the variation in effectiveness within pathways is far greater than the average differences between pathways" (p. 176).

Redding and Smith (2016) said that candidates on non-traditional certification pathways take many of the same courses that traditional certification pathway teachers do, and "the differences come from the emphasis and timing of those courses, with Alternative Certification Programs (ACPs) addressing the pragmatic or technical aspects of teaching rather than theory" (p. 1088). Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) also mentioned that teachers from non-traditional certification pathways "may bring different potential strengths with them" (p. 23) and teacher preparation programs should build on those skills while providing them with knowledge of teacher pedagogy.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) acknowledged that content area expertise and "knowledge of how to teach that content to a wide range of learners, as well as the ability to manage a classroom, design and implement instruction, and work skillfully with students, parents, and other professionals" (p. 20) are critically important. Redding and Smith (2016) stated, "(the) emphasis on practical aspects of teaching leaves participants

with less exposure to methods of teaching and less experience practicing their craft" (p. 1089) which could result in higher attrition rates. The study noted that TFA targets high-need, high-turnover districts and as such, may improve the lack of stability that those district schools experience. However, the students of teachers from non-traditional certification pathways cannot benefit from those teachers if they do not stay in the schools.

Attrition Rates of Teachers from Non-Traditional Pathways

There is conflicting evidence about whether teachers from non-traditional certification pathways have higher attrition rates than traditionally trained teachers. Regarding teachers of math and science from non-traditional paths, Clewell and Forcier (2000) found that these teachers had lower attrition rates than teachers from traditional preparation pathways, and noted "clearly, without a pool of people to recruit from, a program's preparation strategies are irrelevant" (p. 22). Mobra and Hamlin (2020) stated that while non-traditional preparation may remove "barriers to the classroom for individuals who end up becoming valuable teachers in schools" (p. 14), many of the non-traditional certification pathway teachers said that they were teaching in the short-term while looking for other employment, or just giving the profession a try.

Espinoza et al. (2018) declared that teachers from non-traditional certification pathways are "2 to 3 times more likely to leave teaching than fully prepared teachers, creating a revolving door that makes solving shortages an uphill climb" (p. 1). Zhang and Zeller (2016) found that the traditional teacher preparation pathway kept more candidates in the profession, and they speculated that candidates stay because they are better

prepared. The report from the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2003) concurred that attrition rates are higher for teachers with less initial preparation and reported, "bright young teachers are leaving at an unsustainable rate" (Carroll, 2007, p. 2). The growing popularity of non-traditional certification pathways is negatively affecting enrollment in traditional teacher preparation programs. Mobra and Hamlin (2020) said, "there are growing disincentives for prospective educators to devote the time and resources needed to complete traditional certification (e.g., unpaid internships) when they can enter the classroom through pathways requiring fewer resources and less time" (p. 15).

Podolsky et al. (2019) found that teachers who prepared more extensively (observing master teachers, completing student teaching, receiving feedback on their own instruction, as well as learning methods and theory) were two-and-a-half times more likely to stay in the teaching profession. They determined, "it is most helpful to distinguish teacher preparation pathways by the length of clinical experience and amount of coursework, as opposed to whether they are 'traditional' or 'alternative'" (Podolsky et al., 2019, p. 8). Regardless of their pathway to the classroom, the issue of keeping teachers in the profession is critical (Stohmann et al., 2020). Due to the increasing numbers of teachers from the non-traditional certification pathways, it is critically important to find out what conditions would be likely to keep them in the teaching field.

Teacher Retention

Ingersoll (2002) compared the teaching field to a revolving door "in which there are relatively large flows in, through and out of schools" (p. 42). Ingersoll suggested that a solution to that revolving door problem would be to focus on retention of the teachers in

the field. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future ([NCTAF], 2003)

concurred and said, "The conventional wisdom is that we lack enough good teachers. But

the conventional wisdom is wrong. *The real school staffing problem is teacher retention*"

(p. 6, emphasis in original). In the policy snapshot of the Education Commission of the

States, Aragon (2018) suggested focusing recruitment and retention efforts,

recommending "recruiting and retaining the right teachers, in the right subjects, for the

right schools" (p. 1).

One reason to increase retention efforts is that there are fewer teacher candidates.

Sutcher et al. (2019) reported that only 5% of students taking a 2014 American College

Test (ACT) survey expressed an interest in teaching. This is down 29% from four years

prior. Another reason for retention is that teachers improve with experience (Darling-

Hammond, 2003). There is a "steep gain in effectiveness that typically occurs after the

first few years of teaching" (p. 2). Wiswall (2013) said, "If teachers become more

effective through years of accumulated experience and their quality increases over their

career, then teacher turnover should be a major concern and schools should base

compensation and promotion on rewarding experienced teachers and encouraging

retention" (p. 61).

Retention is also important if teachers who leave a school have an impact on

collaboration and collegiality. Ronfeldt (2013) said, "turnover must have an impact

beyond simply whether incoming teachers are better than those they replaced--even the

teachers outside of this redistribution are somehow harmed by it" (p. 31). Carver-Thomas

(2018) noted that teacher retention could reduce shortages of teachers of color. Like

Ingersoll (2002), Carver-Thomas compared the high-turnover rate of teachers to a

revolving door, saying, "a key step to increasing the proportion of teachers of color in the workforce is addressing the factors that contribute to their decisions to move schools or leave teaching" (p. 6). This revolving door model is a substantial expenditure (Carroll, 2007). According to Darling-Hammond (2003), "schools must continually pour money into recruitment efforts and professional support for new teachers, many of them untrained, without reaping dividends from these investments" (p. 4). If we accept Ingersoll's (2003) leaky bucket analogy, then retention may be the necessary patch.

Darling-Hammond (2003) identified four factors that strongly influence "whether and when teachers leave specific schools or the profession entirely" (p. 5). Those factors include (a) teacher salaries, (b) working conditions, (c) mentoring and support, and (d) teacher preparation and professional development.

Teacher Salaries

Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) found "teachers in districts with the highest salary scales, who are better prepared, and who feel the most supported by their school leaders, are least likely to leave their school or teaching altogether" (p. 17). Nationally, beginning teacher salaries are approximately 20% less than other fields that require a college degree. By the middle of their teaching careers, that rises to 30% less (Podolsky & Kini, 2016). Imazeki (2004) found that increasing teacher salary levels statewide could increase the retention rates of beginning teachers. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) agreed, noting "more generous district salary schedules do influence teacher retention decisions" (p. 17).

Gunther (2019) found "while salary matters, other factors matter as well" (p. 10). Hansen (2001) agreed, citing a (Public Agenda, 2000) survey of teachers in New York reporting that 86% of them would trade a higher salary for improvements in student behavior, and 82% would trade more money for a more supportive administrator. Carroll (2007) named administrative support as the most influential factor as the reason teachers stayed in or left the profession.

Working Conditions

Administrative support is a key retention strategy (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). "When teachers strongly disagree that their administration is supportive, they are more than twice as likely to move schools or leave teaching than when they strongly agree that their administration is supportive" (p. 15). Carver-Thomas (2018) added, "administrative support is especially critical in improving the retention of teachers of color" (p. vii). According to McGuigan and Hoy (2006), principals should question teachers about school policies and procedures to determine if they perceive them to be barriers to instruction. In their view, "principals should do everything possible to foster teacher's collective efficacy" (p. 223). Waddell (2010) agreed that principals "can increase teacher retention through building professional relationships in which teachers feel valued, encouraging teacher-teacher interaction and involving teachers in school decisions" (p. 71).

Encouraging collegial relationships is also an important retention strategy (Stohmann et al., 2020). Collegial collaboration "is considered one of the most important variables for learning and retention among teachers. Furthermore, evidence shows that it increases teacher effectiveness" (p. 7). Kini and Podolsky (2016) agreed that teachers

improve their effectiveness through collegial relationships, and when they "accumulate experience in the same grade level, subject or district" (p. 1). Bland et al. (2016) also endorsed collegial relationships, saying that teachers need "to work in teams that have the potential of improving instructional practice so that many students are affected in positive ways" (p. 547). Those collegial relationships, according to McGuigan and Hoy (2006), build trust in one another, and encourage a schoolwide belief in their capacity for success. Collegial collaboration should be the norm for teachers (Wong, 2004). Wong noted, "teachers remain in teaching when they belong to professional learning communities that have, at their heart, high-quality interpersonal relationships founded on trust and respect" (p. 50).

Mentoring and Support

According to Wong (2004), systemic induction is a "coherent, comprehensive training and support process that continues for two or three years and then seamlessly becomes part of the lifelong professional development program of the district to keep new teachers teaching and improving toward increasing their effectiveness" (p. 42). Such an induction process helps districts retain teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). "Induction programs that include being assigned a mentor, meeting frequently, and focusing on high-leverage activities--observation and feedback; analyzing student strengths and needs; discussing instructional issues; and developing a professional growth plan" (p. 18) improve retention rates. Wong (2004) noted, "what these districts with low attrition rates have in common are comprehensive, coherent, and sustained induction programs" (p. 47). Successful systemic induction programs involve

new teachers in collaborative work in professional learning communities with a mentor or coach (Bland et al., 2016). Bland also noted that the induction process should not be linked to the evaluation process.

Wong (2004) emphasized that mentoring is not synonymous with induction. Mentors are a part of the induction process. Wong asserted that mentors are a critical component of the induction process, "but they must be part of an induction process aligned to the district's vision, mission, and structure" (p. 42). Lynch (2012) agreed that mentors could help lower teacher attrition. Darling-Hammond (2003) added that teachers from expert mentoring programs "not only stay in the profession at higher rates but become competent more quickly" (p. 9). Mentoring provides new teachers with information about the culture of the school and, according to Bland et al. (2016), provides them with "encouragement to not only remain in the district, but remain in the profession as well" (p. 448). However, occasional mentoring is not sufficient for alternative certification teachers (Wong, 2004). Wong suggested that teachers from the non-traditional path need close communication with mentors, as well as "intensive training with a comprehensive array of subjects, followed by classroom support during the internship year" (p. 43).

Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

Professional development is an important part of retaining teachers (Billingsley, 2004). Bland et al. (2016) endorsed professional development as a teacher retention strategy and suggested that districts "create job-embedded collaborative content-focused professional development opportunities that continue throughout the academic year" (p.

549). Wong (2004) cautioned that districts should provide professional development for educators "at every point in their careers" (p. 48). Teacher preparation and professional development both have a goal of creating teachers who are well prepared and confident in their ability to make professional decisions and execute best practice. Providing teachers with autonomy communicates confidence in their capacity.

Teacher Autonomy

Teacher autonomy also seems to decrease teacher attrition (Lynch, 2012). Lynch stated, "teachers given greater autonomy and administrative support show lower rates of attrition and migration" (p. 124). Ingersoll (2002) also saw the benefits of allowing teachers to have input into the school's decision-making process and suggested that it would increase retention. Bland et al. (2016) also endorsed giving teachers decision making opportunities, saying, "School leadership is too big a job for one person" (p. 550). Shen (1997) said that teachers who stayed in a school "tended to perceive that teaching has more advantages than disadvantages, that they have more influence over school- and teaching-related policies, and that administrators know their problems better" (p. 87). Darling-Hammond (2003) summed up the goal of retention by saying:

> Good teachers gravitate to places where they know they will be appreciated; they are sustained by the other good teachers who become their colleagues; and together these teachers become a magnet for still others who are attracted to environments where they can learn from their colleagues and create success for their students. (p. 11)

Summary of the Literature

This chapter viewed the teacher shortage and retention issue through the lens of collective efficacy theory. This chapter also reviewed literature around the teacher shortage, including contributing factors and the current reality. Over the past 30 years, teacher turnover has increased significantly (Simon & Johnson, 2015). In March of 2021, the EdWeek Research Center surveyed teachers and administrators and found that more than half of those surveyed were thinking of leaving the profession in the next two years (EdWeek, 2021). The chapter outlined how teacher turnover contributes to the teacher shortage and negatively impacts student achievement (Carver-Thomas & Darling Hammond, 2019). Additionally, literature was reviewed regarding teachers from non-traditional certification pathways and how their attrition rates differ. Furthermore, this chapter examined literature on teacher retention in general, and strategies for improvement.

According to Bland et al. (2016), "there is no silver bullet. The problem is too large and too complex to be solved easily" (p. 551). Mobra and Hamlin (2020) noted, "very little is known about the motivations of emergency certified teachers who enter the profession in a less systematic fashion than traditionally certified teachers" (p. 1). Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) indicated, "as alternative certification pathway teachers become more expert, students and schools gain benefits only if the teachers stay in the schools that have invested in their training" (p. 23).

A number of researchers suggested exploring ways to improve working conditions and the teaching environment (Imazeki, 2004; Simon & Johnson, 2015; Redding & Smith, 2016). Simon and Johnson (2015) said, "policy makers and

practitioners who wish to retain talented, effective teachers in high-poverty, hard-to-staff schools must pursue retention strategies that are designed to improve the teaching environment" (p. 2). Redding and Smith (2016) suggested, "future research on alternative certification could explore the ways in which Alternatively Certified teachers may differentially benefit from various organizational supports" (p. 1116). The intent of this study was to explore perceptions of alternatively certified teachers regarding what experiences and interventions may have contributed to their retention in the profession. The next chapter explains the methodology for this study or how study data were collected and analyzed.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I outline the purpose, structure, and methodology of the study. I used qualitative methods for this study, and I further explain the need to use a grounded theory approach and framework. Additionally, I include how participants were chosen for the study, how the study was completed, and how the data were collected, recorded, analyzed, and interpreted. Finally, I include an explanation of the data as they were analyzed, including verification and validation techniques used.

Statement of the Problem

Over the past 30 years, teacher turnover has increased significantly (Simon & Johnson, 2015). It has significantly contributed to the teacher shortage in the United States. In a report by the Economic Policy Institute, Garcia and Weiss (2019) stated that there was a shortage of teachers needed to fill 307,000 teaching jobs that year. The shortage of teachers has necessitated the employment of more teacher candidates from non-traditional teacher pathways. Espinoza et al. (2018) found that teachers from non-traditional pathways were "2 to 3 times more likely to leave teaching than fully prepared teachers" (p. 1). Ingersoll (2002) suggested that teacher retention is the answer to the teacher shortage and turnover problem.

Purpose of the Study

This study explored what perceived working conditions encourage alternatively certified teachers to stay in education, as well as those factors that would encourage them to leave the teaching profession. Despite the disproportionately high turnover rate, Mobra and Hamlin (2020) noted, "very little is known about the motivations of emergency certified teachers" (p. 1). Therefore, the study explored what motivates teachers to stay in the field of education who are not prepared in traditional teacher certification programs.

Research Approach

This qualitative study used grounded theory to gain information about retaining teachers in the teaching profession who took a non-traditional preparation path. According to Merriam (2002), a qualitative approach will provide information about "how individuals experience and interact with their social world, (and) the meaning it has for them" (p. 4). According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), "The crucial elements of sociological theory are often found best with a qualitative method, that is, from data on structural conditions, consequences, deviances, norms, processes, patterns, and systems" (p. 18). They contended, "Qualitative research is often the most 'adequate'and 'efficient' way to obtain the type of information required and to contend with the difficulties of an empirical situation" (p. 18).

Qualitative research is an inductive process. Glaser and Strauss (1967) maintained that the researcher's "main goal in developing new theories is their purposeful systematic generation from the data of social research" (p. 28). Hearing the stories of teachers from non-traditional certification pathways provided the sort of rich description that is

characteristic of qualitative research. According to Merriam (2002), "words and pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned" (p. 5). Grounded theory is literally a theory that is grounded in and supported by data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss identified the purpose of theory in sociology, "To enable prediction and explanation of behavior; (2) to be useful in theoretical advance in sociology; (3) to be usable in practical applications-prediction and explanation should be able to give the practitioner understanding and some control of situations" (p. 3). This study intended to capture a rich description of the working experiences and perceptions of teachers from non-traditional pathways in an effort to find ways to keep them in the field of education.

Philosophical Paradigm

Creswell (2013) noted that qualitative researchers must recognize "the importance of not only understanding the beliefs and theories that inform our research but also actively writing about them in our reports and studies" (p. 15). Therefore, the following philosophical paradigm provided context for this study. Creswell identified four philosophical assumptions which are "beliefs about ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (what counts as knowledge and how knowledge claims are justified), axiology (the role of values in research), and methodology (the process of research)" (p. 20).

Ontological Assumption

In qualitative studies, researchers seek to identify and report the multiple realities experienced by study participants. This requires that the research findings include the perceptions of the individuals who are participating in the study as well as the researcher's own perceptions. Corbin and Strauss (2015) said:

> People have been trying to make sense out of their experiences since time began. They want to know why certain things happen, and from the earliest accounts of humans, we've learned that they had many explanations or theories for events. (p. 11)

For this reason, the interviews were unstructured so that participants could fully describe their experiences. Since participants were allowed to use their own words, rather than responding to a number of questions, the study gathered information that was truly reflective of what those teachers felt and believed to be true.

Epistemological Assumption

With this assumption, researchers want to immerse themselves in the environment. They gather data while among participants in the field. Evidence is recorded from the individuals who are living the experience. This information is invaluable. Corbin and Strauss (2015) said that grounded theory methods can

> [u]ncover the beliefs and meanings that underlie action, to examine rational as well as nonrational aspects of behavior, and to demonstrate how logic and emotion combine to influence how persons respond to events or handle problems through action and interaction. (p. 11)

In this study, the researcher was very familiar with the environment and had unlimited access to it due to the scope of the researcher's position in the school district. There was also the additional benefit that I was known to study participants. However, that the researcher was known to participants could also be a disadvantage. It might have led them to try and guess what answers were pleasing to the researcher or tempered their responses. As researcher, I attended carefully to pick up cues that these actions were occurring and took care to receive the information in a neutral manner so that participants knew their responses were not being judged and would be held in confidence.

Axiological Assumption

The axiological assumption acknowledges that all researchers have values that color their perceptions of the research. Corbin and Strauss (2015) recognized that in qualitative research, the "intrusion of perspectives, biases, and assumptions can't be completely eliminated when doing a grounded theory (study)" (p. 47). They suggested the practice of keeping a research journal to encourage "self-awareness and the systematic application of research strategies that provide researchers with an assortment of analytic options that can be matched against data for possible meaning" (p. 47). I was transparent about my values and perceptions throughout this research. I made entries in a journal to record my thoughts both before and after the interviews. This allowed me to examine my assumptions before the interview as well as my takeaways afterward. The research journal was a way to foster self-awareness throughout the research process and allow for additional reflection.

Methodological Assumption

Glaser and Strauss (1967) characterized the qualitative research process of grounded theory as flexible. They described a data collection process "whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges" (p. 45). The flexibility of qualitative research means that a study may not be completed in a linear fashion. This research study's methods occasionally required alteration when the findings warranted a change. According to Glaser and Strauss, "this process of data collection is controlled by the emerging theory" (p. 45). For example, an unstructured interview allowed participants to lead the discussion. Participants often introduced topics that the researcher had never anticipated.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study explored the perceptions of teachers from a non-traditional teacher preparation pathway. Therefore, the questions attempted to elicit information to describe the work as study participants experienced it. The topics for the questions came from the findings of the literature review. The factors that research indicates are influential in teacher decisions to stay in or leave a school were explored in preparing the initial research probes, leaving opportunities for participants to contribute additional influences.

Primary Research Question

Among teachers from non-traditional certification pathways, what experiences would contribute to their remaining in the teaching profession, or leaving it?

Sub-questions

- I am looking into the experiences of people who came into teaching from non-traditional pathways, and I chose you to find out more about what teaching was like for you. Could you tell me about your experience? After you tell your story, if I have questions about what you have said or need clarification, I can ask you. But for now, just talk freely.

Additional Probes

- How would you describe your first week on the job?

- What was your school environment like?

- How did you connect with the other teachers in your school?

- Did you have anyone to mentor and support you?

- Do you have a balance of independence and guidance?

- Thinking about your non-traditional pathway, how do you think it compared to others who received more traditional teacher preparation?

- What do you think of your salary as it compares to the work you do?

- What was your experience with the administration in your school?

Description of Qualitative Approach

The centerpiece of this research was in-depth and unstructured interviews with teachers who came to the field from non-traditional pathways. The unstructured interview encouraged by grounded theory allowed participants to tell their stories as they saw fit, emphasizing what they believed to be critical. It also allowed participants to introduce topics of which the researcher was unaware. The interview process is an iterative one and necessitated some changes in focus. To shed additional light on these interviews, I examined prior exit interviews. Exit interviews from teachers comparable to those I interviewed provided additional information. However, exit interviews were strictly supplemental to this study as they were done only with teachers who were leaving the district, and the sample was not representative.

Sampling

The sample for this research was drawn from a large county school district in central Alabama during the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years. A copy of the letter requesting permission of the superintendent is located in Appendix D. Participants were selected from a pool of secondary teachers who came to education through a non-traditional certification program. Secondary teachers were chosen because secondary school teachers seemed to have higher attrition rates than their elementary co-workers (Keigher, 2010). These secondary teachers have been targeted for retention efforts. Data collection methods included interviews and document review.

Interviews

Ten participants received an email inviting them to participate in the interview (see Appendix E). Participants were chosen using purposive sampling. The sampling was purposeful in that teachers were chosen to elicit the greatest variety in participant demographics possible. According to Patton (1990), this Maximum Variation sampling has the following benefit, "any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects" (p. 172). Participants were chosen from the three main content areas as well as Career Technical Education. Participants represented the greatest possible variety in race, ethnicity, age, gender, and socioeconomic status of their schools. They were also representative of all of the non-traditional pathways possible in Alabama as well as additional variations on those pathways. Iterative sampling and re-sampling were utilized to ensure theoretical saturation.

Document Review

The district has previously conducted exit interviews. These documents were reviewed to see what information they contained about the job satisfaction or dissatisfaction of previous employees. Glaser and Strauss (1967) highlighted the importance of document review, saying, "sociologists need to be as skilled and ingenious in using documentary materials as in doing field work" (p. 162). Although the employees of these interviews were no longer in the district, their exit interviews provided valuable information about their beliefs and perceptions about teaching in the district. However, there is a limitation with these data. Information was not available about their particular

pathways to teacher certification. The study is also subject to the limitations of qualitative research, grounded theory in particular, in that the transferability of findings is limited, and only applies to the target group. Additionally, since I was the sole data collector, personal bias may affect the findings. However, my role as researcher is examined further in this chapter.

Data Collection

Creswell (2013) defined data collection as "a series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering good information to answer emerging research questions" (p. 118). The method for data collection in this study was an unstructured interview. Corbin and Strauss (2015) noted, "concepts and theories are constructed by researchers out of stories that are constructed by research participants who are trying to explain and make sense out of their experiences" (p. 26). An unstructured interview allowed participants to tell their stories in detailed and descriptive ways. Qualitative research data should be rich and thick to reflect the views and perceptions of individual participants. Questions were developed from findings of the literature review regarding conditions that might improve teacher retention as well as topics generated by participants. Individual responses were confidential so that participants felt free from reprisal and able to provide honest and complete responses.

Data Analysis

Coding the data is gathering the essence of the information and translating it into a word or short phrase (Saldaña, 2015). Glaser and Strauss (1967) stressed the

importance of coding and suggested, "theoretical sampling is done in order to discover categories and their properties, and to suggest the interrelationships into a theory" (p. 62). Data from this study were analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding, which is typical for data analysis in grounded theory (Creswell, 2013). I began by coding in large categories. This is the open coding stage and could be repeated as necessary. Additionally, in vivo coding was utilized in this study, or coding directly quoting a participant (Saldaña, 2015). Axial coding followed the open coding work and created themes or categories (Creswell, 2013). In the final step, selective coding, the researcher develops hypotheses and "assembles a story that describes the interrelationship of categories in the model" (p. 65). In the following diagram (see Figure 2), Saldaña (2015) illustrated the coding process.

Figure 2

The Coding Process


```
Real ──────────────────────────────────────────────► Abstract

  ╭───────╮
  │ Code  │╲
  ╰───────╯ ╲
  ╭───────╮  ╲  ┌──────────┐
  │ Code  │────│ Category │
  ╰───────╯  ╱  └──────────┘
  ╭───────╮ ╱          │
  │ Code  │╱           │
  ╰───────╯            ▼        ╭──────────╮      ╭────────╮
                       │───────►│ Themes/  │─────►│ Theory │
                       │        │ Concepts │      ╰────────╯
  ╭───────╮            │        ╰──────────╯
  │ Code  │╲           ▲
  ╰───────╯ ╲          │
  ╭───────╮  ╲  ┌──────────┐
  │ Code  │────│ Category │
  ╰───────╯  ╱  └──────────┘
  ╭───────╮ ╱        ┌──────────────┐
  │ Code  │╱         │ Subcategory  │
  ╰───────╯          ├──────────────┤
                     │ Subcategory  │
                     └──────────────┘

Particular ───────────────────────────────────────► General
```
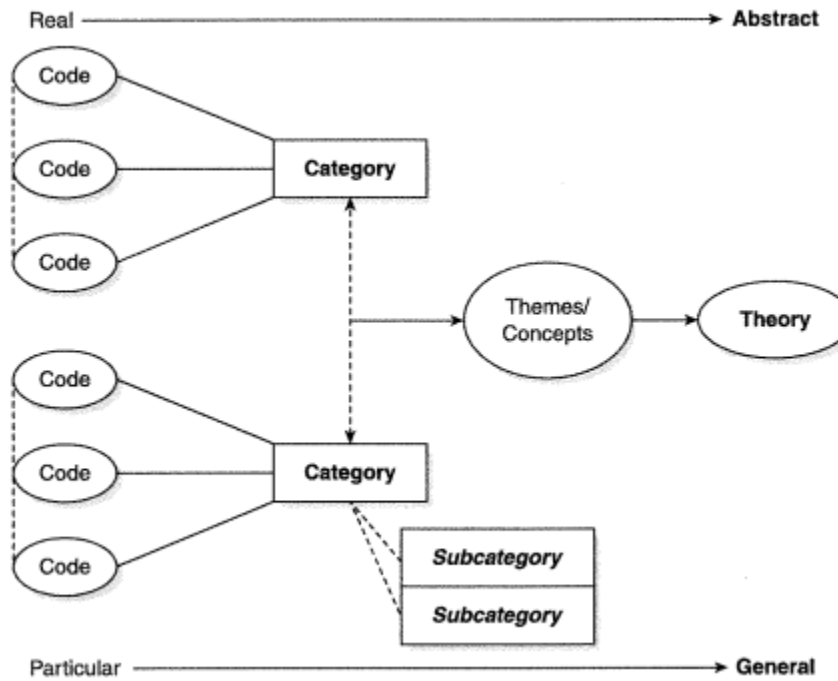
Creswell (2013) also created a coding model that added a level of conditional matrix wherein connections within the evidence collected are noted (see Figure 3). The coding model, shown in Figure 3, illustrates the coding steps in grounded theory. This model identifies the organic development of categories from open, axial, and selective coding, and illustrates how all of the coding stages arise naturally throughout the process.

Figure 3

Connections in Coding Categories
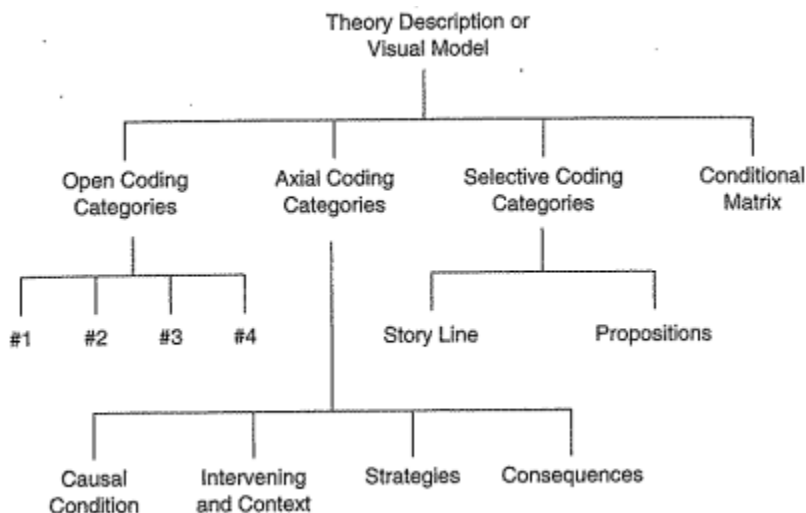
Veracity of Data Analysis

Member checking is one of the methods that I used in this study to verify findings. Creswell (2013) suggested that participants be given descriptions of the themes identified by the researcher so they can verify the accuracy of the information. The study also included peer review, or debriefing, as an additional verification procedure. With the peer review process, individuals who are peers of the researcher provide feedback by examining the research process (Creswell, 2013). I utilized member checking and peer-debriefing in this study so that I could be assured that what I found was representative of participant beliefs and perceptions.

Ethical Considerations

There are ethical considerations for all research. It was difficult to inform study participants about the nature of this grounded theory study given its fluidity. In a study of this sort, there is always the potential for volunteer bias. It was possible that voluntary participation would make individuals atypical of the group of participants for study. I did not anticipate ethical concerns for participants in this study. Participation was completely voluntary, and participants were free to decline to participate for any reason.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I am currently the director of Curriculum & Instruction for a large school district in central Alabama. I have been an educator for 22 years and a central office administrator for the past seven years. During this time, principals approached me for assistance in hiring teachers to fill openings. Out of a desire to serve, I began to study the issue of teacher shortages to learn more about the problem. I developed a network of university partners in an effort to find candidates for the open teaching positions in my district. With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic and resultant retirements, the situation became dire. A large number of teachers from non-traditional teacher preparation programs entered the teaching field. This study sought to determine what working conditions would encourage them to stay in the field. I took care to acknowledge my personal beliefs and values as I gathered data about the beliefs and opinions of study participants.

Conclusion

   The teacher shortage has been a topic of discussion for many years, and the events in the field of education during the pandemic compounded the problem. The findings of this study can provide school leaders with valuable information about the needs and beliefs of teacher candidates who were not prepared in traditional teacher preparation programs. The large numbers of these teachers from non-traditional certification pathways make more information about their motivations critical, as this information may assist current leaders in closing the revolving door in education.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This study implemented the qualitative research methodology of grounded theory outlined in the previous chapter. The findings of this research were based on the beliefs and perceptions of teachers from a non-traditional certification pathway in a large school district in central Alabama. Study participants included individuals with varied demographics in an effort to represent as many perspectives as possible.

This chapter begins with descriptions of the 10 study participants and includes information about the secondary schools where they teach. Thereafter, the chapter outlines how the interview data were coded using the open coding model. The chapter includes details of the grounded theory process whereby axial coding broke categories into sections.

Setting/Context

Study participants work in eight different middle and high schools. The three middle schools all include grades 6-8. The five high schools are all grades 9-12. The school district serves approximately 35,000 students in 57 schools. The district student population is diverse. Approximately 52% of the student population is African American. European American students comprise 44% of the student population. Hispanic students are considered part of the European American population, and constitute almost 13% of it,

and English Language Learners are 7.2% of the total student population. Approximately 52% of the district's students receive free or reduced lunches.

The district is comprised of four zones with 13 feeder patterns. This research includes participants from every zone. There are approximately 4,500 teachers, administrators, and staff members employed by the district currently. Of those, almost 55% hold a Master's degree; 9% are Educational Specialists and 3% hold a doctorate degree. The other 33% have undergraduate degrees. Included within that number are almost 200 emergency certified teachers. Study participants were primarily science and math teachers as those disciplines are most in need of teachers. However, participants were included from the fields of English Language Arts and Career Technical Education.

Participating Teachers and Their Schools

Ten teachers were purposively chosen to participate in this study. They represented a wide variety of perspectives. They varied in race/ethnicity, gender, time in the field of education, size and socioeconomic status of their schools, and certification path, but they all began their teaching careers with emergency certification and a non-traditional certification pathway. The non-traditional certification path also requires that candidates had already earned an undergraduate degree.

Two of the study participants, Nicholas Rhodes and John Oliver (all study participants' names are pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality), chose the Conditional Certificate in a Teaching Field (CCTF) option. They both passed the Praxis in the subject area that they wished to teach, mathematics. They are currently working to complete the four, self-paced modules required with the Teachers for Tomorrow

program. Teachers can teach up to three years with the conditional certificate. After they complete the program, they are given Class B teacher certification.

One study participant, Cathy Butler, chose the Provisional Certificate in a Teaching Field (PCTF) route. After passing the Praxis in the field they wish to teach, candidates take four classes determined by the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) at a state college or university. An individual must have a teaching position to pursue this path. Candidates can teach up to three years with this certificate, and upon program completion will receive a Class B professional teaching certificate.

Sharma Reddy, Phoebe Hudson, Robin Milstead, and Trent Boggins are the four study participants who chose the Interim Employment Certificate (IEC) option. After passing the Praxis in the subjects of their choices, they had to be unconditionally admitted into an Alabama school of education to teach with an Interim Employment Certificate. Teachers can teach with this certificate for three years but must meet program requirements to have it renewed annually. Teachers in this path will receive a Class A teacher certification upon completion.

Alisha Everett recently completed an alternative Career Technical Education (CTE) pathway. CTE teachers may attain a Career and Technical Alternative Baccalaureate-Level Certificate (CT ABC) with appropriate work experience, passing the Praxis, and professional development/coursework. Alisha completed 196 hours of training. A bachelor's degree is not required for some CTE certificates.

The final two participants, Mark Perez and Dwayne Tyler, have not been accepted into one of the alternative certification pathways. Both of them were unable to pass the Praxis. Teachers can teach with emergency certification for two consecutive scholastic

years. At the end of that period, those with emergency certification can re-apply for only another two consecutive years. Table 1 is a list of study participants and their demographic characteristics.

Table 1

Participants and Their Schools

Name	High or Middle School	Years Taught/ Content	Pathway	Gender/Age	Race/Ethnicity	Certification Process	Employment
Nicholas Rhodes	Central HS	3/Math	CCTF	Male/32	European American	In process	Teacher in district
John Oliver	McGraw HS	3/Math	CCTF	Male/31	African American	In process	Teacher in district
Cathy Butler	Clayton HS	16/ELA	PCTF	Female/39	European American	Complete to Ed.S	Central Office content specialist In district
Sharma Reddy	Hopewell HS	4/Science	IEC/ UABTeach	Female/26	Asian (India)	Complete to Masters	Central Office Instructional Zone Coach in district
Mark Perez	McGraw MS	1.5/Math	ECert	Male/25	Hispanic	Emergency	Left district and profession
Alisha Everett	Clayton HS	2/CTE	CTE	Female/35	European American	Complete	Teacher in district
Dwayne Tyler	McGraw MS	3/CTE	ECert	Male/30	African American	Emergency	Teacher in district
Phoebe Hudson	Erie MS	1/Science	IEC/TFA	Female/24	European American	In process	Teacher in district
Robin Milstead	Brigham MS	1/Science	IEC	Female/26	European American	In process	Teacher in district
Trent Boggins	Grant HS	1/Science	IEC	Male/25	European American	Complete to Masters	Teacher in district

Nicholas Rhodes teaches at Central High (all school names are pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality), a Title I high school. Title I status means that Central receives federal funds because of its high percentage of students in poverty, per *Title I, Part A* of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act.* (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). The student/teacher ratio is 16.5:1. Approximately 754 of Central's 768 students (82%) qualify for the free and reduced lunch program. About 92% of the students are African American. There are 53 European American students (7%), and 29 Hispanic students

(3.8%). There are 104 faculty and staff members. Central High School has 145 students

classified as Special Education (19%). Central's graduation rate is 85% (ALSDE, 2022).

Table 2 provides graduation rates for all six high schools in this study.

Table 2

Graduation Rate and College/Career Readiness 2021-2022

High School	Student Population	Graduation Rate	College and Career Readiness
Central High School	767	85%	78%
Clayton High School	1360	91%	58%
Grant High School	1047	93%	75%
Hopewell High School	1204	86%	62%
McGraw High School	1158	91%	63%

Nicholas Rhodes is a 32-year-old male. He is in his fourth year of teaching math

at Central. Rhodes chose the CCTF program and is working to complete the four

modules. He mentioned that both his parents are educators as well as his aunt.

When younger, Rhodes did not think that he wanted to teach, but later just "fell in love with teaching."

John Oliver is a math teacher and coach at McGraw High School. There are 71 teachers and staff members currently. The student/teacher ratio is 18:1. Of the 1,158 students at McGraw, 692 are African American (60%). The 428 European American students account for 37% of the student population. McGraw has 60 Hispanic students. McGraw has 66% of their students classified as free and reduced lunch. Oliver is a 31-year-old male. He is married with two small children. He chose the CCTF pathway but has not yet completed the first course module.

Alisha Everett, 35, is a pastry chef turned CTE culinary teacher at Clayton High School. Clayton is the largest high school in this study with 1,360 students. African American students are the majority at Clayton High at 1,122 (83%). Just over 200 students are European American. The free and reduced lunch rate is 77%. Clayton has a student-teacher ratio of 17:1. Everett said that she traded her chef's career to teach because of the better pay, benefits, and job flexibility that she has with teaching. Married with two small children, Everett cites more time with her family as a benefit of the career change. She recently completed the CTE certification process.

Trent Boggins is new this year to Grant High School. He was at Brigham Middle last year, which is the feeder school for Grant. Grant High has 1,047 students. The majority of students are European American with 697 (67%). Grant has 319 African American students (30%). The 26 Hispanic students account for 2.5% of the student population. The student-teacher ratio is 16:1. Regarding free and reduced lunch participation, 46% of Grant students are part of the program. Boggins, 25, is a graduate of

Grant High School, and recently received a Master's degree through the IEC pathway.

The next two participants, Cathy Butler and Sharma Reddy, were chosen because they both began their careers as teachers from non-traditional teacher pathways. However, they have both risen to leadership positions in the district. Their participation in the study provides a frame of reference regarding the support that facilitated their entry into the teaching profession and subsequent promotion.

Cathy Butler, 39, began her career in 2006 as an English Language Arts teacher at Clayton High School. Cathy is married with one daughter. Both of Cathy's parents were educators, but she noted that she did not want to follow their example. She became interested in the field of education during a summer service-learning project in Harlem. The former district ELA specialist, a position that Cathy now holds, hired her on emergency certification.

Sharma Reddy's parents were also educators. However, they encouraged her to follow her interest into the medical field. Reddy enrolled at the University of Alabama at Birmingham to major in biomedical science. She joined the UABTeach program, and "fell in love" with teaching. She is 26 years old and taught at Hopewell High School for four years. The district hired her as a zone instructional coach this summer. Hopewell High has 1,204 students enrolled, 680 of them are African American (56%). The student population also includes 471 European American students (39%) and 46 Hispanic students (4%). Approximately 73% of Hopewell students are in the free and reduced lunch program. Hopewell has 67 teachers included in a 100-person staff. Their student teacher ratio is 18:1. Three study participants work in district middle schools: Phoebe Hudson, Robin Milstead, and Dwayne Tyler. Hudson, 24, works at Erie Middle School.

Milstead, 26, works at Brigham Middle, and Dwayne Tyler teaches at McGraw Middle. He is 30 years old.

Erie Middle School has 611 students. Of the student population, 562 are African American (92%). The school has 39 European American students (6%), and 31 Hispanic students (5%). Approximately 84% of their students participate in the free and reduced lunch program. There are 48 teachers on staff at Erie Middle, with a student-teacher ratio of 13:1. Phoebe Hudson taught last year at Erie Middle for her first year of emergency certification. She is part of the Teach for America program, and is in the process of getting a Master's degree through IEC.

Brigham Middle School has a student population of 739 students. The majority of Brigham's students are European American (65%). Two hundred twenty-two (30%) African American students attend Brigham, with five Hispanic students (1%). Brigham also has 12 Asian students (2%). Robin Milstead's mother and sister were teachers, but she was interested in athletic training. She began her career last year in the district as a CTE teacher but has since moved to the IEC path to obtain certification to teach middle school science.

McGraw is the largest middle school involved in this study with 843 students. The majority of their students are African American at 529 (63%). There are 283 European American students (34%). McGraw has 27 Hispanic students (3%). Their free or reduced lunch rate is 66%. McGraw has 52 teachers in a faculty/staff of 71, and their student-teacher ratio is

16:1. Dwayne Tyler coaches football and teaches CTE on emergency certification. He has not yet passed the Praxis so that he can begin the CTE coursework.

Mark Perez (25) taught math for one-and-a-half years at McGraw Middle school. He was selected to participate in this study because he chose to leave the district and the teaching profession. It was determined that information about his journey might provide insight into the conditions that led him to leave the district (and the profession). Perez never passed the Praxis exam, so he did not enter one of the non-traditional teacher pathways. He taught on an emergency certificate while he was in the district.

Research Questions

This study sought information about the experiences and working conditions that would encourage teachers from non-traditional teacher certification programs to stay in the field of education. The researcher employed methods of grounded theory, including the unstructured interview, to examine participant perceptions and beliefs about their individual experiences. The primary research question was:

What experiences would keep teachers from non-traditional certification pathways in the teaching profession?

The study was also focused on answering sub-questions. These questions were crafted to elicit information about how best to support the teachers who chose the non-traditional certification pathway. The interviews also provided information to answer the following probe questions:

- How are teachers supported by the teacher induction process?

- What aspects of the mentoring process do teachers feel are necessary?

- How well-prepared do teachers feel to be successful in the field of education?

- How do teachers feel supported by administrators?

- What conditions would prompt teachers to stay?

- What conditions encourage their leaving the profession?

Exit Interview Document Review

The district has previously conducted exit interviews. These documents were reviewed to glean information about the job satisfaction or dissatisfaction of teachers previously employed in the district. In the exit interviews reviewed, 62.5% of former employees rated the district as a good or excellent employer. Forty-two percent of those employees said that they rated the district highly because of the support and professional development opportunities they were offered. Of those who rated the district lower, one-quarter of them cited lack of communication and support as their reasons for their rating. One respondent noted that the district "needs to have better communication regarding expectations from the top down."

The same 62.5% of respondents rated their administrator as good or excellent. One respondent said that they enjoyed working with their administrators because "they were always available to talk and had an open-door policy." Nine respondents mentioned their administrators by name and had specific positive comments for them. For example, one respondent reported that their supervisor allowed them flexibility, "I felt free to experiment with new things. He gave me autonomy. He did not micromanage." According to these respondents, demeanor was the most important characteristic of the supervisor. Characteristics included guidance, leadership skills, fairness, and trust. However, several commented that their administrators could improve communication.

One said, "It felt like, when things were supposed to happen, he would leave it to last minute or forget to tell us about it."

When asked to rate the quality of the teachers with whom they worked, 100% of teachers rated their former colleagues as good or excellent. One respondent commented, "We were all like a family. We had great relationships with one another." Another mentioned, "There was a great sense of family among all of the employees. We worked together well to solve problems." Yet another former teacher mentioned their level of support from colleagues, and said, "If I asked for help, they were willing to give it."

Approximately one-quarter of the teachers said they left the district because their spouse or partner relocated. A similar percentage said they left for personal reasons. Some left because they wanted better pay or a shorter commute. Reasons for leaving and the percentage of teachers who responded similarly are detailed in Table 3.

Table 3

Exit Interview Responses: Reasons for Leaving

Reason for Leaving the District	Percentage of Respondents
Spouse or Partner Relocated	22%
Culture of the District	22%
Personal Reasons	22%
Higher Pay	11%
Shorter Commute	11%
Retirement	11%

Communication, availability of resources, and the culture of the organization were the most often reported areas for district improvement. Former teachers listed reduction of workload/stress, treatment, and support as ways to improve jobs in the district. Half of the former teachers cited the commute as well as better pay and benefits as attractions for their new jobs. However, 50% of exit survey respondents said they would work for the district again.

Initial Coding

After completing and transcribing interviews, I used open coding methods to analyze the data. During the initial analysis, 17 categories were formed from over 180 pieces of code. Table 4 details the pieces of code included in each category.

Table 4

Interview Data Analysis

Data	Category
Teachers of Tomorrow Teach for America UABTEACH/AMP	Non-Traditional Pathway Organizations
Lack of knowledge and experience Public speaking Exhausting Huge learning curve Survival mode Lack of sleep Overwhelming Scary Responsibility	First Year Anxiety and Stress
Other teachers helped Information Support system Welcoming Home Provided supplies Checked in Everyone takes responsibility	Supportive Faculty and Staff
Self-exploration Adjustment Change Student-engagement process Frustration Tiring Fulfilling Organization Priorities Superhuman effort Passion Perseverance Improvement Being myself	Self-Reflection
Role model Influence Genuine	Positive Influence on Students

Caring Connecting Life-changing Life skills Transformative Emotional Making a difference Involvement Engagement Expecting the best Demanding	
Observation Collaborative Belief Connection Information Curriculum Grading help Scheduled interaction Designated time Paperwork Safety net Refusal to accept failure	Mentor Support
Positive interaction Role model Mindset Included Family Constant communication Collaborative environment Co-teaching Tips and advice Classroom management techniques Organization Desire for other's success Donations Time investment Encouragement Hospitable	Peer Support
Conversation Communication Connection Professional belief	Administrative Support/Encouragement

Professional learning Belief Coach Developing leaders Instructionally-focused Empowerment Opportunity Time Achievement-oriented Lead by example Recruitment Valued Facilitation Relational Supportive Effective feedback Caring	
Teach behavior Model appropriately Demonstration Positive relationships Chaos Fairness Consistency Large numbers Small groups	Classroom Management
Communicate care Inspiring Persistence Be real Making an impact Call them by name Love Communicate goals Availability Belief Interconnectedness Building bonds Joyful Provide opportunities	Building Student Relationships
Raises Additional compensation Responsibility past dismissal	Salary

Better pay than previous career Freedom and flexibility Underpaid for effort Sufficient Good compensation Good benefits Grossly underpaid Summers off work	
Student learning Aha moments Making a difference Being involved in their lives Student reponses Gratitude Making a difference for them Love Purpose Worthwhile Needed Fun Passion Fulfillment	Rewards
Unpredictable Flexibility Difficulty of documentation Organization Time management Overwhelming Time expenditure Uncertainty Lack of knowledge	Lesson Plans/Paperwork/Grading
Structure Assistance Side-by-side coaching Pacing Instructional Support Need more structure Excellent onboarding support Need more information for new teachers Coaches make a difference	District Support
Lack of trust Lack of belief	Parent Lack of Trust/Involvement

Lack of involvement Partnership Difficulty Misconception Perception Prior experience Social Media issues	
Student teaching Experience is best Additional classes Traditional smoothes the path More help with lesson planning More theoretical work	Non-Traditional versus Traditional Pathway
More structured process Information provided sooner Support before school started Process explanation Discussion of timeline Longer orientation More time with content support personnel More collaborative time	Onboarding

When teachers began to repeat the responses given by others previously, I knew that a saturation point had been met during the open coding process; further interviews were deemed unnecessary. I utilized in vivo coding because I wanted to tell participants' stories in their own words. Six of the 10 participants mentioned that there were teachers in their families. Rhodes stated that he comes from "really just a long line of educators." Three participants said that both parents were educators. Butler said, "My parents both have backgrounds in education." None of the participants said that they had a desire to teach during their formative years. Reddy said that she had always wanted to be a doctor, and Butler said that she did not want to be an educator. "I thought that I wouldn't want to teach," Rhodes said, "And then as I got older, I just fell in love with teaching."

The following six concepts emerged from the original 17 categories: (1) Anxiety and Stress, (2) District Support, (3) Mentor and Peer Support, (4) Administrative Support, (5) Building Student Relationships, and (6) Compensation. Many of the original categories related to one another and could be encapsulated in a larger concept. The latter portion of this chapter will provide details about these six concepts.

Anxiety and Stress

All study participants reported high levels of anxiety and stress for their first year in education, particularly for the first semester. Hudson remarked that the first week was scary, "It's a huge learning curve the first nine weeks." Additionally, she expressed feeling overwhelmed by the responsibility. "I don't think I slept for two weeks because you're in charge of all these kids," Hudson said. She added that she felt that the first semester was just about survival. Milstead concurred. "I was absolutely overwhelmed," she said, "I cried every single day." Tyler remarked that it was a particularly difficult time for him, as he had not experienced public speaking before. "It was challenging," he said, "I did not like talking in front of people, but I had an opportunity to coach, and give back and help the youth." Butler termed herself a *train wreck* because she lacked both experience and knowledge.

Lack of Knowledge

All participants reported that their lack of knowledge and experience made their jobs more difficult. "I didn't even know what I was supposed to grade or how to even go about looking at a standard," Hudson explained, "I had never made a lesson plan." Perez

agreed and mentioned problems with time management. "Really it was the organization part that was overwhelming. Grading took me forever." Tyler said that he believes that teachers in the traditional preparation pathway are more prepared to plan lessons, and more knowledgeable about completing paperwork in general. Several participants cited paperwork and planning as the most challenging parts of the job. Rhodes mentioned what he viewed as the difficulty with planning for unforeseen interruptions. He cited unannounced fire drills and impromptu pep rallies as problems for pacing. "You never know what's going to happen that day," Rhodes said, "And you can't show it on your lesson plans when it happens." Oliver said that it is best to have contingency plans on tap. "It seems there's always something happening," he said, "Whether it be an assembly that wasn't announced, or this drill, or extended homeroom." He recommended "just trying to be flexible and adaptable to whatever comes."

Classroom Management

Classroom management was another stressor for study participants. The sheer number of students in secondary classes was intimidating for some. Perez said the class size was overwhelming for him. Reddy mentioned that she felt more successful with classroom management due to the field experiences that were part of her non-traditional pathway program (UABTEACH). She explained that she knew to start out with procedures and policies from her apprentice teaching. Reddy stressed the importance of beginning with confidence as well as building relationships with students, and "being fair, firm, and consistent the entire time." Rhodes talked about having to model the behavior that you want to see from students. "You have to teach the kids how to behave,

and show the kids how to behave," he said. That is something that he learned his first year. He added, "If you're asking them to do group work, and you've not demonstrated how good group work is, it's going to be chaotic." Rhodes noted that building positive relationships with the students made classroom management easier. "When the other students say, 'Okay, he cares,' then when somebody else starts acting up, they'll say, 'Hey, you acting up, you need to settle down.'" Rhodes continued, "It's nice to know that you have other students in there that have your back."

Parent Relations

Parent relations were another source of anxiety and stress for new teachers. Several participants mentioned that they felt a lack of trust from the parents of their students. Oliver said that he has had students whose parents did not believe his explanation of an event involving their son or daughter. "They're trying to call you a liar about what you said their child did. I'm just trying to give (them) an accurate representation." Milstead expressed similar sentiment and said that parent relations can be challenging. "You are not going to understand every single word that I say, unless you are in here with me, but you can't take things out of context." She said that part of the problem is that parents are concerned about their children. She also blamed social media for some of the problem.

Milstead said that ultimately teachers have to have a trust relationship to partner with parents. "I'm an adult, so take me for my word, because I'm not going to lie," she added. Hudson mentioned lack of parental involvement as a source of stress for her. "The discrepancy in what some kids have, and some don't" is what drew her to the field of

education. She said that the area where she teaches is very different from where she grew up. Students often come to school lacking knowledge of how to navigate the school experience. "We're teaching how to sit in a classroom," she said, "How we use a computer, how we write. I'm teaching kids at 13 years-old how to read." That lack of student experience can be overwhelming. "People ask what I'm teaching. I'm supposed to be teaching life science, but I'm teaching them life."

Teaching can be very stressful. However, the teachers who participated in this study suggested that it was worth persevering. Oliver said, "There are times that I get frustrated and tired, sure, but at the end of the day, every day, I love my job. I love what I do." Everett said that all teachers have days when they want to quit. However, she said you "need to realize that you are human and that if you want to keep continuing this, and keep this passion going, you have to go through the rain to see your rainbow."

District Support

The teacher shortage and consequent push for teacher retention has made district support even more critical. District instructional coaches and content specialists have prioritized teachers from the non-traditional certification pathway. Hudson mentioned their support and said that it made a big difference for her. She said, "Having them want to come in here makes a big difference—having someone that cares as much as the two of them do." Hudson described the support provided in planning assistance and content deepening "awesome," but requested further support with the certification process. The district human resources department provides help for teachers who are working to achieve alternate certification. Hudson requested that they be given the opportunity to

talk through the process and become familiar with the timeline. Oliver praised the

assistance that he has received from the human resources department and credited the

district assistant director with finding the most appropriate pathway for him (CCTF).

Onboarding

The district has been engaged in re-imagining the onboarding process. Butler

endorsed this focus and commented, "It would have been nice to have more structured

onboarding, because I didn't know what I didn't know." Butler mentioned that she would

also have benefitted from some direction regarding the grading process and noted that the

district did not provide the depth of instructional support provided now. "There really

weren't people in my classroom observing me and giving me feedback very often."

Rhodes praised the lesson plan template provided by the district and said it "does

a good job telling you how much time to spend with each activity." Perez found planning

and grading difficult to manage. "Sometimes I would spend too much time on grading

and not enough time on lesson plans," he said, "But whenever I would get off track with

the lesson plans, it would show in the classroom." He said that the lesson plan template

helped him structure the learning activities in his classroom.

New Teacher Orientation

Boggins stressed the importance of new teacher orientation. He termed the

orientation for new teachers "rushed" and encouraged "more time with (district support

person) and more examples of what teachers are doing in the district." New teacher

orientation traditionally competes with the new teacher mentor program for time at the

beginning of school. While Boggins said that he sees the importance of teacher mentors, he asked that the district prioritize the process of providing new teachers with detailed information about the resources and tools available to them.

Mentor Support

All of the teachers in the study mentioned the importance of mentor support. Butler credited the mentor program with helping her build connections with all of the other teachers in the building. Butler also credited her mentor with shaping the educational leader that she would become. "Having her believe in me made me believe in myself." Everett said that her mentor taught her "everything that I needed to know about grading; how my labs should go, how my curriculum should go, and what labs were." Her only caveat was that she needed more scheduled time for interaction with her mentor.

Tyler had a similar comment, as his only time with his mentor was in the hall during class changes. Oliver had a very influential mentor, but when the mentor moved to another school, he was not given another mentor to replace her. At the suggestion of his mentor, Rhodes was given time to observe classroom management strategies in other classes. "We got a sub for my class one day, and all I did that day was observe (classroom management) in other classes. Mentors in the district often have more than one new teacher to support. Hudson's mentor scheduled time with her. "She comes in so many times a semester so that we can meet and talk," Hudson added. The mentor/mentee relationship is powerful when there is an expectation of regular communication. Boggins viewed his mentor as a safety net. They met on a daily basis and he did not hesitate to tell her when he was struggling. Her responses always communicated her belief in him and in

his ability. However, she did not tell him what to do to remedy the situation. Boggins said that she had a deeply held belief in the power of struggle. "Sometimes," he said, "she was, like, you have to see what failing as a teacher looks like." However, he said he felt supported by her, and explained, "It was almost like she was holding me by the loop on the back of my pants, and when I tripped; she'd catch me and pull me back up."

Peer Support

Study participants also considered peer support extremely valuable, and all of them noted that there is a feeling of family at their schools. Everett said, "The beauty is that the teachers around you want you to succeed." She mentioned an email request for paper that she sent her colleagues. "I can't tell you how much paper I have now. They sent three cases." Milstead said that her colleagues were equally encouraging and were powerful examples. "They really love their jobs. They are here for the kids," she said. Having peer support is particularly impactful if you teach the same content, according to Rhodes. He explained that the teacher across the hall "really helped me out my first year."

"Having that positive role model there to help you out and get your mindset right really helped," he continued. He added that it is easy to fall into the trap of working in isolation. "When you're up there teaching your first year, you feel so isolated," he noted, "but they were there for me." Butler did not feel that sense of isolation, as she had a peer in a similar situation to hers. "There was a first-year teacher whose classroom was next to mine," she said, "We constantly checked in, so I never felt alone." Perez said that his co-teacher walked him through teaching techniques. "She was always giving me tips and

advice on classroom management and organization," he said, "If it weren't for her, I'd have been fired." Reddy said that her whole faculty has a very collaborative approach and works to build relationships and cohesiveness through faculty parties and potlucks. Boggins also described his faculty as very hospitable to young teachers and said they will "support you with every ounce of their being."

Administrative Support

Administrative support is one of the key reasons why teachers choose to stay in or leave a school (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). All but one of the participants in this study mentioned how important they found administrative support and encouragement to be. Perez noted that his principal recruited him to come and teach at the school. Rhodes praised his principal's open-door policy and said that having "people that are willing to just take time out and share a short conversation really goes a long way into trying to stay connected with the school." Hudson appreciated that her administrators knew that she was learning and helped in the learning process. "They're not coming in here, like 'do it this way,' they're helping me figure it out."

The instructionally focused assistant principal at Butler's first school made her feel capable and valued. "She very quickly took me under her wing and gave me lots of professional development opportunities," Butler said. Butler's principal at that same school encouraged her to leave the classroom and become an instructional coach. Reddy's principal identified her as a leader and placed her on his leadership team her first year. "I don't think that I would be in the position I am without him identifying (leadership) qualities in me," she explained. "He gave me a voice, and I loved it!" Reddy

added that her former principal excels at identifying leadership potential and putting teachers in the position to succeed.

Several study participants mentioned that they feel supported and valued by their administrators. Boggins praised one of his administrators for "making the teachers know that they are loved." Milstead said that her administrators are "the best thing ever!" She credited administrator support with keeping her in the field. "If I'd had an administration that didn't really support me, I don't think I'd still be teaching," she said. Additionally, she said that she values the thoughtful feedback from her administrators. "They give really great feedback," she said, "but I don't feel like I have someone hovering over me."

Building Student Relationships

Study participants agreed that building strong relationships with students was critical and enabled them to be a positive influence in student lives. Even though he left the teaching profession, Perez still said that what he loved most about teaching was "the bond and the impact that I made on kids." He mentioned that many of them emailed him after he left to thank him for his influence. The most important thing to Rhodes is building strong relationships with students. He said, "It's most important to let the kids know that you care." "It is a joy being able to inspire kids," Oliver said. He mentioned seeing students out in the community with their parents and having them greet him. He said when they walk away, they say, "That's my math teacher, the one I really like." Hearing that, he said, makes it all worthwhile.

Butler credited relationship building with much of her first-year success. "I'm a relationship builder," she said, "So the majority of kids stuck with me and let me grow."

Everett said that she "built a huge relationship with all my students; I call them all by name." Milstead said that she loves building relationships because she loves people.

Student relationships are transformative, according to Hudson. She says her students changed her. "I get emotional about it," she said, "I love them, and I love this." Hudson explains that she gets so much joy out of watching her students engage in learning. "Last week we went into lab planting plants, and it's so crazy because they like such simple things that they've never gotten the opportunity to do." Boggins agreed that some lessons are game changers for students. He reminisced about a student who came up after working with rockets and told him, "Coach, this is the coolest thing I've ever done in my life." Boggins explained that students can "see the difference in a teacher who loves their job and loves what they teach." Everett agreed that learning could be life changing. She wants to have students learn "just that one little thing from me that's going to change their lives." At the end of the day, Rhodes said that it is about influence. "Was I a positive influence in their lives," he asked, "And a positive role model?"

Compensation

Teacher salaries have been hotly debated recently, with many states working to increase salaries. Opinions varied in this study with participants sharply divided, from finding teachers "grossly underpaid" to having highly desirable compensation. Oliver expressed the feeling that teachers were "grossly underpaid," even with the increases provided by the TEAMS act (Teacher Excellence and Accountability for Mathematics and Science) which offers up to $20,000 for individuals to teach math or science in hard-to-staff areas of the state. He is a TEAMS teacher for the district. Reddy agreed that

teacher salaries are too low, "if you do what you're supposed to do for your students."

"You work your eight hours," according to Perez, "And still have to grade afterwards."

Hudson said, "I think that I'm so underpaid that it's not funny." She was of the opinion

that teachers do more work in nine months than most people get done in 12.

Rhodes was grateful for the raises that the state has provided. "I'm so thankful for

the raises that they've given us," he said, "but I always feel like I need a little more,

especially with a kid on the way." He also mentioned, however, that teacher pay

increases as teacher experience increases. Boggins noted that his opinion might not be

widely held, but he described teacher salaries as good and mentioned the benefits that are

provided in this state (including retirement). He said, "(teachers) work for nine months,

and then you're off for almost three months, and you get all the holidays." Milstead

agreed and said that she thinks the salary is fine. Everett had an entirely different take on

teacher salaries, as they are higher than her previous career of pastry chef. "I'm getting

more than I've ever been paid," she remarked. She said that the ability to have time off is

very valuable to her. "Having this freedom, working 7-3, you can have a weekend. You

can have vacation," she pointed out, "And that's valuable."

Additional Rewards

All of the study participants mentioned other rewards that they received from

teaching that were not monetary. Rhodes mentioned the reward of seeing student success.

"Seeing the students have that 'Ah ha' moment where they actually start getting the

material," he said, "It just puts a smile on my face." Butler also characterized sharing in

student learning as invaluable and said, "There's no bigger high that can compare to it."

Tyler said, "The kids really make me want to come to work." Milstead said that she loves

being with her students because they are so much fun to be around, "They're just fun

little people!"

Teaching was difficult for Perez, and he left the profession to help his family

operate the family business, but he said that his students made it all worthwhile. Reddy

talked about having a hard time leaving school at the end of the day, and said, "I loved

being involved in the lives of my kids and seeing them grow." On his worst day when

nothing was going right, Boggins said, "It only takes that one kid for me to be like, I've

got a job to do!" Everett summed up her interview by saying that teaching is a beautiful

experience. "I never thought that teaching what I love to do would be something that I

would actually be doing." Everett said that she was grateful every day that she gets to

teach. "Teaching is what I love to do, and what I want to show my students, because I am

the teacher I never had."

Conclusion

The following six concepts emerged from the interviews: (1) Anxiety and Stress,

(2) District Support, (3) Mentor and Peer Support, (4) Administrative Support, (5)

Building Student Relationships, and (6) Compensation. The theme of anxiety and stress

was one that seemed to be universal for teachers from the non-traditional certification

pathway, particularly for their first year. Their lack of knowledge about classroom

management and parent relations seemed to add significantly to their stress and anxiety.

Study participants mentioned support, from the district, administration, mentors, and

peers, repeatedly. They also talked about the power of the relationships they have had

with their students.

Study participants shared a great deal about their experiences and perceptions of working conditions during their interviews. Their experiences as teachers from the non-traditional certification path provided valuable information for those interested in teacher retention. In the final chapter, I will discuss conclusions from this study as well as implications for future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explore what experiences and working conditions would keep teachers from non-traditional certification pathways in the teaching profession. I purposively chose 10 study participants so that they would represent the most varied demographics possible. Nine of the participants are still employed in the district. One had left both the district and the teaching profession. In previous chapters, I discussed the issue of teacher shortages and retention in the context of professional literature to date. In this chapter, I will summarize the major findings of the study and confirm my findings in the context of the aforementioned professional literature. Additionally, I will discuss the implications of the study for future practice and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

I categorized the findings of this study into the following six concepts: (1) Anxiety and Stress, (2) District Support, (3) Mentor and Peer Support, (4) Administrative Support, (5) Building Student Relationships, and (6) Compensation. These findings confirmed much of the professional literature cited in the review of professional literature. However, study findings regarding teacher compensation were mixed and differed somewhat from the results of previous studies mentioned in Chapter 2.

Darling-Hammond (2003) identified the following four factors that influence teacher retention: working conditions, mentoring and support, teacher preparation and professional development, and teacher salaries. Study findings confirmed that these factors can influence teachers from a non-traditional pathway. Administrative support, part of working conditions, was deemed critically important by 80% of study participants. Two indicated that they would have left the profession if not for the strong and supportive relationship they had with their administrator. This finding confirmed the importance of the professional relationship between teachers and administrators (Waddell, 2010). According to Waddell, teacher retention increases when teachers feel valued. One study participant noted that her administrator's belief in her made her believe in herself.

Peer and Mentor Support

All study participants advocated for peer and mentor support. One even credited her mentors with keeping her in the profession during that difficult first year. These findings support Bland et al. (2016) that peer and mentor support help teachers stay in the profession. Wong (2004) suggested that close and constant communication with mentors was particularly important for teachers from the non-traditional preparation path. The findings of this study confirmed Wong (2004), and three participants said that they believed they would benefit from extending mentor collaboration.

Study findings also confirmed the importance of collegial relationships in teacher retention (Bland et al., 2016; Kini & Podolsky, 2016; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Stohmann et al., 2020). All study participants said that collaboration with others was critical. The

information provided to them by their more experienced colleagues helped, but collegial relationships also imbued them with a sense of belonging. That sense of belonging engenders the belief that one is part of something larger than one's self. Collegial relationships are a crucial component of collective efficacy.

Teacher Compensation

Study findings differed somewhat from previous findings regarding teacher compensation. Findings of both Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) and Imazeki (2004) indicated that increases in teacher salaries would lead to higher teacher retention rates. For half of study participants, those findings were true. However, the other half of study participants either disagreed that salaries were too low or indicated that other rewards of teaching were more important than salary. One study participant said that teacher salaries were fine. Another said that salaries in her previous career of pastry chef were much lower and had no benefits such as retirement or insurance. Yet another agreed that teacher benefits were attractive but expressed the belief that teacher salaries were comparable to other fields taking into consideration the amount of time that teachers are required to work.

Gunther (2019) noted that there are factors other than salary that are important to teachers. This study confirmed Gunther's findings. Every study participant said that teaching has rewards other than money. All participants said that they teach for the impact that they have on students. Even the participant who had left the field noted that while teaching is difficult, the interaction with the students made it all worthwhile. Two participants mentioned the feeling of accomplishment they felt when students mastered a

concept. One participant said that his interactions with students is what makes him look forward to work. Another valued her involvement in the lives of her students. Yet a third participant said that feeling needed by his students is what encourages him to go on.

Theoretical Framework

Regarding the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 2, collective efficacy theory undergirds much of the work of this study. Bandura (1977) first defined self-efficacy as a person's belief in their ability. Bandura then noted that self-efficacy is related to collective efficacy. Bandura (1977) defined collective efficacy as "a group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments" (p. 447). Goddard et al. (2004) and Hoy et al. (2006) linked teacher collective efficacy to student achievement, making clear that student achievement is tied to teacher belief. The findings of this study identified efficacy as a critical component of teacher retention.

For example, the participant who stated the belief that his students needed him would not leave his current school because he would never want to let his students down. All participants said that they teach for the impact that they have on students. Teachers who believe in their own capacity to provide integral support for their students are unwilling to leave their schools, in spite of their personal challenges. Therefore, self-efficacy is a consideration in teacher retention. Additionally, teachers who believe in the collective efficacy of their faculty are equally unwilling to abandon their colleagues and their work when they experience difficult times.

Significance of the Study

   The teacher shortage has been well documented by previous research (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Ingersoll, 2001; Podolsky, et al., 2019; Simon & Johnson, 2015; Sutcher et al., 2018; Sutcher et al., 2019). The Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) exacerbated the issue. A RAND survey in January 2021 showed that nearly 25% of teachers polled wanted to leave their jobs at the end of the year, a 9% increase (Steiner & Woo, 2021). With over 200 non-traditional certification pathway teachers in this district alone, clearly, information about the experiences that would keep them in the teaching field is invaluable.

What I Learned

   The intensive stages of the coding process in this study led me to the construction of a theory regarding what experiences would keep teachers from non-traditional pathways in the field. Study findings indicated that strong and positive relationships are key to solving the teacher retention problem. These strong and positive relationships can be built with a variety of support structures and a focus on efficacy. I hypothesized the visual model below of the themes that emerged from axial coding.

Figure 4

Visual Model of Findings
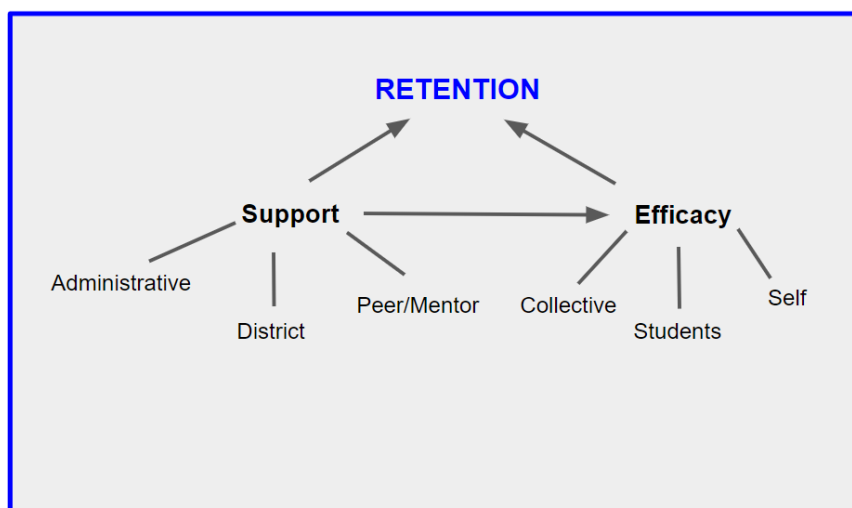
Non-traditional certification pathway teachers who reported strong and positive relationships with their students, colleagues, and administrators, seemed more likely to stay at their school and in the teaching profession. Support and efficacy appeared to be the keys to building strong and positive relationships for teachers from a non-traditional certification pathway. Administrators, colleagues, and the district were primary sources of teacher support. Teachers who worked collaboratively with colleagues, and whom their colleagues supported, were likely to experience collective and self-efficacy. There also appeared to be a powerful reciprocal relationship between teachers and students. Teachers who built strong relationships with students reported positive feedback from their students, which led to increases in teacher self-efficacy. Being well connected to the school and the district seemed to encourage non-traditional pathway teachers to persevere.

The non-traditional certification pathway teachers who participated in this study reported high levels of anxiety and stress, particularly during their first year of practice. Study participants talked about how difficult and overwhelming it was; one termed the first year a train wreck. However, they all reported that the encouragement and support of administrators and colleagues helped them get through that challenging time. Several reported feeling overwhelmed, but the encouragement and support they experienced from their colleagues and mentors helped them persevere. One of the implications of this study is that support is a powerful retention strategy.

District support includes onboarding/mentoring, professional development opportunities, professional learning communities, and help from specialists and instructional coaches. All study participants said that mentor support was vital. Several asked that the district schedule more time for mentors to meet with them. One study participant asked that the onboarding process begin before the start of school. Several of the teachers interviewed said that they would have been happy to attend professional development opportunities if they were offered during the summer. Districts could offer professional development in areas that non-traditional certification pathway teachers would not have experience with, such as lesson planning, assessment, and classroom management. District support personnel, content specialists and instructional coaches could begin building relationships with non-traditional certification pathway teachers while facilitating professional learning.

Several study participants said that the time spent at the beginning of the year in the onboarding process was valuable but noted that before school started they really did not know what they did not know. Several study participants had little knowledge of

lesson planning with course of study standards and the assessment process. They

suggested that the onboarding process continue throughout the first year, possibly on E-

learning days, days when students do not report to the school building. As students are

engaged in online tasks at that time, teachers could work with district support personnel

to address any questions they had about pedagogy or their specific content material.

District support also needs to include ways to identify leadership capacity in teachers. A

pipeline for educational leaders would not only assist the district in *growing its own*, but

would aid in retention, as it would be one more way to connect with teachers.

Administrative support is a critical piece of retention. Administrators can increase

the likelihood that teachers will stay by building professional relationships that make

teachers feel valued and empowered (Waddell, 2010). Study participants noted the value

of principal check-ins. One participant mentioned a conversation with his principal that

meant a great deal to him. It was a short and casual conversation, but it made him feel

seen and heard by his principal. Teachers expressed feeling valued when the

administrator took time to talk.

Administrators can also increase retention rates by identifying and

communicating leadership potential to teachers. Both study participants who are now in

leadership roles in the district credited their administrators. One mentioned that her

principal saw something in her that she did not see herself. Another said that her former

principal identified the leadership qualities in teachers and did a good job of providing

teachers with opportunities to develop those qualities. Teachers tended to stay in a school

when they felt themselves to be an integral part of the work.

Administrators should take care to schedule collaborative time for teachers. This is particularly important for non-traditional pathway teachers but good practice for all. Teacher collaboration fosters a sense of unity and connectedness. It is those connections that promote teacher retention. Professional learning communities (PLCs) are opportunities for teachers to collaborate around student work, assessment, instruction, and achievement. Administrators who encourage teacher facilitation of the professional learning communities get the added bonus of empowering teachers. This district is implementing Networked Improvement Communities (NIC) along with PLCs. In NICs, teachers collaboratively determine a problem of practice and its root cause. Together they decide on a possible solution, or change idea, and implement it for a predetermined period. The NIC work empowers and encourages teachers to make instructional decisions together. Teachers who felt they had the autonomy to make instructional decisions were generally less likely to leave. Providing teacher collaboration time encourages the building of relationships and leads to an increase in collective efficacy (McGuigan & Hoy, 2006).

Support from colleagues and mentors was essential, according to study participants. Several said that they would not have made it through that challenging first year if not for their mentors and colleagues. One mentioned how much she valued the culture of support she found in her school. She added that teachers were willing to help one another, not because they had to, but because it was the way they did business in that school. That culture of unity was expressed by another participant who said they have the motto, "We > me" at their school. That belief in one another was crucial in building collective efficacy.

Self-efficacy is important for teachers from the non-traditional preparation pathway. They have to believe themselves capable of the task. Administrators can help teachers build that belief in themselves. One participant mentioned a conversation that he had with his principal when he felt unsuccessful. The principal said that the teacher needed to give himself time. Another participant said that her administrators knew that she was learning and just supported her through the learning process. Facilitating non-traditional certification pathway teachers in self-reflection during that learning process helps make them aware of all that they are doing well and encourages them to focus on improving just one thing at a time.

District support personnel can also assist teachers in seeing their impact on student learning through data dives and examining student work over time. The students themselves may be the best tool to build teacher self-efficacy. One participant said that she wanted to be the best teacher because her students deserved the best. Another said that one of the best things about being out in his community was seeing his students and overhearing them tell their parents that he was their favorite teacher. For many non-traditional certification pathway teachers, knowing that they had a positive influence on the students they served was enough. When they were discouraged from the day-to-day struggle, they went back to their *why*. For many of them, the difference they made in students' lives was reward enough. Those teachers would not leave a culture where they believed they made a difference for their students. The district can also implement programs that provide student affirmation to teachers. A Most Valuable Teacher program (MVT) would allow students to write letters to teachers who have had a positive impact

on them. Anything that illustrates the strong and positive relationships that teachers have with students serves as a teacher retention strategy.

Recommendations for Future Research

This qualitative grounded theory study explored what working conditions and experiences would keep teachers from non-traditional teacher certification pathways in the teaching profession. It only included secondary teachers from a large county school district in central Alabama. This study could be replicated in other settings and with a larger pool of teacher participants.

Research into what working conditions and experiences of elementary teachers would keep them in the profession might be beneficial, as more of them have also begun to choose non-traditional teacher certification pathways. Future research might examine the working conditions and experiences of teachers who chose the traditional teacher preparation pathway. Additional research could address the working conditions that might attract and retain teachers of color. Investigating working conditions and experiences of teachers who have left the field of education might be another future research project.

The state of Alabama has recently implemented the Teacher Excellence and Accountability for Mathematics and Science (TEAMS) program. The TEAMS program provides a new and higher salary scale for participating teachers. Further research might investigate the impact of TEAMS pay on retention of participating math and science teachers. It might also be enlightening to research the impact of TEAMS pay on the retention of English Language Arts and social studies teachers.

Final Thoughts

Teacher retention became a passion project for me several years ago. Principals were having difficulty finding science and math teachers at the secondary level, and I wanted to help. The teacher shortage was very real to me as a secondary mathematics specialist. The findings of this study have underscored the importance of building strong and positive relationships. It confirmed my belief that building relationships is key to almost all human interaction. Focused and purposeful support for teachers who are non-traditionally prepared appears key to increasing their efficacy, and keeping them in the teaching profession. Finally, it is my conclusion that any efforts to connect teachers to their administrators, colleagues and students in meaningful and positive ways will aid in teacher retention. It is in our connection to one another that we find purpose.

REFERENCES

Aragon, S. (2018). Targeted teacher recruitment: What is the issue and why does it matter? *Education Commission of the States,* 1-9.

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review, 84*(2), 191-215.

Bandura, A. (2000). Exercise of human agency through collective efficacy. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 9*(3), 75-78.

Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology, 52*(1), 1-26.

Bandura, A., & National Institute of Mental Health. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory.* Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Bandura, A., & Schunk, D. H. (1981). Cultivating competence, self-efficacy, and intrinsic interest through proximal self-motivation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 41*(3), 586-598. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.41.3.586

Bland, P., Church, E., & Luo, M. (2016). Strategies for attracting and retaining teachers. *Administrative Issues Journal: Connecting Education, Practice and Research, 4*(1), 545-554.

Boyd, D., Grossman, P. L., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2006). How changes in entry requirements alter the teacher workforce and affect student achievement. *Education Finance and Policy, 1*(2), 176-216.

Bryk, A. S., & Schneider, B. (2002). Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement. Russell Sage Foundation.

Carroll, T. G. (2007). *Policy brief: The high cost of teacher turnover*. National Commission on Teaching and America's Future.

Carter Andrews, D. J., Castro, E., Cho, C. L., Petchauer, E., Richmond, G., & Floden, R. (2019). Changing the narrative on diversifying the teaching workforce: A look at historical and contemporary factors that inform recruitment and retention of teachers of color. *Journal of Teacher Education, 70*(1), 6-12. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487118812418

Carver-Thomas, D. (2018). *Diversifying the teaching profession: How to recruit and retain teachers of color.* Learning Policy Institute.

Carver-Thomas, D., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2019). The trouble with teacher turnover: How teacher attrition affects students and schools. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 27*(36), 1-31. http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.27.3699

Charmaz, K. C. (2000). *Grounded theory: Objectivist and constructivist methods. The Handbook of qualitative research.* Sage Publications Inc.

Charmaz, K. C. (2008). Constructionism and the grounded theory. In J. A. Holstein & J. F. Gubrium (Eds.), *The handbook of constructionist research* (pp. 397-412). The Guilford Press.

Clewell, B. C., & Forcier, L. B. (2001). Increasing the number of mathematics and science teachers: A review of teacher recruitment programs. *Teaching and Change, 8*(4), 331-361.

Cochran-Smith, M., & Villegas, A. M. (2015). Framing teacher preparation research: An overview of the field, Part 1. *Journal of Teacher Education, 66*(1), 7-20. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487114549072

Cochran-Smith, M., Villegas, A. M., Abrams, L., Chavez-Moreno, L., Mills, T., & Stern, R. (2015). Critiquing teacher preparation research: An overview of the field, Part II. *Journal of Teacher Education, 66*(2), 109-121. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487114558268

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2015). *Basics of qualitative research Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among the five approaches.* Sage Publications Inc.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2000). Teacher quality and student achievement: A review of state policy evidence. *Educational Policy Analysis Archives, 8*(1), 1-44.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2003). Keeping good teachers: Why it matters, what leaders can do. *Educational Leadership, 60*(8), 6-13.

Darling-Hammond, L., & Podolsky, A. (2019). Breaking the cycle of teacher shortages: What kind of policies can make a difference? *Education Policy Analysis Archives 27*(34), 1-11. http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.27.4633

Darling-Hammond, L., & Sykes, G. (2003). Wanted: A national teacher supply policy for education: The right way to meet the "highly qualified teacher" challenge. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 11*(33), 1-55. https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v11n33.2003

Garcia, E., & Weiss, E. (2019, March 26). The teacher shortage is real, large and growing, and worse than we thought. *Economic Policy Institute*, 1-19. https://www.epi.org/publication/the-teacher-shortage-is-real-large-and-growing-and-worse-than-we-thought-the-first-report-in-the-perfect-storm-in-the-teacher-labor-market-series/

Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Sociology Press.

Goddard, R. D., Hoy, W. K., & Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2004). Collective efficacy beliefs: Theoretical developments, empirical evidence, and future directions. *Educational Researcher, 33*(3), 3-13.

Hanushek, E. A., & Rivkin, S. G. (2007). Pay, working conditions, and teacher quality. *The Future of Children 17*(1), 69-86. doi:10.1353/foc.2007.0002

Hanushek, E. A., Rivkin, S. G., & Schiman, J. C. (2016). Dynamic effects of teacher turnover on the quality of instruction. *Economics of Education Review, 55*(C), 132-148. doi:10.1016/j.econedurev.2016.08.004

Hoy, W. K., Tarter, C. J., & Hoy, A. W. (2006). Academic optimism of schools: A force for student achievement. *American Educational Research Journal*, *43*(3), 425-446.

Imazeki, J. (2004). Teacher salaries and teacher attrition. *Economics of Education Review, 24*(4), 431-449.

Ingersoll, R. (2001). A different approach to solving the teacher shortage problem. *Teacher Quality Policy Briefs, 3*, 1-7.

Ingersoll, R. (2003). The teacher shortage: Myth or reality? *Educational Horizons, 81*(3), 146-152.

Johnson, S.M., Kraft, M.A., & Papay, J.P. (2012). How context matters in high-need schools: The effects of teachers' working conditions on their professional satisfaction and their students' achievement. *Teachers College Record, 114*(10), 1-39.

Keigher, A. (2010). *Teacher attrition and mobility: Results from the 2008–09 teacher follow-up survey* (NCES 2010-353). U.S. Department of Education: National Center for Education Statistics.

Kini, T., & Podolsky, A. (2016). *Does teaching experience increase teacher effectiveness? A review of the research*. Learning Policy Institute.

Laczko-Kerr, I., & Berliner, D. C. (2002). The effectiveness of "Teach for America" and other under-certified teachers. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 10*(37), 1-53.

Loeb, S. Darling-Hammond, L., & Luczak, J. (2005). How teaching conditions predict teacher turnover in California schools. *Peabody Journal of Education 80*(3), 44-70.

Lynch, M. (2012). Recruiting, retaining, and fairly compensating our teachers. *International Journal of Progressive Education, 8*(2), 121-135

McGuigan, L. & Hoy, W. K. (2006). Principal leadership: Creating a culture of academic optimism to improve achievement for all students. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 5*(3), 203-229.

McLeod, S. A. (2016, February 5). *Bandura - social learning theory*. Simply Psychology. https://www.simplypsychology.org/bandura.html

Merriam, S. B., & Associates (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*. Jossey-Bass.

Mobra, T., & Hamlin, D. (2020). Emergency certified teachers' motivations for entering the teaching profession: Evidence from Oklahoma. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 28*(109), 1-29. https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.28.5295

Nguyen, T., & Springer, M. (2021). A conceptual framework of teacher turnover: A systematic review of the empirical international literature and insights from the employee turnover literature. *Educational Review*, 1-24.

Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Sage.

Patton, M. Q. (1999). Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis. *Health Services Research, 34*(5), 1189-1208.

Podolsky, A., Kini, T., Darling-Hammond, J., & Bishop, J. (2019). Strategies for attracting and retaining educators: What does the evidence say? *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 27*(38), 1-43. http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.27.3722

Redding, C., & Smith, T. M. (2016). Easy in, easy out: Are alternatively certified teachers turning over at increased rates? *American Educational Research Journal, 53*(4), 1086-1125.

Ronfeldt, M., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2011). How teacher turnover harms student achievement. *American Educational Research Journal, 50*(1), 4-36.

Saldaña, J. (2015). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage Publications Inc.

Shen, J. (1997). Teacher retention and attrition in public schools: Evidence from SASS91. *The Journal of Educational Research*, *91*(2), 81-88. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27542134

Simon, N. S., & Johnson, S. M. (2015). Teacher turnover in high-poverty schools: What we know and can do. *Teachers College Record, 117*(3), 1-36.

Steiner, E. D., & Woo, A. (2021). *Job-related stress threatens the teacher supply: Key findings from the 2021 State of the U.S. Teacher Survey.* RAND Corporation.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. M. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques.* Sage Publications, Inc.

Sutcher, L., Carver-Thomas, D., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2018). *Understaffed and underprepared: California districts report ongoing teacher shortages*. Learning Policy Institute.

Sutcher, L., Darling-Hammond, L., & Carver-Thomas, D. (2019). Understanding teacher shortages: An analysis of teacher supply and demand in the United States. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 27*(35). http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.27.3696

U.S. Department of Education. (2018, November 7). *Title I, part a program*. https://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html

Weiss, E. M. (1999). Perceived workplace conditions and first-year teachers' morale, career choice commitment, and planned retention: A secondary analysis. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 15*(8), 861-879. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(99)00040-2

APPENDIX A

TEACHER INTERVIEW EMAIL

 I am Leslie Richards, an Educational Leadership doctoral candidate at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. I am writing to ask you to participate in my research study entitled, "Retention Strategies for Non-Traditional Pathway Teachers: Keeping New Teachers in the Profession." The purpose of this study is to explore what experiences and working conditions would keep teachers from non-traditional educational pathways in the teaching profession.

As one of our teachers who is pursuing an alternative certification in the field of secondary education, you have been purposefully selected to participate in the study by taking part in an interview process.

Your response is confidential as we would like for you to freely share your support needs and beliefs. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you choose to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any point. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, concerns or complaints, you may contact the UAB office of IRB Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m.to 5:00 p.m. at 205-934-3789. While there is no compensation or direct benefit to you, your participation may lead to a better understanding of the support needs of teachers from a non-traditional preparation pathway.

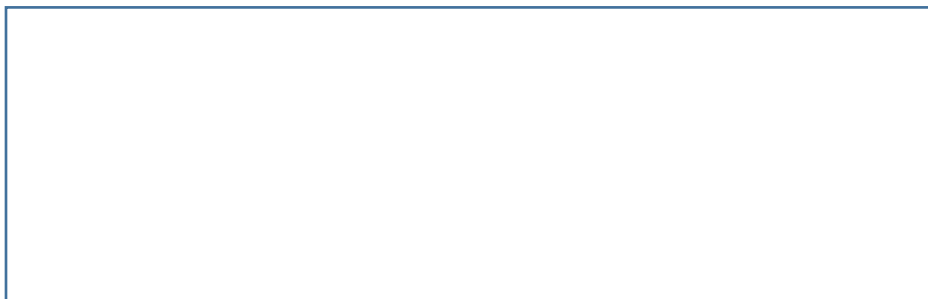Thank you for your time and your participation.
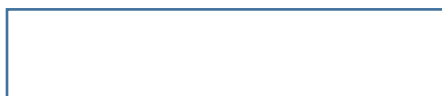
Sincerely,

Leslie C. Richards

APPENDIX B

LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENT

LETTER TO THE SUPERINTENDENT

April 20, 2022

 Over the past 30 years, teacher turnover has increased significantly (Simon & Johnson, 2015), contributing to the teacher shortage in the United States. As you know, this shortage of teachers has necessitated the employment of more teacher candidates from non-traditional teacher pathways in our district.

 I am requesting permission to conduct a research study within Jefferson County Schools entitled "Retention Strategies for Non-Traditional Pathway Teachers: Keeping New Teachers in the Profession." As part of my dissertation research at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, I would like to survey a purposively selected group of Jefferson County secondary teachers who are pursuing alternative certification. If approval is granted, I will interview ten teachers and send surveys to 75 other study participants who will respond anonymously.

Thank you for your consideration. If you approve, please provide me with a signed letter of permission on district letterhead acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this study.

Sincerely,

Leslie C. Richards, Ed.S.

UAB Doctoral Candidate

cc: Dr. D.K. Gurley, UAB Committee Chair

APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD LETTER OF APPROVAL

UAB THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

Office of the Institutional Review Board for Human Use

470 Administration Building
701 20th Street South
Birmingham, AL 35294-0104
205.934.3789 | Fax 205.934.1301 |
irb@uab.edu

APPROVAL LETTER

TO: Richards, Leslie Cranford

FROM: University of Alabama at Birmingham Institutional Review Board
Federalwide Assurance # FWA00005960
IORG Registration # IRB00000196 (IRB 01)
IORG Registration # IRB00000726 (IRB 02)
IORG Registration # IRB00012550 (IRB 03)

DATE: 27-Jul-2022

RE: IRB-300009350
IRB-300009350-003
RETENTION STRATEGIES FOR NON-TRADITIONAL PATHWAY TEACHERS: KEEPING
NEW TEACHERS IN THE PROFESSION

The IRB reviewed and approved the Initial Application submitted on 25-Jul-2022 for the above
referenced project. The review was conducted in accordance with UAB's Assurance of
Compliance approved by the Department of Health and Human Services.

Type of Review: Exempt
Exempt Categories: 2
Determination: Exempt
Approval Date: 27-Jul-2022
Approval Period: No Continuing Review

Documents Included in Review:

- IRB EPORTFOLIO
- IRB PERSONNEL EFORM

APPENDIX D

UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEW

1. Tell me a little about yourself.
2. How long have you been teaching?
3. How were you certified to teach?
4. Tell me about your experience as a teacher from a non-traditional pathway working in _____ County schools. After you have completed your narrative, if I have questions about what you've said or need clarification, I'll ask you. But for now, just talk freely.