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Finding, Developing, and Supporting Teachers: Challenges for Today's School Leaders

Ken Mitchell, EdD
Editor

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Winter 2024-25

The Winter 2024-25 issue of the *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* is focused on teachers. The impact of their work can be profound, leaving indelible impressions on generations of students that influence all of society. Their teaching often goes beyond the formal stated curriculum, embedded with tacit lessons on civility, morality, ethics, and fairness - life lessons that can shape character, ideally for the advancement of a civil and just society.

Yet in recent times teachers and school leaders have faced resistance from those opposed to any classroom discussion of topics pertaining to social or emotional development, arguing that these should remain the purview of the parent. Instruction should be bound to the basics, not topics that examine content that can present as ambiguous, requiring critical interrogation and introspection, sometimes in contrast with parental understanding or beliefs.

The assumption of the “stick to the basics” argument is that what “should” be left to the parent is indeed being addressed in the

home, yet this does not always happen. For many students, the school becomes a surrogate for the family. For 10 months out of the year, children and adolescents spend more than half of their waking day in school; relationships develop organically as does learning.

Proactive educators cultivate healthy relationships with students that combine academics with personal, social, and physical development. America's great educator and philosopher John Dewey advanced a timeless ideal that schools should be designed for cultivating thoughtful, critically reflective, and socially engaged individuals rather than recipients of established knowledge (Dewey, 1916).

These are often the most indelible and life-altering lessons. Teaching is important work. Despite their potency for good and their success in serving what has been perhaps the most transformative public education system in history, teachers are too often maligned and undervalued by those who lack understanding of the enormity and complexity of learning and

the relationship of skillful and research-informed teaching to maximize it.

Dufour & Fullan (2013) distinguish how instruction is viewed from the education professionals as being technically sophisticated, perfected through continuous improvement, and guided by judgment that comes from extensive training with a balance of evidence, collegiality, and experience. Skillful teaching is a collective activity that carries great responsibility.

Such a perspective counters the limited and naive view of those who perceive teaching as technically simple—essentially didactic—requiring moderate intellectual ability. They see it as a delivery of content, rather than a construction of meaning through scaffolding and structured social exchanges. It is a dangerous misunderstanding that proposes replacing the constructivist core through instructional technology and remote instruction from which results are presumed to be more easily measured.

Hawkins in City, E. A., Elmore, R., Fiarman, S., & Teitel, L. (2009), refers to “the ‘I’ (the teacher), the ‘thou’ (the student), and the ‘it’ (the content), which is the essential “instructional core.” While the best of leaders from the principal to the superintendent make it their priority to protect this “core,” there are uncertain times and disruptive events when it is the teacher who must preserve the essence of it. And they do.

Today’s schools are perhaps more complex than at any time in our nation’s history due to changing national political dynamics, transformative technologies, and planetary events related to economics, international relations, and climate change. More than ever, school leaders need to find the

most qualified teachers to prepare our students to take on the challenges and uncertainties associated with these changes.

Just as the hiring of the superintendent is the most important responsibility of the school board, school leaders are tasked with hiring the most competent and caring educators. Yet, hiring teachers has become increasingly more challenging.

According to the Learning Policy Institute (2024) at the outset of the 2024 school year, thirty states reported over 41,000 teacher vacancies with a total of over 400,000, either unfilled or filled by teachers uncertified for their assignments.

Interest in entering the profession has lagged and for reasons aside from concerns of low pay. Encouraging and developing the talent of those with such potential to enter this field has become an essential priority for school leaders.

Over the past year, several of our JSP researchers have studied some of these topics. In “Why Texas Teachers Leave the Classroom: A Qualitative Look into Non-retirement Attrition,” the researchers found that teachers in the systems they studied “believe they are overworked and undervalued in a 360-degree space.” They experience pressure to raise student achievement while managing bureaucratic tasks from school and district level leadership, contributing to low morale from being overwhelmed and overworked. This combined with the challenges of working with “disrespectful, threatening, and apathetic students and varying levels and types of parental involvement contribute to higher attrition. Their study serves as a snapshot of why teachers are exiting the profession at greater rates than past generations.

In “Elementary Teacher Planning Time: Finding Innovation through Focused Collaboration,” the researchers studied a district that took measures to understand how to best support teachers’ collaborative learning and planning within the limitations and challenges of the traditional school schedule. Their work generated “actionable steps for the district, an assessment of multiple innovative scheduling ideas, and evidence of the universal value of collaboration in driving change.” A key to successful retention practices is to enhance the professional learning environment. Providing time with colleagues to learn and plan is one way to achieve this.

The next two articles in this issue focus on unique ways to increase the teacher pipeline. In “A Teacher Apprenticeship Pathway in a Rural, Midwest State: Perspectives of Teacher Apprentices,” the authors acknowledged how the national teacher shortage makes it challenging for principals and superintendents to hire certified teachers. They shared a university-educational agency model designed to address this problem via a “teacher apprenticeship pathway (TAP) for 78 paraprofessionals working in the state’s public, non-public, and tribal schools.” The researchers examined the program through the lenses of participants, who were pursuing a pathway to a teaching degree.

In “To Teach or Not to Teach: A Qualitative Study of Pre-Collegiate Grow Your Own Teacher Programs and the Perceptions of Alumni, Current Staff, and Former Staff,” the researcher studied a “grow your own” program designed to “recruit” current middle and high school students to the profession. The qualitative multiple case study explored the use of such programs through the perspectives of

Black and/or Latinx alumni, program staff, and former staff.

The final article offers readers a unique perspective on an under considered aspect of teaching—teacher vocal wellness. In “Raising the Volume on Teacher Vocal Wellness: Perspectives from Practicing School Administrators,” the authors contend that “Teacher voice health is an important but overlooked issue with consequences for educators, students, and schools.” This qualitative study examined how administrators understood teachers’ vocal complaints and relevant policies. Focus groups made up of 18 administrators yielded key insights: 1) Reliance on voice amplification, 2) Attitudes and responses, 3) Perceived impacts on learning, and 4) Proposed interventions.”

Teachers are perhaps the center of the instructional core. Yet, ironically, the profession is least understood and too often disrespected by the public and those seeking to transform education.

The answer to the question, “How hard can it be?” cannot be understood by those who have not done the work or refuse to accept its complexity.

American schools are confronted with the realities of a teacher shortage that cannot be solved by technology, volunteers, or expedited certification.

School systems need smart and curious teachers who enter the profession with dedication to students and a willingness to develop the skills for complex work. Quality learning experiences need qualified teachers. If today’s leaders are unable to find or develop them, our society is in trouble.

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Why Texas Teachers Leave the Classroom: A Qualitative Look into Non-Retirement

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Abstract

The attrition of classroom teachers has garnered significant attention due to its impact on education. While past discourse focused on pay as the driving force behind departures, our study delves into the qualitative aspects of attrition. Reviewing a dataset spanning 40+ years, we explore multifaceted reasons behind teachers considering leaving the profession. Our findings, derived from 1,175 data points from Texas State Teachers Association members, reveal seven prevalent themes: Compensation, Workload, Support and Respect, Students, Leadership, Working Conditions and Safety, and Culture. These themes interconnect, painting a comprehensive picture of teachers feeling undervalued, overworked, and lacking support. School leaders and policymakers are crucial agents in mitigating attrition by fostering supportive environments and addressing systemic issues. This study underscores the imperative for informed policy decisions and further research to amplify teacher voices and improve retention efforts.

Key Words

teacher attrition, school leadership, teacher voice, teacher morale, teacher compensation, teacher retention

In recent years, political leaders, media sources, and the public at large have seen and discussed the high number of public-school classroom teachers who are leaving the profession. Much of the discussion has focused historically on low pay for teachers, which is often compared to professionals in other fields with similar education and experience backgrounds (e.g., Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Allegretto, S., 2023). The media coverage seems to have little impact on bringing teaching salaries in line with what other professionals with similar backgrounds are paid (Garcia & Weiss, 2019).

Over the last 40+ years, a group of university researchers in conjunction with a professional teacher organization have asked Texas PK-12 teachers if they are seriously considering leaving the teaching profession (Brown et al., 2019; Maninger et al., 2011; Potter et al., 2023). In the context of a questionnaire concerning teacher moonlighting practices, the underlying assumption, perhaps, has been that money is at the root of the decision-making for educators. Current researchers on this project are looking deeper into the data to see if there are other factors contributing to teacher attrition.

Background and Need for Study

Data from the 2022 administration of the teacher moonlighting questionnaire show that a startling 70% of classroom teachers in Texas are seriously considering leaving the profession (Potter et al., 2023). In Texas, schools are already facing unprecedented teacher shortages coupled with funding issues and increased scrutiny from stakeholders. This may mean that addressing the underlying causes of teacher attrition is an area of research interest to those in positions to make changes to the teaching experience, which includes all PK-12 stakeholders. School personnel in leadership

positions such as principals and superintendents are uniquely situated to directly impact change.

Although researchers have delved into the factors contributing to teachers exiting the profession, there has been limited exploration into the stories and motivations of those contemplating departure. The longitudinal study from which we mined the data for the current manuscript has for more than 40 years focused on teachers' moonlighting practices, employment outside of their full-time teaching position.

The questionnaire asks teachers, in addition to other items, what level of pay increase would allow them to quit their moonlighting positions. This question suggests an underlying assumption that teachers moonlight for financial reasons, but the questionnaire also asks teachers if they are "seriously considering leaving the profession" and offers a constructed response opportunity to explain their considerations.

Research Question

Research Question: What trends can be seen in PK-12 teachers' responses to questions regarding the reasons for considering leaving the teaching profession?

Literature Review

Approximately 20% of teachers in the United States will leave the profession by the end of their third year of teaching, and 50% will leave by the end of their fifth year (Boe et al., 2008). Roughly 17% of newly hired teachers depart within their first year, while 10% of experienced educators, those with a decade or more of service, exit the profession annually. This means substantial numbers of teachers are leaving the classroom each year, exploring alternative career avenues (Blatt, 2016). Research indicates that the current relatively high rate of teacher attrition is a primary

contributor to teacher shortages nationally, accounting for close to 90% of annual teacher demand (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). The study reveals that retirements account for less than one-third of the national teacher attrition. Essentially, every year, schools across the country must recruit tens of thousands of new teachers due to the departure of those in the early and middle stages of their careers.

Upon thorough reflection on their decision to leave the teaching profession, both novice and seasoned educators expressed their desire to remain but felt compelled to depart due to job-related factors that exerted pressure, leading to their resignation (Amitai & Van Houtte, 2022). As indicated by most scholars, individuals seldom make career redirection decisions based on one reason.

According to the work by Amitai and Van Houtte (2022), novice teachers commonly cited job conditions as the primary reason for considering departure, particularly grappling with heavy workloads and the uncertainty of achieving tenure. Conversely, experienced teachers predominantly identified the broader career landscape, such as the absence of advancement prospects and fresh challenges, as the main driver behind their contemplation of leaving.

Likewise, Santoro (2021) investigated departure choices stemming from 'demoralization'. These teachers can be considered conscientious objectors, as their decision to leave reflects a refusal to work under conditions that contradict their fundamental beliefs about effective teaching practices. In addition, demoralized educators perceive the school practices or policy mandates they must adhere to are detrimental to students, the overall quality of education, and the teaching profession itself.

Methods

The data were collected for the current study as part of a longitudinal research project that began in 1980. The questionnaire, which is focused on the practice of teachers working a second job in addition to their fulltime teaching position, has remained largely the same since inception, except for a few context-specific items included as appropriate. For example, the most recent iteration of the survey, 2022, from which data for the current manuscript are considered, included items related to COVID 19 and its impact on the teaching profession.

When the research began in 1980, questionnaires were mailed to Texas State Teachers Association (TSTA) members and included self-addressed stamped return envelopes. More recently, this instrument was migrated to a digital platform. The questionnaire link is now distributed by TSTA to its approximately 5,000 members via email.

In 2022, 688 members submitted responses; of those 688, 471 responders completed the constructed response item, "If you answered, 'Yes' to the previous question, why are you considering leaving?" Those 471 responses yielded 1,175 distinct data points. Participants indicated data-use consent by returning the completed survey. At the end of the survey collection period, data were compiled and sorted for further analysis.

Sample

TSTA members comprised the eligible participants in this study. The survey was sent through TSTA to approximately 5,000 teacher members, and 688 responses were received. Of the respondents, 481, or 70% of respondents, indicated they are seriously considering leaving the teaching profession. Of those 481, 471 provided a constructed response to the question of why they have considered leaving. Because several participants gave multiple answers, the

total number of qualitative data points for this study is 1,175.

Instrument

The full 2022 questionnaire consisted of 29 items including 5-point Likert scale, multiple choice, multiple answer, and constructed response items. Demographic items addressed topics such as age, gender, marital status, credentials, income, and teaching experience. For the purposes of this manuscript, only the items asking, “Are you seriously considering leaving the teaching profession?” and “If you answered, ‘Yes’ to the previous question, why are you considering leaving?” will be discussed.

Data collection and analysis

At the end of the data collection period, the survey was closed for responses and the data were compiled to compare demographic data and responses to research items. As noted above, 471 participants provided constructed responses to the item asking why they were ‘seriously considering leaving the profession.’ Those responses were separated into 1,175 distinct data points then coded to facilitate looking for data trends.

To obtain and categorize data from the responses, researchers independently identified codes throughout the data, noting concepts mentioned by the participants that correlated with the research question. The researchers then worked collaboratively to create a master list of initial codes by performing a comparative analysis of the concepts that emerged. They then standardized the codes to create common verbiage. For example, for coding purposes, ‘salary inversion’, ‘low benefits’, and ‘inflation’ were determined to be related concepts, and the standard theme ‘compensation’ was adopted.

With this schema in use, researchers collapsed the initial 105 codes into 21 themes.

The raw data were then reconsidered for alignment with these themes. These were further consolidated into 20 themes.

Findings

In this qualitative research project, the researchers honor the voices of participants by representing their comments and concerns in full. To also be sensitive to the space available, the top seven themes will be discussed in detail and example responses will be included. The complete list of themes is in Table 1 and a pie chart is offered as Figure 1 to help readers visualize each theme’s prevalence. See Appendix.

Theme 1: Compensation

It came as no surprise to researchers that teachers feel undercompensated for the work they do. Of course, salary comes to mind first, and many teachers feel they are underpaid given their level of education and experience. One teacher wrote, “After 20 yrs. and multiple degrees, I don’t make enough to support my family of 3 (1 in college & the other a high schooler). I can’t afford to have my skills underpaid and utilized.”

Along with salary, teachers in this survey state that insurance policies cost too much and offer too little in coverage, “Poor benefits (I pay a high premium for low coverage).” Carrying family members on a schoolteacher’s policy can also be too costly. As this teacher stated, “I cannot afford to have my daughter on my health insurance.” Another teacher states, “I cannot afford the copays I require for a major set of tests, so I am having to live in pain even though I have healthcare insurance.”

Health insurance is meant to provide peace of mind, knowledge that if a health need arises, it will be addressed. Respondents to this survey, however, lack security offered by substandard insurance coverage.

Other concerns of teachers when discussing benefits relate to paying for classroom materials out of personal funds, not being compensated for a heavy workload, large class sizes, work that must be done outside the school day, salary compression and inversion, and inflation outpacing pay schedules. When codes were collapsed into themes, compensation stood out as the primary reason for considering leaving the profession. This correlates to research by Potter et al. (2023) which found that 55% of teachers hold second and third jobs in addition to their full-time teaching job.

Theme 2: Workload

Another factor teachers cite in considering leaving the profession is the amount of work classroom teachers are expected to complete both at school and that they take home to work in the evenings and on weekends. One respondent wrote, “All the extra things teacher are needed to do and so many extra hats that teachers need to wear.” Another said, “Having to work at home in order to complete necessary requirements.” One person even called the workload “unrealistic.”

On top of feeling the need and pressure to work outside of their duty day, teachers state that not spending time in the evenings and weekends on work tasks is negatively reflected in their performance reviews. “For years, I have been pressured to work after hours and weekends for no pay by administration. When I can't, I have been unfairly evaluated.”

In cases such as this, workload issues can then further complicate any compensation issues by making it more difficult for teachers to hold moonlighting positions. The intersection of research themes is reflected in the following response, pieces of which can be coded as workload, testing, leadership, compensation, support and respect, and

working conditions.

“As a teacher I feel that we can't teach. The stress and amount of work expected increases. You say the job title and I am sure it [teaching] is expected of teachers. Responsibility and blame are placed on teachers. TTESS evaluations state that no teacher can ever reach distinguished unless they live on campus and spend their days off working with the community. Teachers aren't recognized for the amazing things we do in class. As stated by one of my superiors, ‘If your students’ tests don't show passing then how can I rate you any higher.’ Really!?! Students grow in so many more ways than a test. I put in a lot of time outside work bonding and educating my students’ parents. There are jobs out there that pay more and will allow me to do my job and will recognize me for a job well done without the volunteer hours and extra duties.”

Theme 3: Support and Respect

As educated professionals, teachers expect the support of parents and administrators and their respect. In the responses to this survey, these basic courtesies were cited as lacking for many teachers. Specifically, teachers attest to lack of support from the district, “District support is not adequate, staff development does not exist for new professionals;” administrators, “lack of admin and parental support;” and parents, “Some parents are supportive, but others take the students word above mine in minor situations that escalate to major situations due to lack of communication” and “no support with student behavior from parents and administrators.”

Frequently, more than one stakeholder group is cited in a single response as not adequately supporting classroom teaching, as this response shows, “I do not feel adequately supported by my coworkers or leadership at the building, district, or state levels.” The most common statement indicated a general “lack of support” with little or no explanation of where support was expected.

The construct of respect is similarly treated in survey responses. Teachers report they are “Not respected as a professional: everything is micromanaged, no autonomy,” and “Students and parents are abusive, and teachers are not respected anymore. I even had students telling other students: are you gonna let her talk to you like that?”

Teachers are demoralized when they are not shown the basic courtesy of being respected as trained professionals with knowledge and experience born of years of hard work and training. Some teachers state exactly the source of disrespect, as this response shows, “General lack of respect for teachers in society and on campus.” Similar to what was found regarding the construct of support, many respondents simply stated that “No respect” was at least in part informing their consideration of leaving the classroom.

Theme 4: Students

Daily, teachers come into contact with students more than any other group of people. It is easy to understand, then, why a person who says they are thinking of leaving the profession “Because behavior of students” might contemplate this action. Throughout the survey, respondents commented that “discipline is out of control throughout the school,” and “Student behaviors getting more difficult to handle.” When this is coupled with the lack of support from both parents and administrators, classroom behavior issues are causing stress, burnout, and teacher attrition.

One teacher summed up the situation saying, “Finally the discipline system in schools need to improve. Students aren't being held responsible for their actions. They are out of hand in so many areas.”

In addition to behavior issues, several respondents mentioned the academic preparation and performances of students. One teacher stated, “majority of students are academically and socially low, which has made it very difficult to teach and reach reasonable expectations.” Another wrote, “The students are extremely low and the pressure from the administration to get kids to pass the STAAR is unnecessary.” Another wrote about how various factors play into an overwhelming internal pressure to leave teaching:

“Too much nonsense. We are taught to differentiate in our teaching and then we give standardized tests. Go figure. Kids are mixed together, on-level and special ed, so both groups suffer. Teachers are required to pass kids even if they don't do the work. Little or no support from administration.”

Theme 5: Leadership

As stated previously, respondents not only felt a general lack of support from their administration but also a lack of leadership and, in fact, “harassment by administration.” Another teacher stated, “just this morning my boss got on my case for drinking coffee.” When a lack of leadership leads to bullying, the stress level of teachers rises causing increased tension in the classroom.

Additionally, teachers indicated that school and district leaders have unrealistic expectations stating that, “the administration does not care about our life's outside of school

they think they own us 24/7.” In contrast, students are not held to such high expectations and teachers are required to assign grades that were not earned as indicated by, “administration now demands that we give no grade below a 50!

That is a disservice to the students and a slap in the face to the teacher. High School diploma is the biggest participation trophy in America.” Again, teachers are expected to unrealistically pass students while working in stressful situations all the while lacking true leadership.

Theme 6: Working Conditions and Safety

The lack of realistic boundaries and the encouragement to prioritize work over other activities was another area of respondent concern. Teachers felt that the working conditions in school have deteriorated over time. Several indicated that lunch and planning time were a luxury. “We were understaffed. I did not have a scheduled lunch or prep” and “lack of support and lack of planning time needed to teach AP classes, classes too large, lack of pay” were just two examples of unrealistic boundaries.

Not only were teachers worried about teaching working conditions, but they were very concerned about the safety of the environment for students and themselves stating, “The students were physically and verbally aggressive and the staffing situation did not allow for a safe or productive environment.” In fact, several teachers indicated that injuries to teachers were not uncommon. “Teachers get assaulted DAILY at my school and no punishment is given to the student” due to the “lack of leadership support, no discipline of unruly students, and injuries of teachers/staff by students.” One respondent went so far as to say, “Terrorism unchecked, pathetic pay, and even worse working conditions under corrupt

administration/principals.” All these things work together to create poor working conditions and safety concerns.

Theme 7: Culture

According to Fullan (2007), culture can be defined as the beliefs and values that guide and are evident in the way a school operates. Many respondents indicated that their school culture was unhealthy. One shared:

The fact that our state has limited what we can teach historically and has jumped on the book ban bandwagon says so much about the state of education in Texas. So much racism, xenophobia, and bigotry taking over our educational system. What does that say to our [student]’s and families of color who are seeing their histories erased? It’s disgusting.

Others voiced concerns over the curriculum or lack thereof, “I feel now we’re just babysitting, watering down curriculum, appeasing parents, and thinking a brand new program of software can solve the problems.”

Other themes can be found in Table 1. One respondent seemed to summarize the whole study in one comment, “lack of professional appreciation, lack of agency, poor pay, poor benefits (I pay a high premium for low coverage), lack of respect, lack of joy, toxic environment, lack of adequate communication, lack of transparency by administration.”

Discussion

Seven prevalent themes emerged from the data and answer the research question of what trends exist among PK-12 teachers and their reasons for considering career changes. Those were compensation, workload, support and respect,

students, leadership, working conditions and safety, and culture. Teachers reported:

- Pay and benefits are low for the education and experience required to be successful professionals (Compensation).
- Demands of time and tasks create unmanageable and unrealistic workloads, and these demands affect performance and performance evaluations negatively (Workload).
- Parents and school leaders express limited support of and respect for teachers (Support and Respect).
- Students create difficult discipline situations, and they are not held accountable for their actions, which in turn empowers them to continue or escalate disruption (Students).
- Pressure about student performance, especially on state standardized tests, compromises the student-teacher relationship (Students).
- School leaders hold teachers to unrealistic on-the-job expectations and use intimidation as an accountability tool (Leadership).
- Lack of unencumbered time like lunch breaks and planning periods creates stressful working conditions (Working Conditions and Safety).
- Concerns about personal safety and well-being while on school campuses result in elevated stress and anxiety (Working Conditions and Safety).
- Societal movements and regulation have potential to marginalize some students and families (Culture).
- Limited positive interactions with students, parents, and school leaders lead to low morale (Culture).

Findings show that no theme is mutually exclusive among the seven. In fact, just the opposite is true; causal relationships can be drawn among any combination of the seven. Previous findings showed that 70% of Texas teachers were seriously considering leaving the profession (Potter et al., 2023). The themes discussed here answer any questions of why and support existing literature from studies in the same timeframe.

Teachers believe they are overworked and undervalued in a 360-degree space. Demands for higher student achievement and increased bureaucratic tasks from school leaders contribute to feelings of being overwhelmed and overworked. Disrespectful, threatening, and apathetic students created undue challenges and pressures that contribute to workload and teachers' perceived lack of respect and value.

Drastically differing levels of parental engagement impact teachers' workload, morale, and working conditions because at any given time, teachers struggle to engage withdrawn parents and appease intrusive ones.

Implications

This study's findings reveal implications for school leaders, district-level leaders, and policy makers. Among these three groups are those who create and enforce policy and hire and supervise teachers. Understanding the teacher experience is critical to understanding the implications of policy and action. Data from

teachers show that school leaders have direct and significant impact on teacher morale. School leaders are responsible for teacher workloads and working conditions, give or deny support to teachers, and set the tone for school culture.

Implications

The implications of this study target, namely, school leaders and district-level leaders.

School leaders

School leaders must be aware of the expectations they place on teachers and how they interact with and treat teachers. They must be cognizant of the time and talent demands they place on teachers and avoid single-handedly creating a work/life imbalance for teachers. Teachers need school leaders' support to be successful, but many feel that school leaders' actions are predominantly punitive. School leaders could benefit from frank, unvarnished conversations with their teachers to determine what challenges, needs, and concerns exist.

District-level leaders

District-level leaders hold school leaders accountable; however, they must be informed

of conditions in school settings. Therefore, district-level leaders must engage directly with teachers to know how school leaders are performing in both the technical tasks of managing and the adaptive duties of leading. Like teachers, school leaders must be supported and held accountable but by district-level leaders directly. Soliciting input directly from teachers on school leader performance, the teacher experience, and school climate would help district-level leaders make informed decisions.

Recommendations for Further Research

Expanding the sample and replicating the study with school leaders could provide greater utility to research on this topic. First, because the sample was limited to members of one professional Texas teacher association, it represents a small population of Texas teachers. Second, replicating the study, albeit with adjusted questions, with school leaders would provide data from the population the findings target primarily. Just like teacher voice, school leader voice is important, and a replicated study with that population would provide valuable data for comparison to determine where the two populations' perspectives agree and differ.

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APPENDIX

The complete list of themes is in Table 1 and a pie chart is offered as Figure 1 to help readers visualize each theme's prevalence.

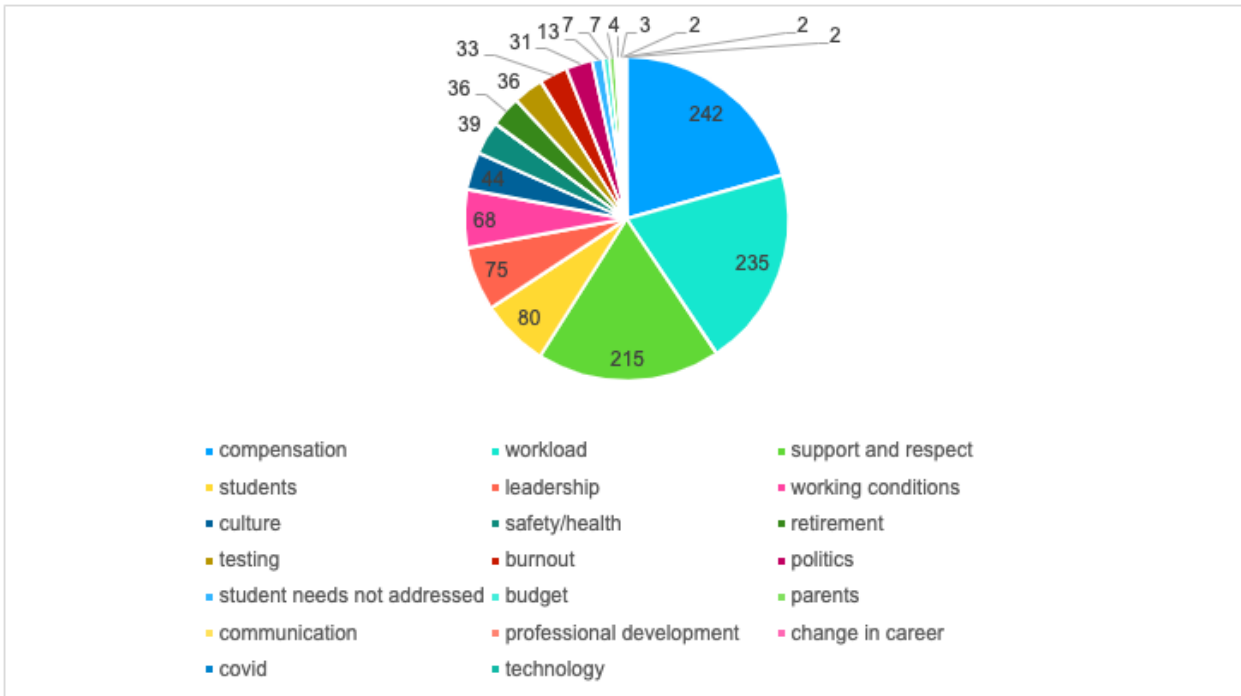
Table 1

Final Themes and Occurrence Count

Theme	Occurrence
compensation	242
workload	235
Support and respect	215
students	80
leadership	75
working conditions	68
culture	44
safety/health	39
retirement	36
testing	36
burnout	33
politics	31
student needs not addressed	13
budget	7
parents	7
communication	4
professional development	3
change in career	2
covid	2
technology	2

Figure 1

Final Themes and Occurrence Count



Elementary Teacher Planning Time: Finding Innovation through Focused Collaboration

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Abstract

Local districts can benefit from a collaborative process for refreshing their master schedules to increase teacher planning time. Alongside national models for organizing the school day, local districts must account for regional factors such as resources, historical practices, community expectations, changing state requirements, negotiated agreements, and core values. The district featured in this research undertook a comprehensive focus group process, engaging diverse stakeholders to identify opportunities and challenges in elementary school schedules, with a specific focus on increasing teacher planning time. The outcomes provide actionable steps for the district, an assessment of multiple innovative scheduling ideas, and evidence of the universal value of collaboration in driving change.

Key Words

planning time, innovation, collaboration, reimagining the use of time, master scheduling, elementary school teachers, teacher planning

School districts have distinctive circumstances surrounding the organization of the school day and how time is used or valued due to historical, political, and environmental factors that are as diverse and multifaceted as students are themselves (Innovative Approaches, 2013). When districts reconsider the use of time in a school day, it is an endeavor to find an ideal balance that serves students' academic achievements, data-driven best practices, the responsibilities of teachers and staff, the legal constraints of the district, and parent and community expectations.

Districts throughout the U.S. have created model school day schedules filled with innovation, creativity, and flexibility (Innovative Approaches, 2013; Merritt, 2016; Benner & Partelow, 2017), but the sweet spot of master scheduling, instructional minutes, teacher planning, professional development, logistical constraints of bus routes, negotiations with unions, and local political pressures are not easily solved through a decree or mandate of a model schedule from another district or researched best practices. Instead, this level of change benefits from a multifaceted approach that includes the research and experience of other districts and honors local environments and practices.

The following case study explores the research and school day change processes conducted by a district, referred to here as HCPS (Harford County Public Schools), which serves 38,000 students and employs 5,400 full-time equivalent employees through fifty-five schools.

For this study, the district sought local qualitative data and co-creation of solutions with diverse stakeholders through a series of focus groups using human-centered design methodology (Luma System methods, 2023). [NOTE: The author completed LUMA

Institute's Practitioner Certification Program in January 2023 and is designated a Certified Practitioner of Human-Centered Design; <https://www.luma-institute.com/about-luma/>].

The focus groups consisted of three parts conducted over three months, with part one analyzing the goals and appropriateness of the research question, part two brainstorming solutions, and part three developing proposals for the superintendent. The methodology aimed to gather qualitative perspectives and unique recommendations (both in innovation and in the specificity of the district's needs) about increasing planning time for elementary school teachers.

Through the systematic review of the focus group processes and subsequent outcomes of the HCPS focus group series, district leaders can reflect on their own use of time, values, and challenges regarding teacher planning and co-creation opportunities for systemic change.

The Planning Time Imperative

The reasoning and momentum at HCPS for a study about planning time stemmed from a different 2022 HCPS study about COVID-19 pandemic innovations, of which a recommendation was generated to protect and increase planning time for teachers (Ousmanou, 2022).

The goal of the 2022 research was to ensure that the district's specific pandemic experiences could inform the future. The district observed how the experience gained by education professionals during the pandemic changed perspectives on a school's role in a community, the use of technology in a classroom, the value placement of non-curriculum services, what time and tools teachers need to succeed, and the inexorable link between physical and mental health and learning. For the pandemic innovation study,

staff members and parents were interviewed to collect data specifically on innovations from the COVID-19 pandemic worth preserving. The data were analyzed for which pandemic adaptations were most important to stakeholders and which innovations helped the district move forward and meet the Board of Education strategic plan goals (Strategic Plan, 2017).

The four key recommendations were:

- (1) Invest in the expansion, formalization, and further integration of technology initiatives in the district beyond the pandemic.
- (2) Explore more permanent funding strategies to keep extra daily substitute teachers at school sites.
- (3) Codify HCPS' commitment to prioritizing student and staff health and wellbeing.
- (4) Continue to explore opportunities to increase planning time for teachers. (Ousmanou, 2022, p. 6)

The final recommendation about planning time was unexpected and provided a novel view of district pandemic experiences. The context of the participant's perceptions of planning time came from an HCPS practice during virtual and hybrid instruction portions of the COVID-19 pandemic, whereby students and teachers enjoyed a weekly asynchronous day of instruction. Students used the asynchronous school day to complete assignments, and teachers used it to prepare lessons and provide targeted interventions.

Teachers expressed much appreciation and support for the dedicated time and space to provide individualized support to students, plan lessons, and provide outreach to families. Through the interview process, teachers strongly asserted that this full day of planning time improved their wellbeing (Continuity of Learning Innovations, 2022). The desire and

need to promote dedicated planning time has been evident at HCPS, even as the pandemic fades into the past.

Specific to HCPS elementary schools, most schedules and teacher duties do not allow time outside of a union-negotiated, contractual daily forty-five minutes of protected planning time.

In past practice, HCPS instituted half days for elementary schools to give teachers more planning time. As this practice evolved, these half days became countywide for all school levels, and leaders began to schedule professional development for teachers, thus removing the additional planning time for elementary teachers. Elementary planning time was ultimately squeezed due to growing needs for professional development on new instructional practices, such as the science of reading, or new mandates, such as behavioral health training.

In addition to COVID-19 and the 2022 recommendation to leverage new practices and perceptions surrounding planning time, the growing demands on classroom teachers contributed to an imperative to ensure adequate planning time for effective teaching and learning. Such demands are faced by districts throughout the country due to the pressures of changing education environments, mandates, and responsibilities.

Many authors acknowledge the growing demands on teachers (Innovative Approaches, 2013; Merritt, 2016; Benner & Partelow, 2017), whereby "teaching is more complex in this decade than ever before as educators adapt to new curricular reforms and assessments, implement social and emotional learning programs, and plan learning for an increasingly diverse student population (Merritt, 2016. para. 4)." At HCPS, the specific demands on teachers

include but are certainly not limited to transitioning to a new online learning platform, a district emphasis on literacy starting at early grades, implementing state law with large-scale education reform requirements, and a significant local and national teacher, support staff, and substitute shortage. HCPS also has experience with a growing population of students needing individualized support for behavior, mental health, English language acquisition, and special education services. These factors place a direct and heavy burden on classroom teachers, and adequate planning time is one method for easing this weight.

Nationally, education writers have compared American teachers' schedules with international high-performing education systems, such as Singapore and Finland, and concluded that there is value in out-of-classroom time for teacher efficacy in the classroom (Benner & Partelow, 2017; Merritt, 2016; Sparks, 2022). Additionally, Merritt (2016) gathered examples of teacher voice prioritizing planning time similar to the HCRC COVID-19 innovation survey. Merritt cites a survey of teachers from Wisconsin asserting that increased planning would have the "greatest positive impact (Merritt, 2016, para. 3)" on their ability to support student learning and also references a study where teachers claimed that lack of sufficient planning time impacted their choices to leave the classroom and served as a particular barrier to providing high-quality, evidence-based curriculum.

Other education professionals provide alternative views about planning time, believing that students need more (not less) time with their teachers and that teachers, unlike other professionals, receive ample holidays and time off (Vilson, 2015). Whether in support or dissent about increasing planning time, the national discourse reflects the same desired outcomes as all districts in their mission and vision to serve all students.

Regardless of national trends and perceptions, HCPS desired specific systemic measures for its post-pandemic re-evaluation of time (Ousmanou, 2022). When coupled with growing pressures on academic outcomes, mandated individualized support for more students, and the sustainability of the teaching profession, evaluating planning time and district philosophy on the use of school time continues to be critical for this district. Ultimately, the 2002 pandemic innovation study recommendation and additional local demands led the superintendent of HCPS to ask: *How do we add five hours of planning time a week for elementary school teachers?*

Focus groups

To address the challenge and opportunity presented by the bold planning time question, the superintendent conceptualized a qualitative focus group framework that would include participation from teachers, teacher specialists, principals, university professors, central office leaders, college student interns, and high school students in a future teacher academy. The impetus for this particular group of individuals with different expertise and experience came from the superintendent's goal to leverage such differences to create new ideas.

Believing that only through diverse collaboration can new and distinctive ideas emerge, the superintendent's philosophy fits Gray's 1989 definition of collaboration as a "process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible (Gray, 1989, p. 5)."

Using this definition of collaboration, the focus groups were formed with three unique groups, so three sets of diverse individuals could collaborate and provide three sets of data and subsequent recommendations, which could

be compared for holistic analysis and consideration. With this participation framework, the Director of Strategic Initiatives created a human-centered design (Luma System Methods, 2023) protocol for a three-part focus group series, with three groups of diverse individuals, conducted over three months to systematically break down the question, encourage creative thinking, and ultimately provide recommendations to the superintendent on how to provide additional planning time to elementary school teachers.

Part 1: Challenging the question

In part one of the focus group protocol, participants collaborated through human-centered design methods to explore the research question. Starting with *abstraction laddering*, the participants challenged whether the right research question was being asked in the first place and why it was being asked. Then, they followed the broader or more narrow issues arising from the exercise (Abstract Laddering, 2023). Groups changed the scope and focus of the question with broader questions and more specific, detailed questions.

Participants were encouraged to think outside their perspectives by considering the question from different lenses (e.g., what if you had unlimited resources?) and, ultimately, identified themes and patterns in their thinking. The protocol for theme identification, *affinity clustering*, involved combining the broader or narrow questions and ideas into groups based on similarity and then labeling the similarities as a theme (Affinity Clustering, 2023).

The emerging themes reflect values, priorities, concerns, and constraints that impact how schools could provide additional planning time. All groups had primary themes about teacher wellbeing and student learning outcomes. The themes created through the

protocol include (1) teacher physical and mental health priorities; (2) the importance of planning effectiveness, methods, and processes; (3) correlation with student needs and achievement; (4) awareness and consideration for curriculum needs; (5) administration considerations (e.g., Budget, Rules); (6) considerations of current or needed staffing structures; (7) use of time and schedules; (8) impact of recruitment and retention; and (9) impact of culture and climate (Ridgway, 2023).

Concerns, barriers, and counterarguments arose when dissecting whether asking for more planning was the right question. For example, included within the themes were concerns about having enough time in the day to meet curriculum pacing expectations, whether the quality of planning might be more important than the quantity of planning, and the sustainability of budgets and staffing.

These concerns were collected and examined in the process so that they could be weighed with the themes representing the positive impact of increased planning time and so they were included in considerations for solution findings and recommendations.

Part one of the focus group protocol stretched the groups' creative muscles as they unraveled their preconceived ideas and leaned into questioning the question. After examining the question, each group identified critical data needed to inform their decision-making and future focus group sessions.

Participants wanted to frame their future brainstorming with a better understanding of state and local scheduling constraints and national and local common practices. Four specific questions emerged, which were researched and provided back to the group for consideration in the subsequent sessions of the focus group protocol.

The first question focused on positioning the work in the broader state landscape: *How many instructional hours does HCPS provide compared to state requirements?* Elementary schools in the state must be open for at least 1080 hours a year, 180 school days, and open within a ten-month period. The district's 2022-2023 calendar for elementary planned for 6.5 hours a day for elementary schools, thirteen shortened days (early dismissal), and a total of 1,131 open hours. The schedule represents fifty-one hours above the state minimum, which participants appreciated understanding in their discussions as this gave room for creativity in the school day schedule, specifically for start and end times (Ridgway, 2023).

The next question centered on nationwide comparison: *What amount of planning time do teachers get around the country?* In 2017, Education Week published an article reviewing data collected through the National Council on Teacher Quality on daily teacher planning time. The author found that 24 districts provided an hour of planning time or more each day, 61 districts provided 45 minutes, 14 districts provided 30 minutes, and five provided 15 minutes (Loewus, 2017). With 45 minutes of daily planning time at HCPS, the district falls in line with the majority in this study.

The groups next questioned the curriculum and instruction needs: *What are content minimums for instruction?* In the district's state, instruction must meet content standards, but no regulatory or state-mandated specific minimum time is required to meet those standards.

For example, in Physical Education (PE), "provide in public schools an instructional program in physical education each year with sufficient frequency and duration to meet the requirements of the State

[curriculum] Framework for all students (COMAR 13A, 1986)." Districts may have individual Board of Education policies or administrative procedures about curriculum time. For this district, a Board Policy requires a minimum of 275 minutes per month for Elementary PE, but no other curriculum area has dictated time minimums (Health and Wellness Policy, 2023).

As standard practice, though, the district provides recommended time allotments for elementary schools for the core curriculum. For example, the mathematics allotment for grades one through five is 65 minutes, and since at least 1995, the English and language arts allotment has been 190 minutes (Ridgway, 2023).

Finally, the focus group participants expressed anecdotally that the thirty-three elementary schools in the district may have vastly different practices for protected planning time, collaborative planning, and additional time outside the classroom.

Participants asked: *What are HCPS schools currently doing for planning time beyond the negotiated 45 minutes?* Proving the anecdotes valid, thirty-one HCPS elementary schools responded to survey questions through the Department of Elementary Education Services with an array of practices around planning time.

All schools had unique responses and focus group participants were provided comprehensive responses from these diverse schools. For example, one school stated, "In kindergarten through grade three, we have collaborative planning from 3:00-3:50 one day for each grade level, Monday through Thursday. The Unified Arts teachers cover the class. Grades four and five have collaborative time during chorus, as all students are in chorus (Ridgway, 2023, p. 9)." In comparison, another

school shared, "We have a wellness block once every three weeks that teachers can sign up for to get another planning block. This is managed by the PE teacher (Ridgway, 2023, p. 10)." With principals throughout the district already finding creative ways to add planning time, these ideas were provided to participants in detail for their systemic considerations.

After completing part one, all data were collated and provided to the participants to consider as they began part two. Armed with the data and themes of their work, participants could go back to their schools for further discussion and evaluation with peers and administrators, which fueled even broader thinking as they approached part two, where the actual work of brainstorming solutions and ideas would begin.

Part 2: Brainstorming and evaluation

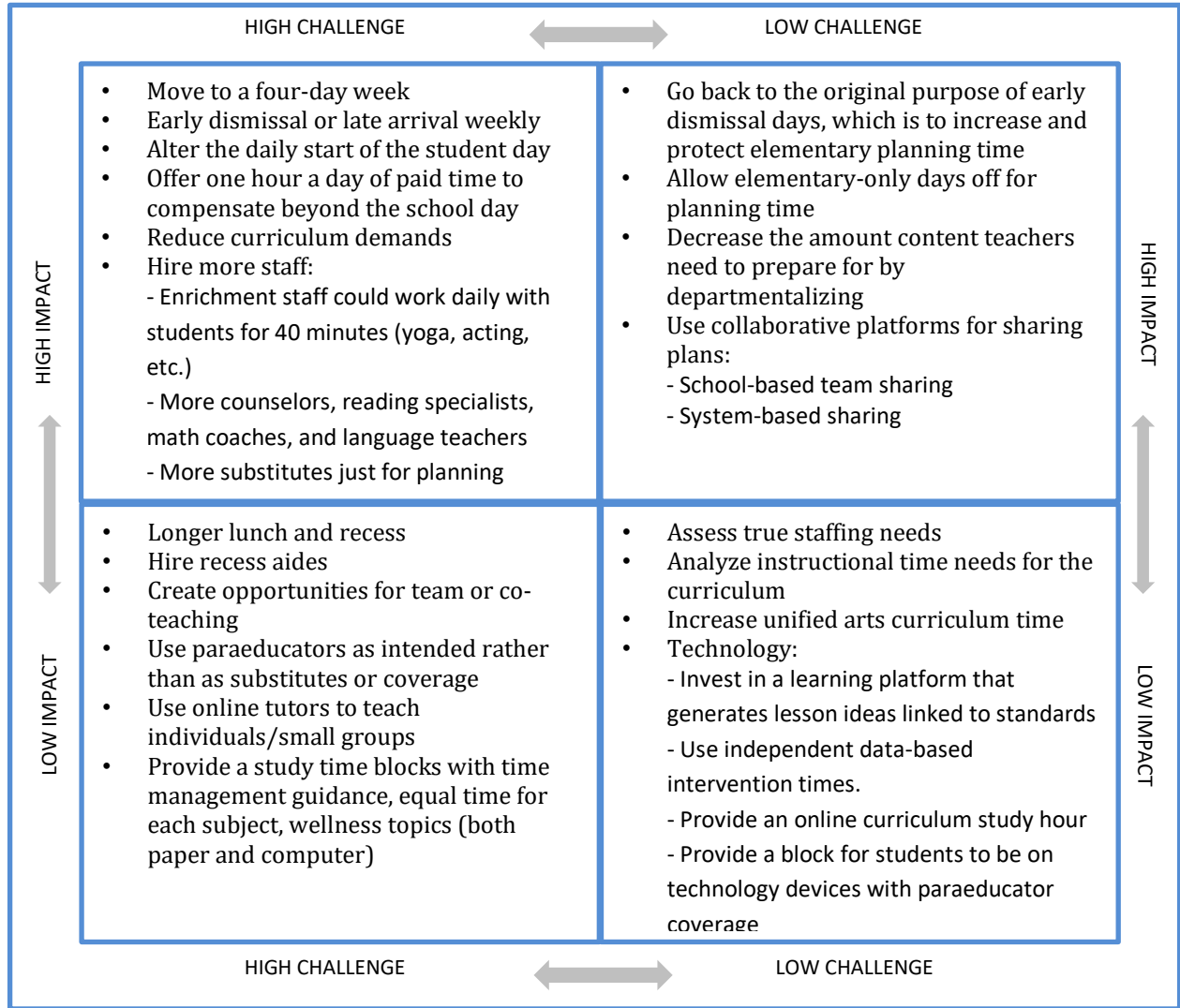
In part two of the focus group series, participants used their research and themes and participated in human-centered design brainstorming activities to identify concrete and actionable solutions for the planning time question. The protocol for brainstorming, *creative matrix*, involved a grid of all the previously identified beneficial themes from part one on an axis (e.g., improved mental health), with the other axis listing the ideas

representing enabling solutions (e.g., school day schedules) (Creative matrix, 2023). Participants crafted ideas of how to meet the desired positive benefit while considering logistics or barriers. Utilizing a philosophy that participants should develop ideas independently and then build off each other's ideas, groups were encouraged to present ideas with all levels of complexity, uniqueness, or simplicity. Groups then followed a protocol to *visualize the vote* to identify the solutions that resonated the most with the group so ideas would emerge that all found viable to explore further (Visualize the Vote, 2023).

Once generated, participants put all preferred ideas through a value-placement exercise and an impact-challenge exercise (Importance/Difficulty Matrix, 2023) to narrow down which ideas might be substantive and impactful as planning time recommendations to the superintendent.

The data from these exercises created a menu of solutions categorized by impact and challenge. Conceivably, low-challenge and high-impact solutions, such as relooking at the usage of half-days and departmentalization, could be more quickly implemented than high-challenge and high-impact strategies, such as changing the school day timeframe and hiring more staff for thirty-three elementary schools.

Figure 1

Impact-Challenge Results

Note: Participants placed solutions within the figure based on perceptions of how hard a solution would be to implement relative to how positive the impact would be for teachers.

The impact-challenge exercise helped groups visualize solutions that may be quick wins for the school district, solutions that might require long-term planning and resource reallocation, and solutions that may significantly impact families. The level of impact and challenge ultimately informed the groups on what solutions they believed may

best fit the specific culture, climate, and constraints surrounding HCPS.

Part 3: Creating recommendations

For the final part of the focus group series, groups now had established values, shared research, an understanding of the complexities of answering the question, new perspectives,

and a plethora of ideas to consider. Creative and unique recommendations emerged through diverse perspectives and systemic collaboration over the three-part focus group series. For part three, groups worked independently and unstructured to find a clear consensus on answering the superintendent's question: *How do we add five hours of planning time a week for elementary school teachers?* The groups crafted presentations with their chosen solutions to provide the superintendent.

Group 1 Recommendations to the Superintendent

Group one recommended the implementation of a focus day on Fridays. In this model, planning time and coverage for kindergarten through grade two could be in the morning and for grades three through five in the afternoon, and could alternate so grade levels can flip morning and afternoon timeslots as desired. To allow teachers to have this planning time on Fridays, students would engage in creative enrichment activities led by community partners or other staff.

Activities during the flexible time could include, but would not be limited to, interventions (primarily reading and math), guest speakers, Lego League, library, health department or healthy eating presentations, fire and police departments, good news assemblies, guidance counselors, yoga, puzzles and games, or music groups from high schools (Ridgway, 2023). This concept of providing enrichment time during the school day can be found in other models, such as Guilmette Elementary School, highlighted by Benner and Partelow (2017), Center for American Policy.

Group one touted focused Friday's potential for increased community partnership, project-based learning opportunities, and time for student wellness. By providing a solution that stays within the bounds of the current school day schedule, this idea has no impact on

families, and if used instead of half-days, it supports families who may need childcare on shortened school days.

Acknowledging the burden of logistics and resources, the group understood that successfully implementing their plan would be time-consuming and may create inequity of time amongst other staff not afforded such time planning time (e.g., special area teachers). With an understanding that the focused Friday concept is not quickly implemented, the groups identified other ideas they felt still had merit and were worth the superintendent's consideration, such as making early dismissal days whole days off for students, providing additional pay for planning outside the school day, and departmentalizing elementary schools.

Group 2 Recommendations to the Superintendent

Group two presented a menu of ideas, which added up to five hours or more of additional planning time for teachers. The group organized the menu based on the impact of the change on HCPS families, which the group found to be an important way to think about the solutions, as some ways to increase planning time might be easy for the district but quite hard for families.

In the group's minimal community impact category, they recommended reworking the existing instructional schedule, using five out of ten early dismissal days for planning time, reallocating collaborative planning, extending recess, using buddy class time, and adding an additional unified arts or physical education block each week. Within the recommendations for reworking the instructional schedule, the group specified a model where students would engage in three hours per week of Physical Education, structured indoor and outdoor play, social-emotional focused learning, soft skills practice, and career exploration.

The group recommended that additional unified arts and physical education staff, community partners, university partners, and volunteers lead these three-hour wellness blocks. This idea has a crossover with the first group's focused Friday approach, with a shared recommendation that enrichment can be provided to students through new avenues while teachers are released for planning time.

Within the increased community impact category, the group provided solutions that would adjust the elementary school start time for students daily, include a weekly delayed opening, or move HCPS to a four-day school week for students (Ridgway, 2023). To accomplish the four-day school week, the groups considered that time would be added to the open school days by thirty-five minutes and that although schools would be closed to students one day a week, teachers would have that day for planning time and other professional development opportunities.

With state minimums for number of school days in a year, this would require either a state legislative change to only count school time in hours or a lengthening of the district's school calendar for shorter summers. Unsurprisingly, the group found ultimate value in a four-day school week, as the motivation for the entire planning time endeavor came from the popularity of the four-day instructional week with one asynchronous day utilized during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, 900 districts throughout the U.S. have moved to this model as of September 2023, which has increased significantly from the 650 districts with a four-day school week reported in 2019 (Petz, 2024).

Group 3 Recommendations to the Superintendent

The third group's recommendations to the superintendent involved three ways to increase planning time and one recommendation to

improve the implementation of any changes to the school day. For increasing planning, the group believed that HCPS should return the ten planned early dismissal days as unassigned planning time exclusively to elementary teachers.

Additionally, HCPS could have a weekly 75-minute late-arrival for students, increase recess time to thirty minutes daily, and provide recess coverage for general educators. As additional considerations, the group suggested that HCPS update and re-evaluate curriculum time recommendations, encourage departmentalization, and determine the viability of employing staff for recess coverage. For improving implementation, the group felt strongly that more educators should be represented in the focus group process and that the superintendent should make decisions after systemic feedback from elementary teachers (Ridgway, 2023).

Additional Collaboration: Teacher's Union

Acting on the recommendation for further engagement with educators, the president of the local teacher's union gathered teachers together to provide feedback on all the recommendations generated thus far to increase planning time for elementary teachers.

Teachers heard the recommendations directly from focus group participants through presentations and then spent time with questions, discussion, and debate. The teachers engaged in lively and robust discourse about the recommendations while reflecting on their pandemic planning experience, their daily planning time squeeze, and how different schools approach scheduling planning time quite uniquely. Using a human-centered design protocol, *rose, thorn, bud*, the teachers categorized the focus groups' recommendations based on positives, negatives, and potential (Rose, Thorn, Bud, 2023).

Teachers expressed consensus and immense support in two areas: using half-days for planning time and ensuring that additional planning time comes in more significant time segments, not in small, fifteen-minute increments. Teachers saw the potential and had an interest in the focus group recommendations around creative enrichment scheduling for half-day planning while students are in school for a full day, recess coverage and extension if staff are hired, late arrival days for students, departmentalizing, four-day school weeks, adjusting curriculum minimums, increasing the number of half days, asynchronous learning during the school day, and extra physical education.

Teachers were concerned and hesitant about other recommendations made through this process that were echoed in the results of the focus group impact-challenge exercises, such as whether staff could be hired to cover recess and the extensive logistics and planning needed for creative scheduling of half-day planning for teachers while students attend school full day. Finally, the idea of providing additional pay for teachers to extend their day for another hour of planning was a negative proposition for the participating teachers (Ridgway, 2023).

The value and insights gained from vetting the focus group recommendations with teachers in collaboration with the teacher's union provided critical perspectives to HCPS leadership and the superintendent when considering future commitments and strategies for addressing planning time at HCPS elementary schools.

Outcomes

With numerous models for giving more planning time to elementary teachers and with qualitative data about the relative value and support for each method, district follow-through was essential. HCPS published a

formal report on its website, *Elementary Teacher Planning Time: Strategic Focus Group Report* (Ridgway, 2023), which includes a commitment to implement recommendations through four action items.

Along with the public posting, the report was distributed to the HCPS Instructional Leadership Team and Senior Leadership Team, HCPS Elementary Principals, the Board of Education, the local teacher's union, the Budget Office, the Calendar Committee, and all staff through the HCPS newsletter. By publishing such a report, leaders throughout the district have a concrete source of information, priorities, and action items to consider. The following are the HCPS commitments published to honor the work of the focus groups, the feedback of the teacher's unions, and the spirit of the superintendent's call to action.

(1) Action Item #1: Central leadership team(s) review half days.

For the 2023-2024 school year, the Office of Organizational Development and the Office of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment collaborated to create a half-day plan, where five out of the ten half-days in the 2023-2024 were dedicated to planning time. The 2024-2025 schedule also follows this model.

(2) Action Item #2: Leadership and principal teams collaborate on short and long-term recommendations.

In March 2023, HCPS elementary principals received a presentation regarding the Strategic Focus Group Report. The Office of Elementary School Instruction and Performance provided leadership and forums for principal collaboration on short—and long-term recommendations (e.g., departmentalization, collaborative

planning, and Friday creative schedules).

- (3) *Action Item #3: Include recommendations that impact the budget in the FY25 budget process.* All recommendations requiring additional resources, such as teachers or recess aides, would be considered and prioritized, where possible, through the budget process each year, depending on local funding.
- (4) *Action Item #4: Share the formal Strategic Focus Group Report with the HCPS calendar committee for consideration in the 2024-2025 School Calendar. Include an elementary and secondary teacher on the calendar committee.* The chair of the HCPS calendar committee shared the Strategic Focus Group Report with the committee and included both elementary and secondary teacher voices in future calendar development committees.

Case Study Implications

Actionable concepts arose from the exercise that can inform all districts as they address their own school-day challenges: reimagining the use of time in the school day, increasing students' opportunities for physical activity, and the inherent value of district-specific collaboration for change efforts.

Consistent throughout the recommendations is reimagining the use of time in the school day, including curriculum time allotments, flexible enrichment scheduling, community partnerships, extended recess, and strategic use of assemblies. When considering reimagining time, the HCPS curriculum time allotment for English and language arts has been in place since 1995.

This historically accepted use of time is just one example of many ingrained past practices that remain today. Going through a process that challenges the school days' structure can benefit districts seeking ways to address new and emerging challenges in our schools. This is reflected nationally in emerging models of team teaching (Next Education Workforce, 2024), enrichment blocks (Benner & Partelow, 2017), longer school days (Innovative Approaches, 2013), and four-day school weeks (Peetz, 2024).

With many models to consider within local environments, there is a tremendous opportunity to relook at the assumptions in the school day schedule and make changes that reflect district values, whether it is for more planning time, more physical activities, or more academic offerings.

Throughout the HCPS process, there was a synergy of desire to increase physical activity for students through either reworking recess, adding additional physical education time, or providing other creative health and wellness offerings while at the same time providing additional planning time for teachers.

This opportunity is evident in all sets of data and recommendations from the HCPS focus group process and in the positive support of teachers in their review session. When reallocating resources and making a case for additional planning time, the opportunity to also implement additional physical and health time for students is a tremendous opportunity that benefits both teachers and students.

Also surfacing through the focus groups series was the immediate benefit of the methodology and collaboration to produce innovative recommendations. The methodology

expanded the participants' perspectives and reinforced their feelings of personal value to systemic decision-making. Feedback from participants indicated that the opportunity to work with different experts and to present to the superintendent provided a unique form of personal and professional development, as well as an improved understanding of the complex challenges faced by district leaders.

By having purposeful group participation (teacher, teacher specialist, principal, university professor, central office leader, college student intern, and a student aspiring to teach), each voice was represented and ensured that the dominance of one philosophy could not sway the process. True evaluation of ideas could occur with balance. Particularly impactful was the participation of the students, as it supported a positive group dynamic.

For districts throughout the country, the HCPS focus group process is worth considering for complex problem-solving. The systematic three-part process gave room, time, and space for innovation. By breaking this process into distinct parts over time, participants were given

room to address their preconceived ideas, hear from many others, research and learn from the wider education community, and reach a clear consensus about actionable recommendations. The time, space, and human-centered design protocols were essential in producing substantive and original action items that could directly support HCPS teachers.

Conclusion

Participants in the HCPS focus groups on planning were often reminded that if the answers were easy, they would already be integrated into the school district. If another district's model was easy to impose on schools, changing models based on best practices would be routine. As such, there is no conclusion with a single solution on how to add planning time for elementary teachers, but the resulting menu of methods, identified opportunities for change (including tying in more physical activity for students), data on value-placement, and administrative and teacher voice serves HCPS well for the future. At the very least and with forward progress, HCPS elementary teachers see more planning time in their schedules than before.

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A Teacher Apprenticeship Pathway in a Rural, Midwest State: Perspectives of Teacher Apprentices

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Abstract

The national teacher shortage makes it challenging for principals and superintendents to hire certified teachers. To address this problem, a university in a rural state in the Midwest partnered with their state's agencies to develop a teacher apprenticeship pathway (TAP) for 78 paraprofessionals working in the state's public, non-public, and tribal schools. The TAP provides an organized pathway to earn a teaching degree. This study reveals the perceptions of the participants after completing their first semester. The results reveal that most experiences are positive, yet they desire more communication and help with time management. The results of this study can be useful to principals and superintendents who may be partnering with stakeholders to begin a TAP.

Key Words

teacher apprenticeship pathway, rural, teacher shortage

Teacher education programs across the nation are seeing a decline in entrants (Evans et al., 2021). Factors such as challenging classroom discipline, subpar compensation, and lack of encouragement from existing educators to enter the profession can be cited as among the reasons for the decline (Evans et al., 2021). South Dakota, where this study is based, reflects this trend, with vacancies remaining unfilled throughout the state, particularly in rural areas. Rural states often have fewer applicants for teaching positions. This can be due to comparatively modest salaries, unique work environment factors, and high teacher attrition (Tran et al., 2020; Oyen & Schweinle, 2021; Hall & Giles, 2022). One solution to this problem has been to develop alternative certification pathways for individuals living in rural areas to earn a teaching degree and become a certified teacher without relocating or leaving their current position. This is oftentimes called an *earn-while-you-learn* model.

The South Dakota Teacher Apprenticeship Pathway (SDTAP) was developed as a strategic response to the critical teacher shortage confronting principals and superintendents in South Dakota. The program, developed in collaboration between one of the state's public universities, Dakota State University, the South Dakota Department of Education, the South Dakota Department of Labor and Regulations, and the South Dakota Board of Regents, is the first registered apprenticeship in the state, as recognized by the United States Department of Labor and Regulation. The SDTAP provides aspiring paraprofessionals, currently working in South Dakota classrooms, a pathway to transition into certified teachers by completing a bachelor's degree in education through Dakota State University. This *grow-your-own* approach provides principals and superintendents the ability to recruit, cultivate, and potentially employ interested paraprofessionals already

working within their schools. The individuals enrolled in the program continue to serve as paraprofessionals while taking online coursework toward their teaching degree in elementary education or special education. In the fall of 2023, 78 paraprofessionals began their journey to becoming elementary or special education teachers within the SDTAP at Dakota State University.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to examine the perspectives of the participants within the South Dakota Teacher Apprenticeship Pathway (SDTAP). By going straight to the source, this research will examine the participants' successes, struggles, and insights. The findings, conclusions, and discussion from the study are informative for principals, superintendents, policymakers, stakeholders, and teacher education programs of other rural states who are facing teacher shortages and considering new strategies to create a pathway for existing paraprofessionals in their schools to become certified teachers.

Teacher Shortage, Recruitment, Retention, and Demand in Rural Areas

Teacher retention and attrition have been prevalent issues in education for decades. With around eight percent of teachers leaving the profession every year in the U.S., much research has explored why teachers choose to stay or leave, especially in the early years of their careers (Sutcher et al., 2016). While several studies highlight unique recruitment, retention, and attrition issues in rural school districts, this review synthesizes key findings from five recent studies.

Rural locales often struggle to attract teaching candidates due to geographic isolation, lower salaries, and lack of amenities (Oyen & Schweinle, 2021; Tran et al., 2020).

Rural teachers also take on additional roles and responsibilities compared to their suburban and urban peers (Tran et al., 2020). However, rural teachers report advantages as well, including close relationships, autonomy, and making an impact on students' lives (Tran et al., 2020). Ultimately, teachers who grew up in rural areas are much more likely to consider returning to teach in rural schools (*homegrown* teachers) whereas over 80% of rural teachers who grew up in urban areas (*transplanted* teachers) leave rural teaching (Husyman, 2008; Oyen & Schweinle, 2021), which signals the importance of purposefully recruiting teaching candidates with rural backgrounds for retention in rural areas.

Additional studies (Frahm & Cianca, 2021; Oyen & Schweinle, 2021; Peterson, Osseo, Baule, & Winona, 2023) emphasize the critical role of administrators in supporting and retaining novice teachers, especially in rural schools where geographic isolation can exacerbate retention issues. New rural teachers report needing active, intentional support from administrators to facilitate connections with the broader staff and community to prevent isolation (Frahm & Cianca, 2021). When administrators prioritize developing personal relationships with new teachers through regular check-ins, providing affirmation, and creating leadership opportunities, retention rates improve (Frahm & Cianca, 2021).

Retaining promising rural teachers cannot fall solely to administrators - the broader school community plays a key role as well (Oyen & Schweinle, 2021). Teachers report staying when they feel a sense of family and belonging with their colleagues (Oyen & Schweinle, 2021). Conversely, veteran teachers threatened by newcomers' energy and innovations can actively discourage talented young teachers (Oyen & Schweinle, 2021). To retain skilled teachers, rural schools should

embrace support for new teachers as a truly collective, shared endeavor.

Well-designed teacher preparation programs represent another pathway to boosting rural teacher retention. Grow-your-own teacher pipelines that recruit rural community members into the teaching profession show particular promise in providing a local, invested teaching workforce (Tran et al., 2020). High-retention residency models that integrate tight district partnerships, extensive clinical experience, and ongoing mentoring can also better prepare teachers for the realities of rural classrooms (Tran et al., 2020). Oyen and Schweinle (2021) report that greater confidence in skills like classroom management, relationship-building with parents, and teaching critical thinking - areas that preparation programs directly build - make candidates more willing to teach in rural locales.

Recruiting and supporting high-quality teachers remains a persistent struggle for many rural schools. Purposeful recruitment of hometown teaching candidates, dedicated leadership support from administrators to facilitate connections, a sense of belonging with the broader staff, and targeted preparation programs emerge from this review as evidence-based approaches linked to higher rural teacher retention.

Current National Teacher Apprenticeship Pathways

One solution to help alleviate the teacher shortage is through the creation of registered apprenticeship programs. According to the Department of Labor, "Apprenticeship is an industry-driven, high-quality career pathway where employers can develop and prepare their future workforce, and individuals can obtain paid work experience, classroom instruction, and a portable, nationally recognized

credential” (Career Seekers, 2024). While apprenticeships have been around for years to help recruit and train a workforce in many career fields, the idea has just recently gained attention in K-12 education.

A registered teacher apprenticeship program is a partnership between K-12 school districts and teacher education programs. The apprenticeship model marries on-the-job training alongside a mentor teacher with college coursework from a formal teacher education program. Often the teacher apprentices hold a paid position as a paraprofessional, or educational assistant, within a school district. They attend college, often for little or no tuition, while simultaneously working as paraprofessionals.

In March of 2022, Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona urged all states to commit to establishing a registered teacher apprenticeship pathway to address the teacher shortage crisis. (*U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona Calls on States, Districts, Higher Ed Institutions to Address Nationwide Teacher Shortage and Bolster Student Recovery with American Rescue Plan Funds.*) In 2022, Tennessee became the first state to register a program with the Department of Labor. By January 2024, teacher apprenticeship programs had been formally registered in thirty states.

To ensure that the apprenticeship programs are high-quality and enable the participants to gain essential content alongside experiential learning, the Pathways Alliance partners with the United States Department of Labor and Regulations to vet each registered apprenticeship pathway. There are many benefits to the collaboration between teacher education programs, K-12 school districts, the Department of Labor and Regulation, and the Pathway Alliance. Teacher education programs experience increased enrollments and degree

completion for a broader group of candidates. School districts can contribute to the apprenticeship program’s needs, give immediate access to classroom experience, and provide mentors to teacher apprentices (Wonthey, 2019).

Methods

The study involved 78 paraprofessionals who were enrolled in the online South Dakota Teacher Apprenticeship Pathway in the fall of 2023 to pursue degrees in K-8 Elementary Education, K-12 Special Education, or a combined degree in K-8 Elementary Education/K-12 Special Education; these paraprofessionals are hereafter referred to as TAP students. The data presented in this study was collected using a survey that was administered to 78 TAP students in November of 2023, which was during the first semester in the program.

Population and Sample

The sample included 48 TAP students who responded to the survey, resulting in a response rate of 61.5%. At the time of the survey, all TAP were working full-time as paraprofessionals. Many schools had more than one TAP student, and all 78 TAP students were employed by 43 accredited public school districts, and one accredited non-public school throughout the state of South Dakota.

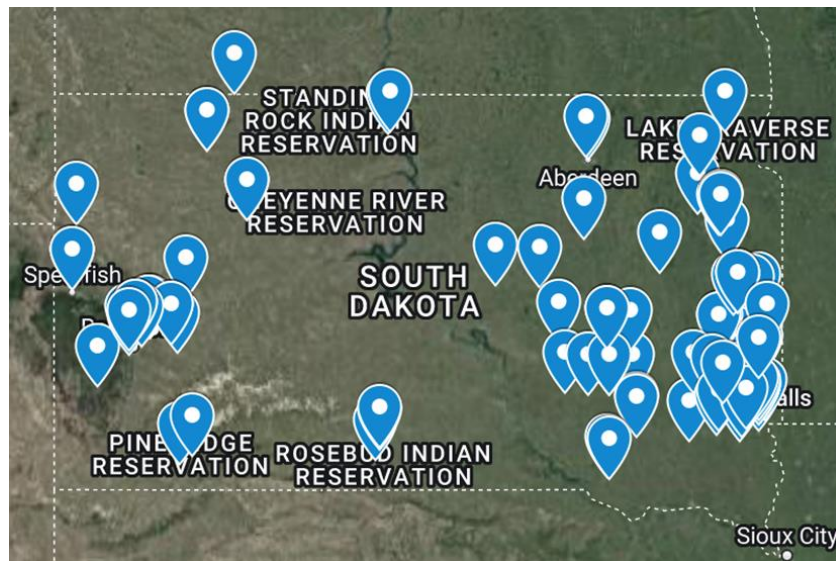
Three of the public school districts were located on lands of federally recognized tribes of the United States. According to the South Dakota Department of Education 2023/24 Fall Enrollment Census data, the total K-12 enrollment of the public school districts where the TAP students worked ranged in size from 117 to 24,358 K-12 students (<https://doe.sd.gov/ofm/enrollment.aspx>). The 43 accredited public schools where the TAP students were employed served an average of 1,871 K-12 students. 6 of the 43 public school districts had an enrollment greater than 3,000

K-12 students. Omitting these 6 districts resulted in an average K-12 enrollment of 775 students. Out of the 78 TAP students, 36 TAP students worked in K-12 school districts that served less than 1000 K-12 students. 33 TAP students declared the major K-8 Elementary

Education, 13 declared special education, and 31 declared the combined major K-12 Elementary and Special Education. Figure 1 shows the dispersion of where the participants were located throughout the state.

Figure 1

Location of TAP Students throughout South Dakota



Research Design and Instrument

Dakota State University partnered with the Regional Educational Laboratory Program (REL) to generate the data for this study. As the purpose of the research was to gather TAP students' perceptions during their first semester in the program, the research used a descriptive design with no predetermined hypothesis. The research instrument was a survey that included these three open-ended questions: 1) How is your apprenticeship going this semester? 2) Do you have any needs to help you have a successful semester? 3) Do you have any other comments or concerns?

The study employed a qualitative analysis approach led by human researchers from the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) group. Through multiple rounds of analysis, the REL identified emergent themes, sentiments, and patterns within the teacher apprenticeship experiences and outcomes. The rigorous process involved line-by-line coding, constant comparative methods, researcher triangulation, and conceptual mapping activities.

After the REL group's extensive analysis, the researchers utilized an AI

language model in a minimal auxiliary role to further sense-check the identified themes. The AI tool aided in surfacing any potential latent concepts not initially captured through the human-driven coding process, along with validating and strengthening the preexisting thematic structure developed by the REL analysts. The researchers were cautious about the AI's limitations, treating its output as a supplementary data point rather than a primary analysis method. Researcher deliberations and conceptual synthesis activities remained the core approach to deriving the final thematic framework representing teacher apprenticeship experiences. Finally, all substantive interpretations, contextualization of themes, selection of supporting evidence, and articulating theoretical contributions remained fully grounded in the human researchers' expertise.

In essence, this methodology prioritized a rigorous qualitative analysis process led by human subject matter experts, with the AI tool playing a minimal role in confirming and enriching the themes identified through the analysts' comprehensive grounded theory efforts.

Findings

The responses to the questions were analyzed and summarized by REL. A descriptive analysis of the responses led to the identification of three categories grouped by impression level: students who had a positive impression, a mixed impression, or a negative impression. 46% of the respondents had an overall positive impression of their experience at the time of the survey. 42% had a mixed impression, and 13% had a negative impression. The qualitative analysis revealed four themes: 1) time management and work-life balance; 2) need for support and understanding from instructors; 3) appreciation for existing support systems; and 4) lack of clarity and communication.

Theme 1: Time management and workload balance

One of the most prominent themes that emerged from the apprentice responses was the TAP students' difficulty in managing time and balancing the workload of the teacher apprenticeship program with other personal and professional commitments. Participants expressed some expected concerns about the extensive amount of homework, assignments, and field experiences that seemed to make it difficult to find sufficient time to complete the expected tasks for the program. The need for more time to complete tasks or assignments and/or strategies for time management was frequently mentioned.

One TAP student wrote, "It is a HUGE adjustment to being in school full time while working full-time." Another TAP student shared, "It's going well, but I'm struggling to keep up with assignments. I'm not sure if it's just me or not, but I find it really difficult to have the mental capacity to do a few hours of homework after a workday. If I don't work throughout the week then my entire weekend is full of homework with little time for anything else at all." Yet another explained, "Going okay, a little overwhelming. Lots of content expected as we work full time and juggle family life." Another responded, "It is going well. I am a little overwhelmed with some of my classes. I find it hard at times to juggle a full workload of homework, working a full-time job, and having a family to take care of."

Theme 2: Need for support and understanding from instructors

A second theme that emerged was the desire for more support and understanding from instructors regarding the unique circumstances faced by the participants. Teacher apprentices expressed a desire for instructors to acknowledge the challenges of balancing work, school, and personal responsibilities, and to be

more accommodating or flexible with course deadlines and workload expectations. A TAP student shared, “I do wish some of the professors had a little bit more of an understand(ing) of how the workload affects some of us and how challenging it can be at times.” Another TAP student elaborated with the following: “I think to help the participants of this program to be successful, classes need to be structured to support full-time employees, many of whom have been out of school for many years. It does not feel like the professors have tried to support apprentices in this transition back to school.” A third example from a TAP student is, “I need time to get work done, and want professors that are understanding in that I might not always be able to submit an assignment on time.” Yet another explained, “I wish our experience as TA’s was taken into consideration. One of the classes I am in is ____ where we learn about assessments and progress monitoring. Because I am a Teacher’s Assistant, I progress monitor students weekly. I wish some of our experience was taken into consideration when designing this pathway.”

Theme 3: Appreciation for existing support systems

While teacher apprentices identified areas for improvement, many of their responses also highlighted an appreciation for the opportunity and support systems already in place for them. The teacher apprentices spoke positively about the encouragement and support that they received from mentors, advisors, and program staff, which helped them navigate the unforeseen challenges of the apprenticeship program. One TAP student shared, “I am so appreciative of this program! All the staff and secondary mentors have been wonderful. I have so many teachers who are in my “corner” cheering me on, wanting me to be successful.” Another TAP student explained, “The apprenticeship is going well. Both of my mentors have been great, and it is great to know

that I have more resources to help support my journey.” A third TAP student expounded, “Love how gracious and understanding my professors are and appreciate how everyone wants me to succeed.” Another TAP student reflected, “So far it is going well. Everyone from mentors to instructors to DSU staff have been very accommodating.”

Theme 4: Lack of clarity and communication

Some of the teacher apprentices expressed a need for better clarity and communication regarding some aspects of the apprenticeship program, such as testing options, grading criteria for work, and the alignment between coursework and field experiences. Apprentices also mentioned the need for improved transparency and clearer guidelines to ensure apprentices could effectively plan out tackling their workload and manage their course responsibilities. A TAP student commented, “Need more support when it comes to field experience.” A second TAP student shared, “If I am being completely honest, I don’t understand the purpose of the secondary mentor.” The following is another point of confusion from a TAP student: “I am curious why certain classes are allowed to change the grading scale. I have two classes that were different. This adds some stress when there is an expectation of a certain grading scale.” Another TAP student commented, “I wish the classes all had the same deadlines. It makes it a lot easier to keep track of what is due when.” Finally, another TAP student shared, “So far throughout the apprenticeship, I feel that there have been a lot of unanswered questions - which is a sentiment I have heard from both apprentices and mentors.”

Discussion

While the number of entrants into teacher education is dwindling, South Dakota’s TAP program’s potential for scalability suggests it

could significantly alleviate the teacher shortage, especially in a rural area.

Before launching the TAP program, DSU sent out a survey to paraprofessionals to gauge interest in pursuing a teaching degree. The response was overwhelming and highlighted in these key points:

- 540 paraprofessionals in South Dakota expressed a desire to obtain a teaching degree.
- 299 paraprofessionals applied to the SDTAP.
- A significant, yet unspecified, number of paraprofessionals contacted the South Dakota Department of Education post-deadline, indicating they missed the application window.
- 78 paraprofessionals were accepted and commenced their coursework at DSU in Fall 2023, a figure limited by available funding.

The geographical distribution of these apprentices across the state not only signifies a widespread demand in rural areas, but also demonstrates a promising step towards addressing the teacher shortage that left approximately 175 vacancies unfilled in the preceding year. The teacher apprenticeship pathway is not just a local solution, but a model for educational sustainability.

The results of this study lead to areas for consideration when designing future apprenticeship programs. While the overall response from teacher apprentices was positive and demonstrated a level of satisfaction, the responses disclosed a range of needs and concerns. The need for improved time management and workload balance emerged as a significant challenge, with apprentices

seeking out strategies or accommodations to help them effectively juggle their various commitments both personally and professionally. Additionally, apprentices expressed a desire for more support and understanding from instructors, acknowledging the unique demands of the teacher apprenticeship program.

While appreciative of the existing support systems, such as mentors and advisors, participants also identified a need for improved clarity and communication regarding certain program elements. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of addressing these concerns and providing appropriate resources and support to facilitate a successful and manageable experience for participants in the apprenticeship program.

The participants in the apprenticeship program wrote often about the idea of feeling overwhelmed and challenged by the program's requirements. One participant wrote, "I'm really enjoying my courses and all that I'm learning! I just feel overwhelmed." Another participant noted, "Going ok, a little overwhelming. Lots of content expected as we work full time and juggle family life." Many of the students had attended college in the past, but it had been several years. They found going back to college, in addition to their existing responsibilities, to be challenging. There can be nuances in returning to college, such as registering for coursework, applying for financial aid, purchasing books, navigating university learning management systems, and registering for required certification exams are among a few of these scenarios. On top of accelerated coursework, this can quickly become overwhelming for a teacher apprentice.

To help address this concern, the TAP program at Dakota State University provides each teacher apprentice access to a professional advisor. The professional advisor's role is to

help students create a program completion plan, register for coursework, modify course schedules as needed, and answer miscellaneous questions related to the university and the program. Three participants in the survey specifically mentioned the importance of access to this professional advisor. "...has been amazing as a support and encouragement." Another participant noted, "... has been very helpful and I have been utilizing my resources within my district."

Primary and secondary mentors are also implemented for each teacher apprentice at the onset of the program. The primary mentor is a teacher within the district where the participant is employed as a paraprofessional. This person provides support within the participants' work environment. The secondary mentor is chosen by the university and is a person who is not working at the university or the participants' school district. The primary role of the secondary mentor is to provide check-ins with the participants, often through email. Sometimes the secondary mentor is just a listening ear, while other times they act as a cheerleader, reminding the teacher apprentice of their potential.

Recommendations

The findings of this study reveal several key areas where targeted strategies and support could be put into place to enhance the experience and further the success of future teacher apprenticeship programs. There is a well-known saying in that *it takes a village*. For TAP students, this village is a group of people that teacher apprentices feel comfortable reaching out to in times of need or challenges, become critical to their perceived success and overall satisfaction of the program. It is recommended that programs provide targeted support for adult learners in online programs. This support can be in the form of a professional advisor at the partnering university, alongside mentors, family members,

and colleagues. Additionally, facilitating opportunities for apprentices to connect can foster a sense of community and peer support, further enhancing their overall experience.

Many apprentices are returning to higher education after an extended hiatus. Orientation programs to aid their transition back to college become a necessary component of their success. Participants should be equipped with strategies and expectations for effective online learning, such as time management techniques, online communication best practices, and navigating virtual learning platforms. Orientation to these nuances can better prepare them for the unique challenges of remote coursework.

Instructors' understanding and flexibility is another area that is crucial to participants' success. Instructors should acknowledge the unique demands faced by teacher apprentices, who are juggling work, school, and personal responsibilities simultaneously. Promoting flexibility in deadlines and workload expectations can allow apprentices to balance their multiple commitments more effectively, reducing stress and increasing their chances of success.

Finally, enhancing clarity and communication is essential. Providing clear and transparent guidelines regarding program components, such as testing options, grading criteria, and the alignment between coursework and field experiences, can reduce confusion and ensure apprentices have a comprehensive understanding of expectations. Establishing effective communication channels can also ensure timely updates and allow apprentices to address concerns or seek clarification promptly.

Through implementing these recommendations, teacher apprenticeship programs can better support their participants, address their unique needs, and increase their

chances of success in becoming certified, effective educators within their context.

Recommendations for Further Research

While the recommendations outlined contribute to the success of students enrolled in teacher apprenticeship programs, there is more research to be considered. Support systems are crucial to the success of the teacher apprentices; however, more research is suggested to determine how these supports work. What roles should each member of the *village* play? What is the difference in these roles? What training or preparation should be provided to these key players to help them work with teacher apprentices? Further, it would be advantageous to know the desired frequency of communication, the preferred form of communication, and the areas of focus during the conversations with mentors and advisors.

Another area for further research is how to best structure coursework to allow for flexibility while maintaining rigor and pace within the program. What is the best timeframe for a course? How many courses should be taken at once? Should the coursework be self-paced? Given the multiple responsibilities of TAP students, should deadline flexibility be an option?

Conclusions

This study explored the perspectives of participants enrolled in the South Dakota Teacher Apprenticeship Pathway (SDTAP) during their first semester in a new program.

Students were surveyed during their first semester of courses to understand their overall perceptions of the apprenticeship program. Questions alluding to how the apprenticeship is going, what needs they may have for a successful semester, and any additional comments concerns they may have yielded responses that could provide stakeholders with information that can be immediately addressed through actionable steps, such as establishing support systems, providing clear communication on expectations, and offering grace when necessary to these aspiring educators.

The staggering number of applications for this opportunity prompted efforts to expand the program, and a second round will begin fall of 2024 at Dakota State University. This initiative has the potential to contribute significantly to alleviating the teacher shortage, particularly in rural areas where the need for high-quality educators is most acute.

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To Teach or not to Teach: A Qualitative Study of Pre-Collegiate Grow Your Own Teacher Programs and the Perceptions of Alumni, Current Staff, and Former Staff

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Abstract

The teaching profession is in peril. Teacher recruitment and teacher retention are issues that have compounded the teacher shortage crisis, particularly in Black and Latinx communities. This study focused on a vehicle by which to recruit people into the profession while in middle and/or high school, known as pre-collegiate Grow Your Own teacher programs. Given the push for a more racially diverse teaching force, this qualitative multiple case study explored the phenomena of pre-collegiate grow your own teacher programs through the perspectives of Black and/or Latinx alumni, program staff, and former staff. Results revealed that pre-collegiate Grow Your Own teacher programs have influenced the professional career decisions of alumni of the program.

Key Words

grow your own, teacher recruitment, pre-collegiate teacher programs, pathway programs, teacher diversity, teacher shortage

There is an achievement gap in this country, which has been promulgated by an education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The education debt is a result of historical, social, and economic disparities that have created inequity for people of color. Education has been considered an equalizer, which can create equitable opportunities for marginalized people of color (Shields, 2011). The ability to educate with an equity lens is crucial to the academic achievement of students of color; however, identity development is imperative.

Identity development is a cyclical process that interweaves a person's past, present, and future experiences (Tatum, 2017). People are inundated with archetypes of people of cultures with which they identify and of those with which they do not identify. Partelow et al. (2017) noted that in 2017, The National Center for Education Statistics reported that while the population of Black and Latinx students is increasing, the percentage of Black and Latinx teachers (particularly in urban areas) is decreasing. There are tangible academic and social benefits to students of color being exposed to teachers of color. The opportunity to see a person of color in a position of authority, which is how many students view their teachers, cannot be overestimated. Additionally, teachers of color can be more connected to culturally responsive pedagogy because of the relatability of those teachers. Lastly, the presence of teachers of color for non-students-of-color is essential relative to the dismantling of stereotypes and biases, which are inherent in our society. Tatum (2017) referred to bias as smog all around us

There is also a decline in enrollment in teacher education programs contributing to teacher shortages in the United States. Teacher shortages are more prevalent in urban and rural communities (Garcia & Weiss & Economic Policy Institute, 2019). Teacher shortages are

also more evident in school districts where most of the student population is Black and Latinx (Garcia & Weiss & Economic Policy Institute, 2019). One approach that has attempted to address the teacher shortage and the need for greater teacher diversity is the implementation of Grow Your Own teacher programs (GYO). Thirty-six states have created teacher pipeline programs to address the issue of teacher shortage (Sutcher et al., 2016).

There are four kinds of GYO program models: pre-collegiate (selective), pre-collegiate (non-selective), community-originated and community-focused, community-originated and university educator-initiated (Valenzuela, 2017). While there has been research done regarding the recruitment of teachers of color and various pathways, there is a gap in the literature relative to pre-collegiate GYO teacher programs and how these programs might be a suitable pathway for teacher recruitment.

Additionally, there is a lack of research about how pre-collegiate GYO teacher programs could foster an understanding of community cultural wealth (CCW) for participants of color; thereby, equipping the participants of color as practitioners with knowledge that can support the academic achievement and socio-emotional well-being of students of color.

This article highlights multiple case studies that explore the phenomenon of pre-collegiate GYO teacher programs through the lens of alumni and staff members. The following pseudonyms were used to refer to the programs: *The Future is Here* and *Here We Grow*. More specifically, the case studies focused on the experiences of alumni of color from the programs and whether their participation in the programs impacted their professional decisions. The sample population were alumni who graduated from a 4-year

institution and staff or former staff of the programs. The studies also focused on the aspects of the program that are tailored to meet the needs of people of color. For the purposes of these case studies, people of color were identified as Black and/or Latinx people.

Theoretical Framework: Community Cultural Wealth

The notion that teachers of color are desirable for students of color is rooted in a few claims. Arguments have been made that teachers of color can support higher student academic outcomes and a sense of belonging through high expectations, role modeling, and cultural connections (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Schools have been historically ingrained into the fabric of a hierarchical society where minoritized people have not always had equitable opportunities for success. As such, Yosso (2005) argued that one of the coping mechanisms marginalized people can employ to combat marginalization is an understanding of community cultural wealth (CCW). CCW purports that people of color share these connections through cultural synchronicity; thereby, making the presence of teachers of color crucial for students (Yosso, 2005). The cultural capital of people of color are viewed as assets in this framework, rather than deficits. These assets can then be used to amplify the voices and support the experiences of people of color (Acevedo & Solorzano, 2021).

Teacher Shortage and Teachers of Color

The term *teacher shortage* is a broad description to describe the teaching labor market. The term is misleading though, given that the teacher shortage is not universal in the United States. Teacher shortages are evident in specific disciplines such as special education, math, and science (Sutcher et al., 2016). Teacher shortages are also a concern for bilingual or English as a second language teachers (Sutcher et al., 2016). There is

variation amongst states in terms of teacher shortages. While states like California and Arizona have experienced widespread shortages, Massachusetts has experienced an abundance of supply relative to teachers entering the profession although there is less supply in more high-demand disciplines (Sutcher et al., 2016).

Yosso (2005) discussed the importance of honoring CCW to support the academic achievement and socio-emotional well-being of children of color. CCW is guided by the belief that students of color bring a plethora of special unique things to their educational experiences, which should have been seen as assets rather than deficits. Yosso noted that students of color have access to six forms of capital: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant. Gist et al. (2018) noted that because of these assets relative to CCW, teachers of color are more capable of being able to relate to students of color and foster student achievement.

In fact, it has been a general assertion that teachers of color are better equipped to teach students of color. Villegas and Irvine (2010) did a study of major arguments and research to identify whether this claim was credible. Villegas and Irvine (2010) identified the following arguments to support the claim that teachers of color are better equipped to teach students of color. The arguments were as follows: teachers of color serve as role models, teachers of color improve student achievement outcomes and experiences for students of color, and teachers of color tend to be less likely to leave the profession. The researchers identified empirical data to support the last two claims. They were unable to find empirical data to support the notion that teachers of color serve as role models for students of color (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). The researchers asserted that the absence of evidence does not refute the claim entirely; however, more research is needed.

Grow Your Own Teacher Programs

Thirty-six states have created teacher pipeline programs to address the issue of teacher shortage (Sutcher et al., 2016). There are four kinds of GYO program models: pre-collegiate (selective), pre-collegiate (non-selective), community-originated and community-focused, community-originated and university educator-initiated (Valenzuela, 2017). The following GYO teacher programs are some of the most well-known in the United States.

While the focus of this study was on pre-collegiate GYO teacher programs, there would be a substantial gap in this literature review if the *Call Me Mister* program was excluded. The *Call Me Mister* program began in South Carolina with a collective of historically Black universities (Jones et al., 2019). Since its inception in 2000, the program has now grown to 23 participating higher education institutions in South Carolina and in other states (Jones et al., 2019). It is by far the most expansive GYO of its kind, at this juncture. One of the major program goals is to increase the representation of Black male teachers in elementary schools (Jones et al., 2019). Jones et al. (2019) noted that participants of the program are typically from underserved communities and are not necessarily high achievers. The program's approach is holistic, in the sense that its goals are centered around developing the personal growth, professional knowledge, and interpersonal skills of the participants. Participants receive financial support throughout their post-secondary education and mentorship (Jones et al., 2019). Participants are also expected to commit to teaching in a public elementary or middle school for a specified period, depending upon how long the participant received assistance from the program (Jones et al., 2019). The data have indicated that the program has achieved its goal of supporting the recruitment of Black males in education. It was reported that since 2004, over

90% of participants have pursued careers in education (Jones et al., 2019). Although this is not a pre-collegiate program, it is important to note the importance of a program that is structured to support the needs of Black male students.

The South Carolina *Cadet* program is an example of a selective pre-collegiate program. It is one of the oldest and most well-known GYO teacher programs. Students are selected to participate in the program based on their grades. The program was the mastermind of Bonner Guider who was interested in exposing students to the teaching profession (Lewis, 1992). The program is explicitly advertised as one that actively recruits students of color. In the course, students are also able to engage in discussions about racial and social issues. Valenzuela (2017) noted that 39.4% of surveyed participants pursued a career in teaching. An integral component of the program is its partnership with Winthrop University.

Another program, which is rooted in its partnership with a university, is the *Pathways2Teaching* program. Through the program's partnership with the University of Colorado (Denver), the program offers mentorship and support from university professors (Bianco et al., 2011). Selection criteria are not applied to admission into the program; however, the program intentionally recruits students of color to create more diversity in the teaching workforce (Bianco & Marin-Paris, 2019). The program's curricula focus on providing exposure to the teaching profession and engaging students from a social justice praxis (Bianco & Marin-Paris, 2019). The program presents teaching as an opportunity for students to contribute to their communities (Goings et al., 2018). The program's major tenets are as follows: (1) foster critical thinking with a social justice lens, (2) create a positive image of teaching, (3) offer

supports for college and career readiness, (4) allow access by ensuring that all students have the opportunity to participate in the program irrespective of grade point average, (5) connect students with role models and mentors from the University of Colorado, and (6) commit to selecting teachers who actively promote family engagement (Goings et al., 2018). Sleeter et al. (2014) noted that there are salient challenges with introducing this program to students in Grades 11 and 12 because at this point, it may be too late to spark interest for students. It was also noted that a lack of funding for the program could render it less than effective relative to following through with long-term support (Sleeter et al., 2014). Still, the program is representative of the manifestation of what many researchers have supported. It provides students with an opportunity to receive exposure to the teaching profession and culturally relevant pedagogy while receiving mentorship from university faculty. There are no grade requirements for entry into the program.

Today's Students, Tomorrow's Teachers is a program that has been in existence since 1994. It was created by Dr. Bettye Perkins. The program has collaborated with school districts across several states to provide a pre-collegiate high school teacher education experience. Additionally, the program has partnered with higher education institutions to provide financial support and incentives to the students from the program. The program boasts an 8-year pipeline and ongoing supports for students from high school through college. The organization touts its success in terms of the high school retention rate, college retention rate, and teacher retention rate for its participants and alumni in relation to their peers who did not participate in the program, according to data on the *Today's Teachers, Tomorrow's Students* website <https://tstt.org/>.

There is a range of GYO teacher programs in middle and high schools with various structures. Some are extra-curricular activities, while others are courses that yield college credit. Those programs, noted above, are some of the most well-known and most researched in the nation. There is no database to identify the pre-collegiate GYO teacher programs that exist across the country. Similarly, there is no comprehensive approach or means by which to identify programs throughout the country. Additionally well-known pre-collegiate programs do not provide ongoing support for students once they leave the program and enter the post-secondary world (Gist et al., 2018). Gist et al. (2018) noted that pre-collegiate teacher preparation programs offer promising possibilities; however, without additional funding, research, and coordination, it may remain an underutilized or ineffective approach to addressing the recruitment, and to a lesser degree, retention of teachers of color.

Summary

There is some qualitative research about pre-collegiate GYO teacher programs; however, there has been little research done to determine the long-term effects of these programs (Gist et al., 2018). A literature review and research has connoted that long-term funding has been a challenge for these programs; therefore, follow-up with program participants has not been commonplace (Gist et al., 2018). There is a lack of literature regarding which aspects of these programs, if any, may be most effective relative to increasing the pool of prospective teacher educators, particularly for teachers of color. This research attempted to provide insight from program participants about their experiences with a pre-collegiate GYO program, the program's influence on their post-secondary professional plans, and the program's capacity to foster knowledge and skills that support the participants' prospective work with Black and/or Latinx students.

Research Design

The study sought to uncover results regarding the following research questions: In what ways did a pre-collegiate GYO teacher education program influence people of color who participated in the program to pursue a career in education? Are there specific components of the program that encourage participants of color to pursue a teaching career more than others? How can a pre-collegiate GYO teacher education program foster an understanding of community cultural wealth (CCW) for participants of color?

The research methodology for this study was qualitative. Qualitative researchers are interested in how people make meaning of the world they are experiencing (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Creswell & Creswell (2013) noted that people make multiple meanings of their experiences, which create opportunities for researchers to view the multi-dimension of their perspective. The qualitative methodology was chosen to elicit more detailed information about the pre-collegiate GYO teacher education program through document analysis and interviews of alumni, current staff, and former staff. The design of the study was as follows: multiple case studies of pre-collegiate GYO programs and a phenomenological study. Researchers use multiple case studies to augment the validity and minimize the bias in their studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To that end, the researcher sought to explore commonalities and differences amongst the programs, while determining possible generalizable implications for future practice.

The researcher conducted multiple case studies and explored specific pre-collegiate GYO teacher programs. A case study was suitable because it allowed for exploration of the GYO phenomena through multiple sources (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). According to Yin (2009), the researcher can gather the following sources of information for a case study:

documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts.

The researcher also employed phenomenological research to explore the influence of the respective pre-collegiate GYO teacher programs, relative to the experiences and subsequent decisions of some of the participants. During phenomenological research, the purpose is to describe a phenomenon (Groenewald, 2004). In this case, the phenomenon is the pre-collegiate GYO teacher program for which there is limited research from the perspective of its participants. Although a narrative study was considered, Bogdan and Biklen (2011) posited that when considering research analysis, it is important to keep the purpose of the study in mind. It was essential to situate the participants' stories within the context of GYO programs for the purposes of this study.

The researcher elicited the assistance of the pre-collegiate GYO teacher program staff to identify the *Future is Here* and *Here We Grow* alumni who had graduated from a 4-year institution, current staff, and former staff. The researcher engaged in purposive sampling; therefore, being explicit with program staff about the sample size that was needed for interviews. The researcher interviewed alumni of color because the purpose of the research was to explore their experiences and whether race was a factor relative to their experiences in the program. The researcher also used maximum variation sampling to elicit the perspective of participants who had pursued careers in education and those who have not pursued careers in education; however, all alumni had pursued a career in education. Current staff or former staff were contacted, irrespective of race. The researcher utilized snowball sampling by asking participants to contact alumni who met the participation criteria, current staff, and/or former staff.

Snowball sampling is a means by which to increase the sample size through people who have connections with potential sample participants (Parker et al., 2019). The researcher provided a questionnaire to prospective participants requesting demographic information, career information, preferred contact information and their availability for the interview.

The researcher interviewed five alumni, four from the *Future is Here* program and one from the *Here We Grow* program. The researcher also interviewed two staff members of the *Future is Here* program and one former staff member/alumni of the *Here We Grow* program. Given the novelty of GYO teacher education programs, the researcher elected to select a sample size that would likely lead to saturation (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). Adler and Adler (2012) noted 6 to 10 participants is enough to glean valuable insight, particularly when the population is limited. It is important to note the associations of the participants for suitable context. They are as follows: P1, P2, P3, and P5 are alumni of the *Future is Here* program. P4 and P8 are staff members of the *Future is Here* program. P6 is an alum of the *Here We Grow* program. P7 is an alum and former staff member of the *Here We Grow* program. Most of the alumni were introduced to the program during high school. In some instances, program staff visited their high school and practiced recruiting. Alumni from both programs noted that their counselors were involved in acquainting the alumni with the program, despite several noting that they felt unseen by their respective counselors.

The collection of research for the literature review and study was housed in Zotero. Zotero was used to store documents and create citations, as well as the bibliography. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants. Semi-structured interviews serve to allow for

credibility and consistency, while allowing for flexibility of diverse perspectives. The interview questions had been field tested by two educators who have done research on pre-collegiate GYO teacher programs. The interview questions for the alumni differed from the interview questions for the staff members or previous staff members. The participants were provided with informed consent forms. The interviews were conducted virtually via the Google Meet platform. The interviews were recorded and transcribed using Otter. Ai with participant consent. All data were downloaded to a password protected USB device.

The researcher reviewed documents such as: program materials, research, interviews, and articles and analyzed to allow for triangulation relative to the interview data. The researcher also identified themes from the program materials and compared the themes to those that have emerged from the interview data, thereby employing a blended coding model. Document analysis has been determined to be a useful method to augment creditability and identify commonalities (Bowen, 2009). The documents helped to set the stage for the interviews, while also aiding in the corroboration of the interview data.

The researcher decided to utilize the blended coding approach, which is a combination of inductive and deductive coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Deductive coding allowed the researcher to have a list of a priori codes based on the document analysis and literature review. After conducting the interviews, the researcher employed an inductive approach. The researcher engaged in first-cycle coding, which is a process that occurs when initially coding data (Saldana, 2021). According to Saldana (2021), this process allows the researcher to reserve previous judgments and let the data guide the researcher to uncover themes and connections.

The process of explicitation, the process of making meaning of data and interpreting it, was developed in conjunction with the initial coding process (Groenewald, 2004). The explicitation process has the following five steps: “bracketing and phenomenological reduction, delineating units of meaning, clustering of units of meaning to form themes, summarizing each interview, validating it, and where necessary modifying it, and extracting general and unique themes from all interviews and making a composite summary” (Groenewald, 2004, p.17). The researcher elected to hand code the data to create a more intimate experience. Saldana (2021) noted that hand coding offers an experience, which fosters more ownership for the researcher.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of pre-collegiate *Grow Your Own* (GYO) teacher programs through the perspectives of alumni, staff, and former staff of the respective programs. The research design involved multiple case studies. Two pre-collegiate GYO teacher programs were the cases involved in this study. The study sought to elucidate the experiences of Black and Latinx alumni who had graduated from a 4-year institution, current program staff, and former program staff. The study sought to uncover the influence or lack thereof that the respective programs had, relative to the alumni’s professional decisions. The study also shed light on the participants’ thoughts about how each program grapples with issues of race, cultural assets, and community cultural wealth (CCW) with its students. The researcher provided questionnaires to a sample population, conducted interviews with participants who met the study criteria, and analyzed program documents. Data from alumni and program staff were instrumental in addressing the research questions of the study. The major themes of the study are opportunity,

commitment, gratification, community, representation, and leveraging.

The alumni expressed overall appreciation for their experiences in each GYO program. The alumni noted that the GYO program had an influence over their decision to pursue teaching. It should be noted that all alumni decided to pursue a career in teaching.

All alumni are currently serving in an administrative capacity in the field of education. Some alumni talked about the benefit of exposure to conferences and the influence of the career development workshops that they experienced. Some alumni credited the pre-collegiate GYO teacher programs with providing them with the tools and foundation that led to teacher careers that impacted student academic achievement. Alumni from both GYO programs talked extensively about the impact at exposure to the teaching profession had on their professional decisions.

Both alumni, staff, and former staff of both programs noted the influence of the supports and resources that the respective programs afforded to the participants. The supports ranged from tangible benefits such as financial aid, scholarships, and college credits to meaningful mentorship experiences. All participants noted the importance of commitment on behalf of the *Grow Your Own* program, school districts, and post-secondary institutions. They discussed the power of involvement of the *Grow Your Own* programs during their post K-12 lives, as well as the value of school districts and post-secondary institutions placing priority to maintain involvement with GYO programs.

Some alumni talked about the gratification they obtained from being a part of these programs. The importance of community and a network that could help to shape and support the careers of participants was

discussed. Several alumni shared that they either wanted to become teachers but did not know how to go about doing so or were interested in other professions altogether until their experience with the GYO program. Other alumni expressed feelings of contentment from the attention, recognition, and personal/professional gain they attributed to their respective GYO teacher program.

Both programs uplifted the notion of representation of Black and Latinx people in the field of education. The theme of representation was expressed throughout the participant interviews. The alumni and staff of the Future is Here program noted that the program fostered an understanding of the importance of representation; however, neither program focused on deep discussions about how to navigate professional spaces as Black and Latinx people. Some alumni delved deeper into the notion of representation and preparation to serve as a teacher or educator of color in potentially emotionally unsafe spaces. Still, representation was described as powerful as it relates to role models that the alumni experienced as well as the value of the alumni going into the profession as people of color. The alumni from the *Future is Here* program stated that the program could be enhanced by providing participants with the tools to leverage their assets and navigate their professional spaces as Black and Latinx people.

Implications for Practice

Start the children early! Early exposure for children to the teaching profession as a possible career path is necessary. Three of the alumni who participated in this study shared that they had no intention of becoming teachers prior to their participation in their GYO program. Students should be afforded the opportunity to create activities to teach their peers in elementary. GYO programs should be a collaborative effort between school districts, university partners, and possibly consultants.

Opportunities for students to “play teacher” should be embedded into the elementary school social studies curriculum.

District curriculum writers might benefit from the expertise of GYO consultants. GYO consultants should ideally be individuals who are able to provide curriculum or support the writing of curriculum for the program at the middle and high school levels. These consultants should be working the school district to leverage partnerships with local universities for the purposes of mentorship, guidance regarding current research and practice in the field, and financial arrangements to meet the financial needs of students.

Pre-collegiate GYO middle school programs should provide middle school students with an opportunity to learn about the profession, while working with elementary school students. High school GYO programs should be a natural progression of curriculum, supports, and educational opportunities. There should be a clear linkage between the district’s middle and high school programs. Teachers should be trained by curriculum writers of the GYO program regarding implementation of the curriculum. The program should prepare children to have a solid knowledge of pedagogy and best practices, while allowing students to apply what they are learning.

Care must be taken to select teachers who work in the GYO programs. The data have noted that the relationship between the teacher mentors, program staff, and the high school students is an important component of pre-collegiate GYO programs. All alumni and staff members discussed the importance of those connections and the mentorship that anchored the students’ experiences. Similarly, a literature review of GYO programs demonstrated the importance of these relationships as well (Oliva & Staudt, 2003). It should be noted that while many teacher education programs are

struggling to recruit and retain young people into their programs, pre-collegiate programs could offer a great deal of insight regarding how mentorship for, and long-term commitment to, support the careers of teacher education students could help to make teacher education programs more attractive.

Lastly, GYO teacher programs must tackle the matter of culturally relevant pedagogy and cultural community wealth to center the discussion about how to leverage representation in the classroom beyond the commonality of race. There must be a multi-layered approach to educating participants in the program about themselves, the historical structures in our nation, issues of race and equity, and the navigational tools to discern safe and unsafe spaces while making space for themselves. People of color must be encouraged to serve in roles that extend beyond tokenism or a generic perception of the benefits that people of color can bring to their respective workspaces. GYO teacher programs should help Black and Latinx participants with self-discovery so that they are better prepared to share their talents and gifts with their school

community. Black and Latinx educators can serve in many roles, not merely those that are generally reserved for them such as the disciplinarian. Additionally, GYO teacher programs must expose students to the instructional expertise needed to amplify the cultural assets of Black and Latinx students through culturally relevant pedagogy and teaching practices.

Conclusions

GYO programs are a viable tool to increase the recruitment of Black and Latinx teachers. The GYO programs must employ intentionality around supporting students through mentorship, exposure, and resources. The GYO programs in this study promoted representation as a critical element for the participants of color; however, deeper discussions of race, equity, and consciousness were lacking during the participants' experiences. Black and Latinx participants of GYO programs should be exposed to pedagogy and best instructional practices, along with cultural competency and community cultural wealth to aid in their professional practice as staff members and practitioners of the craft.

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Raising the Volume on Teacher Vocal Wellness: Perspectives from Practicing School Administrators

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ABSTRACT

Teacher voice health is an important but overlooked issue with consequences for educators, students, and schools. This qualitative study examined administrators' perspectives of teachers' vocal complaints and relevant policies. Focus groups made up of 18 administrators yielded key insights: 1) Reliance on voice amplification, 2) Attitudes and responses 3) Perceived impacts on learning, and 4) Proposed interventions. Findings revealed limited knowledge of vocal health issues and a desire to increase awareness. Concerning reports emerged regarding COVID-19 mitigations worsening student speech and literacy. Further research on the implementation and impact of teacher vocal health programs could be beneficial. This study provides valuable administrator perspectives on policies and practices related to teacher vocal wellbeing. Findings inform efforts to better support educator voices.

Key Words

voice, health, school, administrators, student learning, teachers

Compared to other professions, teachers experience a disproportionately high rate of voice complaints such as vocal fatigue, voice loss, throat discomfort, hoarseness, and related issues (Cantor-Cutiva et al., 2013; Cantor-Cutiva et al., 2016). These vocal problems negatively impact teachers' ability to effectively teach and their overall wellbeing (Behlau et al., 2012; Nusseck et al., 2018), as well as student learning (Lyberg-Ahlander et al., 2015; Rossi-Barbosa et al., 2016; Roy et al., 2004). These negative impacts can potentially reduce schools' educational efficacy. Although teacher voice complaints are a prevalent issue, prior studies indicate that teachers often lack awareness of resources available to support their vocal health (Houtte et al., 2011).

Developing solutions for teacher voice complaints requires a deeper understanding of the current landscape. While prior quantitative research has documented the high prevalence, risk factors, negative impacts, and potential interventions related to teacher vocal issues, inconsistencies exist across studies (Cantor-Cutiva et al., 2013).

The present study aimed to provide additional qualitative insights into administrators' perspectives and experiences with teacher voice complaints.

Examining these firsthand accounts may elucidate the state of and influences on teacher voice complaints, informing the development of effective solutions. Specifically, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are administrators' experiences with teacher voice complaints?
2. How do administrators respond when teachers have voice complaints?
3. How do school and district policies interact with teacher voice issues?

Literature Review

Teacher voice complaints are highly prevalent, with up to 71% of teachers experiencing voice-related issues monthly (Cantor-Cutiva et al., 2013). Numerous studies across the globe over recent decades have shown that teachers report significantly more frequent and more severe voice problems compared to other professions (Alarouj et al., 2022; Behlau et al., 2012; Hunter & Titze, 2010; Morton & Watson, 1998; Oliveira et al., 2022; Roy et al., 2004; Sliwinska-Kowalska et al., 2006; Smith, Lemke, et al., 1998). Though some variation exists (Cantor-Cutiva et al., 2013; Mattiske et al., 1998; Williams, 2003), the overall body of evidence highlights that vocal complaints disproportionately impact teachers.

Risk Factors

Researchers have identified risk factors for teacher voice complaints. While findings have been mixed, several studies have consistently identified the following vocal risk factors: strained voice production or habitual loud speaking (Evitts et al., 2022; Kenny, 2022; Moreno et al., 2022); poor air quality (Evitts et al., 2022); stress (Evitts et al., 2022; Vertanen-Greis et al., 2020); teaching lower grades (Alarouj et al., 2022; Leão et al., 2015; Remacle & Lefèvre, 2021); instructing certain subjects like physical education, art, or performing arts (Alarouj et al., 2022; Cantor-Cutiva et al., 2013; Smith, Lemke, et al., 1998); being female (Feng et al., 2022; Nerrière et al., 2009; Nusseck et al., 2018; Sharp & Cook, 2022); and having more years of teaching experience or increased age (Nusseck et al., 2018; Rossi-Barbosa et al., 2016).

COVID-19

Several studies have examined the impact of remote work as a COVID-19 precaution on vocal health. Researchers hypothesize teachers may have benefited from avoiding damaging in-person conditions, such as loud noises or

poor air quality (Evitts et al., 2022). Other research indicates slightly reduced vocal discomfort when teachers taught remotely. One study found 34% of teachers reported more voice issues in-person versus remotely, with 15% reporting more vocal problems when teaching from home (Evitts et al., 2022). Another study revealed 71% of teachers experienced voice complaints in-person compared to 44% when teaching remotely (Patjas et al., 2021).

Impacts

Prior research indicates that teacher voice complaints negatively impact teacher wellbeing, job performance, student learning, and school operations. Studies have found associations between voice complaints and increased teacher stress (Carrillo et al., 2020; Guzy, 2020; Vertanen-Greis et al., 2020), anxiety, depression (Merrill et al., 2011), and long-term physical limitations (Merrill et al., 2011). Teachers with voice issues also report diminished quality of life (Nusseck et al., 2018), difficulty teaching and communicating effectively (Akinbode et al., 2014; Behlau et al., 2012; Smith, Kirchner, et al., 1998), burnout symptoms (Guzy, 2020), and lower work engagement (Nazari et al., 2019). In one study, 11.6% of teachers said their voice issues limit their ability to do their job compared to 3.1% of non-teachers (Roy et al., 2004).

Teacher absenteeism due to voice complaints significantly impairs job effectiveness and student learning (Gadepalli et al., 2019; Houtte et al., 2011; Lyberg-Ahlander et al., 2015; Martins et al., 2014; Nerrière et al., 2009; Rossi-Barbosa et al., 2016; Roy et al., 2004). Research indicates up to a third of teachers miss approximately one day annually owing to voice complaints (Leão et al., 2015). Another study found 24% of teachers were absent because of vocal problems, missing 1.2 days on average (Nusseck et al., 2018).

Studies reveal additional mechanisms by which teacher voice complaints hinder student learning. Experiments demonstrate voice issues and ambient noise impede students' phoneme recognition and text comprehension (Roy et al., 2004; Schiller, 2022).

Limited research exists on the financial costs of teacher voice complaints, but available estimates are substantial. One study suggested voice issues in teachers may be financially burdensome (Cantor-Cutiva et al., 2015). Further analysis estimated the annual cost of U.S. teacher voice complaints approaches \$2.5 billion when accounting for treatment and substitute teacher expenses (Verdolini & Ramig, 2001).

Notably, administrator perspectives remain unexamined regarding the impacts of teacher voice complaints on classrooms and schools. As leaders managing individual teachers and overall school operations, administrators could provide valuable insights. Their experiences implementing policies around teacher absenteeism and managing vocal impairments' effects on learning warrant exploration.

Solutions

Numerous studies demonstrate teachers lack awareness of voice problems and related resources. Teachers reported minimal vocal health training among pre-service teachers (15%) (Houtte et al., 2011; Schaeffler et al., 2023) and reluctance to seek help (Houtte et al., 2011; Morton & Watson, 1998), with many viewing complaints as an accepted occupational hazard (Gautum et al., 2022). Recognizing this deficit, researchers have assessed interventions including training on appropriate speaking habits and testing, and have shown to improve teachers' vocal health (Cantor-Cutiva et al., 2023; Finn et al., 2023;

Porcaro et al., 2021; Scanferia et al., 2022) or teachers' perceptions of benefits of voice care (Schaeffler et al., 2023).

Some vocal health programs demonstrate limited efficacy for teachers (Greve et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2023). One study found nonsignificant improvements in teacher vocal complaints after basic vocal use training, suggesting that more comprehensive interventions and implementation time may be needed (Lin et al., 2023). Furthermore, compared to other vocally demanding occupations, teachers reported greater barriers to adopting vocal care including time constraints, forgetfulness, lack of confidence, and low motivation (Schaeffler et al., 2023). Overcoming these obstacles through tailored programming and support systems may enhance outcomes.

Research on vocal health interventions also informs best practices for program design, such as maximizing efficiency for time-constrained teachers (Finn et al., 2023; Schaeffler et al., 2023), integrating adequate vocal rest periods (Chan, 1994; Lin et al., 2023; Siqueira et al., 2022), and regular practice and habit formation (Chan, 1994; Lin et al., 2023). As Lin et al. (2023) found, teachers demonstrated the greatest adherence to brief vocal health practices that could be readily incorporated during instruction. By considering teacher time limitations, workload, and learning processes, targeted programs can overcome barriers and promote vocal health skills.

Previous research has also explored voice enhancement systems (VES) as a possible solution to teacher voice complaints. Research on vocal amplification usage yields mixed impacts on teacher vocal health. Banks et al. (2022) found no association between voice amplification and decreased vocal fatigue among teachers. However, other studies indicate benefits, particularly for teachers with

dysphonia (Gaskill et al., 2012; Jonsdottir et al., 2002). The variable effects may relate to study design factors as well as nuances of teacher amplification practices.

There is a gap in research examining how school and district policies interact with voice health complaints among teachers. This study explores teachers' experiences with voice issues, district protocols, and administrator awareness. This knowledge can inform policy improvements and training for school leaders on supporting teacher vocal health.

Methods

We used qualitative methods to gain a more nuanced understanding of voice complaints in teachers (Creswell & Creswell, 2020) to complement the already present wealth of knowledge collected through quantitative measures. We conducted four hour-long focus groups with 18 administrators. Administrators represented five districts that covered schools in areas ranging from rural to urban. A key for identifying study participants is found at the end of the article.

Focus group discussions were seeded by a set of questions centered on administrators' experiences with and perspectives on teacher voice complaints. These questions were based on current knowledge as found in the literature as well as on preliminary insights gained through previous one-on-one interviews with administrators. With participants' consent, focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim to facilitate in-depth analysis.

To analyze the focus group data, we employed a qualitative coding methodology to identify emerging trends and themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Two researchers independently conducted initial open coding of the verbatim transcripts using NVivo software to identify salient trends and

concepts emerging from the discussions. Following the constant comparative approach, the researchers then collapsed these codes into larger categories based on thematic similarities (axial coding). The two coders met to review their categories, discuss inter-coder reliability, and agree upon higher-level selective codes synthesizing the major themes represented across the groups. Themes were only included for further analysis if endorsed by a minimum of 50% of participants. Through this qualitative coding process, we identified four key themes that provided insight into our research questions regarding administrators' perspectives on teacher voice complaints.

Findings

Through focus group analysis, four overarching themes emerged relating to administrators' perspectives on teacher voice complaints: 1) administrators' reliance on voice enhancement systems, 2) administrators' attitudes toward voice complaints, 3) administrators' perceived impact of teacher voice issues on teaching and learning, and 4) administrators' proposed interventions. Each of these themes encompassed multiple nuanced sub-categories providing deeper insight. In the following section, we present these key themes and related sub-themes, utilizing illustrative quotes to convey administrators' perspectives from the focus group discussions.

Administrators' reliance on voice enhancement systems

One major theme that emerged was administrators' heavy reliance on voice enhancement systems (VES) as a primary strategy for addressing teacher voice complaints. Administrators detailed their experiences with procuring and managing VES as a solution for vocal issues. They described the rationale for adoption, typical usage habits, differences based on infrastructure, and the shared responsibility between district and school leaders surrounding these systems.

VES improves teachers' voices

Administrators observed that voice enhancement systems reduced voice issues among their teachers. One high school administrator (14THA) reflected that 10 years ago, teacher voice complaints were a significant problem, but since installing VES, "it has significantly reduced the number of absences and hoarse voices that are in classrooms." An illustrative quote from a teacher shared by an administrator highlighted the benefits: "I can just talk normally, and the kids can all hear me without me having to shout or feel like I'm always projecting my voice." According to administrators, these classroom systems had tangibly improved teachers' vocal capacity.

Usage patterns and policies

According to administrators, most teachers in their schools utilized VES regularly based on their observation. An administrator (14THA) described visiting classrooms and seeing that teachers have "made [VES] a priority...and they recognized the need for [VES]." Based on these perspectives, it appears that teachers viewed VES as an essential, normalized component of their regular instructional practice rather than an optional tool.

Administrators largely promoted these systems to teachers as an important classroom tool, as reflected by one rural administrator (4RM): "Whether the teacher uses it or not, it's up to that teacher, but...they all have voice amplification built in. And so that's something that we strongly encourage them to use." Another urban administrator (6CE) echoed this sentiment: "That's always been my take on it for when I presented...Please use your mics." The prevalence of VES usage illustrates that teachers saw these systems as necessary for managing vocal demands. Teachers' perspectives on VES could be a result of administrators' communicated perspectives.

Framed with students in mind

According to administrators, VES are typically encouraged and framed around benefits for students rather than vocal benefits for teachers. As one administrator (17SH) said, "When we got all these sound systems in, it was...for the students, so they can hear better. It was never put as a help to the teacher so that they don't have to speak so loudly or strain their voice." The consensus across administrators was that district and school leaders promote VES installation primarily regarding "student safety, student hearing, student accessibility" (1SE) rather than potential advantages for preserving teachers' vocal health and reducing vocal strain. Though VES may indirectly benefit teachers' vocal health, this benefit is not the guiding rationale communicated for adopting VES.

Availability depending on the age of the building

While most administrators felt VES were widely available for teachers, they noted challenges in obtaining and replacing VES in older school buildings. Some reported being unable to replace antiquated systems, as one elementary administrator (1SE) explained: "I literally couldn't get [teachers] the resources. I couldn't buy them anymore. So, we were all waiting at the doors of schools that were closing to try to get their microphones because our system is outdated." Administrators also indicated limited VES access in decades-old buildings not originally built to support the infrastructure. While VES may be widely available, these perspectives illuminate the unique challenges faced by some schools.

District and school policy regarding VES

While no formal district policies around teacher voice complaints were reported, administrators described district-led efforts to install and maintain VES. Many indicated their district funded and coordinated full VES implementation over a multi-year schedule (up to 5 years) and smaller-scale VES maintenance.

While VES were generally provided by the district, a few administrators described being individually responsible for installing and maintaining their school's VES. One rural middle school administrator (18RM) explained, "I'm looking at the invoice for \$27,324.12 that I paid to just create that audio system...It wasn't until April that we got district funding to make that happen...Any upkeep that I've had to deal with has come from school funds." For this administrator, initial VES procurement and ongoing upkeep costs came from individual school budgets rather than district funds.

Administrators' attitudes toward voice complaints

A major theme that emerged from administrators' comments was insight into their attitudes and perspectives surrounding teachers' voice complaints. Within this broad theme, several sub-topics provide a window into administrators' attitudes: administrators' reactions to voice complaints, their perceived relationship between voice complaints and instruction, and their experience with voice complaints as former teachers.

Administrators' reactions to voice complaints

When asked how they respond to teachers reporting voice issues, many administrators said their first step was referring teachers to use their VES. One suburban administrator (3SE) reflected: "I think that's one of the first things I do look at and point them towards is the sound system...That's probably on me if I don't teach them that." Others reported asking teachers with severe vocal fatigue to take sick leave, though teachers were often reluctant. As one administrator (13SE) explained:

I don't feel like [teacher voice complaints are] something that I can send them home for. Is their instruction as effective when they can't speak? No. But I know that

teachers want to save [sick days] for real emergencies, and in their eyes, losing their voices isn't a real emergency.

This quote suggests that sick day policies may be a possible barrier to addressing teacher voice complaints.

Administrators' perceived relationship between voice complaints and instruction

Some administrators expressed perspectives linking teacher voice complaints to issues with classroom management or instructional effectiveness. As one suburban administrator (3SE) described:

It's symptomatic of how your teachers are doing in the classroom. If they're not able to get their class quiet enough to talk without an elevated voice, and even if they're just talking at their normal voice, it's going to hurt for a full day.

In this view, voice problems stem from teachers' inability to control student behavior and volume. Another administrator (13SE) noted some veteran teachers "might frown upon [VES]. It's almost like they don't feel like they're as effective if they need help in speaking more loudly."

Along similar lines, a high school administrator (14THA) suggested: "We have less direct instruction than we've had in the past, and so I think you have less vocal strain as a result." According to these perspectives, effective classroom management and pedagogy should preclude routine voice complaints, framing such issues as preventable with proper teaching strategies.

Administrators' experiences with voice complaints as former teachers

In addition to observations about teachers, some administrators referenced their own prior experiences

with voice issues as former teachers and in their current roles. One elementary administrator (1SE) described damaging her vocal cords as a physical education teacher:

I actually damaged my vocal cords and had a really strained voice. I went to therapy because of the strain on my voice, and I had to beg my administrators ... to put a microphone system in our gymnasium.

She concluded: "I was completely unaware of it until it happened to me."

Other administrators experienced vocal fatigue after the first days back leading faculty meetings and visiting classrooms. One administrator (7SE) reflected after delivering professional development, "I remember by the end of the day my voice not feeling quite right." Administrators who had experienced voice complaints as a teacher appeared to be more aware of and ready to provide resources for their teachers, suggesting that personal experience shaped administrators' empathy and diligence in addressing this issue.

Administrators' perceived impacts on teaching and learning

According to administrators, teacher voice complaints can impact teaching and learning in multiple ways within their schools. In describing observed effects, administrators noted increased vocal strain at the beginning of the school year, decreased productive instruction, hindering student speech and literacy development, and greater challenges for early elementary teachers.

Beginning of the school year

Multiple administrators described escalated teacher voice complaints at the beginning of the school year. One suburban elementary administrator (5SED) recounted commonly

hearing remarks like, "Oh, I'm getting my teacher voice back,' or 'I'm getting my stamina back'" early in the fall. This increased hoarseness and loss of voice was attributed to the vocal demands resuming classroom duties places on teachers after the summer break. As one administrator (5SED) analogized, teachers' voices are "almost like other muscles. If you don't use it, it atrophies a little bit. But, you know, the more you're using your voice and talking through the day, the more stamina you get, the longer it can last." The intensive vocal effort required to establish routines and procedures was also cited as a factor taxing voices at the beginning of the school year.

Decreasing productive instruction

According to administrators, impaired teacher voices can hinder productive instruction in multiple ways. Some described teachers needing to alter interactive teaching styles to accommodate vocal limitations. One suburban administrator (8SE) described a teacher who lost their voice and even with a portable mic had a "limit[ed] ability to teach the way she wanted to."

Administrators also noted teachers missing work due to voice complaints required reliance on substitute teachers, which was seen as decreasing instructional quality. One administrator (7SE) explained substitutes often utilize "busy activities" rather than delivering substantive lessons. While a couple of administrators observed short-term student behavior benefits from strained teacher voices, the consensus was that impaired vocal ability impedes impactful teaching. As one suburban administrator (12SE) summarized, prolonged teacher absences due to voice issues can "have significant impact."

Hindering students' speech and literacy development

A few administrators speculated about potential impacts of teachers' voice problems on speech

and literacy development, particularly for younger students. One administrator (2CE) suggested strained voices could have "academic implications" for foundational skills. Another administrator (9CH) described observing struggles teaching phonics and reading readiness during vocal issues, especially when a substitute is required: "I think that is just one area that I've observed where instruction is really limited because of [teacher voice complaints]."

One elementary administrator (1SE) noted a significant increase in the number of students referred for speech services after the pandemic. While speculative, these administrators raised thought-provoking considerations about the potential downstream effects of teacher voice problems on beginning learners.

Teachers Talk More in Lower Grades

Administrators commonly reported that lower elementary grade teachers may be more susceptible to voice issues. Some hypothesized this could relate to less preparation time and a greater need for collaborative planning talk during the limited breaks in the day. As one elementary administrator (2CE) compared the 20 minutes per day of preparation time in elementary school to the 90 minutes in high school. With minimal respite for vocal rest built into the elementary schedule, administrators proposed that continual verbal demands contribute to greater voice complaints compared to secondary grades.

Administrators' Proposed Interventions

Administrators generally agreed that teachers are unaware of teacher voice complaints. Interestingly, administrators believed that raising teachers' awareness of this issue would be more impactful in preventing problems than creating a policy. As such, administrators

proposed various interventions aimed at promoting vocal health literacy among staff.

Unawareness

Administrators expressed a shared lack of awareness of teacher vocal health as an occupational issue. One urban administrator (6CE) admitted: "I don't think that I really thought about it, like, 'Oh, it's an issue that I have a sore throat at the end of the day.'" As one (2CE) reflected, "I'm going into my seventh year as an administrator. I've never...stood in front of my faculty and have talked about teacher vocal health, and yet it's something that exists and something that we need to be cognizant of."

Interestingly, many administrators felt teachers were unaware of voice complaints because administrators did not approach this topic with them.

Increasing awareness as solution

Instead of policy measures, multiple administrators emphasized raising teacher awareness as a critical first intervention. Simply providing basic information was seen as an important starting point, with one (2CE) suggesting, "Maybe just some information for teachers. Like we have said, they may not even realize that it is a problem until it's maybe too late."

Many argued consciousness-raising would inspire more lasting change than policy mandates. One (5SED) said, that helping people "understand that there are things you can do that are preventative" by "just, 'Hey, be aware of this. Take care of yourself'" was considered more impactful (5SED). Others concurred teacher buy-in comes from explaining "why it's important" so teachers can "solve the problem" (9CH, 12SE). Increasing vocal health literacy was viewed as a critical first step toward cultural change.

Ideas for raising awareness and preventing problems

In considering potential interventions, administrators proposed raising teacher awareness through education on vocal health issues, preventative best practices, and available classroom technology. They felt providing information could bring this overlooked topic to the forefront and spur proactive behaviors.

Some suggested sharing data on voice problems' prevalence to prompt reflection, with one (17SH) stating, "I think anytime you want to start people thinking about or getting interest or making awareness is sometimes data ... Data is sometime a fun way to say, 'Hey, have you ever thought about this because this is an issue.'" Another (12SE) felt briefly learning statistics was "a game changer" that brought personal relevance.

Many also advocated supplying resources on protective strategies and self-care. One (1SE) recommended sharing information on "how we protect our voice, strategies they can use if they are feeling strain, the ability to use time off...for those type of things." She felt vocalizing support for taking time as needed could encourage help-seeking. Other administrators (7SE) thought teachers would welcome practical "strategies on how to keep your voice healthy."

Additionally, they saw value in educating teachers about VES. One (15SCSD) proposed that rather than mandating use through policy, "this is something about...access and education." Increasing understanding of "what the repercussions of not using this is" could promote voluntary adoption. One (3SE) also noted proper usage training was needed, as "teachers may not be aware what the repercussions of not using this is."

Administrators brainstormed integrating vocal health into existing wellness programs or new teacher training. They suggested sharing tips through wellness initiatives to transfer vocal health knowledge. Others suggested brief modules or slides during annual trainings to cover awareness, prevention, and available supports. Overall, most agreed with one administrator who said (10SE), "we need to educate teachers on this issue. We're educators, we believe in educating, and this is certainly an area that we could do much better in." Administrators viewed equipping teachers with information as a feasible solution for addressing this overlooked issue.

Discussion

This study examined the perception of the current state of teacher voice complaints from the perspective of practicing school administrators. The aim was to understand how administrators respond to vocal issues and how existing school and district policies address such concerns. Four key themes emerged from the focus group discussions: (1) administrators' reliance on voice enhancement technology, (2) administrators' attitudes toward voice complaints, (3) perceived impacts of voice issues on teaching and learning, and (4) administrators' proposed interventions. These major themes provide insights into the research questions regarding administrators' experiences, responses, and relevant policies surrounding teacher vocal health complaints.

How do administrators handle situations in which teachers have voice complaints?

Administrators' responses to voice complaints, including sending teachers home and verifying voice amplification use, provide new insights not found in existing research. While prior studies show student learning declines with unexpected teacher absences (Gadepalli et al., 2019; Houtte et al., 2011; Leão et al., 2015; Martins et al., 2014; Nerrière et al., 2009; Roy et al., 2004), how administrators specifically

address vocal issues has been unexamined. Investigating the frequency and efficacy of these management approaches could illuminate best practices.

Encouraging vocal rest aligns with evidence that adequate recovery time supports vocal health (Chan, 1994; Lin et al. 2023; Siqueira et al., 2022). However, explicit links between administrator recommended breaks and teacher vocal outcomes need verification.

This study also reveals administrators' heavy reliance on classroom voice amplification to mitigate complaints. Some previous studies suggest VES can improve teacher vocal wellbeing, especially for those with existing issues (Gaskill et al., 2012; Jonsdottir et al., 2002). However, one study found no association between VES and improved vocal health (Banks et al., 2022). The finding that teachers already experiencing fatigue used amplification more frequently (Banks et al., 2022) mirrors administrators' reports of promoting VES for symptomatic teachers. Examining the efficacy of administrators' approaches is an important direction for better supporting teacher vocal health.

How do school and district policy interact with teacher voice complaints?

Administrators in this study reported no existing policies on teacher vocal health, despite describing district practices around VES provision. When asked about potential policy approaches, most preferred increasing teacher awareness over formal regulations.

This finding aligns with extensive research indicating teachers lack consciousness of vocal issues (Gautum et al., 2022; Houtte et al., 2011; Morton & Watson, 1998; Nusseck et al., 2018; Schaeffler et al., 2023), thus supporting administrators' belief that bolstering vocal health literacy could be an impactful

initial strategy. As they suggested, existing literature reviews offer resources to inform teachers on this overlooked issue (Cantor-Cutiva et al., 2013; Williams, 2004).

Administrators also emphasized explaining the rationale behind preventative behaviors to motivate action. This echoes research citing limited motivation as a barrier (Schaeffler et al, 2023), and calls for improved understanding of vocal care importance (Yiu & Ma, 2002).

In summary, administrators' preference for promoting awareness aligns with extensive evidence of knowledge gaps among teachers. Formal study of such consciousness-raising

effects could elucidate impacts on reducing vocal complaints.

Conclusions

Teacher voice health issues can adversely affect both student learning and teacher wellbeing. Administrators may consider educating themselves and staff on the prevalence of voice problems and recommended preventive steps.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) offers recommendations that administrators could share with staff:

- Practice vocal hygiene—stay hydrated, limit irritants like alcohol or smoking, avoid shouting/throat clearing, and rest your voice when ill.
- Plan regular vocal breaks.
- Avoid vocal extremes like yelling or whispering.
- Use amplification devices.
- Learn proper projection techniques.
- Reduce classroom/background noise.
- Employ conscious breathing.
- Use non-vocal cues with students.
- Practice self-care as fatigue and stress affect the voice.
- Heed warning signs like persistent hoarseness, roughness, or discomfort when talking—seek help from a speech pathologist.
- Take sick days for vocal recovery.

Additional research is needed to raise awareness of current policies and administrator perspectives. As one administrator (4RM) aptly stated, "Your voice is your profession. It's how you teach. It's what you do. It's how you engage students...Teaching kids, you need to have a powerful voice."

Amplifying administrator and teacher voices on this overlooked occupational challenge remains critical for informing supportive policies, positive behaviors, and ensuring teachers can fulfill their profession with strong, healthy voices.

Author Biographies

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Appendix

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Participant Key

School Location	School Type
R – rural	E – elementary
S – suburban	M – middle/junior
C – city	H – high
T – town	A – alternative
U – urban	D – district position

**CORRECTIONS FOR THE FALL 2024 ISSUE
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Correction #1

Regarding “Connecting the Courtroom to the Classroom: How Educators Can Claim Their Agency through Legal Literacy” by Christopher Thomas and Jamie Kudlats, additional author information for the first five references follows:

Author (2022): Thomas, C. D. (2022). *Reclaiming democratic education: Student and teacher activism and the future of education policy*. Teachers College Press.

Author (2023a): Thomas, C. D., McElhattan, L. E., Carlo, S. M. (2023). Legal literacy and generative artificial intelligence: Comparing the education law knowledge of practicing educators and large language models like ChatGPT. *Education Law Reporter*, 414, 783-797.

Author (2023b): Thomas, C. D., & Kudlats, J. (Hosts) (2023, Nov. 21). The cussing cheerleader and off-campus student speech (No. 3) [Audio podcast episode]. In *Chalk & Gavel*. <https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/chalk-and-gavel/episodes/The-Cussing-Cheerleader-and-Off-Campus-Student-Speech-e2c6636/a-aakrb9d>

Author (2024a): Thomas, C. D., & Kudlats, J. (Hosts) (2024, Feb. 13). Religion in schools and the praying coach, part 1 (No. 10) [Audio podcast episode]. In *Chalk & Gavel*. <https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/chalk-and-gavel/episodes/Zero-Tolerance-and-Due-Process-e2f3pqu>

Author (2024b): Thomas, C. D., & Kudlats, J. (Hosts) (2024, Feb. 20). Religion in schools and the praying coach, part 2 (No. 11) [Audio podcast episode]. In *Chalk & Gavel*. <https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/chalk-and-gavel/episodes/11--Religion-in-Schools-and-the-Praying-Coach--Part-2-e2g0jon>

Correction #2

J. Cameron Anglum author of “Fostering Stronger Superintendent-School Board Relations” is now an assistant professor at Lehigh University’s College of Education, Bethlehem, PA.

Mission and Scope, Copyright, Privacy, Ethics, Upcoming Themes, Author Guidelines, Submissions, Publication Rates & Publication Timeline

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