

SOCIAL NETWORKS OF VETERAN EDUCATORS  
WHO REMAIN IN THE EDUCATION PROFESSION:  
A CASE STUDY

By

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Abstract: The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the social networks of select veteran teachers in three schools within one large, urban school district. Using Lin's (1999) Network Theory of Social Capital as the theoretical framework, the case study described participant perspectives regarding how the social networks contribute to the teacher's decision to remain in the profession. The participants in this study are 9 educators selected using purposeful sampling meeting the criteria-based attributes reflected in this study. The participants teach in a region of Oklahoma that have the lowest rates (31.7%) of educators with 15 years or more and high poverty rates of enrollment. All 9 educators have at least 15 years of teaching experience and remain despite teaching in this region. Data were collected through a Name Generator Survey, interviews, and observations. The data in this study indicated that the 9 participants use the social networks among their colleagues, administrators, and family to provide professional, emotional, and problem-solving support. The resources embedded in those social networks provided the participants with the desire to grow professionally, financially, mentally, and physically. Regardless of the need for a formal or informal meeting to determine how to preserve, the veteran educators in this case know they have networks of support and resources to continue in the education profession.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Educational leaders and policy makers recognize the importance of hiring quality teachers to lead the academic and social learning in classrooms (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006; Rockoff, 2004). The National Report from the Alliance for Excellent Education (2005) indicated, “There is growing consensus among researchers and educators that the single most important factor in determining student performance is the quality of [their] teacher” (p. 1). Johnson, Berg, and Donaldson (2005) differentiated between *quality* and *physical* retention of educators and noted that when a district goal is student learning, it is important to retain skilled and effective educators rather than burnt out and incompetent educators. Johnson, Berg, and Donaldson (2005) concurred that a reduction in teacher retention cannot be as simple as putting any teacher with students; the educator must be a contributor to school and student improvement.

Beyond student outcomes, there are other reasons school districts want to retain effective teachers. One catalyst prompting education communities to further focus on retention and recruitment of educators is the financial burden of filling vacant positions.

Teacher turnover can prove costly and strain a district's budget. In *The Journal of Education Finance*, Watlington et al. (2010) asserted, "While some of the costs are easily quantified, other costs are more difficult to ascertain because they are embedded in many years of the school district budget" (p. 25). Related expenses include time, resources, professional development, and human resources personnel needed to attend job fairs to replace staff. The annual cost of teacher attrition across the United States ranges from one billion to \$2.6 billion each year (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004, 2005; Haynes, 2014; Hughes, 2012). Lack of finances and increased job demands fluctuate every year, but a constant factor in promoting student success will be the need for quality teachers to educate students.

Despite the understanding of the importance of quality teachers in every classroom, teacher shortages are widely experienced across the United States. According to a 2017 report conducted by the Learning Policy Institute, trends in teachers leaving the profession are approximately 8% or about 90,000 additional teachers needed to be hired yearly in the United States (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). As a result, changes in certification processes to meet the demand created by teacher shortages have led to an unprecedented number of emergency certified teachers in classrooms. For example, in many states, individuals with a bachelor's degree may submit transcripts to become emergency certified, but these individuals are not required to complete the basic higher education classes taken by traditionally certified teachers. As a result, in 2017, our nation's schools had approximately 100,000 classrooms that were taught by "underqualified teachers" (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Politicians and communities are feeling the impact of teachers leaving the profession as more of their own children are being educated by alternative and emergency-certified teachers. Oklahoma is one of the states experiencing a severe teacher shortage. The number of emergency certified teachers needed to cover vacancies in Oklahoma has increased from 32 certificates in the 2011-2012 school year to 3,092 certificates as of November 2019 (Oklahoma State School Board Association, 2019). Additionally, educational leaders understand the urgency of finding solutions for the problems that are created when their best educators retire or quit. As the nation witnesses more teacher strikes, leaders are focusing on identifying efforts needed to support and retain quality teachers for their communities.

### **Problem Statement**

Research shows that a high number of teachers leave the profession within the first three years, particularly in challenging schools (Day and Gu, 2010; Ingersoll and Stuckey, 2014). In a study conducted at the University of Tulsa, Assistant Professor of Economics, Matthew (2015) stated, “Among new teachers, about 35% exit their school after the first year on the job. About 29% of new teachers exit their district and about 17% exit the Oklahoma public school system after their first year on the job” (p. 3). Leithwood (2007) noted as new teachers enter the education profession and realize the incredible amount of preparation, reflection, and accountability required in their daily actions, they begin to experience resulting stress and reduced levels of teacher self-efficacy.

Despite the high levels of attrition in some schools, some teachers do remain in the profession for their entire careers. According to an Oklahoma State Department of

Education report conducted by Lazarte-Alcala (2018), of the 50,598 active public-school educators for the 2017-2018 school year, the largest percentage of educators, 36.1%, had 15 or more years of experience. Research indicates a few reasons why teachers remain in the profession. Teachers who have strong relationships with their colleagues, including administrators, and have the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes typically report higher levels of job satisfaction and higher retention rates (Denton, 2009; Grissom 2011; Zhang, 2006). Additionally, teachers who view their principals as effective, supportive, encouraging, collaborative, and intellectually stimulating tend to be more satisfied with their positions (Brown, 2009; Denton, 2009; Leithwood, 2006). Research conducted by Berkovich and Eyal (2015) found that effective building leaders assist teachers in controlling negative emotions by encouraging them to consider the positive perspective in situations. Research also indicates numerous positive teacher outcomes when there are high levels of individual and group efficacy (Leithwood, 2007).

One other probable reason some teachers choose to remain in the profession may be the social networks the educator builds within their professional environment. In Nieto's (2003) inquiry research group, the teachers in the study revealed that "creating communities of learning among teachers is necessary if they are to remain connected to their profession, their students, and one another" (p. 395). Although research on the interrelationship of social networks of teachers and retention in the profession is limited, much of the existing research does acknowledge the impact of "relationships" (Goodwin, 2005) and "meaningful interactions" (Kelchtermans, 2009a; Kelchtermans, 2017) that a teacher values within the profession. Goodwin (2005) maintained that "close relationships acted as important 'social glue' helping people deal with the uncertainties of

their changing world” (p. 615). Therefore, it is likely that educators who choose to remain in the profession rely on their social networks to help them manage the stress and expectations of their careers (Edwards, 2007; Goodwin, 2005).

### **Purpose of the Study**

Given the importance of a high-quality teacher in each classroom, it is necessary that districts and schools have a greater understanding of the factors that lead to the retention of teachers. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the social networks of select veteran teachers in three schools within one large, urban school district. Using Lin’s Network Theory of Social Capital as the theoretical framework, the case study will describe how the social networks contribute to the teacher’s decision to remain in the profession.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do veteran teachers in this study describe their social network connections for professional support, emotional support, and problem-solving support?
2. What are veteran teacher perceptions of why they have chosen to remain in the teaching profession?
3. What resources, if any, are embedded in veteran teacher social networks that have contributed to their decision to remain in the profession?

### **Epistemological Perspective**

This study seeks to understand the social networks and resources that support educators during the longevity of their careers. Therefore, constructivism is the epistemological perspective for this study. Crotty (1998) explained that the development of meaning used by constructivist is “constructed by human beings as they engage with

the world they are interpreting” (p. 43). Crotty stated that researchers using the constructivist perspective interpret data collection through their personal background and experiences. Researchers with this perspective strive to interpret the participants' meaning within their environment.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Network theory of social capital (Lin, 1999) is the theoretical framework used for this case study to examine the social networks utilized and social capital embedded in networks of veteran teachers choosing to remain in the profession. The perspective of a social network assumes information and knowledge are exchanged between individual relationships (Borgatti & Ofem, 2010), while social capital refers to the resources acquired in social networks (Coleman 1990; Lin, 1999; Lin, 2009). Variations within the characteristics of a network lend to resource quality or quantity (Lin, 2005). Lin (1999) analyzed two points of this perspective as “(1) how individuals invest in social relations, and (2) how individuals capture the embedded resources in the relations to generate a return” (p. 32). Therefore, because this study seeks to identify networks and social capital within those relationships, the data may provide insight to the social capital embedded in social networks that has led to their retention in the profession.

### **Methodology**

The design for this study is a qualitative case study utilizing social network data to understand teacher support networks. According to Merriam (1998), when approaching qualitative research with a constructivist lens, a case study design gathers perspectives from multiple participants while focusing on the differentiated interpretations of the research topic. In educational research, case study research is often used to identify and



explain specific issues and problems grounded within the context of the case (Merriam, 1998). To affect and improve the educational practice of retaining quality veteran educators, I have chosen a case study design to address the research problem and answer research questions.

The population included Oklahoma educators currently working in an urban school district with 15 or more years of teaching experience. The region has 98 school districts and 17,218 of the statewide 50,598 educators within nine of the 77 state counties (Lazarte-Alcala, 2018). According to Lazarte-Alcala, the 98 school districts in this region of Oklahoma had the highest state turnover rate at 24.5% during the 2017-2018 school year. The Lazarte-Alcala (2018) report also indicated that this region of Oklahoma had the lowest rates (31.7%) of educators with 15 years or more of education experience. Given the high degree of turnover, this region is an appropriate area in which to explore how veteran teachers' social networks may influence the decision to remain in the teaching profession.

Participants were selected using purposeful sampling. Researchers use criterion selection in case studies to narrow the number of participants meeting the purpose of the study (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2014). The criteria for this case included nine educators who are currently teaching within the Macken School District and who have 15 or more years of service. According to the Lazarte-Alcala (2018) report, the Macken School District is an urban district located in the region of Oklahoma with the highest state turnover rate. Three schools within the Macken School District were purposely chosen to gain the insight of three educators from each of the three schools who have decided to remain in the profession despite high levels of turnover within this

region. These nine veteran educators are currently working in district schools with high poverty, high special needs, or ELL students. Although the average years of teaching experience in the schools chosen are less than 10 years, the sample participants for this research meet the criteria and have remained in the profession beyond 15 years.

Nine veteran educators will be asked to complete a name generator survey, a commonly used method to gain social network data (Lin, 1999). Participants were asked to list the initials of up to nine individuals to whom they go for professional support, emotional support, and problem-solving support when dealing with work issues. Additional data collection will occur through semi-structured, open-ended interviews. Patton (2014) stated, “Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful and knowable and can be explicit” (p. 426). The qualitative interviewing method goes a step beyond direct observations (Patton, 2014). Observations of teacher interactions during faculty meetings, time between classes and lunch, and before and after school will be conducted (Merriam, 1998). By observing the participants’ interactions or lack of interactions within their work environment, triangulation with interview answers and the name generator survey may provide additional understandings of teacher support networks.

Once the interviews were conducted, I transcribed the audio recordings. Data collected from the study are coded and recognized themes and pertinent quotes and information from the observations and interviews are organized to develop meaning and explanation (Merriam, 1998; Saldana, 2016). Using the constant comparative method of analysis, the researcher compared and identified patterns among the various data sets which exposed common themes and key issues within the case study (Merriam, 1998).

## **Significance of the Study**

By analyzing the social capital used within the networks of veteran educators in this case, districts may implement similar networks of support to increase retention of quality educators. While state legislators and educational advocates search for incentives to keep educators, this case study may provide insight into the social capital within these veteran teachers' networks that have led to their longevity within the educational profession.

## **To Practice**

As more teachers are leaving the profession, it is imperative that educational leaders identify ways their leadership can foster social networks to keep teachers. Price (2008) indicated that, "A good leader, no matter the leadership style, needs to be able to motivate the staff, and again, if motivated teachers motivate students, then further efforts need to be made to do so" (p. 22). For educational leaders to provide professional networks for teachers during this stressful time, analyzing and identifying reasons that teachers do remain in the profession is necessary. If educational leaders do not pay attention, mentor, and provide teachers with resources and skills that will reverse this negative correlation, schools are at risk of losing more teachers.

## **To Research**

This present study will add to existing teacher retention research by focusing on teachers who remain, and the reasons why these teachers stay, as opposed to the teachers who leave the school environment. Support systems within professional development help individuals to achieve goals or strive to achieve improved goals (Westaby, Pfaff, & Redding, 2014). Research exists on the stress and lack of support that leads to teachers quitting (Belcastro & Gold, 1983; Herman, Hickmon-Rosa, & Reinke, 2018; Maslach,

Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). However, taking time to focus on the informal and formal teacher networks can provide educational leaders with a plan that may reduce the opposition and frustration that leads to them leaving the profession.

### **To Theory**

This study may identify the social capital used in teacher networks that contribute to retention of quality educators. Theories regarding how the use of multiple social networks impact school environments may assist educational leaders in the development of school culture and change. The environment for educators is influential to their continued success or loss of interest in the profession. Daly (2010) recognized that the positions and structure of the people teachers interact with directly influence how information about changes are received and perceived. School leaders can explore and identify changes needed in current professional networks and interactions that may increase retention opportunities. Results of this study could potentially add to the existing research on either the positive or negative influence social networks have on teacher job satisfaction and retention.

### **Definition of Terms**

#### **Veteran Educators**

Experienced teachers who have served a lengthy amount of time in the profession (Day and Gu, 2009) and in this research, “lengthy amount” will refer to 15 or more years of experience.

#### **Teacher Attrition**

“Qualified teachers, leaving the profession, for reasons other than having reached the age of retirement” (Kelchtermans, 2017, p. 972.)

### **Teacher Retention**

Keeping qualified teachers in the profession (Kelchtermans, 2017).

### **Social Network**

A social network is the finite set or sets of actors and the relation or relations defined by them (Wasserman & Faust, 1994, p.20) that can either make it easier or more difficult to obtain social capital (Lin, 2001; Wasserman & Faust, 1998).

### **Social Network Ties**

Connections or links that “shape how individuals identify and define their membership in groups, communities, and societies, and ultimately shape action” (Rios-Aguilar & Deil-Amen, 2012, p. 181).

### **Social Network Strength**

Social network strength distinguishes between weak or strong networks and depends on the intensity, interaction, and reciprocity (Granovetter, 1973).

### **Social Capital**

“Resources that are accessed in social networks” (Lin, 1999, p. 471).

### **Resources**

Resources produced by social capital are material or symbolic goods (Lin, 1982) described as either bonding capital which maintains trust and stability within a network or bridging capital promoting innovation and financial growth (Lin, 1999).

## **Summary and Organization of the Study**

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter I provided the introduction to the study, the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, and the research questions.

A qualitative case study was used to identify which social networks and social capital are needed to retain quality educators.

Chapter II provides a thorough review of previous literature that aids in comprehending the research topic. Within the literature review is research to address: the teacher attrition problem, the social networks teachers use to remain in the profession and the social capital used by educators to reduce attrition rates. In summation, the chapter details reasons that can potentially lead to social networks and social capital that are vital to understanding retention of quality educators.

Chapter III provides a detailed explanation of the research methods and procedures for this case study. It explained the research design, participants, data collection and methods for data analysis. Chapter IV presents the data and analysis of the case study, and Chapter V provided answers to the research questions, the discussion of the findings through the lens of Nan Lin's network theory of social capital. Recommendations for future research and a summary are included at the end of Chapter V.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to explore the social networks of select veteran teachers and described how social networks contributed to the teacher's decision to remain in the profession. Key topics discussed in this literature review include: (1) establishing the need for effective educators (2) identifying reasons that veteran educators leave the teaching profession (3) recognizing reasons veteran educators remain; (4) and discussing the utility of Lin's (1999) Network Theory of Social Capital for explaining findings in this study.

#### **Effective Educators**

Retaining highly qualified educators in the classroom provides our students and communities with a more solid learning foundation. The vacancies left by veteran educators lead to the placement of novice educators in schools with the greatest need for experienced and qualified personnel (McKinney et al., 2007). Studies by Babu and Mendro (2003) asserted that when students are taught by ineffective teachers for three consecutive years, academic failure is more prevalent compared to students who have quality educators. Bembry et al. (1998) conducted a longitudinal study of academic achievement for students with and without quality classroom educators. Bembry et al. (1998) affirmed that "the common practice of pacing students who have had an

ineffective teacher with a highly effective one to erase differences, even over three years, does not remedy entirely the loss of achievement” (p. 20). The continued cycle of employing inexperienced educators in high need schools leads to educators leaving the profession and rehiring novice or emergency certified staff. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2005) found the following:

A major result of teacher attrition and inadequate induction is that poor, urban, and minority children are taught by less experienced, less qualified teachers who do not stay long enough to become an expert, high-quality teacher their students desperately need. (as cited in McKinney et al., 2007, p. 3)

Darling-Hammond (2003) noted that the research conducted in 2000 by the Texas Center for Educational Research concluded that 40 percent of teachers in their first three years had a turnover that estimated cost of their attrition was around “\$329 million a year, or at least \$8,000” for each educator that left the profession (p. 8).

### **Characteristics of an Effective Educator**

An effective educator contributes to the academic success of students and positive culture of the learning community. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2007), a highly qualified teacher is one who has completed a teacher education program and has a bachelor’s degree or higher and completed state license requirements (Marszalek, Odom, LaNasa, & Adler, 2010). Teachers who are highly qualified must also be proficient in their academic subject area and not hold an emergency or provisional license (Marszalek et al., 2010). Experienced teachers also possess multiple strategies needed for effective teaching (Housner & Griffey, 1985) and have fewer disruptions from student misbehavior resulting in a better learning environment (Graber, 2001; Munby,



Russell, & Martin, 2001). Spillane and Louis (2002) discovered that when educators are in a culture promoting collaboration and network development, student achievement increases.

### **Reasons Teachers Leave the Profession**

National teacher surveys indicate lack of education funding (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Johnson & Kardos, 2008), non-collaborative culture (Boyd et al., 2011; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Hong, 2012; Katzenbach & Smith, 2013; Leithwood, 2007), and stress and depersonalization are reasons for leaving the profession (Anitha, 2014; Berryhill, Linney, & Fromewick, 2009; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

#### **Lack of School Funding**

Lack of educational funding has led to a perceived lack of respect for the teaching profession and is prompting many veteran educators to leave. Despite funding discrepancies for each state, the trend tends to lean towards the deficits that affect teachers and students. During the 2017-2018 school year, some states experienced multi-day teacher walkouts to advocate for salary increases and per pupil funding. In an online survey conducted in the Fall of 2017 by the Oklahoma State Department of Education, the data from the respondents indicated that compensation was the number one reason for leaving (Lazarte Alcala, 2018). The survey also indicated that 31% of the respondents with active certifications would return to Oklahoma's public schools if salaries were increased (Lazarte Alcala, 2018).

Lower compensation for educators is a deterrent to the profession. Research indicates that finding quality math and science teachers is due to their access to higher-

paying jobs outside of education within skillset (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Therefore, people teaching math and science are in the classroom via an alternative or emergency route and have fewer teacher preparation skills. The recent teacher walk-outs across the nation brought a spotlight on the low compensation making it more difficult to recruit quality candidates into teacher preparation programs. States are noticing low enrollment into teacher preparation programs and the deficit it is creating for the future (citation needed).

### **Lack of School Collaboration**

With lack of support systems listed as the prominent indicator for leaving education, Buchanan (2010) stated it is imperative to create opportunities for staff collaboration. Educators who quit lack professional connections because of experience or even the physical distance from their colleagues (Newberry & Allsop, 2017). Within education systems, there are times when leaders must house teacher classrooms in locations that are not as easy to build comradery. School facilities may be under construction or built-in ways that prohibit support and/or collaboration via proximity. In a three-year research study conducted by Coburn, Choi, and Mata (2010), results suggested that schools that create spaces of proximity and interaction can influence teacher networks (Coburn, Choi, & Mata, 2010). Educators find it difficult to remain when networks are lacking, and emotional and professional validation and motivation do not exist in the working environment (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002; Papatraianou & Le Cornu, 2014).

School climate and staff turnover play an influential role in a teacher's decision to stay or leave the profession (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005; Gaytan, 2008;

Haynes, 2014). The disruption caused by continuous loss of staff potentially leads to a negative school climate and trust building among staff members (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Guin, 2004). Dissatisfaction in the classroom has negative impacts on student achievement and the school climate. In a meta-analysis by De Dreu and Weingart (2003) conflict in work teams, they found that negativity within a community can compromise team performance and member attitudes.

### **Stress and Depersonalization**

In research conducted by Ross, Romer, and Homer (2001), emotional exhaustion and depersonalization were connected to teacher burnout. Depersonalization occurs when teachers emotionally separate themselves from situations that become stressful. Ross, Romer, and Homer (2012) suggested that teachers develop negative and indifferent attitudes towards students and the profession. With an increase in government policies requiring more accountability (Leithwood, 2007), more teachers are opting to exit, are less satisfied with their job and are more stressed (Dworkin, 1997) as they work to meet these demands. As the daily experiences in the classroom and work become unrewarding, teachers' feelings of personal accomplishments they get from contributing to helping their students diminish (Maslach et al., 1996).

As the workload increases, there is little time for educators to regain their energy. The exhaustion leads to teachers becoming more negative towards the students as well as the profession (Ross et al., 2001). It is inevitable to avoid change while working in an educational setting. Best practices, curriculum, new leadership, and new colleagues are just a few things that change while working in an educational system. Time management of the heavy workloads and lack of administrative support can lead to quality educators

leaving (Connell, 2007; Flores, 2006; Ingersoll, 2001, 2002). Teachers begin to exhibit behaviors that lead them to mentally withdraw from the job and reduce job effort levels.

### **Choosing to Stay a Professional Educator**

Current research focuses on the factors that lead to teacher attrition, specifically for early-career teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001, 2002, 2003).

However, there is research to support that there are teachers who choose to remain in the profession when school culture is positive (Ingersoll, 2003; Gu & Day, 2013) and there is administrative and collegial support (Boyd et al., 2011; Day et al, 2007). Haberman (2005) asserted that a key factor in retaining teachers is to understand this phenomenon, “why do some teachers stay?”

### **Administration Support**

A teacher’s perception of support from leadership is among one of the most significant predictors of stability and turnover in education (Boyd et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2005; Ladd, 2011; Marinell & Coca, 2013). In research on the recruitment and retention of teachers, Gaytan (2008) asserted that “because working conditions are essential to teachers’ satisfaction with teaching and their careers, it is crucial for school administrators to gain a thorough understanding” of them (p. 125). Reducing the feelings of isolation and frustration for teaching professionals is an intentional cultural development being established by educational leaders. “Across states that have conducted a Teacher Working Conditions survey, educators consistently rank leadership as the most important factor affecting their willingness to remain teaching at their school” (Hirsch et al., 2006, p. 17).

Ladd (2011) reviewed North Carolina's statewide teacher survey designed to examine the correlation between working conditions and retention according to teacher's perception. Survey items measuring the teachers' view of administrative support regarding student discipline, classroom instruction, and evaluation were examined. The research findings revealed that the quality of school leadership was the highest predictor of teacher departure (Ladd, 2011). Ladd (2011) also noted that despite high percentages of free and reduced lunch and racial minority students, school leadership qualities had a stronger impact on teacher attrition.

In research conducted by Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, and Gundlach (2003), one of the five conclusions indicated the building leader's role is to provide resources that address the specific and unique needs of the school. Retaining teachers hired depends on the support system that is developed and implemented by the building administrator. "Buffering teachers from distractions to their instructional work, acknowledging and rewarding good work, and providing feedback to teachers about their work are also positive working conditions for teachers" (Leithwood, 2007, p. 630). As administrators focus on retention of quality educators, their goals should include providing support systems and resources that allow their teachers to concentrate on student achievement rather than mandates from the district and state (Hirsch & Emerick, 2007).

### **Positive Culture**

Successful educational leaders work to create a school culture that educators will want to grow professionally and remain. Hawley and Valli (1999) claimed, "School improvement cannot occur apart from a closely connected culture of professional development" (p. 129). The development of a shared vision is to create dialogue and

opportunities of collaboration for the educational practices and continued professional learning result in a positive school culture (Cowley & Meehan, 2002; Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, 2008).

Collegial support and networks contribute to retention of educators and staff (Burke et al., 2013). As professional challenges occur, teachers feel it is important to be surrounded by positive relationships that include trust while seeking advice or engaging in discourse (Allensworth et al., 2009). Given the day-to-day stressors and work-related tasks, educators utilize the relationships at work to help with decisions needed to sustain their mental, physical, and professional growth. Allensworth et al. (2009) studied Chicago teachers who were more likely to keep teaching if there was a “can do” attitude among their colleagues. School cultures which emulate those associated with family roles and support contribute to teacher retention (Hong, 2012; McIntyre, 2010). Collegial networks create strong supportive relationships to help teachers feel a sense of belonging (Hong, 2012; McIntyre, 2010).

As educators are recognized for their contributions to the system, they tend to strive to improve themselves and others interact with colleagues, administrators, students, and community members (Dufour et al., 2008; Fullan, 2009). Newberry and Allsop (2017) concluded that the professional support structure was a factor for teachers who remained or left despite challenges within the profession. An effective system develops leaders within every level of the organization. Fullan (2002) contended that “sustainability depends on many leaders—thus, the qualities of leadership must be attainable by many, not just a few” (p. 20). Monitoring and acknowledging the strengths

everyone offers the organization is dependent on the leader's awareness of staff work (Banerjee et al., 2017; Flook et al., 2013).

### **Investing in Professional Growth**

Research supports teachers remain when they have access to “regular learning opportunities to expand content knowledge, address diverse learning needs, manage student behavior, and improve pedagogical skills” (Wiebke & Bardni, 2009, p. 34).

Successful teachers seek professional development to improve their daily practices and instruction. Job retention depends on acquiring and having resources to succeed (Kohli, 2019). Coaching and mentoring professional development are connected to a positive culture of work for educators (Hirsch, 2004). Professional development opportunities that provide collegial formats for problem solving prove beneficial to social resources needed for retention of staff (Loucks-Horsley et al., 1998).

When professional development does not meet the needs of the intended educators, the educators will choose to not actively participate or avoid the opportunities. Fullan (2009) said, “Building capacity involves developing new knowledge, skills, and competencies; new resources (time, ideas, materials); and new shared identity and motivation to work together for greater change” (p. 10). A study conducted by Garet et al. (2001) concluded that educators described effective professional development as the ability to use it immediately in daily life as well as engaging in group participation activities with educators from their own school. Educators have busy schedules and value their time. Because professional growth opportunities are either mandated by administrators or provided for educators to voluntarily attend, successful professional development must be effective and timely.

Educators participating in professional development indicated that the skills acquired provide them with a desire to advance in the profession (Coldwell, 2018). As teachers invested in opportunities to enhance their professional skills, they developed a capacity to engage in school leadership (Taylor et al., 2011) and subject field promotion (Jones et al., 2008). Whether they remained in the classroom or sought promotions within their field, educators engaging in professional development gained reassurance and confidence that was a factor for remaining in the profession.

Analysis of social networks within organizations has explained organizational commitment, satisfaction, and behavior (Krackhardt & Porter, 1985). The study of teacher networks and the relationship to longevity within the profession is a more recent interest in education (Adams, 2000; Lieberman, 2000). Daly (2010) noted that “recent research suggests that relationships and collegial support are central for the retention, increased professionalism, and depth of engagement of educators” (Chapter 1, para 2).

In 2001, the National Staff Development Council stated that “organized groups provide the interpersonal support and synergy necessary for creatively solving the complex problems of teaching and learning” (p.175, as cited in DuFour et al., 2008). Cross and Thomas (2008) noted indicators of experts are people who position themselves in networks that extend their expertise, provide diversity versus similarity, focus on high-quality vs large networks. Gu and Li (2013) noted that ‘teachers’ worlds are made up of multi-layered relationships’ (p. 98) and knowing the systems that provide support allows educational leaders to create a culture of collaboration.

Leaders can offer a network of people and resources that provide emotional support for sustainability. Katzenbach and Kahn (2010) agreed that leaders who are



effective do not only help teachers with research and logic, but by connecting to their emotional needs. According to Daly (2010), social network theory research “is founded on the premise that how a system is put together is as determinative of the system’s behavior and outcomes as the composition of its elements” (Chap. 2, sec. 2, para. 6). Daly (2010) acknowledged research that indicated during times of crisis, people turn to support within their subgroups for stability.

### **Internal Collegial Connections**

Teachers with strong relationships with their colleagues, including administrators, and with opportunities to participate in the decision-making process typically reported higher levels of job satisfaction and were more likely to stay in the profession (Denton, 2009; Grissom, 2011; Zhang, 2006). Collegial connections influenced educators and their commitment and well-being are needed for everyday work (Day et al., 2007; Day & Gu, 2010, 2014). DuFour and Marzano (2011) noted that it is more important to create a successful system of collaboration among the staff you are given versus obtaining great people only to have them work in an ineffective system (p. 19).

Veteran educators confirmed that colleagues and a sharing culture attributed to their longevity within socioeconomically challenged communities (Gu, 2014; Jordan, 2006; Kelchtermans, 2009a; Lindqvist & Nordanger, 2016). Simos (2013) stated, “Developing supportive and constructive relationships between new practitioners and mentor teachers is ... of vital importance” (p. 103). Additionally, Stanbury and Zimmerman (2000) asserted that the successful pairing of mentor-mentee support system is dependent on the mentor’s understanding of how long and laborious the process is to get to the teaching level that they themselves have achieved. Districts should invest in

days of orientation sessions to explain to the mission, vision, goals, policies, procedures, and other pertinent information about the organization (Reeder, 2013).

Gu's (2014) determined that 91% of her research participants contributed their positive teaching experiences to the support of their colleagues (p. 514). Katzenbach and Smith's (2013) study revealed that "within teams there is nothing more important than each other's commitment to a common purpose and set of related performance goals for which the group holds itself jointly accountable" (p. 44). The social networks created by educators tend to be naturally established based out of a need to find commonality in support both professionally and emotionally. Klassen et al. (2010) discovered that teachers have lower levels of stress and higher levels of commitment and satisfaction when there is staff collegiality and proper communication. Marston et al. (2006) discovered that social interactions with colleagues and administrators were factors in teacher retention.

### **External Collegial Connections**

The increase of technology use in education has prompted educators to utilize online social networks to share and retrieve resources to enhance their professional knowledge (Anderson, 2012; Holmes et al., 2013; Whitby, 2010). National and state professional organizations contribute to building a professional learning network (PLN) for successful teachers (Moore & Swan, 2008; Smith-Risser, 2013; Wesley, 2013). As educators across the nation continue to advocate for higher pay and professional respect, data collected regarding the impact of systems of support (Wolff & Moser, 2009) could assist in determining retention of veteran educators. The social media networks create this data source.

Professional development can be placed into formal and informal categories as defined by Richter, Kunter, Klusmann, Ludtke, and Baumert (2011). The formal learning networks are conducted in “structured learning environments with a specified curriculum” (p. 117), and the informal learning is not confined to specific curriculum or environment (Richter et al., 2011). It was suggested by Conlon (2004) that almost 90 percent of professional development occurred in informal settings. With the evolution of social networking sites (SNS), more research is being conducted to show that educators utilize SNS to keep up with educational trends and news as well as share resources (Smith-Risser, 2013).

Twitter and other social media tools are used by educators to network and grow their professional base. By utilizing a hashtag and topic, educators expanded their networks of support and resources on a global level and beyond their own school. Around 2009, a community of educators created the hashtag #edchat (Frontpage, 2009) which has now evolved into a daily resource of posts and discussions that promotes a social network community benefiting the improvement of teaching and learning (Forte et al., 2012). Teachers seeking professional comradery, encouragement and ideas benefit from the online networks that reach beyond their building and district walls.

## **Network Theory of Social Capital**

### **Social Network Theory**

Social network methodologists noted that individuals are not independent; rather, they are interdependent and embedded in a social structure (DeGenne & Forse, 1999; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Real-world phenomena such as social influence and social selection are explained using social network theory (Frank & Fahrback, 1999; Marsden &

Friedkin, 1994). Educators’ networks analyzed by the social network theory may provide educational leaders insight (Daly, 2010; Moolenaar, 2012; Scott, 2000) to increase veteran teacher retention by reviewing the individuals’ position(s) in their social network structure (Wasserman & Faust, 1994).

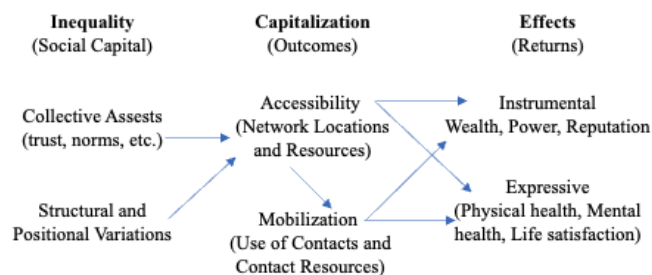
### Social Capital Theory

To analyze the social networks of educators without considering the social capital obtained or used within those networks, denies the researcher the understanding of the impact of the exchange of resources (Lin, 1999, 2005). The social capital theory refers to resources that are identified between the ties of the actors (Coleman, 1988). A primary source of social capital for educators is the networks within the profession (Cross & Sproull, 2004).

Lin (1999) proposed an initial model of a social capital theory which identifies three components: factors of the social structure (network), the social capital (resources), and the possible returns for social capital. Figure 1, below, describes social capital as “an investment in social relations by individuals through which they gain access to embedded resources to enhance expected returns of *instrumental* or *expressive* actions” (Lin, 1999, p. 39).

**Figure 1**

*Modeling of Theory of Social Capital*



Adapted from “Building a Network Theory of Social Capital,” by N. Lin, 1999, *Connections*, 22(1), 28-51.

### **Applying Lin’s Network Theory of Social Capital for Teacher Retention**

As veteran educators decide to continue in the profession, leaders can review the influence of diverse social networks that provide resources for retention, whether tangible or intangible (Moolenaar, 2012). The added capital gained through instrumental actions may benefit a person socially, economically, or politically (Lin, 1999). The instrumental actions may include job promotions and additional compensation. When the outcomes of network ties are expressive, the social capital is used to collect resources and preserve and defend against losing those possessed by the person (Lin, 1999). For educators, expressive outcomes may reduce or add stress and job satisfaction. Therefore, teachers need both the instrumental and expressive benefits of their social networks to continue to grow professionally, financially, mentally, and physically to remain in this demanding profession.

The impact of the social capital exchanged and gained within teacher networks can guide educational leaders as they provide more teacher-centered professional development. Researchers agree that professional development is important for teacher retention (Hargreaves, 2003; Smith & Rowley, 2005). The creation of social capital within professional development was analyzed in a two-year study of twenty-nine urban public high school science educators (Baker-Doyle & Yoon, 2010). Utilizing social network analysis, research in the late 2000s indicated teacher practice was strongly influenced by informal networks (Baker-Doyle & Yoon, 2010). The development of informal networks through professional development revealed that teachers seek advice

with people sharing similar demographics and work status (Baker-Doyle & Yoon, 2010; Moolenaar et al., 2012; Smith-Risser, 2013). Higher levels of social capital and increased innovation are characteristics of educators with more diverse networks (Baker-Doyle, 2015; Boud & Middleton, 2003; Hinds et al., 2000).

Researchers affirmed that teacher collaboration within their social networks and the social capital gained build teacher capacity and student achievement (Daly & Finnigan, 2010). Improvements in quality teaching practices and school organizations are attributed to interactions within the networks (Daly & Finnigan, 2010; Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007; Moolenaar et al., 2011). It becomes critical to educational leaders to understand the patterns and social ties between teachers in a social network and how the resources are either restricted or accessed (Lin, 2001; Wasserman & Faust, 1998).

### **Summary**

Chapter II detailed a thorough review of previous literature to emphasize the need for the current study. The beginning of the chapter discussed educators leaving the profession due to either lack of school funding, stressful conditions, or negative school cultures. The literature highlighted the impact these factors have on teacher attrition.

The next portion of the literature review noted the contextual factors that often contribute to retention of professional educators. The reasons that many educators remained were due to the administrative support and leadership either within their building or in the district. Staff collaboration and networking is conducive to a culture of collegiality among educators who return each year. The literature mentioned a positive

work environment and professional development opportunities as social capital resources that are critical to understanding retention of quality educators.

The final research in the chapter described the potential impact that social networks have on teacher retention. It provided educational leaders with ideas on developing networks and social capital to assist in retaining quality educators for their communities. The analysis of the networks within a school leads to an important first step for educational leaders when they are determining strategies that will either hinder or propel change that can influence teacher retention (Daly, 2010).

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

Research indicates that there is a growing teacher shortage, and the impact of this shortage on student achievement is detrimental to our communities (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Ingersoll (2003) indicated 40-50% of teachers leave the profession entirely within their first five years. Teachers have provided several reasons for their departure that include, but are not limited to, lack of financial support (Ingersoll, 2001), unhappiness with school administration, and dissatisfaction with the career (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). However, there are also teachers who remain in the profession, even for decades. Therefore, additional research is needed to better understand the factors that lead to teacher retention. Qualitative case studies seek understanding of a phenomenon that occurs within the context of the real-world (Merriam, 1988).

#### **Purpose of the Study**

Given the importance of a high-quality teacher in each classroom, it is necessary that districts and schools have a greater understanding of the factors that lead to the



retention of teachers. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the social networks of select veteran teachers in three schools within one large, urban school district. Using Lin's (1999) Network Theory of Social Capital as the theoretical framework, the case study described participant perspectives regarding how the social networks contribute to the teacher's decision to remain in the profession.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do veteran teachers in this study describe their social network connections for professional support, emotional support, and problem-solving support?
2. What are veteran teachers' perceptions of why they have chosen to remain in the teaching profession?
3. What resources, if any, are embedded in veteran teacher social networks that have contributed to their decision to remain in the profession?

### **Research Design**

The constructivist epistemology gave direction to the research questions and search for answers from the participants' varied experiences. Creswell (2014), Mertens (2010), and Crotty (1998) noted that constructivists focus on the participants' individual interactions and meanings within a particular setting. Participants' truths are constructed through their engagement with the world. In the present study, teacher perception of truth is constructed through their interactions with one another. Data regarding these perceptions were collected through interviews, observations, and a social network survey.

The intent of this qualitative case study, through the constructivist perspective, was to explore social networks of veteran teachers and the factors influencing their retention in the education profession. Merriam (1998) claimed a distinctive feature of a

qualitative case study is the particularistic focus of an everyday situation or phenomenon and the revelations of what it represents. Merriam (1998) also noted that the descriptive aspect of a case study is due to the interactions of many variables observed over time. The descriptive results suggest that many factors influence the complexities of the case study (Merriam, 1998). Finally, Merriam (1998) defined the heuristic quality of a case study as: “They can bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader’s experience, or confirm what is known” (p. 30).

## **Methodological Procedures**

### **Participant Selection**

To obtain interview information, participants were selected using purposeful sampling. Merriam (1998) indicated that “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 61). Merriam (1998) proposed establishing a criteria-based selection list of attributes that reflect the purpose of the study. Because the Lazarte-Alcala report indicated the region of Oklahoma that had the lowest rates (31.7%) of educators with 15 years or more of education experience, the Macken School District [a pseudonym], a 6A suburban school district in Oklahoma was chosen for this case study. With an enrollment of over 19,500 students, the district has three high schools, five middle schools, and 18 elementary schools. Research indicates that urban schools with high rates of poverty are often staffed with inexperienced educators (Boyd et al., 2005; Sutchter et al., 2016); therefore, selecting a case study site in which veteran educators continue working in high poverty areas is important.

Other attributes contributing to teachers leaving were schools with high percentages of student populations identified as qualifying for free/reduced lunches, special education services, and English Language services (Boyd et al., 2005; Sutchter et al., 2016). The reality of urban school challenges within the school sites selected include: 79% to 100% of the student body receive free/reduced lunch status; 11.2% to 19.5% receive special education services, and 3.9 to 8.5% have been identified as English Language Learners.

**Table 1**

*Demographics of Student Population and Teacher Experience*

Indicator	Numbers/Percentage		
	School 1	School 2	School 3
Total Student Enrollment	634	617	671
Black	53.0%	44.9%	15.8%
Hispanic	19.4%	11.2%	38.8%
White	11.7%	26.1%	15.8%
Two or more Races	13.1%	12.3%	7.9%
Native American	1.9%	2.8%	3.5%
Asian	0.9%	2.8%	1.7%
Free/Reduced Eligibility	100%	100%	99.8%
English Language Learners	10.9%	2.8%	8.1%
Special Education	10.4%	12.3%	18.7%
Number of Teachers in School	34.5	33.3	36.3
Average years of Teaching Experience	6.9	7.7	8.4

*(Office of Education Quality and Accountability, 2019)*

After reviewing the Oklahoma Department of Education State personnel reports generated from districts and consideration of the attributes contributing to teachers leaving, Macken had three schools meeting the criteria for this case study. The veteran

educators in the Macken School District provided unique context to explore the motivating factors that have contributed to their career longevity despite working in three schools where the average teacher professional experience is 6.4 to 8.9 years.

### **Data Collection**

Multiple sources of data were collected in this study to triangulate data (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2014). Merriam (1998) asserted, “Data collection in a case study is a recursive, interactive process in which engaging in one strategy incorporates or may lead to subsequent sources of data” (p. 134). Therefore, this case study included a name generator survey, interviews, and observations to gather data from research participants.

#### **Name Generator Survey**

It was necessary to obtain approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) from the university to conduct this qualitative case study. I was granted permission from the district and site administration to work with the educators. The building administrator identified the educators in their building with at least 15 years of teaching experience. I provided a consent form for each participant to sign to protect their rights as it pertained to the research process. In distributing the survey and conducting interviews and observations, I was cognizant of the participants’ busy schedules and worked to accommodate the research to their schedule. The nine teachers completed an interpersonal name generator survey to reveal the social networks that they go to for professional support, emotional support, and problem-solving support when dealing with work issues. The challenge of using name generators is to obtain an adequate amount of reliable information without creating participant fatigue (Carrasco et al., 2008; Merluzzi & Burt, 2013; Small, 2013).

Research investigating social network contacts through name generator surveys typically allow participants to list five to seven contacts in their social networks. For example, research conducted by Merluzzi and Burt (2013) concluded that a request of five names was adequate for participants. However, the debate of limiting the number choice versus the freedom to list additional network contacts (Kossinets, 2006, Marsden, 1990) continues, and researchers are encouraged to evaluate their study to determine need (Merluzzi & Burt, 2013). For the purposes of this study, the career longevity of the participants may lead to more than five influential adults within each of these support networks; therefore, the participants were allowed to list up to nine adults per question.

A set of name interpreter questions was included to provide additional information for each alter (Maness, 2017; Pustejovsky & Spillane, 2009). Name interpreters added further description regarding each social network contact that the participant listed (Maness, 2017). The additional characteristics of this name generator requested: the relationship to the teacher, years acquainted, and frequency of communication. To promote efficiency and to minimize the time needed to complete the survey, additional information for each alter was requested immediately after the name was listed.

## **Interviews**

Data collection occurred through semi-structured, open-ended interviews. To obtain data for the research questions, the nine participants were asked to explain the factors of the social networks that contributed to their continuation as an educator. Patton (2014) stated, “Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful and knowable and can be explicit” (p. 426). The qualitative

interviewing method goes a step beyond direct observations (Patton, 2014). The interviews were recorded, with permission from the participant, and downloaded to my password protected computer. I transcribed the interviews to also include non-verbal observations made during the process. Each interview was approximately 45 minutes to one hour in length with permission to contact the participant again for any clarifications.

Interview questions were created to serve as a structure for the interview while allowing for a natural conversational style. The questions included, but were not limited to:

1. Number of years you have been teaching
2. Number of years you have been teaching in this district
3. Number of years you have worked in this specific school
4. Type of Certification: Traditional (Bachelor's degree in Education), Alternative Certification, Emergency Certification
5. What do you consider a support network as it relates to your profession?
6. What experiences have helped you grow professionally?
7. Who has helped you grow professionally?
8. When you become frustrated with a situation at work, how do you seek a solution?
9. What are some obstacles that you encountered in the last year?
10. How did you address this problem?
11. How has your support network influenced your decision to stay/leave the profession?
12. May I contact you if I have any further questions?

## **Observations**

Merriam (1998) indicated that observation data allows the researcher to record behavior as it is happening. I observed team meetings and professional development trainings during the year. Due to Covid restrictions, most of the meetings were conducted through Zoom. Observations focused on interactions of participants and colleagues related to knowledge, communication, professional interaction, and social interaction. Field notes were taken in detail to provide additional information about events that occurred in the natural setting of the participants (Merriam, 1998). Although attending in person was not allowed due to Covid restrictions, the Zoom meetings with active cameras allowed me to observe team meeting interactions and discussions. Prior to Covid, I had worked in two of the buildings and worked with the individuals in the third building at some point during my educational career. This prolonged exposure contributed to the trust and rapport that I had with the participants. While conducting the interviews, correspondence via emails, or follow-up questions via telephone calls, the educators were comfortable elaborating on questions presented to them.

## **Data Storage and Security**

I provided each participant with a pseudonym. Pseudonyms were utilized to match participants to corresponding fieldnotes and to protect anonymity. Files were password protected on my computer and an external hard drive. Documents that were initially in paper format were locked in a file cabinet to which only I had access. The documents were scanned to create a PDF that was uploaded to the password protected areas described above.

## **Data Analysis Process**

Merriam (1998) suggested that collection and analysis of data in qualitative research occurs simultaneously and is recursive. The process of analyzing data in this qualitative study was a constant pattern of refining and organizing the recorded notes from the survey, interview transcriptions, and observation field notes. Analyzing data allowed me to discover themes and recurring patterns (Merriam, 1998). The case study description provides an understanding of the nine veteran educators within three schools and the social capital that is embedded within their networks. Because participants indicated that they go to the individuals (alters) listed on the name generators for support, it logically follows that these connections serve as resources that have increased retention rates. Referring to Figure 1, Lin's (1999) Network Theory of Social Capital, this theory can be utilized to understand if the social capital embedded in specific networks (professional, emotional, or problem-solving) had instrumental (wealth, power, reputation) and/or expressive (physical health, mental health, life satisfaction) effects or outcomes. These understandings are included in the Discussion section of this study.

### **Social Network Analysis**

To better understand the complexities of the social networks of veteran educators, the Name Generator Survey provided data that quantified and identified the social networks (Daly & Finnigan, 2010). The systemic approach of the Social Network Analysis (SNA) for the Name Generator Survey indicated the frequency and type of social network veteran educators seek for professional growth, emotional support, and problem-solving skills.

The data from the Name Generator Survey was downloaded and collected in a spreadsheet to organize and compare the results from the nine participants in this case



study. The nine participants listed initials and the relationship (administrator, colleague, family, friend) of the individuals they seek for: professional, emotional, and problem-solving support. The number of initials provided by each of the nine participants varied depending on both the participant and the type of support (Tables 6, 7, 8, 9). The data was calculated to understand the social networks most frequently used for support. The SNA of the Name Generator Survey provided trends that further informed the additional analysis of the interviews and observations collected for triangulation and validity.

### ***Organization and Preparation of Data***

For data analysis, each interview was transcribed immediately following the interview. Files for each interview transcript were created, and fieldnotes, documents, and transcripts were included in separate participant files. After transcribing the interviews, I was able to review the Zoom video for each participant and insert any notes or observations of reactions and emotions to the transcription. I reread the many data forms to solidify my knowledge that was gained from the participants and to consider how data related to my research questions.

I took the printed documents of interviews and survey data and used a variety of highlighter colors for potential codes. I also created a document with each interview question as a guide to combine each educators' answer to the corresponding question. The printed view allowed me to read the responses to the same question in succession and identify common phrases or words. Using a cohort member to peer review the data, I was able to continually check emerging codes accurately reflecting the data.

### ***Coding Data***

Using the constant comparative method of analysis, I conducted selective coding followed by axial coding to identify categories and themes that emerged. I then compared and identified patterns among the various data sets which exposed common themes and key issues within the case study (Merriam, 1998). I also recognized patterns in the social networks identified by these veteran educators who had continued in the profession. Axial coding was utilized to group the color codes into categories of related data. Through the coding process, patterns were identified for analysis and interpretation of the meaning of the data.

### ***Themes***

Pertinent quotes and information from the observations and interviews were organized to develop meaning and explanation for each of the themes that emerged from data analysis (Merriam, 1998; Saldana, 2016). As themes emerged, narratives developed from the analysis and reflections while sorting through the data. I kept in mind that there was a chance that during the observations, I could have misinterpreted a person's thoughts, feelings, and intentions. I reflected upon interview questions and participant responses to provide clarification (Patton, 2014). I also requested and was granted permission to follow up with a participant, if additional information or clarity was needed.

**Constructing Themes.** Recurrent themes emerged through data analysis, and these themes were evident while reviewing the interviews and zoom observations of team meetings. The themes were: collegial networks, administrative networks, external networks, and reasons for leaving. Collegial networks were a common theme throughout the process. The educators gave examples of current and retired colleagues that they

continue to seek when experiencing professional, emotional, and problem-solving issues. Administrative networks, both positive and negative, influenced the educators in this case study. External networks provided resources that encouraged the participants to stay in the profession. There were also themes that emerged from the interview questions regarding the obstacles or stressors that have led to colleagues leaving. The themes emerging from the interviews included lack of funding, Covid stress, and inadequate professional development. Each theme is addressed in Chapter IV.

**Reflexivity.** Patton (2014) defined reflexivity in qualitative research as “emphasizing the importance of deep introspective, political consciousness, cultural awareness, and ownership of one’s perspective” (p. 70). Patton (2014) explained that qualitative researchers have self-awareness and mindfulness as they seek to acquire knowledge through their inquiry of knowledge. Hertz’s (year) noted that being reflexive is “to have an ongoing conversation about experience while simultaneously living in the moment” (as cited in Patton, 2014, p. 70).

### **Data Verification Strategies**

I offered the district administrators and participants the opportunity to review transcripts to be certain that they had expressed their perceptions in the manner that they had intended. This method of member-checking helped to ensure the accuracy of the data and the verification of data analysis. Each educator was provided with a shared document of their individual transcript to review and make edits or additions, although none were made.

In reviewing and printing the results of the Name Generator survey data, I did reach out to the individuals to clarify the relationship category they provided for each

social network. The educators could define the relationship through any term that they chose; however, even though terms differed (for example, “spouse,” “husband,” etc.), I was able to identify similar terms and organize those relationships into categories. As a result, I was able to limit the number of categories by placing relationships into the categories of colleagues, family, friends, and administrators. However, to ensure that the terms they provided were categorized accurately, I followed up with each participant for clarification. For instance, when a spouse, son, or parent was listed, I asked if I could use family as the category. Because the purpose of this study was to explore the social networks of select veteran teachers in three schools, it logically followed that grouping all family relationships (children, spouse, aunt, etc.) into one category titled “family” would best meet the purpose of the study. If the term co-worker or a specific job title was listed, I contacted the participant to determine if the specific social network was more of a colleague or administrator. Each participant agreed with the four relationship categories that emerged from data analysis.

### **Assumptions**

The following assumptions were made while conducting the research:

1. It was assumed that the educators in the study understood the questions asked in the interview and responded truthfully about their experiences or lack of support.
2. It was assumed that I clearly and accurately understood the responses of the educators’ interview questions.
3. It was assumed that the interviews were properly recorded and transcribed to allow for further analysis of this study.

### **Researcher Role and Bias**

As a former building administrator, I was cognizant of the many hours dedicated to supporting my staff with resources, acts of kindness, and words of affirmation for them to be successful and less stressed. Knowing the stress teachers endured daily, I also used my position in central office to create resources and answer emails, calls, and requests in a timely manner so teachers could get immediate support. I would create pre and post surveys for my professional development to meet specific and majority requests. Despite my efforts and those who work in administration and central office, teachers continued to say, “I never get help from (insert any name or department),” or “There are never enough resources for my classroom and students,” or “I have to use my own money and time to do (insert any activity).”

As a building administrator, I spent an enormous amount of time on the hiring process and vetting quality candidates. Considering most of the candidates were in their first five years of teaching, it was imperative that I selected an employee who was trainable and willing to work collaboratively with our current staff and student culture. Once staff were hired, I would provide them with networks in the educational field to provide individual support and resources so our students would have consistency and quality.

These experiences led to my research questions and the desire to know what it is teachers really need to remain content and enthusiastic about their profession. While collecting data via interviews and observations, it was difficult not to project personal feelings or react to some of the responses. To be transparent to participants, I explained previous job experiences that have led to the research which adds credibility to the current study (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2014). It was imperative that during the interview

questions I did not allow my personal experiences to skew the findings of the study. I used the practices of trustworthiness as explained by Gay et al. (2012) in Table 2.

### **Trustworthiness**

Gay et al. (2012) cited Guba’s (1985) Model of Trustworthiness, which highlights four criteria for trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To ensure trustworthiness in this study, I conducted prolonged participation at the study sites prior to Covid restrictions and practiced reflexivity.

**Table 2**

*Trustworthiness Practices*

<b>Technique</b>	<b>Results</b>	<b>Examples from Research</b>
Prolonged Engagement	Built trust	Participated in virtual meetings and virtual professional development with the educators and their teammates.
	Developed rapport	
	Built relationships	
	Obtained a wide scope of data	
	Obtained accurate data	
Persistent Observation	Obtained in-depth data	Given the time with the participants, I was able to compare notes from informal and formal discussions and interviews to validate the data given.
	Obtained accurate data	
	Deciphered relevancies from irrelevancies	
Triangulation	Data verification	Interviews
		Virtual observations
		Name Generator Survey
		Member-checking
Peer Debriefing	Tested working hypotheses	Debriefed with peers with similar study.
	Found alternative explanations	

	Explored emerging codes, categories, and themes.	
Member Checking	Tested categories, interpretations, or conclusions (constructions)	Clarified ideas in interviews with interviewees.

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### **Limitations of Study**

Potential limitations in this study include limitations imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, sample characteristics, researcher experiences, and reader interpretation. The educators in this study are from one state experiencing financial restrictions that could be a major factor contributing to the loss of certified educators. As a reminder, though not a limitation, as with all qualitative research, this qualitative case study is not generalizable. Findings may be transferrable to school districts with similar demographics and contextual conditions.

### **Summary**

Chapter III provided a detailed review of the methodology used in this study. The population of the study was described, and participant selection was explained. Data collection and data analysis procedures were explained also. Considering the previous job descriptions in education, I presented the potential areas of bias in collecting the data that would indicate the social networks used by veteran educators and the decision to remain in the profession. I also included the criteria of trustworthiness that were utilized and considered during the collection and analysis of data for this study.

## CHAPTER IV

### DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the social networks of select veteran teachers in three schools within one large, urban school district. Using Lin's (1999) Network Theory of Social Capital as the theoretical framework, the case study describes how the social networks contribute to the teacher's decision to remain in the profession.

The beginning of this chapter explains the current context of education in Oklahoma, followed by a description of the school district, and then the three school sites selected. Data presentation in Part I was collected through the Name Generator Survey. Part II includes the analysis of data from the interviews with the nine educators and the observations made during Zoom virtual meetings and presentation of themes that emerged.

#### **Part 1: Presentation of the Case**

##### **Context of the Case**

##### **Oklahoma Education at the State Level**

To understand the need to study the social networks of veteran educators, it is beneficial to describe the context of education in Oklahoma. During this research, the



world encountered a global pandemic that altered the daily routines and lives of educators' families. With the onset of Covid-19, schools across Oklahoma and the nation were not allowing face to face instruction beginning in March 2020 (OSDE, August 5, 2020). Teachers were forced to teach virtually while adjusting to working from home with family members and trying to remain healthy despite the deadly virus that had many unknown factors to even top scientists across the world.

Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt declared a state of emergency on March 15, 2020, due to the health and safety threat of COVID-19. This declaration led to an emergency meeting the following day, organized by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Joy Hofmeister, and members of the State Board of Education. During the meeting, participants recommended that all schools remain closed until April 5, 2020 (OSDE, 2020). Over the following months, many virtual meetings and guidelines were prepared by the State Department of Education to guide schools to reopen in the Fall of 2020 while adhering to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines.

In spring 2020, district administrators met to develop calendars and schedules for traditional (face to face teaching); distance learning (done remotely just as it would occur in a face-to-face environment), and blended learning (combination of traditional and distance learning) (OSDE, 2020). Their decisions had to coincide with weekly updates from the Oklahoma State Department of Health as the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths were reported. Not only was there a shortage of educators from previous years of education financial deficiencies, but now districts were also at risk of losing educators to

the risks associated with the COVID-19 virus and stress of not knowing if they would be allowed in buildings or teaching virtually from their homes while taking care of family.

## **Population**

### **Macken School District**

Oklahoma school districts submit teacher data to the State Department of Education indicating the number of certified teachers in each school and their years of experience. After reviewing OSDE teacher data for Macken [a pseudonym], I found three schools within the district that met the criteria for this study. Research by (Boyd et al., 2005; Sutchter et al., 2016) indicated that urban schools with high rates of poverty were often staffed with inexperienced teachers. Data in Table 3 reports the district demographics along with teacher experience in years.

**Table 3**

*Demographics of Student Population and Teacher Experience*

Indicator	Numbers/Percentage		
	School 1	School 2	School 3
Total Student Enrollment	634	617	671
Black	53.0%	44.9%	15.8%
Hispanic	19.4%	11.2%	38.8%
White	11.7%	26.1%	15.8%
Two or more Races	13.1%	12.3%	7.9%
Native American	1.9%	2.8%	3.5%
Asian	0.9%	2.8%	1.7%
Free/Reduced Eligibility	100%	100%	99.8%
English Language Learners	10.9%	2.8%	8.1%
Special Education	10.4%	12.3%	18.7%
Number of Teachers in School	34.5	33.3	36.3

Average years of Teaching Experience	6.9	7.7	8.4
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*(Office of Education Quality and Accountability, 2019)*

After submitting a request and being granted permission by the district and administration at each school site, seventeen teachers with at least 15 years of experience were invited to participate in the Name Generator Survey and interview, and nine agreed to participate. Asking educators with 15 or more years of experience in education to participate in this case study provided a unique context to explore the motivating factors that have contributed to their career longevity. The nine participants listed initials and the relationship (administrator, colleague, family, friend) of the individuals they seek for: professional, emotional and problem-solving support. The number of initials provided by each of the nine participants varied depending on both the participant and the type of support (Tables 6, 7, 8, 9). Data were calculated to understand the social networks most frequently used for support.

The criteria are important because, despite working in three schools where the average teacher professional experience is 6.4 to 8.9 years, these participants have remained in the profession beyond 15 years. Eight of the nine participants completed a bachelor’s degree program in education while one of them obtained an alternative certificate. Isabella [a pseudonym], who is alternatively certified, earned a Bachelor of Psychology degree and a Masters in Community Counseling.

**Table 4**

*Participants Years as Educator*

	Years in Education	Years in District	Years in Building	Certification Type
Carmen – Grace ES	16	15	15	Traditional

Josephine – Grace ES	21	21	21	Traditional
Steve – Grace ES	21	21	2	Traditional
Vivian – Pep ES	24	3	3	Traditional
Mary – Pep ES	29	5	5	Traditional
Becky – Pep ES	31	3	3	Traditional
Angeline – Mills MS	26	21	5	Traditional
Rosie – Mills MS	22	4	4	Traditional
Isabella – Mills MS	16	4	3	Alternative

### **Grace Elementary**

#### **School Setting**

Grace Elementary employs one principal, one assistant principal, one counselor, 43 certified educators, and nine teaching assistants. Previous research (Boyd et al., 2005; Sutchter et al., 2016) and data from Table 1 indicated that teachers leave schools with student populations having high free/reduced lunches, special education services, and English Language services. During the 2019-2020 school year, the student demographics in Table 1 indicated that 53% identified as Black, 19.4% Hispanic, and 11.7% White. The English Language Learners, ELL, population was 10.9%, and 10.4% of all students were receiving Special Education services. The average teacher experience was 6.9 years.

Grace Elementary strives to provide PreK-5<sup>th</sup> grade students with a safe retreat from the local crime that is prevalent within the Section 8 housing apartments that surround it. In 2003, Mr. Land was recruited to become the principal of Grace Elementary. The school was known throughout the district to have a high teacher and principal turnover rate and high suspension rates for the 100% free and reduced lunch students. However, with the leadership and cultural changes through Mr. Land’s tenure as principal, suspension rates dropped to almost zero, and teacher retention increased.

During his time at Grace Elementary, Mr. Land was successful in recruiting classroom teachers to the school. The educators Mr. Land recruited also decided to have their own children transfer to Grace Elementary to be immersed in the cultural diversity of the school rather than have them attend their more affluent neighborhood schools. Despite his retirement in 2016, the retention of veteran educators continues with their new administrator, Ms. Sparks.

With an enrollment of approximately 635 students each year, Grace Elementary has been able to create relationships between the staff, family, and communities. Mr. Land sought relationships with local churches and businesses to help support his staff and the families of Grace Elementary. This practice was soon adopted by other schools in the district due to the value it brought to the students and families at Grace Elementary.

During the interview, Josephine noted that the parents and families in this Section 8 housing development are familiar with incarceration and drug use. Mr. Land recruited a few mothers that he knew needed a job and had a voice and connection with the community. These mothers became family liaisons and began to create clothing and food closets for many of the parents at Grace Elementary. Carmen explained that it was not unusual for students attending Grace Elementary to have one or both parents with a criminal record. Due to their personal history, some parents were afraid or leery of the school system, knowing that educators have an obligation to protect children and report any home issues reported by the students or observed. The parent liaison was provided an office in the school to support families with resources to help them gain employment and social services they were not aware of or capable of accessing on their own. Due to the community and staff investment in support for families, parental involvement is high for

this 100% free and reduced lunch school. According to the 2019 data reported by the Oklahoma State Department, 96% of the parents attended parent conferences (Office of Education Quality and Accountability, 2019).

### **Participant Profiles**

#### ***Carmen***

Carmen is in her 16<sup>th</sup> year of education and her 15<sup>th</sup> year in the district and at Grace Elementary. She has a traditional teaching certification which means her bachelor's degree is in Elementary Education. Carmen has taught several grade levels but is currently a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher on a team of four. Her husband is an educator in the same district, and their son attends school with Carmen despite living outside of the school district.

#### ***Josephine***

Josephine has a traditional teaching certificate and has spent all 21 years of teaching at Grace Elementary in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Both of her children attended Grace Elementary. One child is a graduate of the district, and her other child is currently in the district high school. Her spouse is not employed in education but given the amount of time that Josephine and her kids spend working with the school community, she noted that her husband feels like he does work in the school system (Josephine, Interview March 2021).

#### ***Steve***

Steve was hired the same year as Josephine, and his 21 years of teaching have only been at Grace Elementary. Steve has a traditional teaching certificate in education. His spouse works in the corporate world, and both appreciate the flexibility of his teaching

schedule that enables him to take their two children to their school and sporting events. His children attend school in a neighboring district. Steve and Josephine were a part of the same 5<sup>th</sup> grade team for 17 years. During this time, their 5<sup>th</sup> grade team remained consistent with few changes in team membership. The team changed when one member married a co-worker and moved to another town. An additional change came when another member retired.

Steve has moved out of the classroom and is now a behavioral resource teacher for the school. Because of his longevity at the school, being one of the few male educators, and his relationships with the families, his colleagues and the administration believed Steve was a perfect fit for this position. As a behavioral resource teacher, his skills and experience allow him to work with the entire student body and not just the students in his classroom. When a student is experiencing behavioral issues, a teacher can request that Steve remove the student from the class. Steve then works with the teacher and student to build relationships and create a positive and productive learning environment.

Steve comes from a family of golfers, and other family members are participants in other sports. The students in Grace Elementary come from a quite different upbringing compared to Steve, yet he has a passion to make sure that they are given every chance to succeed. He explained that he creatively finds ways to connect sports, fun and education while providing the students at Grace ways to feel successful outside of the classroom. During his time at Grace, he worked to establish district intramural sports among the 18 elementary schools. He has connected with outside industries to bring in

grants that fund the purchase of athletic shoes and other resources for students at Grace Elementary.

## **Pep Elementary**

### **School Setting**

Pep Elementary is situated in an area that includes middle-class homes as well as Section 8 housing. School attendance averages between 600-620 students per year in the PreK-5<sup>th</sup> grade. With similar demographics to Grace Elementary, Pep Elementary has one principal, one assistant principal, one counselor, 36 certified educators and four teaching assistants. During the 2019-2020 school year, the student demographics indicated that 45% identified as Black, 11.2% Hispanic, and 26.1% White. The English Language Learners, ELL, had decreased from 3.9% in the 2018-2019 school year to 2.8% and 12.3% of all students were receiving Special Education services. The average teacher experience was 7.7 years.

### **Participant Profiles**

#### ***Vivian***

Vivian has been in education for 24 years and recently relocated to the district. Vivian has been at Pep Elementary for three years teaching 1<sup>st</sup> grade. She has enjoyed working in a larger district with the additional teammates and professional development that is offered. Although she has been employed in education for a while, Vivian indicated that moving away from her hometown has rejuvenated her love of the job and eagerness to learn new things from her colleagues.

#### ***Mary***



Mary has been an Oklahoma educator for 29 years. Her journey has led her from the classroom to the Oklahoma State Department of Education, to serving as a building administrator and now back to the classroom. Although she loved each job while she held the position, Mary missed working directly with students. For the past five years, she has been working at Pep Elementary as a Special Education teacher. Despite experiencing a significant medical issue during the last year, she was eager to return to her students and the families she serves at Pep Elementary.

### ***Becky***

Becky is also in her third year at Pep Elementary and has 31 years of experience and a traditional teaching certificate. Becky is currently a Kindergarten teacher. Moving to a new larger district and learning the norms of the school and community has been a bit of an adjustment for Becky. Her previous district was smaller, and the student demographics were different than those at Pep Elementary. However, she noted that she relies on her teammates and the veteran staff who have worked for Pep Elementary to provide insight into the family situations that impact her students.

## **Mills Middle School**

### **School Setting**

The third school meeting the criteria for this case study and with administrative approval to conduct research is a middle school. Mills Middle School is one of five middle schools in the district. With an enrollment that hovers around 670 students that are in the 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades, the school employs one principal and one assistant principal. The three grade levels have two core teacher teams, each consisting of an English, geography, math, and science teacher. Students are grouped into Core Team A or B and stay together

for their core classes before exploring their elective courses. The elective and resource teachers support students for the remaining hours of the school day.

Mills Middle School is next door to Mills Elementary School which houses the PreK-5<sup>th</sup> grade students. During the 2019-2020 school year, the student demographics indicated that 16% identified as Black, 39% Hispanic, and 16% White. The English Language Learners, ELL, had increased from 7.0% in the 2018-2019 school year to 8.1% and 18.7% of all students were receiving Special Education services. The average teacher experience was 8.4 years.

### **Participant Profiles**

#### ***Angeline***

Angeline has been an educator for twenty-six years after completing her bachelor's degree in education. She has been in the district for twenty-one years as an elementary classroom teacher and now as a middle school Special Education teacher. She began working in the Macken district and then left to take a position as a math coach in a neighboring district. Angeline then returned to the classroom and the Macken district and has been at Mills Middle School for five years. Her spouse is not employed in education. Angeline stated that, due to low Oklahoma teacher salaries, it is beneficial for new teachers to have a spouse that can support them financially.

#### ***Rosie***

Rosie is a traditionally certified English educator who left the profession for a period to raise her children. She returned to teaching and is in her fourth year at Mills Middle School and her 22<sup>nd</sup> year as an educator. She has recently completed her master's degree and will become a Library Media Specialist to be able to share her love of reading

and writing. Rosie is excited to remain an educator in the district in a new role that will allow her to support more students and teachers.

### ***Isabella***

Isabella is the only alternatively certified staff member in this study. Like Angeline, she is a recent transfer from elementary school to the middle school environment and believes this is the age level that is best for her. She has moved into the counselor's role, but given the current needs within Oklahoma schools, she does teach classes daily. There is another counselor in the school that has a traditionally non-teaching counseling role to assist students and families. She is in her sixteenth year as an educator, fourth year in the district, and third year at Mills Middle School.

### **Name Generator Findings**

All participants completed a Name Generator Survey to identify their social network connections. Research provided in the literature review indicated networks of support may help increase teacher retention (Daly, 2010). In previous research, educators who chose to remain in the profession sought to continue learning and developing professional skills (Westaby et al., 2014). Research also indicated veteran educators do seek social networks that offer them emotional support due to the stress of current work conditions and demands (Belcastro & Gold, 1983; Herman et al., 2018; Maslach et al., 2001). A third indicator of teacher retention is the ability to connect with others for the day-to-day problem-solving issues that occur (Lin, 2001; Wasserman & Faust, 1998).

The Name Generator survey asked participants to list the initials of individuals to whom they turn for professional growth, emotional support, and problem-solving skills. For each question (professional growth, emotional support, and problem-solving) listed

on the Name Generator, the participants could list up to nine adults they sought for support. The total number of network connections identified varied per educator and per question. Descriptive statistics were calculated to understand the size of each participant's networks. Data in Table 5 indicates the number of individuals each participant listed when they seek professional support, emotional support, and problem-solving support when dealing with work related issues.

**Table 5**

*Number of Adults Listed per Support Category*

	Professional Support	Emotional Support	Problem-Solving with Work Issues
Total # of Social Network Connections Listed	55	41	42
Carmen – Grace ES	9	9	7
Josephine – Grace ES	9	4	6
Steve – Grace ES	5	3	4
Vivian – Pep ES	3	3	3
Mary – Pep ES	9	2	4
Becky – Pep ES	3	2	2
Angeline – Mills MS	9	9	8
Rosie – Mills MS	6	4	5
Isabella – Mills MS	2	5	3

Participants were asked to identify their relationship to the person that they turned to for professional support, emotional support and problem-solving support when dealing with work related issues. After reviewing the relationship terms that participants listed, I noticed that the relationships fell under four categories: colleague, administrator, family, or friend. If the title was not exactly one of the four listed above, I contacted the

participant to clarify that the term that they listed matched one of the four categories of support. For instance, if a specific job title was listed, I contacted the participant to understand whether that relationship fell under the colleague or administrator category. If the participant listed husband, wife, son, or daughter, I used the category “family.”

**Table 6**

*Relationship to Participant: Name Generator Results*

	Professional Support		Emotional Support		Problem-Solving Support	
Total # of Social Network Contacts Listed	55		41		42	
Relationship to Participant	Total # of Professional Support Contacts by Relationship Category	Response %	Total # of Emotional Support Contacts by Relationship Category	Response %	Total # of Problem-Solving Support Contacts by Relationship Category	Response %
Colleague	36	65.45%	20	48.78%	29	69.05%
Administrator	14	25.45%	3	7.32%	10	23.81%
Family	3	5.45%	11	26.83%	1	2.38%
Friend	2	3.64%	7	17.07%	2	4.76%

Findings from the survey presented in Table 6, indicated that colleagues are the most influential social networks for the participants of this case study when they are seeking professional growth, emotional support, or work problem solving support (N = 36, 20, and 29).

The Name Generator Survey results presented in Tables 7, 8, and 9, present survey data results by social network: professional growth support (Table 7), emotional support (Table 8) and problem-solving support (Table 9). Data were also provided by school.

## Professional Growth Networks

Table 7 data responses reveal the social networks most often identified by the nine participants when they are seeking advice on professional growth. This data is broken down by each school. There were three participants per school and each of the participants could have listed up to nine individuals for this question. Grace Elementary participants listed the most with 23 individuals, Mills Middle School participants listed 17 individuals, and Pep Elementary participants listed only 15 individuals they seek for professional growth.

**Table 7**

*Social Networks used for Professional Growth by School*

	Grace Elementary		Pep Elementary		Mills Middle School	
Total # of Responses	23		15		17	
Relationship to Participant	Response # out of 23	Response %	Response # out of 15	Response %	Response # out of 17	Response %
Colleague	13	56.52%	12	80%	11	64.71%
Administrator	5	21.74%	3	20%	6	35.29%
Family	3	13.04%	0	0%	0	0%
Friend	2	8.7%	0	0%	0	0%

The data from the Name Generator survey indicated that, when discussing professional growth, the social network contacts sought by these veteran educators are most often a colleague or an administrator. Only Grace Elementary participants indicated that they may also discuss professional growth with their family and friends (N = 2).

## Emotional Support Networks

For the emotional support question on the Name Generator Survey, the veteran educators in this case study were asked to list up to nine individuals that they go to when they need emotional support. Compared to Table 7 and question one of the surveys, there were less individuals listed for social networks used for emotional support by both Grace Elementary and Pep Elementary (N = 16, 7, and 18).

**Table 8**

*Social Networks use for Emotional Support by School*

	Grace Elementary		Pep Elementary		Mills Middle School	
Total # of Responses	16		7		18	
Relationship to Participant	Response # out of 16	Response %	Response # out of 7	Response %	Response # out of 18	Response %
Colleague	9	56.52%	4	57.14%	7	38.89%
Family	3	18.75%	3	42.86%	5	27.78%
Friend	3	12.50%	0	0%	5	27.78%
Admin	2	12.50%	0	0%	1	5.56%

Data results presented in Table 8 suggest that veteran educators at all three schools most often contact a colleague for emotional support. The veteran educators at Pep Elementary did not list a friend or administrator as an emotional support contact. Only one educator at Mills Middle School and two at Grace Elementary seek their administrator for emotional support.

**Problem-Solving Support Networks**

The problem-solving question on the Name Generator Survey asked the nine participants to list up to nine individuals they communicate with when problem solving a

work issue. The three participants at Grace Elementary listed only colleagues and administration and no friends or family as problem-solving support.

**Table 9**

*Social Networks for Problem-Solving by School*

	Grace Elementary		Pep Elementary		Mills Middle School	
Total # of Responses	16		7		16	
Relationship to Participant	Response # out of 16	Response %	Response # out of 7	Response %	Response # out of 16	Response %
Colleague	13	76.47	7	77.78%	9	56.25%
Admin	4	23.53	1	11.11%	5	31.25%
Friend	0	0%	0	0%	2	12.50%
Family	0	0%	1	11.11%	0	0%

The data in Table 9 indicate that in all three schools, veteran educators in this case study go to a colleague for problem-solving support (N = 13, 7, and 9). Both Grace Elementary and Mills Middle School educators listed their administrators as the second most frequently used contact when problem solving daily issues (N = 4 and 5). Mills Middle School is the only school indicating they would go to a friend (N = 2) when problem solving issues occurring on the job.

**Part II: Analysis of Data**

After the nine veteran educators completed the Name Generator Survey, they were asked for a follow-up semi-structured, open-ended interview. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, I offered the opportunity to be interviewed via Zoom rather than an in-person discussion. Interview questions (Appendix C) were used to guide initial conversations but allowed for the educators to share any additional information that evolved naturally from the questions.



Sociograms are often used to create visual representations of social networks. However, I chose not to create sociograms because I was interested in the number and types of connections that each participant utilized for success in the profession rather than the structure of each participants' network. Understanding who participants turned to and what social capital they gleaned from different types of network connections was more informative to the purpose of this study than an individual sociogram of each participant.

### **Major Themes**

After reviewing the interview transcripts and notes from the observations and follow-up emails and phone calls, patterns were identified among the initial codes to create categories. Categories were then organized into the following themes: collegial networks, administration networks, external (outside of the school building) networks, and potential reasons for leaving. Under the collegial, administrative, and external networks, when evidence was presented, the data included how each network provided professional, emotional, and problem-solving supports to the veteran educators.

### ***Collegial Support Networks***

Veteran educators in this case study affirmed the importance of their colleagues for the support they needed to remain in the profession. They shared examples of informal conversations and interactions as well as the professional learning meetings mandated by the building and district.

**Professional Support from Colleagues.** The Macken district offers professional development from internal, state, and national educators. There were educators in this case study that had worked in other Oklahoma districts, and they recognized the opportunities and quality of professional development that is offered in Macken.

Angeline stated, “I want to further my career. I want to do the best for kids that's out there. So, it's to my advantage and to their advantage for me to go to it.”

Josephine and Steve were previously on a 5<sup>th</sup> grade team at Grace Elementary, prior to him taking a teaching position that is more of a resource teacher serving more students and staff. Although they remain close and continue to collaborate, Josephine is now the veteran on her team and feels she can now provide support to her younger teammates. Josephine noted that although she has attended many professional development sessions during her twenty-one years, it is important that she continue to learn.

My team is young, so I know there was one-time Mrs. Sparks (the principal) was like, “You know, maybe you could do something else.” but my team really was strong about attending this PD, so I joined them because they are young. They're in their 20's, and I thought I need to do it as a team and so I did.

At Mills Middle School, there are also faculty meetings designed to include professional development opportunities every fourth week. Angeline said, “We always do professional development and different people give that professional development. There are times when the instructional coaches or other teachers will share ideas that they are finding successful in their classroom.”

Whether the professional development is delivered from an educator outside of the district or from within, the veterans noted that they can grow their social network within their building and beyond. Macken has invested in Professional Learning Communities and mandates weekly meetings for teachers and administrators to collaborate and plan for student learning. The PLC is often limited to teams within the

building, but when the district offers professional development for a specific topic or subject area, the teachers can meet other grade level, content area educators to expand their social networks. Collaboration with national and state educators helps the participants stay aware of current trends and research.

Angeline worked with math coaches from across the nation when the district adopted a new math program.

Because the trainers were former and current classroom teachers, I have stayed in contact with them for the past 7 years. They were in a district multiple days during the year and their struggles and successes were a constant reminder that I am not alone here in my state or district, especially during Covid. As we tried to determine the best schedule for our students, it was helpful to have connections in Oklahoma and other states.

Seven of the nine educators have worked in other districts. Despite the change in districts, they still have connections with former colleagues. It was noted that during the 2018 Oklahoma teacher strike and Covid, they did reach out to their former district colleagues to share ideas, challenges, and successes. The educators also confirmed that when a colleague from another district or state had participated in a training deemed beneficial, they either shared the materials or encouraged them to attend the professional development.

### ***Emotional Support from Colleagues***

Prior to Covid-19, teachers across the nation acknowledged the stress associated with teaching (Flook et al., 2013; Klassen, Usher, & Bong, 2010). The participants noted the pandemic created emotional fatigue and anxiousness that resulted in retirement for

their friends. Mary has held several positions during her 29 years in education and affirmed:

There is no way I could have stayed in this profession without the amazing educators I have worked with along the way. As an administrator, I saw so many teachers who never sought help or fellowship among their teammates. No matter how much I would try to connect them to a mentor or provide them with ideas and professional development, they focused so much on the hardships of the job and never found the joy of the job. I get it, long hours, angry students and parents, administration demands, and then they go home to their own families exhausted. Truly, I can't think of many jobs that you wouldn't encounter some of that stress, but they just couldn't connect and accept the help provided by their teams or administrators.

The participants from Grace Elementary stated their teams and staff were built around trust and fun. All three participants noted that it is a tradition for staff at the school to meet regularly on Fridays for Happy Hour to enjoy the friendship and bond they have as co-workers. This tradition goes way beyond ten years and as new staff members were hired; they were invited to continue this tradition. The three participants have been at Grace Elementary longer than the current administrators and have tried to educate the new administrators on the importance of allowing the teachers to enjoy a culture that goes beyond classroom objectives.

Steve, Carman, and Josephine agreed that they all try to build trust with their teammates. They added that trust and friendships are what allows them to feel okay when they need to take a mental day or be gone to help with their families. Steve said,

We grill once a month, you know, and I just go in the courtyard and people bring stuff up. Let's have fun or let them at least want to come into the building and then you know we can drop bombs on them.

The educators in this case also discussed the monthly or weekly dinners or coffee meetings they have with current and former colleagues. The Pep Elementary School educators are new to their schools and continue to have dinner with their former colleagues to exchange ideas and just catch up on the struggles and successes of the job. Vivian stated, "I love my new school, but I also love having dinner with my former teammates. We try to meet once a month to just share how our families are doing as well as our funny and frustrating stories of teaching."

Angeline has been meeting every first Tuesday with her teacher friends for twenty years. The group includes the retired educator she did her student teaching with and ranges to new teachers that they have mentored and are now part of their Tuesday group. Most of the educators in her group are still teaching and the remainder have retired. She said that the retirees always say how glad they are that they are no longer teaching during this decade. The retirees have grandchildren and children and recognize the struggles of the parents and students while empathizing with their teacher friends who continue to work under the new pressures.

### ***Problem-Solving Support from Colleagues***

Professional learning communities were not only an opportunity to grow professionally, but they were also an important resource for collegial problem-solving. Some of the teachers enjoyed their time to debrief and prepare on the district mandated Wednesday virtual teaching and meeting day. Rosie added,

We would meet each week on Wednesdays (spread out and with masks) because we did not have students on that day. Those Wednesdays were an absolute Godsend. Our meetings were wonderful because we did not feel rushed, and we could discuss more than just the academics. We had all different levels of teachers on our team, and everyone felt comfortable sharing ideas. (Rosie, 2021)

The district middle schools have a 48-minute block of time every day for their educators. At Mills Middle School, the content area teams meet and depend on the data that is discussed for the day, the special education, Title I, and any additional resource teachers attend. The administrator in charge of the content department is also in the meeting to assist with any student concerns or celebrations.

Angeline indicated that the daily PLC meetings are led by the teachers and not the administrators.

We have a notebook that we pass around and each day a different teacher leads it (PLC), and we write down the questions. And before we leave that day, we have the agenda for the next day. We do a lot of mapping during that time and so we know exactly what we need to be working on it for building C.F.A. or if we were just building M.V.P. or if we are unpacking standards. Our M.V.P. is our most valuable practice and a lot of people equate it with their board work or their warm-up and that we have taken the five skills in for math that we have, and we have broken those down and each day we do a different scale. One of those five skills on Monday through Friday that's our M.V.P. Our C.F.A. is our common formative assessment, and in every couple of skills that we do in our lesson, we'll then come back and have a C.F.A.

Rosie, at Mills Middle School, left teaching for a few years to take care of her children. Four years ago, she returned and stated,

I never thought I would be a teacher again, but I have found I like it more this time around because of the support network and teamwork. Before, I was the only one teaching my grade levels, so I had no one to bounce ideas off of. Having a team (and the internet) makes all the difference in the world!

It was a mixed response on the value of the PLC time dedicated to problem solving student concerns and successes. An administrator was supposed to attend the meetings to provide support while the teacher team discussed academic and behavior data. However, there were times when administrators were not able to attend due to more urgent issues from parents, students, or district administration. Some teachers reported that during Covid virtual PLC meetings, many people were not paying attention; therefore, the meetings were not beneficial.

Becky at Pep Elementary noted the adjustments during virtual teaching and virtual meetings lead to Zoom exhaustion. She stated,

Adjusting to working with students and figuring out schedules to teach virtually made it difficult to get excited with scheduling a team meeting and interacting with colleagues. The reality was that we just wanted time to prepare and learn for the kids. I didn't feel my colleagues and I had positive information to share during that time. It was more of a time to complain and seldom did we find a solution to our problems given the constantly changing mandates and rules that Covid brought to teaching.

### ***Administration Networks***

Administrators were the second most frequent social network the teachers went to for professional growth and support for daily problems, as noted in Table 6. The participants indicated that they appreciated the administrators who developed relationships with both students and staff. Having administrators who pushed them to grow professionally, with either guidance or reassurance, helped these educators work through the years of challenges and changes in education.

**Professional Growth Support from Administration.** Angeline from Mills Middle School and Mary from Pep Elementary have been in the classroom and district curriculum specialist, yet both have returned to the classroom to work directly with students. Mary said:

I often wonder if I go to my administrators more than most colleagues, because I have worked with them at the district level. Don't get me wrong, on a daily basis I am talking to my teammates and teachers in the hallway, but I am definitely not scared to talk with my administration team when I need help. I know they spend more time on researched based practices and are in the know about upcoming opportunities for district and state PD.

Oklahoma teacher evaluations are intended to provide educators with feedback on their professional strengths as well as opportunities and areas of growth in their educational practices. Angeline said that she looks forward to feedback from the observations and evaluations that are conducted by the administrators.

I think it can be scary to some people especially if you haven't been held to a higher standard. A tool that evaluates you, good teachers don't care what tool it is. They're still doing their job. They're working hard. They're doing what they need.



It's just the feedback that you get from it. If somebody came to me and said, “You know; you need to work in this area.” Then I would definitely work in this area in order to improve it.

Most of the staff at Grace Elementary are White and middle class and unfamiliar with working and supporting students from poverty and minority backgrounds. Mr. Land invested in educating his staff in cultural truths and diversity training. The empathy and expectations that evolved from his mentorship and training became a part of the staff retention. Carmen noted:

When we needed to hire a new team member, he made sure that our team had discussed our expectations and definition of a quality team member. He knew that we would have to work many hours with this person and so he allowed us to conduct most of the interview. Honesty was key. We did not hold back on the hours and time we would dedicate to our kids and families. We told applicants that as much as we expect them to show up for us and the kids; as a team, we would do the same for them. We were very up front about not having time to coddle an adult with a degree in showing up and being there when we knew the struggles our students and parents had daily. The process may sound harsh, but we were able to weed out a lot of people who we knew would not be willing to invest time learning about and loving our kids. (Carmen, 2021)

### ***Problem Solving Support from Administration***

Four of the six educators in this case study who were newer to the district or buildings, had relocated after working with an administrator that lacked positive attributes to support them emotionally or professionally. However, those four loved

working with students and had positive prior experiences so they knew that leaving the profession completely was not what they wanted. Upon arriving at their current buildings, they quickly developed relationships with their colleagues or administrators and are confident they made the right decision. Given the daily work issues that teachers incur, Steve explained:

We've been lucky 'cause we've had three, you know, really good principals and only three since our (Steve and Josephine) 21 years. A good principal makes it easy, you know, because you can share frustrations, share thoughts, share ideas and you know you're being heard and listened to.

Isabella emphasized:

I have a great relationship with my principal, and I have gone to her about previous issues that I have had with students and/or teachers. My AP (Assistant Principal) pulled me aside and gave me some great advice. She told me to be careful posting EVERYTHING on Facebook. I am prone to speak my mind and have posts that reflect that. She told me to be careful and if I wouldn't say it to my mom or grandma, then don't post it. That has helped me so much the last several years.

### ***External Social Networks***

**Virtual Support Connections.** With the increase in virtual learning and for the participants that have changed grade levels or teaching assignments, the veteran educators in this case noted the online social networks that have encouraged them to grow professionally and remain in education. As Angeline transitioned from elementary to middle school, she noted:

Khan Academy and I are friends. Because a lot of times, you know, you have to learn the math, and the math has changed since we were in school, when we were in seventh, eighth grade. And so, I use that to help me learn the lesson before. Because when they teach it, if I can learn it, then I can teach it and I can present. If I've never seen it, I haven't looked at it or anything, then I'm not going to be able to present it or teach it very well. (Angeline, 2021)

Rosie has also found value with online resources as an educator who left and came back along with her recently acquired master's degree in Library Media Science.

There are so many teacher groups on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The discussions do go back and forth between the good and bad of the profession, but more often I find myself learning new things or meeting educators world-wide that I would have never met without social media. Especially after getting my masters, I wanted to connect with great librarians that have been successful in the field and are practitioners and not just the theory I learned in class. And even when it is a post about how hard the profession is, it usually makes me laugh rather than deter me from being an educator.

### ***Family and Friend Support***

Outside of school, the educators in this case study indicated that family and friends supported them emotionally and financially. Seven of the nine veteran educators are married and the other two are widows. Carmen is the only educator out of the nine in this case with a spouse in the education profession. Steve noted that the flexible schedule of teaching allows him to take his children to their activities and spend the summer

traveling with them. Josephine and Carmen also enjoy being in the same district as their children and the time they can spend with them due to their schedules.

Angeline stated that besides the encouragement of her spouse, she is thankful that his profession financially supports their family due to the low teaching salaries in Oklahoma.

My husband is a pharmacist, and we have two boys. Although my salary is not as much as I would hope, my children have been able to participate in many school activities and we have travelled during their childhood and adulthood. It has also allowed me to provide my students with items that are not provided by the district or state.

The participants also noted that their church friends, neighbors, and long-time college friends have encouraged them and supported their classrooms financially over the years they have been in education. Although the April 2018 Oklahoma teacher strike is four years in the past, they still remember the support of their friends and neighbors.

Vivian described how her friends, students and parents went to the capitol to sit with the teachers and provided words of encouragement and food to her colleagues.

They know how dedicated we are to the students and understood our frustration of not being financially supported by our state. I think I cried each day when I would see friends take time off and bring us food, hugs and encouraging words. They would arrive with chairs and tents and sit with us as we visited legislators to share our ideas and concerns. It reaffirmed to all teachers that our decision to be a teacher meant something to not just our students, but to families and communities.

Angeline indicated that the 2018 teacher strike inspired her son to get his alternative teaching certificate after seeing friends and family rally to support the educators across Oklahoma.

He grew up knowing the struggles and successes that I had but chose a degree in journalism. He always loved sports and coaching, but knowing the salary, he didn't want to get into education. After visiting me and others during the teacher strike and witnessing that the advocacy brought victory of a pay increase, he decided to seek a teaching and coaching job in my district. I could not be prouder of him for following his passion and seeing that overall, communities believe teachers deserve to be paid more for their work.

### **Reasons for Leaving**

The educators in this case study have remained despite watching their colleagues leave the profession. However, during the interviews and team meeting observations, they did share why others have left and reasons they are tempted to leave during times of stress.

### ***Lack of Funding***

Teachers mentioned the lack of funding that leads to their larger class sizes and low salaries. They are aware that fewer people are coming into the profession for those two reasons require the veterans to take on more responsibilities. Angeline noted, "The overcrowding in the classroom, it's hard to have to get to everybody when you have so many kids in a classroom."

The nine educators in this case study also included family, friends and social media as groups that supported them while working in the education field. Eight of the

nine educators in this study have spouses who are not employed in an education field and stated that financial support was needed due to the low salaries.

### ***World Pandemic and Minimal Adjustments to Outcomes***

The Covid-19 pandemic has also contributed to many of their colleagues leaving and created stress for those who remain. The learning expectations of the students did not decrease. Goals and milestones for student learning continued, despite the pandemic.

Mary said,

It has been hard working with children who have literally been out of school for a year. There really is no way to fix the problem. I have tried talking with parents, I taught summer school to try and help the students catch up. It has been very hard.

Rosie noted the scheduling difficulties created for teaching during Covid.

Trying to work around the A/B schedule and how to teach the students and keep them engaged while they were home was the toughest part. Wearing masks all day then having to keep students separated in class was difficult since I am a teacher who loves collaboration among my students. Also, trying to figure out what part of the curriculum to cut was hard.

Angeline affirmed the struggle of students meeting goals and noted the special education students needing modifications suffer from scheduling conflicts.

Students are still expected to take a grade level task even though we've identified them as special education students and know that they need modifications and accommodations. With our new schedule, I'm not able to read science and social studies tests to students who need it, so that's a frustration as well.

### ***Inadequate Professional Development***

The teachers did share their dislike for a recent district-wide professional development that was conducted by an outside company. The training was to assist the district educators on Equity Diversity Inclusion awareness. The educators in this study agreed that training is needed for many of their colleagues, but also concluded that the presenters did not seem to take a personal interest in becoming familiar with their individual schools or the teachers. Steve stressed,

I don't feel like the presenters have a grasp of their audience. I don't think that they took any time to get to know us. They didn't know anything about us at Grace Elementary and how we handle things. So, it was almost offensive when they would talk to us about certain things. I was like, "You don't understand; we've been doing this for 20 years."

### **Summary**

Chapter IV begins by providing data descriptions of the population and participants for this case study. Information about the participants was collected from the Name Generator Survey as well as the interviews. The presentation of the findings from the Name Generator Survey were explained and shared in tables. The interviews and observations were then analyzed and identified themes were revealed. Chapter V will present the findings of the case study through answering the study's research questions, discussion of the findings through the lens of Nan Lin's network theory of social capital, implications for research, theory, and practice, and a summary.

## CHAPTER V

### FINDINGS

Given the importance of a high-quality teacher in each classroom, it is necessary that districts and schools have a greater understanding of the factors that lead to the retention of teachers. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the social networks of selected veteran teachers in three schools within one large, urban school district. Using Lin's Network Theory of Social Capital as the theoretical framework, the case study described how the social networks contribute to the teacher's decision to remain in the profession.

During the time this research was conducted, educators could not have predicted the impact the world pandemic Covid-19 Virus would have on our daily routines and our educational environment. Oklahoma retention of educators was already diminishing and with the Covid-19 alteration of the health, mental, and financial needs of educators, the ability to keep educators is a pressing issue. According to the Teacher's Retirement System of Oklahoma, retirements during the months prior to the August school start dates were approximately 1600 educators in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 compared to approximately 2,205 in 2021-2022 (<https://www.ocpathink.org/post/teacher-shortage-persists-despite-massive-pay-raises>). The Teacher's Retirement System of Oklahoma also estimates that by December 1, 2022, there would be 9,491 educators who would be



eligible for retirement (<https://www.ocpathink.org/post/teacher-shortage-persists-despite-massive-pay-raises>).

Districts were scrambling to find certified educators, yet they were often left to seek educators who requested Emergency Teacher Certifications. Individuals seeking an Emergency Teaching Certificate must pass a background check, official college transcripts and have either passed or registered for a subject area test (<https://sde.ok.gov/teacher-certification>). The Oklahoma State Department of education reported the following numbers of educators that were granted Emergency Teacher Certifications (OSDE Office of Teacher-Certification, September 2020).

**Table 10**

*Oklahoma Emergency Teacher Certifications*

School Year Date	Number of Certificates Approved
2012-2013	97
2013-2014	189
2014-2015	505
2015-2016	1,063
2016-2017	1,160
2017-2018	1,851
2018-2019	3,038
2019-2020	3,321
2020-2021	2,801
2021-2022 as of 11/1/21	3,833

Oklahoma law, at 70 O.S. § 6-187(F) provides that the State Board of Education may issue an emergency certificate, as needed. Provided, however, prior to the issuance of an emergency certificate, the district shall document substantial efforts to employ a teacher who holds a current non-emergency certificate. In the event a district is unable to hire an individual meeting these criteria, the district shall document efforts to employ an individual with a non-emergency certificate in another curricular area with academic preparation in the field of need. Only after these alternatives have been exhausted shall

the district be allowed to employ an individual meeting minimum standards as established by the State Board of Education for the issuance of emergency certificates. (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2021).

Despite the data, the veteran educators in this case noted the social networks in their school buildings, both internally and externally, have encouraged them to remain in the profession beyond 15 years of service. When asked to categorize their relationship to those in the social networks, the responses included: colleagues, administrators, family, and friends. Participants were allowed to list up to nine individuals they seek out for professional growth, emotional support and problem-solving when dealing with work issues.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do veteran teachers in this study describe their social network connections for professional support, emotional support, and problem-solving support?
2. What are veteran teachers' perceptions of why they have chosen to remain in the teaching profession?
3. What resources, if any, are embedded in veteran teacher social networks that have contributed to their decision to remain in the profession?

Based on the data presented and analyzed data in Chapter IV, the research questions are answered below.

**Research Question One: How do veteran teachers in this study describe their social network connections for professional support, emotional support, and problem-solving support?**

#### **Internal Networks**

##### ***Collegial Connections***

Collegial contacts were listed in Table 5 as the most frequently utilized social network when the educators in this case needed professional growth, emotional support, or support for the daily problem-solving tasks of teaching. Colleagues were identified as either current or past co-workers and those who did not serve in a supervisory position. Often due to proximity and frequency of interactions, the teachers lean on the educators they work with daily to help them with the stresses of the job and/or professional growth. They also noted that outside of the school day, they continue to connect with their colleagues, past and present, in social situations.

### ***Administrative Connections***

The veteran educators in this case study also list administrators, both current and past, as support networks they use daily. The participants at Grace Elementary have all been in the building longer than their current administrators. However, that has not deterred them from building a relationship that has managed to keep best practices from the previous administrator nor meet to collaborate and adjust according to new student, family and staff needs. Carmen believes,

We were fortunate to work with Mr. Land during a major improvement at our school. He allowed us to be a part of the conversations and solutions and we have built relationships with the families in this community. When it was announced that he was retiring, and we would get Ms. Sparks, initially, we were scared. We did not want to lose the positive momentum we had going for us after years of working towards district success. Ms. Sparks has allowed us to work with her to maintain our success. As a staff, we have also seen growth within our teachers and ourselves due to both of them and their leadership style. I have colleagues in

other schools in our district that do not have the same benefit of good leadership and that unfortunately has led to some of them leaving the district or profession all together.

For some of the other participants who are new to their school, they have experienced both supportive and non-supportive administrators during their career. Angeline, Mary, and Isabella mentioned that they learned from both the good and bad administrators from the past. The three of them also added that they were fortunate enough to realize that it was not the profession that they disliked, but the leadership, and they made a choice to choose to work in a different school and not leave the profession they loved. Mary stated,

My administrator in my previous district offered no support and actually created a hostile environment. In most districts, teachers finish the year, but in this one, we saw teachers leaving almost monthly. My mental and physical health declined and a co-worker that left encouraged me to come with her. I am so glad that I did. I love teaching and feel so supported by my new administrators and colleagues. I am no longer scared to share my ideas and even when my idea is not taken; I am at least validated for sharing and feel that I learn from the ideas we do use.

## **External Networks**

### ***Retired and Virtual Educator Network***

With the increase of virtual learning and online social media, educators are now able to connect with educators across the world. For the colleagues that have relocated or retired, the participants in this case study use social media to continue collaborating and conversing with educators as challenges and successes are shared. The educators in this

case did indicate that their relationships with virtual colleagues or those from their past share similar struggles and concerns. This data does emulate research conducted by Baker-Doyle and Yoon (2010), which indicated the informal social networks of educators provide social capital that strongly influences retention. Rosie mentioned,

I have many of my sorority sisters that are in education. When I was trying to decide to teach again, after raising my kids, they were the ones who encouraged me to come back to teaching. I also have retired teachers and librarians that knew I loved the library and was considering getting my master's in library science. They encouraged me to go back to school and have even connected me to other Oklahoma librarians across the state. I am so excited that I listened to them all. I am exactly where I need to be, and my network of educators has grown and so diverse at this stage in my career.

**Research Question 2: What are veteran teacher perceptions of why they have chosen to remain in the teaching profession?**

Through interviews and observations, veteran educators in this case study noted their love for children as a major reason they have continued teaching. They described the happiness they felt when their students were successful. In each interview, the teachers discussed the extra hours they invested in tutoring or working with students who often needed remediation either academically or emotionally. The veteran educators in this case noted the relationships with their students and families were additional and often demanding work, but very satisfying.

When Angeline's school moved to virtual learning, due to the increase in Covid cases, she drove around the neighborhoods and would help parents and students connect

to Wi-Fi to make sure that their learning continued. Mills Middle School staff has held family Thanksgiving dinners to assist the students and parents that do not have the financial resources. Angeline shared that her own family would help her, and the staff serve student families in the mornings prior to hosting their own family Thanksgiving later in the day. Angeline noted:

During my career, I have had parents nominate me for Teacher of the Week or Month awards from local businesses that provided gifts and certificates that I could personally use and professionally use in the classroom. It is always a shock when they announce it, because I just do what I do for the kids so they have a chance at success. However, when I have parents and kids recognize the effort and time I invest in building relationships with them, it does reinvigorate me, and I look forward to work. Those little reminders throughout the year are timely and needed for me to stay in this profession.

Steve, Carmen, and Josephine get the list of their students prior to the upcoming year and contact the families. They set up a time to meet and enjoy a meal at a fast-food restaurant to establish a connection. This is not a school or district expectation, but as a team, they are invested in the relationships and success of their students and families.

Isabella affirmed,

None of us are here for absurd amounts of money! I am here because I like to make a difference. I like to be needed by my students. I like the feeling of working with a difficult student, you earn their respect, and they listen to you. I love to see them blossom and realize they don't have to be the way they've been. They're a better person now!

Each veteran educator noted at least one colleague during their career that decided to retire or leave their low-income school system for a more affluent school or district in hopes of reducing their stress. However, veteran educators with more than 20 years admit that they are closer to retirement and would like to finish. Mary and Angeline both mentioned that they have invested too many years to change professions now and that their support networks encourage them to stay. Becky shared,

I do laugh at my friends who left our school for ‘greener pastures’ so they didn’t have to deal with so many problems that our poverty students and families bring to our job. When we go to dinner and meet, they continue to complain about issues they have with parents and students in their new more affluent schools. The problems are just different, but they still exist and can be exhausting. At the end of the day, I guess I have more empathy for our community and the problems associated with them. When I have connected with a difficult student and/or parent, that makes me so happy. Knowing I actually made a difference in another person’s life keeps me in schools with higher needs.

The participants in this study also noted the administrators during their careers that influenced their longevity. They all experienced strong and weak administrators, but regardless of the relationship, lessons were gained. Because they had experienced a good leader at some point in their career, when a less experienced leader or a leader with a different philosophy was in charge, the resources from other networks or their former leader helped them persevere. Mary can never forget an administrator that denied her time off, even after the death of her mother.

I worked for someone who initially supported me by mentoring me and helping me to advance into administration. I am not sure what happened, but at some point, that relationship became very hostile. I am a single parent. She began expecting me to work when I was taking care of my dying mother without adjusting my workload to accommodate for my mental and physical health. I was made to feel guilty for taking more time for my family than spending extra time before or after school like the other administrators. I looked around and noticed I was not alone. As colleagues started to leave, I was fortunate that they valued my work and encouraged me to join them at another school with a different leader. I truly can't remember what finally made me do it, but I got in the car with another administrator friend of mine while she drove me to her new school. I walked in and sat before the principals and a few teachers and because my friend had told them how amazing I was, this new team made me feel like I was valued and needed. They hired me on the spot and luckily, I accepted immediately. I never understood how important your network was until that moment. I truly believe she saved my life by putting me in a situation where I could feel and be successful again. Seven years later, I am so glad my dedication and hard work was recognized by others so I can continue to fulfill my dream to be an educator.

**Research Question 3: What resources, if any, are embedded in veteran teacher social networks that have contributed to their decision to remain in the profession?**

Using Lin's Network Theory of Social Capital, the findings in this case indicate that veteran educators use resources from their social networks to support their drive to continue in the profession. The veteran educators in this case study indicated that their



social networks provided professional growth, emotional support, and opportunities to problem-solve daily issues.

### ***Professional Growth***

The district has implemented Professional Learning Community meetings for over a decade. Elementary teachers are given an hour a week to work together with their teammates, administrators and other resource teachers that may provide services for their students. The designated time creates opportunities for colleagues to discuss successes and concerns they are experiencing. It is a designated collaboration time for them to invest in each other and their professional growth to help their students.

The educators also noted the hours of professional development they have been exposed to during their career. When they begin to feel their knowledge is stagnant, they discuss options with a colleague or administrator to discover and attend a local, state, or national professional development session. When new learning occurs and is put into practice with success, the resources they have gained are noticed by their colleagues and administrators. The veteran educators in this case study have experienced opportunities to present and mentor educators in their school and district. Angeline has held a district curriculum position and Mary has been a State Department of Education Director and building administrator, yet both made a choice to return to the classroom to work with special needs students while still mentoring their colleagues and administrators. Steve and Rosie have been encouraged by their colleagues and administration to pursue job titles that take them out of an isolated classroom and put them in teaching positions that allow them to work with the entire student body and mentor teachers.

### ***Emotional Support***

The teachers emphasized that besides the mandated PLC meetings, they informally congregate during their daily planning periods to discuss student issues and lessons. They also realize that their social networks provide them with emotional support when they are stressed and contemplate leaving or retiring. Educators in this case indicated that whether they went to a colleague, administrator, friend, or family member, they were reassured of the importance of their career and the impact each of them has made in the lives of students, colleagues, and families.

Educators in this case study did recall the encouragement of their students, families, and communities during the recent 2018 Oklahoma strike. The support they witnessed during that time continues to impact their decision to remain in education. Although Covid has produced new and sometimes extreme opposition from the public, the educators in this case acknowledged that reaching out to their network of friends, family, colleagues, and administration is the encouragement they need.

### ***Problem-Solving Support***

The veteran educators in this case study affirmed that their colleagues, administrators, family, and friends provided resources and ideas to help them solve daily problems or concerns. Mary noted that as she has mentored many new educators, those who stay develop the ability to seek advice and are willing to learn and implement new techniques. Although Vivian, Becky and Mary are new to Pep Elementary School, combined they have 84years of experience and use ideas from their previous schools to implement with their new colleagues.

The PLCs not only provided a time to collaborate and professionally develop the skills of the team, but it also provided discussions that helped the team solve student and

learning issues. The educators in this case study have over 15 years of experience and that knowledge enables them to provide colleagues with examples and ideas that they have implemented.

### **Discussion**

The theoretical framework, Lin's (1990) Network Theory of Social Capital, was used as the lens for this case. The exchange and use of resources provided by social networks of veteran educators can be beneficial for retention. For this case study, it was important to understand who the teachers depended upon, and the resources obtained to address some of the challenges they have experienced throughout their careers.

Through the lens of Social Capital theory, these findings suggest that social capital was embedded in those networks (Coleman 1990; Lin, 1999; Lin, 2009). The educators in this study shared how they have used the resources from their administrators, colleagues, families, and friends to continue in the education profession despite the daily demands and changes of the occupation. Lin noted that the returns gained from the social capital can be instrumental or expressive actions/returns (Lin, 1999).

#### **Instrumental Actions/Returns**

Instrumental actions can include job promotions and additional compensation. The participants in this case referred to the 2018 Oklahoma Teacher strike and the networks throughout their community, district and state that contributed to the pay increase for Oklahoma educators. The social capital gained from the resources took Oklahoma teacher salaries from third lowest in the United States to 34<sup>th</sup> in the nation (Goldstein, 2018). Professional growth was another resource that provided the social capital necessary to retain the educators in this study. The veteran educators contributed

their longevity to networking with their colleagues within their own building, within their state, and virtually. The professional development acquired via the formal and informal sessions and meetings contributed to their knowledge. This type of social capital led to them being asked by colleagues and administrators to mentor and train other teachers. At least four of the nine participants in this study were given promotions during their career to have an impact on more students and educators.

### **Expressive Actions/Returns**

The social capital gained from social networks can also be expressive and is collected to preserve and defend against losing what someone possesses (Lin, 1999). For educators, this type of social capital may reduce or add to stress and job satisfaction depending on the network and resource provided. Each educator in this study has had multiple administrators and colleagues during their career. As much as they reported the positive support and encouragement from each network, they could also remember a network they avoided due to stress and frustration that came with the individual. Given the longevity of the participants, they have had teammates come and go. They are often tasked with mentoring teachers who are new to the team or to the profession. When they work with educators who are not willing to grow and learn, they admit they will either continue to support them during the mandated PLC's or professional development but learn to distance themselves from the negative interactions. Steve was very honest and said,

I have been doing this long enough to know within the first month whether a new colleague will stay or not. We spend a lot of time with our students and each other and state that expectation for others during the interview. Most agree they are or

will be just as committed in order to be hired, but their lack of interactions with us or the students is evident almost immediately. It is hard to watch another educator self-impose misery and hatred for this job when we do everything we can to support them. Our team doesn't like to give up on anyone. However, the kids are our main focus, and our team energy is spent to make them a success. Adults can choose to love this place or leave it; our students don't have the choice to stop coming each day.

Knowing that a career in education will continually have demands and expectations from students, parents, administrators, and colleagues, the veterans in this study indicated that the support they have received from their networks create opportunities for good mental health and life satisfaction. For example, participants explained that they seek out dinners and gatherings outside of the school day to provide encouragement and laughter when their daily job is tough. Angeline meets with her monthly educator group to play Bunco. The Grace Elementary team tries to meet every Friday for Happy Hour to share stories and laughs from the week. The Pep Elementary participants for this study reunite with their new and former friends either for dinner or just a phone call on their way home. Rosie noted that she goes to a local gym a few times a week to workout with educators that she has met at the gym.

I have never taught in the same school as some of the educators at my gym, but somehow, we gravitated to this gym. Maybe it is because the owner is a former educator and we have recruited our teacher friends. Whatever it is, we are able to encourage each other to be physically healthy because we each know the stresses of the job.

Another example of social capital gained from teacher networks is the expressive return of life satisfaction. They take time to celebrate with their students and families and focus on their love of teaching and seeing students enjoy learning. Vivian mentioned the support teachers received when the pandemic closed schools and students had to learn virtually.

No one could have anticipated that our dismissal for the yearly Spring Break would be the last face to face with our students. Our hearts were broken, and the uncertainty was scary for educators and families. For almost two months, the world was trying to learn how to navigate and survive and before we knew it, it was May, and we were all reminded of the former festivities that schools do to celebrate the end of the year. We couldn't do them. We couldn't hug each other and celebrate a year of being together. But students and parents got creative. I was not alone, but I woke up one morning to see that students and parents had left signs in my yard to thank me. Some even did a drive by to honk and wave signs they had made to show their appreciation and that they missed me. The tears of knowing that we had mutually made a difference in each others' lives despite the distance learning, that is why I do this job. I do matter, and so do they.

Angeline will never forget the student who was hospitalized but insisted on keeping up with the chapter book the class was reading.

My students already struggle academically, and some do have medical conditions that impede that learning. A few years ago, a parent called me and asked if I would come and visit their son because he had some questions about the book the class was reading. I grabbed the assistant principal and we headed to the hospital

after school. He was so excited to see us but said that he really was more excited to read to me and ask questions about the chapter book we were reading in class. This was a student who was a few years behind in reading, yet this book was so interesting to him, he worked hard to make sure he could read some of it out loud to me. I went away thinking, ‘if this sick kid who struggles academically can make the effort when he is very ill and in the hospital, then that is all the more reason I should not give up on him or any other student’.

### **Implications**

This case study reported the social networks that were important for nine veteran educators as they continued to work in the education profession beyond 15 years. The participants were honest about the struggles and successes they have endured during their tenure. Despite working in a high-poverty suburban district, a state with low salaries, and a world-wide pandemic, they have remained in the education profession.

### **Implications for Research**

This case study explored the social networks and the resources provided by those networks and how they contributed to the teacher’s decision to remain in the profession. The veteran educators in this study contributed their career longevity to relationships they have developed with current and past colleagues and administrators as well as their family and friends. It was noted that the internal, external, and virtual school networks provided them with resources for professional growth and emotional and problem-solving support. With current declines in enrollment into teaching programs across the nation, and a mass exodus of educators after the Covid-19 pandemic, this research takes the focus off “Why teachers leave?” to “Why do they stay?” Findings from this study suggest

that these educators depended upon their relationships and the resources they provide to face the challenges that they experienced. Though not generalizable, this finding underscores the understanding that social connections may be a key factor for career longevity (Moolenaar, 2012). If so, school leaders have many opportunities to build relationships between teachers, administrators, and families in their districts. Additional research is needed to explore this finding.

### **Implications for Theory**

Lin's Network Theory of Social Capital, (Lin, 1999) was used to explain the findings of this case study. Applying this theory to the social networks of the veteran educators in this case study provided insight on their desire to remain in the education profession. Though not generalizable, the perspectives that these long-term educators shared regarding the importance of social connections for career longevity may be transferrable to efforts to enhance retention in highly mobile districts with similar contexts. Further, utilizing Lin's theory provided insight into the resources that these veteran educators perceived as important for remaining in the profession. This study revealed that key networks and the social capital gained from those networks yielded support for careers that endured beyond 15 years in education. Applying this theoretical framework to explain the instrumental and expressive benefits from social networks of teachers expands the use of this theory and could lead to additional studies that seek to understand how teachers can utilize resources embedded in social networks to grow professionally, financially, mentally, and physically as they continue their careers in education.

### **Implications for Practice**



Findings from this study indicate that the relationships that teachers developed across time influenced their decision to remain in the profession. Participants in this study explained that, when teachers have opportunities to collaborate and meet with colleagues and administrators, they were encouraged to grow professionally. Additionally, the relational connections provided emotional support that they needed to address challenges that they encountered in the workplace. These veteran teachers explained that collaboration in both formal and informal settings helped to contribute to their longevity within the profession. It is possible that providing opportunities in the workplace for relationship building may lead to enhanced job satisfaction and longer career trajectories. This study highlighted the importance of diverse types of support networks to meet teacher needs. Additional research is needed to understand how each type of support network functions to support career longevity.

Another important implication from this study is that building administrators had an influence on their longevity and relationship building among teachers. Administrators encouraged veteran educators to mentor and seek additional knowledge to grow professional by allowing teachers to support each other and share best practices. Mutual respect, regardless of job title, provided the veteran educators with the confidence to engage in professional discourse with their administrators. The most impactful leaders offered vulnerability, when necessary, to facilitate relationships with staff. The educators in this case admitted that they were not always in agreement when engaged in discussions with their administrators but knowing and feeling that they were heard was the key to their appreciation for the administrator and their position. Additionally, the finding that these teachers were empowered to lead PLCs and professional development suggests that

they felt validated as professionals and that their skills were needed and appreciated. Administrators that were willing to create leaders and opportunity for professional growth in educators, whether the teacher remained in the classroom or was promoted, were the administrators that these veteran educators tended to seek for resources needed to continue in this profession. While findings from this study are not generalizable, they emphasize the importance of collaboration and emotional support for these participants as key resources gained from their social networks.

### **Summary**

The social networks listed by these veteran educators included current and past friends, family, and colleagues. Each participant realized that they need to be able to confide and learn from the social networks they acquired over the span of their lifetime. They are also cognizant of their importance to mentor new colleagues and provide professional and emotional resources for success. They are aware that even as the demands and stresses of the job do not stop, their networks have a range of knowledge and experience to help them through the current situation. Regardless of the need for a formal or informal meeting to determine how to persevere, the veterans in this case know they have networks of support and resources to continue in the education profession.

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## APPENDICES

### Name Generator

Directions: Please list the initials of up to nine adults you seek for *professional growth*. Next to the initials, indicate their relationship to you (Ex: co-teacher, administrator, instructional coach, spouse, sibling, former colleague, friend, etc.), the years you have sought their professional knowledge, and how often you communicate.

Initials	Relationship to You	Years of Relationship	How often do you communicate?				
			Occasionally Daily				
1. _____	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5
2. _____	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5
3. _____	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5
4. _____	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5
5. _____	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5
6. _____	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5
7. _____	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5
8. _____	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5
9. _____	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5

Directions: Please list the initials of up to nine adults you seek *emotional support*. Next to the initials, indicate their relationship to you (Ex: co-teacher, administrator, instructional coach, spouse, sibling, former colleague, friend, etc.), the years you have sought their professional knowledge, and how often you communicate.

Initials	Relationship to You	Years of Relationship	How often do you communicate?				
			Occasionally Daily				
1. _____	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5
2. _____	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5
3. _____	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5
4. _____	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5
5. _____	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5
6. _____	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5
7. _____	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5
8. _____	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5
9. _____	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5



Directions: Please list the initials of up to nine adults you seek *problem-solving support when dealing with work issues*. Next to the initials, indicate their relationship to you (Ex: co-teacher, administrator, instructional coach, spouse, sibling, former colleague, friend, etc.), the years you have sought their professional knowledge, and how often you communicate.

	Initials	Relationship to You	Years of Relationship	How often do you communicate?				
				Occasionally	Daily			
1.	_____	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5
2.	_____	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5
3.	_____	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5
4.	_____	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5
5.	_____	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5
6.	_____	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5
7.	_____	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5
8.	_____	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5
9.	_____	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5

## APPENDIX B

### Recruitment letter for Name Generator and Interview

Good afternoon/morning,

I would like to introduce myself. I am an Educational Leadership & Policy Study doctoral candidate from Oklahoma State University in Stillwater. As you are aware, Oklahoma has struggled to retain and recruit quality educators over the last decade. As an administrator and curriculum director, hiring, supporting, and retaining educators that would continue in this profession beyond 15 years of service became a focus for me. I had the privilege of working with many educators that stayed beyond 15 years despite the chaos that surrounded them in their school, district, community, and state.

My research is focusing on the social networks that veteran educators utilize that support them in staying in this profession beyond 15 years. The purpose of this study is to listen to veteran educators and learn what social networks contribute to their longevity. It is my hope that it will help myself and other administrators emulate the positive networks and support to retain quality educators for our children.

The purpose of this email is to invite you to participate in a quick survey and a 30–45-minute interview to identify the social networks that have supported your career beyond 15 years. The interview will be conducted at a time and location that is convenient for you. Interview questions will contain prompts to elaborate on the networks of support that you seek to remain in the education profession. You have the option of skipping any question during the interview or survey, and you may also discontinue your participation at any time. To keep the validity of the data, I also ask permission to record the interview simply to remember everything you say. The file will be protected and not shared with anyone in your district. The responses will only be known to the researcher.

There are no direct benefits to participants. However, findings from this study may help administrators, legislators and educational collegiate professionals identify and provide social networks and supports to current and future quality educators.

If you would like to participate in the survey and interview portion, a link has been provided at the end of this email. If you choose not to participate, the “opt out” link is also available. If you choose to “opt out” of this research study, you will not receive any additional emails.

If you have questions about this research, you may contact me, Karie Carpenter, or you may contact my advisor, Dr. Katherine Curry, 306 Willard Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078; phone (918)520-9217 or email: [Katherine.curry@okstate.edu](mailto:Katherine.curry@okstate.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact the IRB office at 223 Scott Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078, (405)-744-3377 or [irb@okstate.edu](mailto:irb@okstate.edu).

Your consideration is sincerely appreciated,

Karie Carpenter, Ph.D. Candidate  
Oklahoma State University

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Questions

1. Number of years you have been teaching
2. Number of years you have been teaching in this district
3. Number of years you have worked in this specific school
4. Type of Certification: Traditional (Bachelor's degree in Education), Alternative Certification, Emergency Certification
5. What do you consider a support network as it relates to your profession?
6. What experiences have helped you grow professionally?
7. Who has helped you grow professionally?
8. When you become frustrated with a situation at work, how do you seek a solution?
9. What are some obstacles that you encountered in the last year?
10. How did you address this problem?
11. How has your support network influenced your decision to stay/leave the profession?
12. May I contact you if I have any further questions?

## APPENDIX D

### Institutional Review Board Approval

**Project Title:** Social Networks of Veteran Educators Who Remain in the Education Profession  
Social Networks of Veteran Educators Who Remain in the Education Profession

**Investigator:** Karie Carpenter, Principal Investigator, Oklahoma State University

**Purpose:**

Given the importance of a high-quality teacher in each classroom, it is necessary that districts and schools have a greater understanding of the factors that lead to the retention of teachers. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the social networks of select veteran teachers in three schools within one large, urban school district. Using Lin's Network Theory of Social Capital as the theoretical framework, the case study will describe how the social networks contribute to the teacher's decision to remain in the profession.

**Procedures:**

As a participant in this study, you will complete one survey. The survey will ask you to provide the initials and relationship of persons that you go to for professional support, emotional support, and problem-solving support when dealing with work issues. It will take approximately 30 minutes to complete the survey. You may also be asked to participate in one 30-45 minute interview in which you will be asked to elaborate on the networks of support that you seek in order to remain in the education profession. To collect data focusing on interactions of participants and others within the school related to knowledge, communication, professional interaction, and social interaction, I will observe 1-2 faculty meetings and/or professional development trainings. If you participate, your total time commitment will be less than three hours.

**Risks of Participation:**

There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

Interviews and observations will follow local, state, and federal guidelines to help reduce the spread of COVID-19. Considerations for in-person will include but not limited to:

- Physical distancing: Whenever possible, we will maintain at least 6 feet of distance between persons while conducting the study.
- Mask/Covering: Researchers will wear, and participants will be advised to shield their mouth and nose with a cloth face cover or mask during the study, even when maintaining at least 6 feet of distance. Tissues will be available to cover coughs and sneezes.
- Handwashing: Researchers and participants will wash hands before/during the observation or use a hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.
- Disinfecting materials: When feasible, researchers will clean and disinfect surfaces between participants, using an EPA-registered disinfectant or a bleach solution (5 tablespoons of regular bleach per gallon of water) for hard materials and by laundering soft materials. Disinfected materials will be handled using gloves, paper towel, plastic wrap, or storage bags to reduce the chance of re-contamination of materials.

Approved: 11/06/2020  
Protocol #: IRB-20-505



- Electronics: Alcohol-based wipes or sprays containing at least 70% alcohol will be used to disinfect shared touch screens, mice, keyboards, etc. Surfaces will be dried to avoid pooling of liquids.

**Benefits:**

There are no expected benefits for participation in this study.

**Confidentiality:**

Each participant in the study will be assigned a pseudonym for the survey and interview. Only the researcher will have access to the document linking the pseudonym to the participant’s name. This document will be kept secured in a locked cabinet or encrypted computer file on a password protected computer and destroyed after the duration of the research project (no longer than one year). Names will not be used in the publication or presentation of data.

The research team works to ensure confidentiality to the degree permitted by technology. It is possible, although unlikely, that unauthorized individuals could gain access to your responses because you are responding online. However, your participation in this online survey involves risks similar to a person’s everyday use of the internet. If you have concerns, you should consult the survey provider privacy policies at [Qualtrics](#) and [Zoom](#).

**Compensation:**

Participants will not receive compensation for participating in this study.

**Contacts:**

If you have questions about this research, you may contact me, Karie Carpenter, M.Ed. [kariejc@okstate.edu](mailto:kariejc@okstate.edu) or 405-308-1157, or you may contact my advisor, Dr. Katherine Curry, 306 Willard Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078; phone (918)520-9217 or email: [Katherine.curry@okstate.edu](mailto:Katherine.curry@okstate.edu).

If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact the IRB Office at 223 Scott Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or [irb@okstate.edu](mailto:irb@okstate.edu).

**Participant Rights:**

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this project at any time, without penalty.

**Signatures:**

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form has been given to me. I hereby give permission for my participation in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the prospective participant sign it.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Approved: 11/06/2020  
Protocol #: IRB-20-505



## VITA

Karie Jo Zamarripa Carpenter

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Dissertation: SOCIAL NETWORKS OF VETERAN EDUCATORS WHO REMAIN  
IN THE EDUCATION PROFESSION: A CASE STUDY

Major Field: DOCTOR OF PHLOSOPHY IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND  
POLICY STUDIES

### Biographical:

#### Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Education in your major at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in December 2022.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Library Science at East Central University, Ada, Oklahoma in July 2006.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Educational Leadership at East Central University, Ada, Oklahoma in July 1998.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education at East Central University, Ada, Oklahoma in December 1994.

#### Experience:

Senior Professional Development Specialist, PowerSchool – February 2019-Present  
Elementary Librarian - 2016-2019 – Oklahoma City Schools  
Curriculum Director - 2014-2015 – Oklahoma City Schools  
Ed Technology Instructor – 2013-2014 – OU, K20 Center  
Building Administrator – 2008-2013 – Putnam City Schools; Enid Schools  
PK-8<sup>th</sup> Classroom Teacher – 1995-2008

#### Professional Memberships:

American Education Research Association (AERA)  
University Council of Educational Administration (UCEA)  
Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society