

EXPLORING ELEMENTARY TEACHER  
PERSISTENCE IN A MICROPOLITAN AREA  
THROUGH THE LENS OF MASLOW'S HIERARCHY  
OF NEEDS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

By

LORA G. REAVIS

Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education  
Northeastern State University  
Tahlequah, Oklahoma  
1995

Master of Education in Reading  
Northeastern State University  
Tahlequah, Oklahoma  
2008

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Dissertation Approved:

Dr. Edward L. Harris

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Dissertation Adviser

Dr. Katherine A. Curry

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Dr. Denise Blum

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Dr. Tonya R. Hammer

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Name: LORA G. REAVIS

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Abstract: This qualitative study explores the factors that motivate elementary teachers to remain in the classroom in a micropolitan area school district as filtered through the theoretical framework of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The findings suggest, teachers working to satisfy safety needs are less likely to reach satisfaction in the areas of esteem and self-actualization and are less likely to stay in the classroom. It also suggests, for teachers who reach self-actualization, while the love and belonging needs for relationships with students remain relatively stable, other relationships diminish and esteem needs increase. The most important factor for participants in this study to persist in the classroom was the relationship with students.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Teacher turnover in beginning teachers is prevalent in U.S. schools. Research has indicated that teachers are leaving their positions at rates as high as 50% within the first five years (Ingersoll, 2003; Ingersoll et al., 2018; Sutchter et al., 2019). There has also been an increase in beginning teachers entering the field and the loss of teachers in the first five years creating a larger impact on the teaching force than before (Ingersoll et al., 2018). The high rate of loss of beginning teachers affects the success of schools (Chetty et al., 2014).

Teacher retention is important for the success of schools for several reasons. When teachers are not retained it negatively affects student achievement, particularly in low performing schools; the attrition affects the achievement of students of the leaving teacher, the mass student population of the school, and overall teacher effectiveness (Ronfelt et al., 2013; Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). There is also a financial effect. Replacing teachers can be a substantial cost to schools on tight budgets; it involves both the cost of replacement and the loss of professional development investment (Levy et al., 2012). Another burden created by teachers leaving their positions is the ability of schools to find qualified teachers to fill vacancies. Sutchter and his associates' (2019) analysis of the

national database revealed a predicted teacher shortage of around 112,000 teachers in 2017-18; further, approximately 109,000 job candidates were not certified for their teaching position in 2017. Teaching positions cannot simply be left unfilled. Although staffing difficulties may be caused by many factors, teacher turnover has been identified as a contributor (Sutcher et al., 2019). Therefore, it is important for leaders in education to explore avenues to retain effective teachers currently in the field.

Factors influencing teachers to stay in the classroom have been studied by many researchers (Cowen et al., 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Kraft et al., 2015; Moore, et al., 2018) Cochran-Smith et al., (2012) noted research in the area of teacher retention has been focused mainly on features of the teacher work force and working conditions. Further research in areas of teacher retention could provide useful insight. Maslow's hierarchy of needs provides a framework to examine how teachers perceive their needs are being met in the context of their jobs and their motivational factors (Aydoğmuş, & Tükel, 2019).

Educational studies on teacher retention have been conducted in rural and urban areas (Cowen et al., 2012; Guarino et al., 2006; Hughes, 2012; Moore et al., 2018). Examining studies in of variety of contexts provides breadth in research. One context that has been unexplored is schools in the micropolitan city, which is defined as “the largest city in an urban cluster with at least 10,000 and less than 50,000 people form the urban cores of micro areas” (Ratcliffe et al., 2016). There are 18 micropolitan areas in the state of Oklahoma and 543 in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). This Core Based Statistical Area was established in 2010 and provides a context beyond the basic rural and urban statistical domains that pervaded the 20th century (Ratcliffe, 2015). “Nonmetropolitan is often used

synonymously with rural, and while there is overlap, these geographic entities are not identical and should not be used interchangeably” (Ratcliffe et al., 2016, p. 4).

### **Problem Statement**

Teachers enter the field of education each year, often with the intention to remain in the profession in order to make a difference in society (Castro & Bauml, 2009; Moss, 2020; Pietrzak et al., 2011; Tamir, 2009). Researchers have studied why teachers chose to teach and found teachers all over the world have ranked one of their top reasons as wanting to make a difference in the lives of children (Mannion & Davis, 2018; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Richards, 1960).

While teachers enter the profession pursuing a lifetime career that makes a difference, many stay in the profession for the duration of their career (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Day & Gu, 2009), but between 40% and 50% quit their position within the first five years of entering the profession (Ingersoll, 2003). In more recent data, Gray and Taie (2015) found 17% of all teachers were not teaching after the fifth year, and 30% of teachers had left their school. One explanation for new teachers staying beyond five years even as others do not may be due to the ability of schools to meet the various needs of individual teachers. Studies have shown teacher job satisfaction can be understood in relationship to teacher needs (Aydoğmus & Tükel, 2019; Fisher & Royster, 2016). Examining these needs may serve to mitigate teacher shortages and develop approaches for administrators to best support all teachers (Fisher & Royster, 2016).

One way to approach teacher retention was by examining Maslow’s hierarchy of needs to explain teacher motivations to stay in the profession. Maslow’s (1943) theory explains how human needs are met through five basic motivational strata. The motivational

factors provided a lens to view individual needs of teachers and their driving force to remain in the classroom.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs why teachers who have taught between five and 10 years in a micropolitan community stay in the profession.

### **Research Questions**

1. What factors informed elementary teachers in an Oklahoma micropolitan community to persist more than five years in their profession?
2. How did motivational factors promote their persistence in the profession?
3. How does Maslow's hierarchy of needs explain the above?

### **Epistemological Framework**

Merriam & Tisdell (2016) posited that knowledge is socially constructed and consequently, "Researchers do not 'find' knowledge: they construct it" (p. 9). "Social constructivists believe that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 8). The individual point of view and their own understanding of their world is relevant as noted by Crotty (1998) "Constructivism... suggests that each one's way of making sense of the world is valid and worthy of respect as any other..." (p. 58). A constructivist approach allowed me to construct knowledge and explore the complexity of constructed views of the participants.

A qualitative case study provided an "...in-depth description and analysis of a bound system" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 37). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) "The overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences"

(p. 24). Important aspects to qualitative research include the researchers as the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing data and the use of the inductive approach in collecting and analyzing data. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Theoretical Lens**

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a theory in psychology proposed by Abraham Maslow in his 1943 paper "A Theory of Human Motivation" and served as the theoretical lens for this study. His five tenets of need include physiological, safety-security, belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization. Although the theory has received both criticism and support, it continues to be cited and used by theorists and researchers to study employee needs, job satisfaction, and persistence in many fields (Taormina and Gao, 2013). Examining the reasons for the retention of teachers can be compared to the relationships among the needs found by Maslow and their capacity for predicting specific outcomes.

Maslow adapted his hierarchy of needs to acknowledge these basic needs and noted they may not be fulfilled in order and persons fluctuate in and between the needs; although teachers may or may not progress through these basic human needs in an orderly fashion it does provide a framework through which observations of needs being met can be seen (Maslow, 2014).

### **Procedures**

This research explored the experiences of elementary school teachers who taught between five and ten years in the classrooms of micropolitan area elementary schools. A qualitative case study was proposed for this study in order to give proper depth and breadth to the experiences of teachers. "A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') within its real-life context" (Merriam and Tisdell,

2016, p. 37). I chose a qualitative design in order to explore the environments, relationships, day-to-day routines, and school system of the teachers (Peshkin, 1993).

### **Population & Sample**

The population of the study included Oklahoma State certified teachers who had taught between five and ten years, serving in four public elementary schools located in an Oklahoma micropolitan city. Although this micropolitan school district had six elementary campuses, one was eliminated from the study due to the individual nature of the site as an arts magnet school and the other due to the possible perception of power imbalance of the researcher as a reading specialist who supported and trained teachers. Purposeful sampling was used to select ten successful Oklahoma State-certified teachers. Selection was determined by teachers' total years of service in the classroom and willingness to participate in the study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) argued "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. 98). One to four participants were chosen from each individual elementary school to allow for variance in the participants and capture "...the core experiences and central shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon" (Patton, 2015, p. 283). Participants were contacted initially for inclusion in the study through e-mail and were given one week to confirm their agreement to participate. When enough volunteers did not respond, the invitation was resent and followed up with a personal contact. Ten teachers from four schools volunteered to participate in the study.

### **Data Collection**

The use of interviews, a focus group, journaling, field notes, and observations allowed for triangulation of the experiences of these teachers. Creswell and Creswell (2018)

note the process of triangulating data from multiple sources can add to the validity of a study. Person-to-person interviews were held with each of the ten participants. These interviews provided the perceptions of the teachers' motivation to continue teaching. The interviews were designed with open ended questions in order to create depth to the experiences of the teachers and used flexibility which allowed me to respond to evolving contexts and unique participant views and interpretations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interviews were held in neutral locations at the convenience of the participants and were limited to one hour.

Two focus groups consisted of three members. All members were invited to attend one of two focus groups. Focus groups provide a unique opportunity for social construction of knowledge on the subject at hand; they can bring together a broad range of perspectives while revealing commonalities and variety through open discussion (Hennink, 2014). The time allotment was 60 to 90 minutes and was conducted in a neutral location. Observational notes of non-verbal data were written immediately following or within the same day to ensure accuracy. I conducted member checks after the focus group with each participant in order to maintain reliability and validity.

### **Data Analysis**

Inductive analysis allowed patterns and important aspects of the data to emerge instead of presuming what the important data would be or hypothesizing the results (Patton, 2015). Analysis was ongoing from the conception of the study in forming questions and created opportunities for the member's meanings, beliefs, and perceptions to be unmasked. Researcher journaling aided in the integration of analysis of data as it unfolded. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) clearly stated, "...collection and analysis should be a simultaneous process in qualitative research" (p. 195).

All interviews were voice recorded and fully transcribed using Temi, an online speech to transcription service, in order not to limit the findings through exclusion. I checked and corrected the automated transcription as online transcription processing did not catch all words accurately. Denaturalized transcriptions were used in order to preserve the context and meanings of the interviews (Mero-Jaffe, 2011). A framework of the themes emerging from collected data was built through the systematic collection and analysis of data and brought reoccurring and connected themes together to create deeper meaning and perceptions (Oliver et al., 2005). I used inductive manual coding and included in vivo coding and values coding. “Values coding is the application of codes to qualitative data that reflect a participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview” (Saldana, 2016, p. 131). In Vivo codes allowed the words of the members to be coded rather than research created words and phrases (Saldana, 2016). Manually manipulating the data on cards gave me more control in exploring the data. Second round coding included focused coding to develop major categories from the data to compare with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.

I kept an analysis journal to record insights and connections found throughout the study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted “the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (p. 16). Journaling helped me see the gaps as they evolved so I could fill these holes. It also helped me to monitor my own biases and judgments and be reflexive in my analysis of the data and my beliefs.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study lies in the need to provide the best education possible to support student achievement in elementary education. The nationwide teacher shortage is



shortchanging students by increasing class sizes, filling teaching positions with alternatively certified teachers, and creating movement of teachers within the profession from one school to another. A consistent staff is not just desirable as a school quality, but ideal for student development. The teacher-student relationship plays an important role in student's achievement (Roorda et al., 2017). Additionally, having experienced teachers not only teaching students but available to guide and mentor beginning teachers can be crucial in their development and impact student achievement (Callahan, 2016). To slow the attrition rate, it could be useful to explore the experiences of mid-career teachers who have taught between five and ten years, the period just beyond the critical years of induction. Exploring this research within the context of micropolitan city public schools will fill a gap in the study of teacher retention.

### **Definition of Terms**

The key terminology in this section is directly related to the research and was used throughout the research:

*Belonging.* A motivational need to “have affectionate relations with people” (Maslow, 2012, p. 13) or to be a part of a group.

*Esteem.* One of the five motivational needs of humans defined by Maslow (2012) as “...a stable, firmly based, (usually) high evaluation of themselves, for self-respect, or self-esteem, and for the esteem of others... soundly based up real capacity, achievement and respect from others” (p. 13).

*Micropolitan Area.* Micropolitan statistical areas in the United States centered on an urban cluster (urban area) with a population of at least 10,000 but fewer than 50,000 people (U.S.

Census Bureau, 2020). Examples of the 18 micropolitan cities in Oklahoma include Stillwater, Muskogee, McAlester, and Ardmore.

*Mid-Career Teacher.* Teachers working between five and fifteen years in the profession (Booth et al., 2021).

*Migration.* Teachers moving from one school to another (Hughes, 2012).

*Physiological Needs.* The base of the five motivational needs of humans referring to the somatic needs of the body such as nutrition, water, warmth, and sleep (Maslow, 2012).

*Safety Needs.* One of the five basic motivational needs of humans to be free of endangerment from physical harm and the need for social and financial security (Maslow, 2012).

*Self-Actualization.* One of the five basic motivational needs of humans, characterized by individual creativity, expressiveness, and the self-awareness of a person to be fully functioning as one “becomes ... more truly himself, more perfectly actualizing his potentials, closer to the core of his Being” (Maslow, 2014, p. 87).

*Teacher Attrition.* Teachers leaving the field of teaching for any reason, including but not limited to leaving the profession, retirement, and changing careers (Haun & Martin, 2004; Ingersoll, 2001).

*Teacher Mobility.* The movement of teachers between teaching jobs (Espel et al., 2019).

*Teacher Persistence.* Teachers’ continued employment in a position despite challenges. Moore et al. (2018) distinguished between retention and persistence noting teachers may persist in a position even though they face challenges in the classroom.

*Teacher Retention.* Teacher retention has been defined as continued year to year employment within the current school (Hughes, 2012; Ingersoll, 2001).

## **Summary of Chapter**

This chapter introduced a summary of the background information, purpose, methodology and procedures for the qualitative case study. The methodology was aligned to understand how the subjects interpret their own experiences and the meaning they assigned to those experiences (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016) The data collection and analysis strategies, significance, terms, and biases were addressed.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Motivation drives people to attain goals. Simply put, when we want something strongly enough to take action to attain it or keep it, we are motivated. In the world of education, researchers have found student teachers share many factors of what gave them the drive to attend college and pay for years of training in order to teach and reach their goals (Mannion & Davis, 2018; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Richards, 1960). However, as these professionals enter the field of teaching, reality can be quite different from the dream. Some experience inviting entries into the world of education with mentors and support while others struggle on their own to keep their heads above the water from day one.

There are many ways to influence the experiences of teachers in the classroom and leaders in education need to be vigilant in applying best practices in schools to retain high quality teachers in order to support student achievement (Cardichon et al., 2020). Public education in the United States is facing teacher shortages across the nation. According to Ingersoll et al. (2018), with the exception of a short-term dip in the level after the recession of 2008, beginning teacher attrition has been on a slow and steady

increase for the past three decades with the most recent figures reporting over 44% of beginning teachers in both public and private schools exiting teaching within five years. The greatest effect on the teacher shortage is teacher attrition. The rate of teacher attrition has been found to be directly related to 90% of the yearly demand (Ingersoll, 2002; Sutchter et al., 2019). Teacher attrition in itself is natural but the high rate is not. This issue does not come with a simple solution but there is research providing factors for teacher retention and attrition that can be leveraged to reduce the effects on our public schools and students.

Many researchers have studied teacher retention and persistence but no research was situated in the population of a micropolitan area school. Understanding the personal motivation of teachers to stay in the classroom in micropolitan school districts could help leaders make decisions about how best to approach supporting them. It takes time to know and understand individuals, but a glimpse from their perspective could provide possible insights into retaining our best and brightest.

### **Teaching as a Career Choice**

Teaching has held a low status in the professional world for many years as educators have faced low pay along with challenging work conditions (Tamir, 2009). However, teachers enter teaching expecting to stay in the classroom for many years in order to make a difference in society (Castro & Bauml, 2009; Moss, 2020; Pietrzak et al., 2011; Tamir, 2009). The motivation of people to teach varies and includes altruistic values and intrinsic purposes (Nesje et al., 2018). But, one of teacher's top reasons to enter the field has been wanting to make a difference in the lives of children (Mannion & Davis, 2018; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Richards, 1960).

## **History of the Teaching Profession**

The choice to pursue teaching as a career is grounded in varying and complex reasons. Rarely do individuals come to a decision to teach based on one sole purpose, rather they consider different aspects of the education field to reach their decision. The reasons include altruistic, internal, and external factors such as: wanting to work with or help children, to make a difference in society, to be of service to others, the flexibility of teaching in regards to leaving and returning, teaching schedule, job security, experiences in school, high interest or passion, and salary/benefits (Pietrak et al., 2011; Wood, 1978). Researchers have studied why teachers choose to teach and found teachers all over the world have ranked one of their top reasons as wanting to make a difference in the lives of children (Mannion & Davis, 2018; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Richards, 1960). However, this is not the only reason and while many factors have remained, others have changed throughout the decades. Teaching is no longer one of just a few career options for women; gender equality has opened the doors so that those both male and female who choose to teach do so as a true choice.

During the mid-twentieth century the field of teaching experienced times of teacher abundance, followed by a limited job market and teacher shortages. As the times changed so did the motivations of teachers to enter the career. Fielstra (1955) identified the most important factors in teaching as a career choice were the persuasion of former teachers, friends, and relatives; along with, newspaper reporting on the need for teachers. Further, he identified the opportunities potential teachers saw in the field of teaching with the top two answers for both men and women being: (1) “To help youngsters develop sound values of living, desirable citizenship attitudes, and deep appreciation of the good

and beautiful,” and (2) “To work with children and adolescents and to be an inspirational friend to them” (Fielstra, 1955, p. 663). Free responses in Fielstra’s (1955) study included: “love of children”, prior experiences in teaching or working with youth, “liking the kind of people who are in the profession of teaching”, and “desire for intellectual stimulation” (p. 666). The 1960’s saw a shortage in teachers as student enrollment increased. Researchers continued to assess the factors influencing college students to choose teaching as a profession. Richards (1960) approached her study using an attitude inventory of 50 statements and determined most of the students chose the teaching field “...because they wanted to help children and anticipated personal enjoyment in the work, with salary, security, and chance for advancement being only secondarily considered in making their choice” (p. 380). Fox (1961) found that while former teachers still influenced students’ decisions to teach, the majority of elementary teachers considering the field did so mainly for altruistic reasons such as a desire to help or work with children and wanting to impart knowledge. Yet, prospective high school teachers were more practical in their considerations which included “their liking for a particular subject” (Fox, 1961, p. 430), the lure of shorter work days and more vacation time in the summer, and the “trend toward increasing salaries of teachers” (p. 430).

The 1970s saw a flooded field of teachers from the prior years of heavy recruitment; however, the field continued to see a plethora of education candidates. Vacant positions decreased from 2.4% of total positions in large school districts to just 0.2% between 1967 and 1972; a time when many states were seeing an overall “substantial excess of applicants” (Graybeal, 1972, p. 7). Wood (1978) noted that although teaching positions were “increasingly difficult to secure” at the time, candidates

still had a desire to teach stating the following motivations: experiences with children, desire to work with children, and a desire to contribute to a child's education (p. 48). A few students in this same study by Wood (1978) cited other reasons, including: others had influenced their decision, a desire to change education, advantages of the job such as mobility, schedule, pay, the challenge, and love of school.

Strong service-oriented motivation continued in the 1980s with teachers expressing a desire to help students (Book & Freeman, 1986). However, as elementary and secondary student enrollment increased and the population of college-age students was projected to decrease researchers began to focus on incentivizing teaching through economic measures (Bartell, 1987; Zarkin, 1985). Zarkin (1985) found 14.4% of secondary teachers in the reserve pool, those who were certified but not currently holding a teaching position would return to teaching if offered a 20% increase in salary. Zarkin also noted "These results suggest a substantial wage response in the public school teachers' market and demonstrate the importance of economic factors in the supply of public school teachers" (p. 19). As economic incentives were explored researchers continued to find teachers initial interest in entering the profession centered around altruistic reasons. Book and Freeman (1986) noted differing results between elementary and secondary educators in that the elementary teachers' motivations were child-centered such as wanting to work with and help children. In contrast, secondary teachers reported a desire to apply the knowledge of their subject and help students acquire knowledge and understanding (Book & Freeman, 1986).

As the 1990's approached, the reality of the shortage of teachers in urban school settings moved researchers to study the motivation of student teachers to teach in this



setting. Weiner (1990) found the students reported their initial reasons included altruistic and intrinsic motivations.

Students were attracted to teaching primarily because of its social usefulness and a desire to change society, as well as intrinsic rewards: the opportunity to be creative, the anticipation that teaching was a job they could do well, and the pleasure of working with young people. (pp. 258-259)

However, researchers found completing student teaching experiences in urban schools had varying effects on the motivations of students to commit to the field (Pagano et al., 1995; Tamir, 2009; Weiner, 1990). Weiner (1990) suggested “idealistic, academically talented liberal arts graduates” (p. 272) who participated in student teaching experiences felt discouraged from seeking teaching positions after feeling removed from the students they worked with and unprepared in skills to teach this population. In contrast, Pagano et al. (1995) found Jersey City State College students felt more motivated to teach in urban settings and noted that during their student teaching experience in the urban setting their involvement with students of diverse backgrounds gave them a desire to work with students who needed their help. Pagano et al. (1995) argued the connection and success these student teachers had in the field with students fueled their desire to teach.

### **Why Teachers Today Choose the Profession**

In more recent history the drive to teach has been framed in part around social justice; teachers today still want to make a difference (Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Tamir, 2009). Tamir (2009) found students in Elite College teacher programs saw education as a means through which solutions for systemic inequities could be attained. In a longitudinal study of teacher’s early career decisions, Cochran and associates, (2012) interviewed

teachers entering the field and found multiple participants perceived a teaching career as one dedicated to advancing social justice. Student teachers' own explanations have revealed optimistic views of their future teaching careers and their altruistic beliefs they could help children and change the world; as one teacher expressed, "I was told to find what broke my heart and fix it" (Moss, 2020, p. 1). Giersch et al. (2021) found American student teachers the most likely in comparison countries to indicate their preference to work at either a high achieving school or a disadvantaged school and suggested American teacher candidates are likely aware of the disparity in school quality in the U.S., and therefore "find appealing the idea of teaching in a school that is more effective than most or doing more to advance social equity" (p. 75).

Altruistic motivations are still accompanied by intrinsic and extrinsic purposes in varying demographics and at varying degrees. In a rural state study, 85% of participants identified the combined choice of area, interest, and passion as the most important influence in their decision to teach (Pietrzak et al., 2011). Moss (2020) noted preservice teachers indicated the encouragement of prior teachers, previous teaching, or experiences with children was coded only four times in the thematic coding of responses from 112 education major students. However, black teacher candidates referred to the inspiration of former teachers as a reason to choose teaching and listed a desire for social justice as well (Dinkins & Thomas, 2016). The motivation of second career entrants to move to teaching also involved the influence of others. Second career teachers made the transition to teaching due to internal and altruistic reasons including: experiencing teaching in small ways and realizing their own ability, the encouragement of others who recognized their

ability to work with children, fulfillment, and the understanding of how teaching could impact children (Castro & Bauml, 2009; Dieterich & Panton, 1996).

Emergency certified teachers report both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to work in the field of teaching. Mobra and Hamlin (2020) found career changers had a desire to teach but had come upon barriers and were positive about going into a profession they had always wanted to pursue. It was further noted the prospect of supporting and serving youth and giving back to society were motivating factors. Extrinsic influences included the need for work, insurance, and the opportunity to experience teaching before committing to it long term (Mobra & Hamlin, 2020).

The reasons for choosing to become a teacher are similar around the world, but lean more toward intrinsic motivation and abilities in recent studies abroad. In a study of pre-service teachers in Ireland, Hennessy and Lynch (2017) discovered students were motivated to teach because of experiences with teaching and their self-perceived aptitude in the field. Likewise, studies in both Norway and Turkey noted the motivation to teach was primarily a self-perception of the ability to teach and a general interest in doing so (Nesje et al., 2018; Zembat et al., 2020). Fenyvesiova and Pavlickova (2019) found Slovakian students were driven by their interest in working with children but were least motivated by the influence of family and their environment.

Giersch et al. (2021) conducted a small comparison study of Finland, Sweden, and the U.S. students and their motivations to become a teacher. They found the Finns expressed high expectations to be valued professionals and they as well as the Swedes anticipated being paid well. While the countries all described teaching as worthwhile and

an avenue to help future generations, the Finns were less likely to select working with children as a motivating factor (Giersch et al., 2021).

### **Teacher Retention and Attrition**

Teachers come to the profession expecting to make a difference in the lives of children during a full career in the classroom, but the turnover rates for teachers in the U.S. exceed the supply (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Day & Gu, 2009). In fact, “About 90% of the annual nationwide demand for teachers is created because teachers leave the profession” (Darling-Hammond, 2017, para. 8). Ingersoll (2003) revealed between 40% and 50% of teachers quit their positions within the first five years of entering the profession and the statistics remain high today. Harris and Adams (2007) disputed claims of comparison of attrition rates to other professions but did not deny the high rate of attrition for beginning teachers. The simple economics of supply and demand is not adequate in meeting the current needs of schools for teachers. One possible solution is to develop policies to retain teachers. Sutchter and associates (2019) noted, “Cutting teacher attrition in half—and hence reducing teacher demand—would make our current supply adequate on a national scale...” (p. 27). Teachers may be more likely to stay if schools worked to address the individualized needs of teachers. Teacher needs can be understood in the context of teacher job satisfaction (Aydoğmus & Tükel, 2019; Fisher & Royster, 2016). Examining these needs may ease teacher shortages and aid in developing approaches for administrators to best support all teachers (Fisher & Royster, 2016).

Leaders throughout the education community have expressed concern over teacher shortages and are interested in the issues contributing to it (Cochran-Smith et al., 2012; Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Sutchter et al., 2019). These concerns are not new in the

world of education. There is a body of work reflecting on teacher shortages and causal factors (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Ingersoll, 2001, Sutchter et al., 2019). Aragon (2016) argued “long-term trends indicates that the nation as a whole is unlikely experiencing a shortage crisis” (p. 3). However, Aragon (2016) acknowledged the great shortages in numerous districts and states. Martin and Mulvihill (2016) questioned the overall teacher shortage but found teacher shortages existed, at least in specific educational fields and locations. The predominant research however indicates widespread shortages (Sutchter et al., 2019).

### **Successful Career Paths**

Once teachers enter the field of teaching, there is an expectation to remain in the field as a career teacher and many do persist effectively as they serve as veteran teachers (Day and Gu, 2009). Retaining effective teachers can increase student achievement, increase a teaching staff’s productivity, lower turnover costs, and minimize disruptions in a school (Finster, 2015). Studies revealing factors to retain teachers help schools approach teacher retention strategically and benefit teacher job satisfaction.

Administrators are an important factor in retaining quality teachers (Moore et al., 2018). Researchers have found teachers are more satisfied in their positions when they perceive their school leaders in a positive manner (Glennie et al., 2016; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Learning Policy Institute, 2017) Teachers tend to stay in schools where they know they will be appreciated and supported in their work. Quinn and Andrews (2004) found first-year teachers perceived stronger support school wide when they believed they had the support of their principal. Several studies have found strong organizational support can even negate the effects of school and student characteristics predictive of

attrition (Boyd et al., 2011; Ingersoll & May, 2012; Kraft et al., 2015). Teachers need the support of a coordinated team and the administrator is key in this role. Teacher retention is higher when communication, collaboration, and collegiality between both administration and staff are present in the school (Ansley et al., 2019; Moore et al., 2018). In a qualitative case study examining teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders Prather-Jones (2011) recorded administrative and collegial support was critical in retaining these teachers, participants expressed this was shown when their principal exhibited respect, trusted their decisions, and expressed appreciation. The support of administrators has also been shown to be a key factor in small rural schools (Ulferts, 2016). The impact of the staff and administration of a school on teacher retention is seen to be a critical element. Moore et al. (2018) emphasized, “human capital has an enormous impact on teacher retention” (p. 2929).

There are exceptions in case studies as Cochran-Smith et al. (2012) noted some quality teachers remained in their schools despite the absence of administrative support while other quality teachers moved on; also, some low ability teachers stayed in their positions mostly because of the absence of administrative oversight, while other low ability teachers were let go.

Leadership styles have also played a part in the retention of teachers. Servant leaders, administrators who choose to serve first and then lead, may aid in the retention of teachers. Shaw and Newton (2014) reported, “A strong correlation between perceived servant leadership levels, job satisfaction levels, and teacher retention rates” (p. 106). Transformational principals have been praised for the culture they promote for their staff and school; whereas, teachers in schools with principals who do not possess

transformational qualities are more likely to report negative feelings toward leadership and the school culture (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). Aydin et al. (2013) found teachers' organizational commitment increases under transformational leaders and also showed transactional leadership to have a positive effect on teacher job satisfaction. They asserted, "Some dimensions of transactional leadership are needed as well as transformational leadership for an effective school management" (Aydin et al., 2013, p. 809). The link between school leadership and the retention of teachers is strong. Moore et al. (2018) suggested

Effective school leaders are instrumental in creating a culture of care focused on individual teacher growth and supporting improvements in student learning and achievement while equally creating an environment for empowerment, resourcefulness, and continuous improvement. The link among the quality of principals, caliber of teaching and levels of student achievement is tightly connected. School leadership is a key factor when it comes to retaining quality teachers. (p. 2927)

Culture is made up of the relationships and interactions among people. Harris (2015) noted "It encompasses the entire education process, specifically the values, beliefs, norms, and social patterns of all members of the school community" (p. 36). Supporting beginning teachers with the human factor can be especially effective for beginning teachers. Clandinin et al. (2015) stated,

Starting with the person allows us to consider each teacher's personal support networks, mentorship, and contexts as unique in how each person is sustained. Sustaining people who are beginning to teach begins with knowing them beyond

their “noviceness” in one particular aspect of their life. Sustaining beginning teachers requires that we know them as people. (p. 12-13)

First year teachers who identified with their colleagues in professional goals and interest and felt like they mattered, or generally had a good fit with the staff of a school, were more likely to remain in their school (Miller & Youngs, 2021). Furthermore, this fit “had a stronger association with teachers’ decisions to remain at their schools than school characteristics, teacher characteristics, principal observation activities, or mentoring-related activities” (p.7).

Culture within the classroom may also play a factor in the retention of teachers. Ulferts (2016) investigated small rural school retention and found the within-classroom sphere to show the highest mean of influence on retaining teachers in rural schools. The culture with the students that had the greatest affect was found in the following factors: relationships with students, safe environment, and small class size (Ulferts, 2016).

Resources come in the form of human capital, staff development, programs, and also in physical materials such as books and supplies. No matter which type of resource considered, resources can improve the likelihood of teachers remaining in their positions. Researchers found schools that provided resources as a matter of policy to support the retention of teachers saw not only an increase in teacher retention but also in student achievement (Moore, et al., 2018). Resources can help negate attrition even with challenging student populations. Although teacher attrition is known to increase in urban areas, teachers in one Texas urban area were more likely to stay when the student population consisted of a heightened population of at risk and special education students; this increase was attributed to the increase in multiple resources for both students and



teachers in this location (Moore, et al., 2018). Ingersoll et al. (2016) listed the quantity of resources provided to teachers for their classrooms and support provided as one of four working conditions to contribute significantly to teacher retention.

High-quality mentoring as a resource can improve teacher retention by improving teacher effectiveness and helping beginning teachers to experience success (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2011). Wiens et al. (2019) noted quality mentor programs continue to be effective in reducing teacher attrition and indicated schools incorporating the Peer Assistance and Review Program “saw a reduction in transiency rates by nearly double that of the next closest school group” (p. 108). Mentoring as a resource has the potential to improve the likelihood of teachers staying in the profession and in their schools.

Teacher autonomy can be a powerful factor in the retention of teachers. Ingersoll et al. (2016) found one of the most affective factors in teacher retention was the autonomy of the classroom teacher. They further expounded

The relationship of sanctions to teacher turnover in these schools strongly depended on how much autonomy teachers were allowed in their own classrooms over key issues: selecting textbooks and other instructional materials; choosing content, topics, and skills to be taught; evaluating and grading students; selecting teaching techniques; determining the amount of homework to be assigned; and disciplining students. (p. 48)

Math teachers listed their strongest indicator for remaining in a position as the degree of classroom autonomy afforded to them (Ingersoll & May, 2012). Thorpe et al. (2020) discussed the importance of teacher autonomy in retaining early childhood educators and called attention to the need to make provisions for teachers, “Attention to work

conditions and the social and psychological ethos of the workplace is critical to sustain the optimal engagement and well-being of educators” (Thorpe et al., 2020, p. 643).

Black teachers were found to stay in schools more often when there was a strong leadership presence, mentoring, and quality professional development in the same manner as white teachers and this retention was even stronger for black teachers who had been identified as effective on observational ratings (Sun, 2018). A unique set of factors were found to be influential in retaining teachers of color. Teachers of color were more likely to maintain their positions in urban schools with higher populations of students of color when compared to their white colleagues (Achinstein et al., 2010; Sun, 2018). Achinstein et al. (2010) found the commitment they made to the school existed in their desire to make a difference and improve the opportunities afforded to the student body and give back to the communities they identified with racially or culturally. Another factor suggested when schools maintained a commitment to provide for multicultural students, implemented resources, and expressed an inclusive culture for all, teachers of color were more likely to stay (Achinstein et al., 2010). They further found teachers of color were more likely to stay in their positions when they were afforded teacher entry programs focused on the cultural resources of the pre-service teachers and engagement in learning communities with diverse faculty.

### **Teacher Attrition**

Unfortunately, for many new teachers reaching the status of a career teacher never becomes reality. The rate at which beginning teachers leave the field of teaching is especially high in the first five years. Ingersoll (2002) found 39% of beginning teachers left their positions within the first five years of teaching. This astounding number was

based on “a rough approximation” but brought about the attention teacher attrition needed in the field of research (Ingersoll, 2002, p. 23). In 2003, Ingersoll and Smith reported 40-50% of beginning teachers left teaching in the first five years. The rate of turnover for teachers fluctuates annually but the trend for high rates of teacher turnover has continued. Between 1988 and 2004 the rate of turnover in first year teachers increased from 21.4% to 28.5%. In a longitudinal study between 2007 and 2012 Gray and Taie (2015) disaggregated the data into beginning teachers who at the end of five years moved schools, returned after not teaching the previous year, and those who were not teaching-at rates of 10%, 3%, and 17%, respectively. This data represented 30% of beginning teachers leaving their positions and correlated with the dip in attrition levels after the recession noted by Ingersoll, et al. (2018). Sutchter et al. (2019) reported the national overall turnover rate for teachers is 16%, with 8% of teachers moving schools and 8% leaving the profession with the highest rates existing in the south. Further, administrators are finding it increasingly difficult to fill the void these teachers leave (Sutchter et al., 2019).

Teacher attrition and teacher mobility are both components of teacher turnover and contribute to teacher shortages. The effect of attrition of beginning teachers is not harmless; it is accompanied by financial costs and plays a significant part in teacher shortages. The financial cost to replace a single teacher can range from \$10,000 to \$20,000 (Darling-Hammond, 2017). The national cost of teacher turnover in the United States is estimated to be over \$8 billion (Sutchter et al., 2019). National databases indicated the 2015-2016 school year was short around 64,000 teachers and the 2017-2018 school year shortage increased to 112,000 (Sutchter et al., 2019). Teacher shortages vary

by location and teaching areas but overall have been on a steady rise. Oklahoma is no exception to increases in unfilled teaching positions as illustrated by the rise in emergency certifications with 34 statewide in the 2012-2013 school year, 1,073 during the 2017-2018 school year, and a record setting 3,091 emergency teacher certifications were issued in 2018-2019 (Lazarte Alcala', 2018). Teacher attrition is most harmful to vulnerable students. The rate of teacher turnover in schools with higher enrollment of lower performing, economically challenged, special needs, and minority students is at least 10% higher than the national average (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Sullivan et al., 2017).

Clearly, teacher shortages and teacher attrition present substantial challenges for school systems. Due to these high rates of attrition, the cost to schools, and the ultimate effect on student achievement, it is important to understand why teachers leave.

When teachers lack administrative support, they are more likely to leave their positions. Moreover, perceived lack of administrator support is the most predictive factor of teacher attrition. Teachers are twice as likely to leave a school when they believe their administration does not support them as when they feel they have a supportive administration (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). This finding is based in teacher perception. In some instances, a dissonance existed between administrators and teachers wherein the teachers lacked confidence in their administrative team, district initiatives, and the voice to express their genuine needs; meanwhile, administrators felt they were supporting their teachers effectively through coaching initiatives and remained unaware of the struggle teachers had in the classroom, especially with student behavior (Ramos & Hughes, 2020).

High poverty, Title I schools experience teacher attrition at a 50% higher rate than low-poverty schools (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). The reasons have historically been rooted in disparate conditions: these schools provided fewer resources, had poorer working conditions, and consisted of student and family populations who had many needs (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). These statistics do not look much different today. Teachers who leave the profession are still more likely to be from a school with a greater ratio of minority students, higher level of poverty, or large populations of English language learners; all populations presenting unique challenges (Espel et al., 2019). Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) found schools with the highest population of students of color (more than 55%) suffered turnover rates 70% higher than schools with populations made up of less than 10% students of color. Student racial proportions may play a lesser role than presented by some studies as researchers who also considered working conditions in their studies reflected a reduced relationship in student race and high teacher turnover rates (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). When teachers in urban settings develop an understanding of the culture of their students, they are more likely to stay regardless of racial makeup or poverty levels of the students (Moore, et al., 2018).

Studies indicate student behavior is a factor in teacher turnover (Ingersoll & May, 2012; Ramos & Hughes, 2020). Finster (2015) found while effective teachers were happy with most facets of their positions, the teachers who were dissatisfied with their administration and student behavior were those with a desire to leave. Ramos and Hughes (2020) revealed 59% of teachers, in their sample of 200, reported student behavior was a problem in delivering instruction and 75% believed if more resources were provided to

assist with student discipline the teacher turnover rate of the school would diminish. One teacher interviewed by Ramos and Hughes (2020) expounded

I have thought about quitting more than once. The behaviors that students have are extreme and I have never felt so degraded and harassed. If it were not for the support of my admin and coach, I would have quit in the first month. I do not know how much more I can withstand, but as long as they are trying, I will try as well. (p. 11)

An interesting finding in this study was the administration leaned on behavioral coaches to intervene in discipline issues and in some instances administrators remained unaware of the difficulties teachers were experiencing in the classroom for months until it reached the point of no return, literally, for beginning teachers (Ramos & Hughes, 2020). The leadership of schools is a critical part of supporting teachers with managing student behavior and classroom management. Ramos and Hughes (2020) suggested “schools need to respond to classroom and attrition challenges more holistically through policy that invites and respects teacher inputs as much as hard data on student behaviors” (p. 15).

Salary plays a part in the attrition of teachers. Researchers have found teachers who move schools are more likely to come from schools providing lower than average teacher compensation (Espel et al., 2019). In comparison, districts providing salaries from \$72,000 to \$78,000 experienced 20 percent less teacher turn over than districts paying an average salary in the bottom fifth (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Adamson and Darling-Hammond (2011) provided some stark contrasts in salaries between affluent schools and neighborhood schools existing just miles away. For

instance, New York City schools' median salaries and those in the neighboring Nassau schools were so disproportionate the range did not even overlap. While affluent schools attracted certified teachers, those in places such as Harlem had high rates of turnover and provisional teachers, those not fully certified to teach (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2011). While not all schools are as extreme in wage disparity, the lure of salary can work hand-in-hand with school districts high in economically advantaged students and lower rates of diversity making it difficult to delineate salary as a lone determinate. Ingersoll and May (2012) found although science teachers indicated maximum earning potential as one of the strongest factors to stay in a school; math teachers showed no indication of salary as a motivator to either stay or leave. Further, in spite of these findings teachers in this study who moved schools tended to move horizontally toward the same demographic types of schools (Ingersoll and May, 2012).

Teachers working in high minority schools leave at a rate approximately 70% higher than those working in schools with a minority population of less than 10% (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). This departure is greater in struggling schools for teachers in all subject areas with the exception of English Language Development teachers as high minority schools have more positions and greater need for these teachers than schools with low enrollment of minority students. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) reported black teachers feel called to teach in high-poverty areas and are directly related to improving student achievement in these communities. Yet, while close to "80% of Black teachers work in schools in the top quartile of students of color, and more than 70% teach in title one schools" (Carver-Thomas & Darling-

Hammond, 2017, p. 22), the overall turnover rate for black teachers is about 22%, almost 50% higher than non-black teachers.

Teachers in specific subject areas do not leave the profession in proportionate numbers; the rates of turnover vary. Mathematics and science teachers have historically had higher rates of turnover than general education teachers. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) found “Teachers of mathematics, science, special education, English Language development, and foreign languages are more likely to leave their school or the profession than those in other subjects” (p. 30). They noted the shortages in these areas are felt nationwide.

### **Motivation and Teacher Retention**

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs can provide one avenue to organize and explain teacher motivations to remain effective and stay in the profession. Maslow’s theory (1943) explains how human needs are met through five basic motivational strata. Fisher and Royster (2016) aligned the motivation of teachers with Maslow’s physiological needs to convey a description of the motivational needs of teachers. Many teachers indicate a desire to make a difference in the lives of children as their motivation to enter the teaching field (Mannion & Davis, 2018; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Richards, 1960). This could also remain a motivating force as teachers strive to reach self-actualization or as Maslow (1943) referred to it, “become everything that one is capable of becoming” (p. 382). When teachers are able to grow to their fullest potential in their teaching career, higher teacher retention rates may be realized.

### **Teacher Motivation**



The term motivation was derived from the Latin word *movere* which means simply to move (encyclopedia.com, 2021). Motivation is the element which creates responses and gets people moving in one way or another. It helps us to develop and reach personal, group, and organizational goals. In education, motivational factors create tension which can be used to influence the actions of the faculty, staff, and the students. Praver and Oga -Baldwin (2008) asserted “Teachers that are motivated will work harder, put more effort in to trying new techniques and activities, and in general do more for the sake of the students, all of which contribute to smoother classes and more efficient learning” (pp. 1-2). The motivation of teachers can involve a multitude of complex factors. Researchers have found altruistic, intrinsic, and external factors may influence teachers to enter the profession (Alexander et al., 2020; Pietrzak et al., 2011; Tamir, 2009). Likewise, these same teacher motivations are carried into the profession and are reported by inservice teachers (Alexander et al., 2020).

Alexander et al. (2020) established a relationship between the inservice teacher’s self-concept and motivation. The most prominent intrinsic factors specified were the value of teaching as a career, their self-perception of personal abilities for teaching, and their belief they could meet the demanding task of teaching with success (Alexander et al., 2020). Furthermore, “Teachers who were intrinsically interested in and enjoyed teaching were also shown to be motivated by altruistic values to provide service and benefits to children/adolescents and society at large” (Alexander et al., 2020, p. 8). Male teacher responses were more likely to indicate intrinsic motivators such as an interest in teaching and an interest in the subject area than altruistic factors; social status and salary, extrinsic factors, exhibited lower rankings. Although the sample size in the Alexander et

al. (2020) study was large, its low response rate could point to the respondents being more motivated teachers in general and most useful for establishing motivational influences in resilient teachers.

Self-efficacy, an individual's belief in their ability to perform a task, can be a motivating influence in teacher's continued commitment. Demir (2020) found for teachers "self-efficacy is a predictor of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, motivation and job involvement" (p. 217). Efficacy has also been tied to teachers' professional agency to learn within a professional community; it was found to be one of several elements which also included skills and motivational factors (Pyhältö et al., 2015). They further established the professional agency of teachers had a direct relationship with their ability to seek out and accept support from colleagues, which reduced work-related stress. Praver and Olga-Baldwin (2008) proposed factors based on their study to motivate language teachers to persist in the classroom; these included: intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy along with autonomy, positive work relationships and strong collegiality, suitable compensation, job stability, institutional support and training, and the opportunity for self-realization through personal goal setting and the expectation of success in the classroom.

Relationships and belonging in a school could impact retention of inservice teachers. Employees "experience a sense of purpose in their work when they feel valued and appreciated by their supervisors and colleagues" (White, 2016, p. 24). Ozcan (2020) suggested teachers appreciate when school principals positively enforce school procedures and rules and build relationships to support teachers' professional development especially as the show appreciation for the teachers' abilities and

knowledge base and create open communication. “School principals’ constructive criticisms, recommendations for solutions, cooperation with teachers and communication may increase teachers’ motivation” (Ozcan, 2020, p. 317).

Relational motivation is not limited to supervisors and colleagues. In a qualitative study by Kraft et al. (2015), they observed teachers’ care for students as a motivating factor; for example, one respondent replied, “I love the kids I work with and that is what keeps me coming back” (p. 764). The authors noted, “Time and again, when we asked teachers why they stayed in these schools, they responded, ‘the kids’” (p. 764). The relationships teachers build with their students can be highly motivating especially when success is experienced by both the teacher and student. Close bonds are formed with high needs students and provides motivation. Difficult challenges can come with satisfying rewards: this was captured well by a teacher from the Kraft et al. (2015) study:

One of the things I like most about them is also the most frustrating... They have so much potential and you can see it in them, but then they also shut down so quickly. So, I really like just getting through at least to one or two kids, and you can see a change and you’re like “Yes! Yes! Success!” (p. 764)

Beyond relational motivation, this quote exemplifies teacher esteem or possibly self-actualization, which may be experienced when making a difference in the lives of others.

## **Maslow**

### **History**

Maslow published his first paper introducing his hierarchy of needs in 1943 and continued to develop his motivational theory through the 1950’s (Maslow, 2012). Since the theory’s introduction, Maslow’s work has made a substantive contribution to

organizational management with continued endurance (Kaur, 2013). Maslow consulted with several companies to utilize his motivational theory in the work place. Lussier (2019) asserted,

A new constellation of psychological techniques, motivational theories, and corporate strategies were mobilized through job design programs and motivation training between the 1960s and the 1980s. [This] helped to shape a particular conception of the work ethic that continues to resonate today: the idea that work could and should be a major site for self-actualization. (p. 338)

Maslow's theory of motivation has been used in research for decades but not without critique. Some researchers critiqued the theoretical underpinnings (Geller, 1982; Neher, 1991) while others defended the scientific basis (Ginsburg, 1984). It has been supported as empirically generalizable across cultures through the common human experience (Taormina & Gao, 2013; Yang, 2003) but also viewed as applicable only to individualistic, mainstream cultures (Francis & Kritsonis, 2006). Through the years the breadth and depth of research analyzing Maslow's work has provided empirical evidence to its importance in physiological and organizational theory (Stewart et al., 2018; Taormina & Gao, 2013).

### **Maslow's Theory in Education**

Maslow's theory has been researched to provide a model for a positive school climate in public schools (Weller, 1982), to retain college students (Brookman, 1989), and to determine teacher motivation and its significance to productivity (Adiele & Abraham, 2013).

Maslow's theory continues to be used in education today. Fisher and Royster (2016) used Maslow's theory to understand the needs of mathematics teachers in order to provide better support strategies for all teachers. Fisher and Royster (2016) associated Maslow's hierarchy of needs with the needs of teachers by drawing the following parallels: (1) physiological needs as subsistence, the basic needs of a beginning teacher; (2) safety as the salary, benefits, and general feelings of fairness in their positions; (3) belonging was associated with the relationships the teachers formed with teams or groups and the support of their families and friends; (4) self-esteem was viewed through the idea of achievement, the teachers' actual capacities, and respect given by others; and, (5) the self-actualization in teaching was seen as reaching the "pinnacle" (p. 1004) of their teaching career.

Fisher and Crawford (2020) examined a promising practice of a rural administrator who implemented the use of Maslow's hierarchy beginning with the physiological stage to provide food for students and continuing the model to support the struggling school one stage at a time. The model hierarchy was implemented from the bottom up and included: physiological needs of food and supplies for students and resources for the teachers; the meeting of safety needs at school and events with the involvement of parents and community; the love need included an emphasis of teams, sports, and support in educational endeavors; meeting esteem needs through recognition of work, rewards for attendance, school titles, and competitive spirit; and self-actualization was considered on its own merit (Fisher & Crawford, 2020). The school achieved an improved culture and higher achievement through the endeavor and serves as

a model of meeting student needs and overall school improvement going “from school of crisis to distinguished” (Fisher & Crawford, 2020, p. 17).

### **Tenets of Maslow’s Theory**

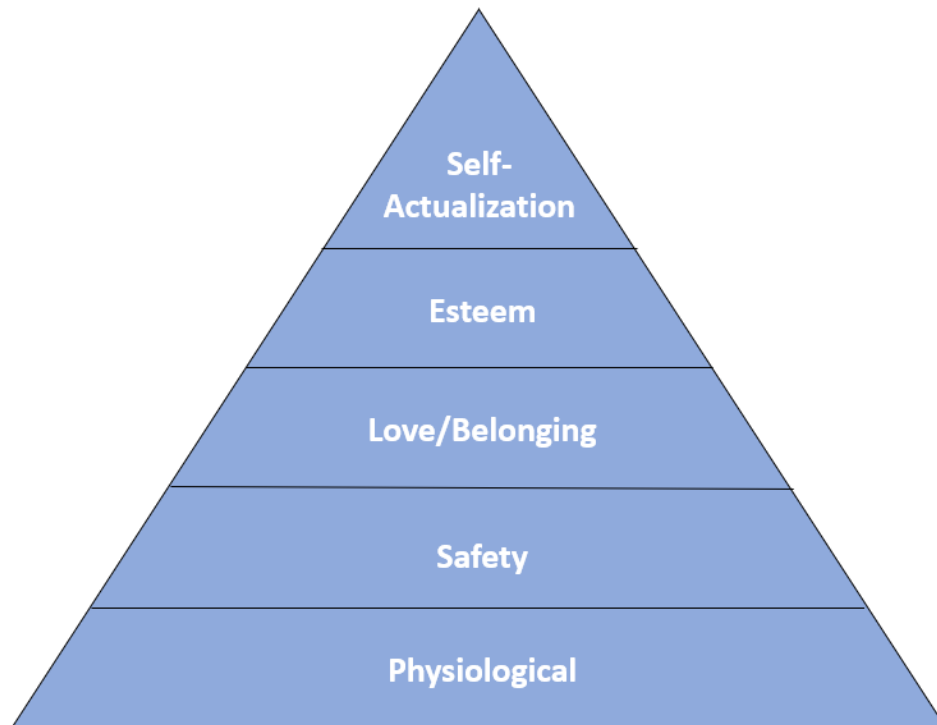
Maslow’s theory of human motivation asserted, as basic physiological needs are met in an individual, it frees them to focus on their safety needs; then, as safety needs are met the same happens for the higher levels of need, love, esteem, and self-actualization, respectively (Maslow, 2012). “The hierarchy is not a matter of valuing what is ‘important’ but, rather, whether one is physiologically ‘deprived of something which, when sufficiently lacking, gives rise to the need” (Taormina & Gao, 2013, p. 157). Thus, if the physiological needs and safety needs are met a person will feel the lack of relationships and will desire to fulfill the need for love or belonging. This is more often the case than not as Maslow explained, with some exceptions, most people do not experience great hunger and for many adults safety needs are manifest in the need for financial security (Maslow, 2012). Maslow’s theory (2012) allows for variance in total satiation of a need as he introduces the love needs. “If both the physiological and the safety needs are *fairly well* gratified, then there will emerge the love and affection and belongingness needs...” (Maslow, 2012, p.14). Love and belonging are relational needs that require a reciprocal nature; people need to feel they belong to a group. The esteem needs are based in respect, the ability to achieve and feel self-esteem and receive the respect and appreciation of others. Self-actualization can exist when one finds their needs mostly met and is able to come to their full capacity as an individual and do what one feels they were made to do. Maslow asserted the hierarchy is not “rigid” (Maslow, 2012, p. 19) as some people may value one need over others or experience the needs differently

at different times in their lives. “The average member of our society is most often partially satisfied and partially unsatisfied in all of his wants” (Maslow, 2012, p. 28).

Figure 2.1 shows a visual representation of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.

**Figure 2.1**

*Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs*



**Importance in this Study**

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is organized to show the necessity of fulfilling the lower-level needs before moving on to the higher order needs. In a teaching career, as with many professional jobs, the lower-level needs are mostly met and employees are ready to meet the higher-order needs within themselves. Maslow (2012) noted the average citizen does not experience true hunger but instead appetite; for most in an advanced society, physiological needs are met. With physiological needs mostly met, teachers are ready to meet any unsatisfied needs in the level of safety and the higher order

needs of belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Teachers may have a desire to be valued, committed to their work, and proud of their accomplishments as well as many other desires. In Cangemi's (2009) case study of disgruntled employees, he found although their lower-level survival needs were met, the employees lacked any consideration of their growth needs. Cangemi's (2009) findings point to self-actualization and self-esteem as the apex for employees. The need to create and have independence to continue growing is how he defines self-actualization and he explains self-esteem as the need to be significant or "the need to be somebody" (pg. 40). Stewart et al. (2018) provided a helpful explanation of how employees' various levels of needs are intertwined and cannot necessarily be addressed in isolation: "Ultimately, there are two ways in which a company can compensate its employees: material or economic rewards, and emotional or psychological rewards. Neither is sufficient by itself, and material rewards do not beget psychological ones on their own" (Stewart et al., 2018, p. 68). The various motivations found in Maslow's pyramid of needs provide a framework to examine the many possibilities of individual needs for teachers in the classroom which may be met in part through administrative practices.

### **Micropolitan Area Schools**

#### **Micropolitan Area**

Micropolitan statistical areas in the United States are centered in an urban cluster or urban area with a population of at least 10,000 but fewer than 50,000 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). There are 536 micropolitan areas in the United States (Ratcliffe et al., 2016). Each of these micropolitan areas are recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as Core Based Statistical Areas and all contain a principal city (Gevert,



2015). Examples of the 18 micropolitan cities in Oklahoma include Woodward, Stillwater, Muskogee, Duncan, and Ardmore. Micropolitan area principal cities can be classified as either urban or rural.

### **Research in Micropolitan Areas**

Although the U.S. Department of Education recognizes micropolitan areas as a statistical classification, research in education continues to be largely delineated between urban and rural criterion (Biddle & Azano, 2016; Kraft et al., 2015; Moore et al., 2018; Pietrzak, 2011). “Nonmetropolitan is often used synonymously with rural, and while there is overlap, these geographic entities are not identical and should not be used interchangeably” (Ratcliffe et al., 2016). The National Center for Education Statistics uses 12 geographic locale classifications; these are based on size for cities and suburban areas and on proximity for town and rural assignments (Geverdt, 2015). This classification identifies both a micropolitan principal city with a population of approximately 37,000 and a nearby town with a population of approximately 4,000 as both “Town: Distant”, meaning they are both between 10 and 35 miles from an “Urbanized” area (Geverdt, 2015). However, these two entities are very different in their size, services, businesses, and their school district characteristics. For example, all 18 micropolitan area school districts in Oklahoma have multiple elementary sites and allow for transfers between schools and at times require them to balance their student/teacher ratio and equity; unlike smaller rural schools who have single elementary sites.

The micropolitan area classification can be readily found in research concerning economics, health, business, and sociology (Gonzalez et al., 2007; Karim & Chen, 2021; Liu et al., 2021; Stetz, 2017). In the realm of education only two published studies were

located and include the subjects of inequalities of informal learning institution availability to Indigenous people and student persistence at a micropolitan university (Short et al., 2020; Williams & Luo, 2010). No research concerning teacher persistence, retention, nor attrition was found for micropolitan area school districts.

### **Covid19**

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared a pandemic involving COVID-19, an acute respiratory coronavirus originating in China (Ghebreyesus, 2020). COVID-19 spread across the world creating serious impacts on aspects of everyday life including: the economy, lifestyles, transportation, education, and both the physical and psychological health of individuals (Khalifa et al., 2021). The effects of COVID-19 have become a serious issue. Since the start of the pandemic, researchers have included the aspect of COVID-19 affects in organizational commitment and in the area of education to determine its impacts on individuals in society (Khalifa et al., 2021; Riehm et al., 2021).

The pandemic resulted in changing the platform of schools and delivery of education at all levels (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020; Hong et al., 2021; Kazouh et al., 2020). This major shift in the delivery mode of education had an impact on teachers and students. Researchers have incorporated the effects of COVID-19 on teacher stress and job satisfaction in their work since the pandemic began (Hong et al., 2021; MacIntyre et al., 2020; Walker et al., 2020). Collie (2021) found supporting teacher autonomy by school leadership was associated with lower stress and lower emotional exhaustion in teachers; while, “autonomy-thwarting leadership” (p. 9) had the opposite effect on workplace buoyancy. Multiple studies found mid to high teacher stress levels during the

pandemic (Klapproth et al., 2020; MacIntyre et al., 2020; Oducado et al., 2021). Moser and Wei (2020) found language teachers in the U.S. “felt untrained, marginalized, and emotionally overworked (p. 26). Less than 50% of the members expressed a strong commitment to stay in education as language teachers and these stayers were the only members to report solid administrative support (Moser & Wei, 2020). Hoang (2020) researched teacher retention in Southeast Asia during the time of the pandemic and found schools should stay aware of their policies and regulations during COVID-19 and create more opportunities for social engagement for expat teachers.

The approach of another school year brings more uncertainty as COVID-19 continues to spread. Darling-Hammond and Hyler (2020) acknowledged “With the advent of the pandemic, even greater efforts are called for in meeting the social-emotional needs of children and implementing trauma- and healing-informed practice, all while making up for learning loss and preparing for the coming unpredictable combinations of distance learning, blended learning, and in-classroom learning” (p. 457).

### **Summary of Chapter**

Chapter two provided an in-depth review of the literature concerning this study and the need for it. First, teaching as a career choice was presented, including a history of the motivation of teachers to teach. These motivations include altruistic, internal, and external factors. The factors have varied through the years but the literature yields evidence many teachers want to make a difference in the lives of children. Teachers continue to choose the profession for the same types of reasons but more recently include the desire to influence society through social justice. Next, teacher retention and attrition were presented as turnover rates in the U.S. remain high for schools. Much of the demand

for teachers is created by teachers leaving the profession. The literature review reveals factors which effect some teachers' choice to stay in the classroom. The most prominent reasons include positive school culture with administrators who support their teachers and show appreciation, available resources, mentoring, autonomy, and quality professional development. The high rate of teacher attrition was examined, including the reasons teachers leave. Teachers are more likely to leave their positions when they lack administrator support, experience poor working conditions, have student discipline issues, or are paid a lower than average teacher salary. The subject areas of math, science, special education, and English language development have higher rates of attrition than other subject areas. Finally, Maslow's theory of motivation was presented, including its history, applications in the area of education, the tenets of his theory, and its importance to this present study. The motivational theory of Maslow provides a framework for examining the motivations of teachers to stay in the classroom. The statistical micropolitan area is defined and discussed to develop the importance of the population of this study. Current literature on COVID-19 studies in education are addressed because this study will potentially be implemented during the pandemic.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

Teacher retention in this study was explored through qualitative methodology, which provided a deeper understanding of why teachers persist in their careers. Maslow's hierarchy of needs considers how individuals' needs are met. Using qualitative research to explore teacher persistence through Maslow's hierarchy of needs allowed for a narrative portrayal of how teachers attribute meaning to their teaching experiences. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted, "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 6).

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Teachers pursue the teaching profession for a myriad of reasons including making a difference in the lives of children and thus our communities (Moss, 2020; Pietrzak et al., 2011). Unfortunately, from one-third up to one-half leave their position within the first five years of teaching (Ingersoll, 2003; Sutcher et al., 2019). Teacher attrition directly affects student achievement (Ronfelt et al., 2013; Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). One explanation for teachers leaving could be the inability of schools to provide for the needs of the teachers. This problem can be approached by examining how teachers' needs of

job satisfaction are fulfilled and what motivates their drive to be successful using the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Fisher & Royster, 2016).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs why teachers who have taught between five and 10 years in a micropolitan community stay in the profession.

### **Research Questions**

1. What factors informed elementary teachers in an Oklahoma micropolitan community to persist more than five years in their profession?
2. How did motivational factors promote their persistence in the profession?
3. How does Maslow's hierarchy of needs explain the above?

### **Research Design**

The epistemology of constructivism was the cornerstone of this research to build the meaning of the teacher's experiences through their own perceptions. Crotty (1998) reflected "Constructivism describes the individual human subject engaging with objects in the world and making sense of them" (p. 79). Social constructivists hold that individuals have their own perceptions of their experiences which are complex and the researcher's role is to make sense of the meanings of others (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

I investigated how teachers perceived job satisfaction through a qualitative case study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted, "The overall purpose [of qualitative research] is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences" (p. 24). A qualitative case study encompasses the qualitative theoretical framework in a bounded system in order to tell the stories that lie within and reveal their meanings and members'

understandings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The bounded unit was teachers who had between five and ten years of experience and were teaching in a micropolitan public school system. The construction of meaning used data from participant perceptions through interviews, focus groups, observations, journaling, field notes, and reflection, as qualitative case studies are underpinned using multiple sources of information to understand the unit of study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The unit of study in this research was the perception of job satisfaction and motivation for this group of teachers. In keeping with the qualitative framework, I, as the researcher, was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 16).

## **Methodological Procedures**

### **Participant Selection**

The sample was selected using purposive sampling of the available participants. The population was elementary teachers in a single Oklahoma micropolitan city public school district who had taught between five and ten years. Ingersoll (2002) found 39% of beginning teachers left their position within the first five years of teaching. This population allowed me to research teachers who had remained in the classroom past the critical fifth year but were not near the end of their careers. Purposeful sampling of the population allowed me to study teachers who could provide insight into job satisfaction. Merriam and Grenier (2019) explained “since qualitative inquiry seeks to understand the meaning of a phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants, it is important to select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 13).

I selected ten total participants from four elementary schools existing in the district. Six elementary schools existed in the district but one was delineated as a magnet

school and one was not be included in this study; my position as a reading specialist may have caused a power imbalance in this location. One to Four subjects were selected from each elementary school site in order to create maximum variation in the sample and to allow any common patterns to arise within the shared boundaries of the study (Patton, 2015). Maximum variation supported the transferability of the study by creating diversity in sites and participants which could be “applied to a greater range of situations by readers or consumers of the research” (Merriam & Grenier, 2019, p. 29). Participants were contacted initially for inclusion in the study through email and were given one week to confirm their agreement to participate. When enough volunteers did not respond the invitation was resent and followed up with a personal contact. Ten participants from four schools volunteered for the study.

### **Procedures**

The timeline for implementation was four months. First contacts with potential participants were made after IRB approval was secured. The participants completed an informed consent document and were confirmed by the second week. Initial individual interviews were held between the fourth and twelfth week of the study. These same participants were invited to participate in a focus group. Two focus groups of three participants were conducted after individual interviews were complete. Teachers were also given a journal and asked to record a minimum of four entries at different periods of time noting their experiences that effect their job satisfaction. Six participants returned their journal entries. A portion of participants who returned journals were not the same as those participating in focus groups. The use of interviews, focus groups, observations, journaling, and member checks allowed for triangulation of data. “Interview transcripts,



field notes from observations, and documents of all types... can help you uncover insights relevant to the research problem” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 107).

### ***Interviews.***

Interviews allowed me to gather the unobservable perceptions of teacher job satisfaction. Individual interviews were conducted with a semi structured format of open-ended questioning. This provided a guide of focused questions to explore and also allowed for a flow of natural exchange as the conversation developed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). “Less-structured formats assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 110).

The individual interview was held prior to the twelfth week of the study. Interviews provided the perceptions of the teachers’ motivation to continue. Interviews were held in a neutral location at the convenience of the participant and were limited to one hour. Each interview was followed up on the same day with written field notes and reflections. Researcher journaling aided in the integration of analysis of data as it unfolded. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted, “...collection and analysis should be a simultaneous process in qualitative research” (p. 195).

### ***Focus Group.***

Two focus groups of three participants each were conducted after completion of the interviews to generate further knowledge of the teacher’s experiences and perspectives. This group size produced productive interactions to reveal the teachers’ perceived motivational factors. The focus groups were made up of the same participants who were interviewed. By allowing these same participants to engage in the focus group new insights were revealed as the teachers grew comfortable in their peer group and

reflected on personal experiences in the context of group exchanges. Focus groups provide a unique opportunity for a social construction of knowledge on the subject at hand; it can bring together a broad range of perspectives while revealing commonalities and variety through open discussion (Hennink, 2014). The focus group was held in a neutral but private setting. It was conducted with a semi structured format. Questions were adapted to guide the relevance of data generation and follow up questions were asked and remained in the subject of the field of questions proposed. Observational field notes of non-verbal data were written immediately following or within the same day to ensure accuracy. All interviews were voice recorded and fully transcribed in order not to limit the findings through exclusion. A member check was completed within two weeks of the focus group in order to maintain reliability and validity.

### *Interview Questions.*

The interviews and focus groups were designed with open ended questions in order to create depth to the experiences of the teachers and gather the meanings these experiences brought at a very personal level and lent power to the findings; they also allowed me to capture the points of view of the participants without interjecting my own point of view (Patton, 2015). A semi structured set of questions allowed the interview to be “guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored... This format allowed the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondents, and to new ideas on the topic” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, P. 110). Follow up questions and questions along the same subject line were asked during the interviews for clarification and understanding of the events of the year and the connections participants made.

### **Interview Questions.**

1. Why did you choose teaching as a profession? Does this still play a factor in your desire to teach?
2. What are your experiences in teaching that encourage your continued service in the field?
3. What do you like best about your current teaching position?
4. Describe your relationships at school.
5. What experiences have you had in leadership roles you fulfill in your school and in the district?
6. Please tell me about any continued education you have attained or may pursue.
7. How/where do you receive appreciation?
8. How do you make a difference in the world through teaching?
9. What advice would you give someone who wants to become a teacher?

### **Focus Group Questions.**

1. What factors have influenced you most in persisting in the teacher profession?
2. Discuss how the covid19 pandemic has affected you as a teacher and your motivation to continue teaching.
3. Where do you see yourself in five years? Explain.
4. Is there anything I haven't asked or we haven't discussed, you would like to share?

### ***Observations***

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted observations are a primary source of data for qualitative research and are unique in that observations “...take place in the setting where the phenomenon of interest naturally occurs... observational data represent a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a secondhand account of the world obtained in an interview” (p. 137). I observed participants in a variety of occurrences in the educational setting which included staff meetings, grade-level meetings, and staff development. During observations detailed field notes were collected and included notations as suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) on the environment, contextual notes, the participants’ presence, the interactions and activities observed, unobserved data (that which does not happen), and my own role in the setting. I took the stance of participant as observer during a staff development session, observer as participant during a grade-level meeting, and complete observer at a staff meeting as appropriate to the available setting and informed the group of observational data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### ***Documents and Artifacts***

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), documents are a “ready-made source easily accessible to the imaginative and resourceful investigator. These types of data sources can exist in both a physical setting and an online setting” (p. 162). Artifacts are physical objects that are meaningful to the participant/s or the setting of the research study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Documents and artifacts can provide a stable resource for the researcher to examine details. For this research project, journal entries of six participants were analyzed for importance.

### **Table 3.1**

### *Data Collection Strategies*

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Initial Interview Questions</b>	<b>Focus Group Questions</b>	<b>Documents and Artifacts</b>
<b>What factors have informed elementary teachers in an Oklahoma micropolitan community to persist more than five years in their profession?</b>	2, 3, 4, 5	2, 3, 4	Field notes Journals Reflections
<b>How did motivational factors promote their persistence in the profession?</b>	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	1, 2, 3, 4	Field notes Journals Reflections
<b>How does Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs explain the above?</b>	8	3	Field notes Journals Reflections

### *Data Analysis*

Inductive analysis was incorporated to allow patterns and important aspects of the data to emerge instead of presuming what the important data would be or hypothesize the results (Patton, 2015). Analysis was ongoing, beginning with the conception of the study in forming questions and creating opportunities for the member's meanings, beliefs, and perceptions to be unmasked. Researcher journaling aided in the integration of analysis of data as it unfolded. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained "...collection and analysis should be a simultaneous process in qualitative research" (p. 195). Member checks were used with both interviews and focus groups.

All interviews were recorded and fully transcribed using Temi, an online transcription service, in order not to limit the findings through exclusion. The transcriptions were checked and corrected as the automated online transcription

processing did not catch all words accurately. A framework of the themes emerging from collected data was built through the systematic collection and analysis of data to bring reoccurring and connected themes together to create deeper meaning and perceptions (Oliver et al., 2005). Inductive manual coding was used and included in vivo coding and values coding. “Values coding is the application of codes to qualitative data that reflect a participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview (Saldana, 2016, p. 131). In vivo coding allowed the participants’ words to be coded rather than words or phrases of the researcher. Manually manipulating the data on cards gave me more control in exploring the data. Second round coding included focused coding to develop major categories from the data to compare with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.

I kept an analysis journal to record insights and connections found throughout the study. Merriam & Tisdell (2016) noted “the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (p. 16). Journaling helped me to monitor my own biases and judgments and be reflexive in my analysis of the data and my beliefs.

### ***Data Storage***

Data were stored on a flash drive and on my personal computer. Data being shared for purposes of educational support through my committee was transmitted via Oklahoma State University email. Printed copies of transcripts, coding notes cards, and other printed documents were stored in a file cabinet in my home. Data were organized and labeled with participant number, date, and where the data was collected in order to access accurate information for analysis throughout the study.

### **Researcher Role**

## **Researcher Bias**

I possess an undergraduate degree in early childhood education and a master's degree in reading. I have also been a Nationally Board-Certified Teacher as an early childhood generalist. My tenure in the school district I serve is 24 years at five different elementary schools. I have held the roles of teacher, instructional specialist, and am currently in my fourth year as a reading specialist and Reading Recovery teacher. I have also served as the district summer school elementary principal.

My position in the district leaves me with a unique perspective and bias. Since bias cannot be completely eliminated Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested, "Rather than trying to eliminate these biases or "subjectivities," it is important to identify them and monitor them ...to make clear how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data" (p. 16). Throughout the research process I monitored my personal bias by participating in reflective research journaling to remain aware of thoughts and considerations rooted in my own perception.

## **Trustworthiness of Findings**

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) reminded researchers "Being able to trust research results is especially important to professionals in applied field because practitioners intervene in people's lives" (p. 237). In order to ensure trustworthiness and credibility, ethical considerations concerning data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation were utilized.

## **Data Verification Strategies**

Validity was achieved in this research through the use of triangulation in data collection using interviews, focus groups, and member checks. This triangulation of data

collection ensures the trustworthiness of the study (Mills & Gay, 2016). Merriam and Grenier (2019) verify "...from an interpretive perspective, triangulation remains a principal strategy to ensure for validity and reliability" (p. 26). Triangulation was used in the analysis of the data using denaturalized full transcriptions, inductive theme and pattern analysis, and incorporating a research journal. This rigorous analysis strengthens the dependability by ensuring "...the results are consistent with the data collected" (Merriam & Grenier, 2019, p. 28). To strengthen the transferability of results the research used rich, thick descriptions, "...enough description and information for readers to be able to determine how closely their situations match, and thus whether findings can be transferred" (Merriam & Grenier, 2019, p. 29).

### **Limitations**

Limitations in this study exist due to my position as the leader in the district in which I conducted the study. Participants may have been guarded in their responses due to my position. The limited sample size of participants may not translate into generalization in other micropolitan area elementary schools.

### **Ethical Considerations**

All individuals participating in this research study were granted the reasonable expectation of privacy. No identifying information about the individual was revealed. Further, participating schools' identities were not revealed. Individuals participating in this study had a reasonable expectation that information provided would be treated in a confidential manner and information revealed throughout the study would not be given to anyone else or used in any manner, outside the confines permitted by the IRB. Individuals participating in this research study were informed of the nature of the study



and chose whether or not to participate. They were not coerced into participation. Informed consent was signed upon initial agreement to participate in the study and prior to each data collection point. Member checking occurred following the focus groups and one-on-one interviews to ensure reliability. Reciprocity was extended to each participant in the form of a \$25 gift card following the exit interviews. IRB approval was secured prior to the beginning the study. No data collection begin until IRB approval was attained. The Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) training was completed in accordance with Oklahoma State University guidelines.

### **Summary of Chapter**

This chapter provided a summary of the methodology for the proposed qualitative research in the form of a case study. The methodology is aligned to understand how the subjects interpret their own experiences and the meaning they assign to those experiences (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). My role as a researcher and potential bias was revealed. The design, data collection strategies, data analysis strategies, verification strategies, and limitations were addressed.

## CHAPTER IV

### NARRATIVE PRESENTATION OF DATA

Chapter Four presents a narrative description of data collected during this study. The purpose of this study was to explore through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs why teachers who have taught between five and 10 years in a micropolitan public school stay in the profession. This chapter first reviews the history of the school district and then provides details about the four elementary sites and the teacher participants. Finally, this chapter organizes the data collected by the themes that emerged through the process of qualitative data analysis. The emerging themes included: relationships; student success; passion for teaching; impact; self-efficacy; appreciation, recognition, and respect; affinity for children; and security. Data were collected through interviews, focus groups, observations, and journals within four elementary schools located in the River City School District: Chilton Elementary, McKinley Elementary, Hillman Elementary, and Lemont Elementary. The structure of the school district and its demographics are addressed in the overview to build the backdrop of this micropolitan area school district where the teacher's stories take place.

#### **Overview of District**

River City Public Schools is a mid-sized district located in a small city designated

as the center of an urban cluster, known as a micropolitan area, a statistical area delineated to provide appropriately detailed geographic analysis. It has a population of around 38,000 people and is a county hub for many small rural communities providing access to healthcare, government services, employment, and shopping. According to the 2020 census, the city’s racial context is 51.8% white, 15.4% African American, 16.3% Native American, 0.7% Asian, 0.1% Pacific Islander and 10.8% reporting two or more races. Hispanic ethnicity is reported for 8.4% of the population. The median income is about \$38,000 with a per capita income of \$21,000 and 23.9% of people living in poverty.

River City Public Schools has a population of approximately 4,700 pre-K-12 students. The ethnic population is 28% white, 22% African American, 18% Native American, <0.1% Asian, <0.1% Pacific Islander, 17% Hispanic, and 13% Multi-Racial. Limited English Proficiency exists for 9.4% of students. River City Public Schools is ranked in the top 1% of the most diverse schools in the state. There are five K-5 elementary schools and one K-8 elementary art school. The district provides free breakfast and lunch for every student due to the high poverty rate. Table 4.1 provides the demographics of both the students and teachers of the four participating elementary schools.

**Table 4.1**

*Participating Elementary School Demographics*

	<b>McKinley Elementary</b>		<b>Hillman Elementary</b>		<b>Lemont Elementary</b>		<b>Chilton Elementary</b>	
Teachers (T)	T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S
Students (S)								
American Indian	18%	10%	5%	6%	5%	8%	29%	7%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0%	<1%	0%	0%	5%	<1%	0%	<1%

African American	27%	10%	37%	34%	15%	21%	11%	8%
Hispanic	0%	16%	0%	11%	0%	11%	0%	17%
Two or More Races	5%	30%	0	28%	5%	34%	0%	34%
White	50%	33%	58%	21%	70%	25%	60%	33%

Changes in the structure of elementary schools began as the 2015-2016 school year approached; the local school board voted to close one of ten elementary schools in the district due to declining enrollment and a flat-funded budget for 2016. Nine of the elementary schools served K-6<sup>th</sup> grade students and one was a magnet school serving K-8<sup>th</sup> grade students. This move dispersed 197 students and ten classroom teachers and staff. It was the smallest school in the district. In 2019, with a continued decline in students and as virtual schools sprang up, the district once again faced the need to make changes. A new superintendent brought fresh ideas and the local board decided to close two more elementary schools and reconfigure elementary schools to contain K-5<sup>th</sup> grade students and make one of the former elementary schools a 6<sup>th</sup>-grade center. This moved around 800 students and their teachers from their home schools. The district's school boundaries were redrawn, and the school year began with six K-5<sup>th</sup> grade elementary schools, one K-8<sup>th</sup> grade elementary magnet school, and one 6<sup>th</sup> grade center. One of the remaining K-5<sup>th</sup> grade elementary schools was moved to two different sites in August 2020 in order for a new elementary building to be constructed. Misfortune was plentiful during that year and in January 2020 one of the elementary schools was forced to close due to irreparable damage. This elementary moved into an empty building and continued in that building for the next year. It was closed in 2021, and students were dispersed among the remaining K-5<sup>th</sup> grade schools for the 2021-2022 school year. The new elementary building was ready for occupancy of K-5<sup>th</sup> grade students for the 2021-2022

school year. As of the 2021-2022 school year, the district consisted of five K-5 elementary schools, one K-8 magnet school, one 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> grade center, one 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> grade center, and one high school. These changes have not only affected the students but the teachers have made every move alongside them.

The diminishing space has also forced an increase in class sizes. Kindergarten classes increased from 20 to 22. First through third grades classes have increased from a limit of 20-22 students to contain between 22-25 students, and fourth and fifth grades increased from 24 to have up to 30 students in classes in River City Elementary schools. The increased class sizes, maneuvering the trials brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the increased use of virtual education brought new challenges for teachers.

### **Participants**

Teachers serving in four selected elementary schools who had between five and ten years of teaching experience were invited to participate in the study through a direct email. Three respondents quickly replied affirmatively. I sent a second email and received four more affirmative responses. After this, I was able to speak in person with the qualifying participants; three more agreed to participate in the study.

The participants in this study had unique experiences, characteristics, and perspectives. Providing information about each interview participant and their initial motivation to become teachers will help the reader see these participants. This information is important in considering their motivation to continue in the classroom. One of the teachers in this study is African American, one is Native American and eight are white. Their schools are not provided to protect their identity. Three of the participants taught at Hillman Elementary, one taught at McKinley, two taught at Lemont

Elementary, and four taught at Chilton Elementary. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the privacy of individual teachers. Table 4.2 provides a summary of the profiles of the participants.

**Table 4.2**

*Participant Profile Summary*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Years of Experience at River City Public Schools</b>	<b>Years of Experience at Current Elementary</b>	<b>Number of Elementary Schools Taught in</b>	<b>Years of Experience in Teaching</b>	<b>Grades Taught</b>
Ann	7	6	2	7	K, 2, 3
Amara	2	2	3	10	K-1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Sarai	8	2	2	8	K, 2, 3
Kassi	8	1	6	10	K, 1, 2, 3
Becca	7	0 <sup>a</sup>	5	7	K, 1, 2, Music
Lisa	10	2	2	10	1, 2, 5
Amy	4	4	2	7	4, 5, 6
Justine	6	6 <sup>b</sup>	1	6	K, 1, 2, 3
Donna	9	0 <sup>a</sup>	5	9	3, 4, 5, 6
Abby	10	0 <sup>a</sup>	4	10	K, 4

<sup>a</sup>Participants' first year at assigned elementary school

<sup>b</sup>Not continuous service

**Ann**

Ann had been teaching in the district for seven years. She had taught at two schools in kindergarten, second, and third grades. Ann began working toward her degree in teaching after substituting in her children's school and working as a paraprofessional. She found she loved being in the classroom and working with children. A principal noticed her talent for it and encouraged her to finish her degree telling her, "You really need to go back to school and finish your degree. You are so good at this" (Ann, interview, December 8, 2021). She agreed thinking, "Oh my gosh, this is so much fun. I love it. I just could hang out with kids" (Ann, interview, December 8, 2021). Ann

displayed the characteristics of a calm, professional teacher; always prepared to take on the day.

### **Amara**

Amara had taught for River City Schools for two years in fifth grade and had prior experience in another state. She had always wanted to be a teacher but was pushed toward the medical field as close ties told her “That’s just a dream. Don’t dream about being a teacher” (Amara, interview, January 3, 2022). They said she needed to go into a field where she could make more money. She followed that path and began working in the medical field after graduating. However, her heart wasn’t in it; she tutored on the side while she was in school and then found other areas in which to work with children including daycare and substituting. She put herself back through school to become a teacher. She shared, “Where I was from, they didn’t have a lot of African American educators in the Title I schools... I thought, okay, I’ll go to public school because there’s a need” (Amara, interview, January 3, 2022). Amara’s drive to do her best and serve her community was evident in her continuing professional and personal development and also her service commitments to the community at large.

### **Sarai**

After five previous years in an early childhood setting, Sarai attained her bachelor’s degree and began teaching for River City Schools. She had been with the district for eight years. She had taught in two different elementary schools and three grade levels. As a child, Sarai enjoyed teaching her dolls and had always had the desire to teach. She said teaching came naturally to her and she felt confident in what she did and liked to use her own style in the classroom. Sarai had the heart and the desire to care for

children and provided all she could for them whether that was in the classroom or beyond.

### **Kassi**

Kassi wanted to do something she was interested in and also felt that she was good at. As she matriculated to college, she initially chose one career path but ultimately changed her direction to teaching because of her love for children. Her family saw how good she was with children and encouraged her in her endeavor to teach. When talking about children she shared, “I just knew that I had that passion of being around them, and it was enjoyable, and I was good at it” (Kassi, interview, December 16, 2021). Kassi had been teaching for River City Public Schools for eight years and had taught at three sites. She had also served at three area rural schools. Her teaching experiences were in grades Kindergarten, first, second, and third grades. She completed a total of 10 years in the classroom prior to the 2021-2022 school year. She seems to always carry upbeat energy and addresses her life and challenges in a positive light.

### **Becca**

This was Becca’s eighth year with River City Public Schools. During that time, she had taught at five schools in grades kindergarten, first, second, and music. Becca loved being with children and felt a connection with them. After working in daycare to spend as much time with her own children in their formative years as possible, she worked toward her teaching degree in order to provide a better income for her family in a position she felt confident in. Becca shared her self-confidence, “I’ve always kind of been good with kids” (Becca, interview, January 31, 2022). She enjoyed watching



children and helping them succeed. She had a personality of a steady, always there, let's-get-it-done teacher.

### **Lisa**

Lisa had ten years of teaching experience as she started the 2021-2022 school year. She taught at two different schools in the River City Public School district in the first, second, and fifth grades. She liked to play school as she grew up and always liked children. For Lisa it was simply natural, "I've always gravitated towards that" (Lisa, interview, January 31, 2022). Lisa was the quietest of this group of participants but in her quietness, there was a strength. She had a tender heart for children and loved to build them up.

### **Amy**

"Teaching's kind of in my family" (Amy, interview, December 7, 2021). That is what drew Amy to teaching. She grew up with it and when her children were going to school, she knew she wanted to be there too. Amy was pure energy and could talk as fast as she moved. She put all that energy into building relationships with her students. Amy had spent four years in the district and came in with 3 prior years of experience. She has served in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades in one school.

### **Justine**

Justine came to teaching to serve and help others and had been doing that for six years teaching in kindergarten, first, second, and third grades. She is from a line of educators and family dedicated to service for others and our country. "I think I just kind of have that in my personality, that call to duty for others. It's something that I always knew that I wanted to do. I always even played kind of teacher growing up as a child...it

was nothing that I really ever had to second guess. I just kind of knew cause that's what I wanted to do from a long time ago" (Justine, interview, December 9, 2022). Justine had an upbeat personality which at the same time exuded strength of character.

### **Donna**

Donna had worked in River City Public Schools for nine years and taught in five schools within the district. She had taught in the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. When Donna needed to rejoin the workforce, she had a choice to make. She loved children and knew she didn't want to return to daycare so teaching looked like a good career path. Donna was a no-nonsense teacher who wanted things done fair and right.

### **Abby**

Abby's first job was tutoring middle school students after school. She enjoyed being around kids even when she was younger and shared that "Kids kind of just always came naturally to me, being with kids, even when I was younger" (Abby, interview, January 6, 2022). She also knew teaching would give her the same hours as her children, and family was very important to her. Abby had spent ten years with River City Public Schools. She had taught kindergarten and fourth grades. She seemed quiet at first and then showed her spunky side. Devotion to her family is at the forefront but she desired to do and be her best for her students.

## **Factors in the Motivation to Teach**

Teachers in this study presented multiple reasons to stay in the classroom. Each teacher brought their own experiences and perceptions to bear on the matter. The emerging themes in the data included: relationships, student success, passion for teaching, impact, self-efficacy, appreciation, recognition, and respect, an affinity for

children, and security. The order of perceived importance is listed respectively and is presented below according to factors emphasized by the participants.

### **Relationships**

The relationship was the most discussed motivator of these teachers in the classroom. This encompassed relationships with students, colleagues, administrators, and parents. All the participants discussed their relationships and how they affect them in connection with being a teacher. The most important factor expressed was the relationships with students. All of the participants mentioned this aspect and 70% of relational references concerned students compared with colleagues 13%, administrative 10%, and parents 6%.

### ***Student Relationships***

Many of the teachers expressed how they loved their students. Ann related the love of the students and the relationships she had with them as one of her favorite things about teaching at Lemont Elementary, “I love my students. I have a relationship, really good relationship with most of them and I like making connections with them” (Ann, interview, December 8, 2021). The love she gave was reciprocated as well. She shared,

The kids. They love me and they know I love and care about them. The hugs they give me they tell me they love me, just, they want to do good. They want to show me what they know. I think that is a big part of just the appreciation that I feel.

(Ann, interview, December 8, 2021)

Abby was heartbroken when her school was closed. She shared, “I loved our kids”

(Abby, focus group, February 21, 2022).

Sarai noted, “I can’t stress enough how important it is to build relationships. Educators think of their students as if they were their own kids” (Sarai, journal entry, February 11, 2022). Sarai enjoys a meaningful relationship with them, “...they come into Walmart and things you know them. You’ve seen them. You’ve had them in school, church... you know them. It’s more meaningful to me” (Sarai, interview, December 13, 2021). She desired for students to continue the relationship, “If you can come back to me and you can bond with me and you can talk with me or need just a few minutes out of your class, a situation, or whatever, you’re always welcome to come back” (Sarai, interview, December 13, 2021). The term “bond” pointed to a reciprocal experience in the relationship. This language was not used in connection to other types of relationships. Becca shared, “...in those aha moments, when you have that kid that does achieve it, or writes you a note “I love you” ... you know there’s that bond between you and the kids. I like that” (Becca, focus group, February 21, 2022). The joy the teachers expressed while talking about their students was evident. Kassi shared, “It’s the best job in the world. You’re going to get all the love... I get more of the love from the little ones than anything” (Kassi, interview, December 16, 2021). She noted, “There are things I would change but... working with children is rewarding in and of itself. I love my students” (Kassi, interview, December 16, 2021). Amara shared how this relationship extends outside the classroom,

I spend a lot of time with them outside of school doing things, their church programs, their football games, basketball games, recitals, that kind of thing. So, I’m more like a relative to them than a teacher. I think that helps in the classroom because they trust me. (Amara, interview, January 3, 2022)

The students are a big part of why these teachers stayed in the classroom. Amy expressed, “I stay for the kids... just give me kids all day long. I will deal with kids all day long. I can make that work. I don’t want any part of the other” (Amy, interview, December 7, 2021). She loves and cares for her students. She shared, “You want to make sure that they’re taken care of and they’re getting everything they can get” (Amy, focus group, February 18, 2022). She doesn’t just form relationships with her classroom students, “I’m actually building some relationships with much younger kids that will move up through the years” (Amy, interview, December 7, 2022). When the district asked Lisa to move schools she requested to stay where she was, “I just couldn’t leave my children. I wouldn’t do that to them. I felt bad when I had to go on maternity leave” (Lisa, focus group, February 18, 2022). These relationships built a desire in the teachers to stay with their students in their schools. They wanted to see the students continue to grow through their educational careers and come back to see them and maintain that connection. Donna noted “...seeing the students every day, getting attached to them and having former students come and say hi, or getting a hug” as motivating factors to stay in the classroom. Justine shared,

That made everything that I’ve done worth it. The fact that that’s a positive relationship that I still have with these kids that are getting into their teenage [years] and older. And so that just continues to kind of drive me to keep doing what I’m doing. I want to be that person they come back to. (Justine, interview, December 9, 2021)

In this statement, Justine referred to the students as kids and all of the participants referred to students in this manner in their interviews and conversations. In these

instances, teachers referred to more personable relational ties than when they use the word “students,” which was more directed at the purpose of teaching in the classroom.

Kassi’s statement was clear,

But what really gets me is the kids. It’s all that’s ever forced me to stay in my profession is I’m going to miss the kids, being in the classroom environment with all the kids... that is what has always drawn me toward education. (Kassi, interview, December 16, 2021)

Amara shared, “I spend a lot of time with them [kids] outside of school doing things... I think that helps in the classroom because they trust me” (Amara, interview, January 3, 2022). “It’s where they [the students] know they can trust me. It’s not an ‘I got you’; it’s, she really cares” (Amara, interview, January 3, 2022). The relationships built with students allow the teachers to impact students’ lives. While journaling Kassi expressed,

These are the questions I ask myself when I feel overwhelmed. “Why did I get into education? What is it about teaching that I love? What is it about teaching that keeps me excited? These are the answers that keep me motivated and keep me striving at my profession. The students! They are the reason I entered this profession in the first place, and the reason I get out of bed every morning. My devotion to kids is constant, and my desire is to positively impact their little lives every day... I love my students regardless of the school in which I teach, and regardless of the circumstances. (Kassi, journal, April 12, 2022)

### ***Colleague Relationships***

Relationships with colleagues were also important to teachers, although they were mentioned less than student relationships. These teachers saw teaching as a relational

field and a big part of why they taught. Developing working relationships with colleagues was an important factor for all of the participants. Many referred to collegial relationships in terms of friendship, team, and family. Kassi had taught at six elementary sites in River City Schools. She had moved districts and come back. She preferred it here because “It’s family, basically... I know a lot of people. It’s nice. When I do see them, I’m like, hey, I know you. I have that relationship” (Kassi, interview, December 16, 2021). Even after being placed in the one school that she didn’t want to move to she said, “Guess where they placed me. But I fell in love with all the people that I [worked with] and I really, I cried and cried when they move me from there” (Kassi, interview, December 16, 2021). She also developed a close relationship, “I have a colleague... She helps me and we’ve just built that, she’s my best friend now” (Kassi, interview, December 16, 2021). She noted her connections, “It’s definitely been a great experience here at [McKinley Elementary]. I really enjoy being here. I have several [teachers] that I’ve worked with previously, so I have that connection with some of my colleagues” (Kassi, interview, December 16, 2021). The sense of family was a good reason to stay for Lisa. She spoke fondly as she told, “It just feels like a home... just that school family, cause we’re in it together... the teamwork that we have here, we’re a really good team.” She also shared, “I get to teach next door to my best friend, with my best friend. And so, we kind of do a lot of team teaching and I’m really enjoying that” (Lisa, interview, January 31, 2022).

Abby saw how relationships impacted the school culture, “When your staff likes each other, they honestly get along. There’s a difference in your school” (Abby, focus group, February 21, 2022). Abby expressed, “I love our staff” (Abby, focus group, February 21, 2022). This difference in the culture gave the teachers a reason to stay in

their school. Amara shared enthusiastically, “I love the campus. I don’t know any other ones [in the River City Schools district], but I would prefer to stay here. I love the staff” (Amara, interview, January 3, 2022).

Becca would have preferred to remain at her school too, “So the staff I work with would be, yeah, really a reason to stay in this building for sure” (interview, January 31, 2022).

Justine appreciated the support she got from her colleagues,

We help each other out. We have a really strong relationship. We all have the same goals and every one of us could not have a more different teaching style. We just work well together. I really enjoy coming to work and knowing that I have such good backup and good support from them. (Justine, interview, December 9, 2021)

Donna noted, “There’s three other third-grade teachers here and we get along and we work together as a team. It’s always nice to work together as a team with your coworkers, cause I’ve had both and I prefer to tag team and try and work together on stuff” (Donna, interview, January 4, 2022). Sarai wanted to stay at her school, “I don’t like moving. I like being able to stay at a school... it’s those bonds and those relationships.” “I think I just love people!” (Sarai, interview, December 13, 2021). She appreciated the support she received from colleagues, “I do have a handful of my peer teachers and staff that I can talk with that support me” (Sarai, interview, December 13, 2021).

### ***Administrator Relationships***

The relationship with administrators was presented mostly in context following discussions about the relationships with students. Principals were appreciated when they



connected with the students, worked to build a community atmosphere, and created relationships with their staff. Abby noted,

The way your staff interacts with each other, it makes a difference in the way your school is ran. When your staff likes each other, they honestly get along, there's a difference in your school. When we got our principal, I felt like she built a certain community within the teachers that we had there. (Abby, focus group, February 21, 2022)

Kassi shared, "I really enjoy my administrator. She has my back and I love that about it. She's real... she does stick with the rules, but she really helps you if you are struggling" (Kassi, interview, December 16, 2021). Becca shared the same sentiment, "I love my principal... I'm very comfortable... She's just really supportive" (interview, January 31, 2022). Lisa reflected on how her principal cared about the staff and checked on their well-being. "[I] just felt really blessed to have her" (Lisa, interview, January 31, 2022). At the end of a focus group discussion, when asked if there was anything more the participants wanted to discuss, Lisa reinforced,

Just again, relationships. And it is about the children and leadership. In the past two years, I wanted to quit. I didn't even want to come to work because I didn't have good leadership... Your principal is like the teacher of the teachers. You need to try to have a relationship with me. You want me to have relationships with kids. It is those relationships." (Lisa, focus group, February 18, 2022)

The little things mattered in the relationship between principals and teachers. Donna noted she liked when the administration did the "little stuff for you" like giving a little something at Christmas or doing small things (Donna, interview, January 4, 2022).

Abby appreciated that her principal built a “community” or “family atmosphere” among the staff. (Abby, interview, January 6, 2022). Amy said her principal was really good about “building relationships” and “making sure people interact” (Amy, interview, December 7, 2021).

### ***Parent and Community Relationships***

Parental relationships were mentioned by two teachers. This relationship was seen as necessary to support the teacher in being successful in teaching the students. It is also extended to the community and building relationships with the people who lived in our community. Being part of the community allowed the teachers to use that relationship to build up students and the support systems they have.

When considering advice to give to those going into the teaching field Ann said, “Think about it and decide if they want to spend that much time and devote that much emotion to other people” (Ann, interview, December 8, 2021). When reflecting on what motivated her to continue teaching she shared, “Really making connections with students and parents and thinking about these kids that I’m teaching are going to be adults when I’m an old lady” (Ann, interview December 8, 2021) ending with a chuckle. When Lisa was asked what had influenced her most to stay in the classroom, she replied, “The relationships, coworkers, and relationships with my students and even parents” (Lisa, focus group, February 18, 2022). She summed it up in her interview, “A relationship... you know, we, everybody wants that” (Lisa, January 31, 2022).

Sarai shared how she preferred being part of the community, “I like [this] district... It’s the community in which I live, even if somebody was to pay me more” (Sarai, interview, December 13, 2021).

## **Student Success: Today and for a Lifetime**

Student success was an important factor for all the teachers. It motivated them when they experienced the learning moments with the children. Sarai loved to see the “light bulb” moments and expressed, “I enjoy those teaching moments, those opportunities that just come up... to see the wheels roll, like, oh, that makes sense” (Sarai, interview, December 13, 2021). She also supported them in developing character and confidence, “I received a compliment on a student’s behavior today... I have really worked on building his confidence this year and it’s showing” (Sarai, journal, January 3, 2022). Justine said, “I really like being able to be a part of a child’s life and seeing the connections that are made and little lightbulbs that go off and they’re like, oh, I got it” (Justine, interview, December 9, 2021). Student success seemed to have a two-fold effect. The first was the student’s learning and how it boosted self-esteem and scaffolded to create future success for the child. Becca reminisced, “Ah, when you have that kid that does achieve it” (Becca, focus group, February 21, 2022). Donna enjoyed the smiles of the students when they improved on literacy testing. This motivated the teachers to continue to plan for further success. When Amara saw her students succeed, she thought, “Let me figure it out, what I need to do tomorrow, so they can get the next part of it. I’m really driven by that. I love it!” (Amara, interview, January 3, 2022). Teachers were not simply concerned with the immediate successes in the classroom but also the possibilities of future success through the elementary and secondary school years and beyond. Becca spoke about preparing her students for their next challenge, “My hope is that I’m preparing them for the next grade as fully as possible” (Becca, interview, January 31,

2022). Sarai was passionate about keeping the future of the students in mind as she taught more than academics,

A lot of kids let the events in their lives define what their future holds...

Everybody can have a growth mindset, work hard, and be successful. It does not matter how much money you do or don't have, where you live, or what you wear.

When given the opportunity, all students can shine and overcome. (Sarai, journal, December 3, 2021)

The second effect was that student success was also a success for the teacher and may be considered within the context of self-efficacy. Becca shared, "I've always been kind of good with kids and really enjoyed watching them go through milestones and feeling part of that, that I was helping them succeed" (Becca, interview, January 31, 2022). Ann shared, "I love watching students learn to read. It's really exciting to me... Just make me feel good. That I know I'm doing what's right for kids and teaching them" (Ann, interview, December 8, 2021). Amara was driven to do all she could. "There are so many needs, you have to learn other things... I want to know what else I can do" (Amara, interview, January 3, 2022). Amy talked about the "aha moments" (Amy, interview, December 7, 2021) and later wrote, "Today was a good day! Everyone did well on the rule's tables, in and out charts. Win!" (Amy, journal, January 17, 2022). She later shared, "I'm able to make sure they're getting what they need" (Amy, focus group, February 18, 2022). She makes a difference "...in every way possible: attitude, discipline, academics. I mean, everything" (Amy, interview, December 7, 2021). Kassi foresaw long-term success, "One of [my] students are going to go out and do wonders. And when I see it, I was a part of their life. And that's what gets you, like, yes! I did something" (Kassi,

interview, December 16, 2021). When Justine saw a student succeed, she felt it gave an intrinsic reward, "...makes you feel like you're doing something right" (Justine, interview, December 9, 2021).

### **Passion**

The expression of having a passion to teach was not only repeated but emphasized with exuberance when it came up in interviews and focus group discussions. Merriam-Webster.com (2022) included in its definitions of passion, "intense, driving, or overmastering feeling or conviction" and also "a strong liking or desire for or devotion to some activity, object, or concept". Teachers expressed this passion with the words: passion, calling, drive, and desire.

Kassi noted this passion as her reason to choose the teaching profession, "I just knew that I had a passion of being around kids and it was enjoyable" (Kassi, interview, December 16, 2021). Amara shared her story of listening to family and friends tell her not to go into teaching and how she first attained a degree in nursing before putting herself back through school to become a teacher because she had such a desire to teach. "I had thought about it all my life. I want to teach. I want to teach and I always taught on the side" (Amara, interview, January 3, 2022). She noted her drive as the reason for still being in the classroom. "I think it's just the drive" (Amara, interview, January 3, 2022). However, her drive may not have been enough to keep her in the classroom. She shared,

I don't think I will stay in the classroom... once you get a skill set and kind of tap out of it, and your skill set pushes and drives you. And I think that I have been driven out so we'll see how it goes. But I think really honestly, I've been driven out of the classroom. (Amara, interview, January 3, 2022)

She noted, “In five years, I would like to coach, just really coaching teachers” (Amara, interview, January 3, 2022).

For some this desire or passion did not stop once they entered the classroom. It was a motivator to overcome even the most trying times; as Sarai expressed, “At the end of the day if it’s truly your passion and it’s truly what you want to do, you’re going to go through all the struggles. You’re going to deal with it” (Sarai, focus group, February 18, 2022). She also noted, “I think that’s the key because you’re not doing it for incentives. The pay is not the best” (Sarai, focus group, February 18, 2022).

Amy spoke about the passion she has for teaching and how it drives her to care for the students like they are her own children and how the passion for teaching has made it a part of who she is even beyond the school walls. Amy referred a comment back to a colleague during a focus group, “It goes back to the same thing, she’s in it because that’s her passion or she wouldn’t be in it” (Amy, focus group, February 18, 2022). Amy not only expressed her own passion for teaching, but she also did so in a passionate voice each time she spoke about it. “Once you find your niche... you’re just like this is where I’m supposed to be” (Amy, focus group, February 18, 2022). She shared the advice she would have given someone considering becoming a teacher ardently,

If you’re not passionate about it then you are wasting your time and kid’s time.

It’s not just a job; it’s your life... You don’t ever leave it here. It is your life and if you’re not passionate about something... If you’re a doctor and you’re not passionate about bedside manner, you shouldn’t be a doctor. If you’re a teacher and you’re not passionate about changing the kids’ lives, you shouldn’t be a teacher. (Amy, interview, December 20, 2021)

When asked where she saw herself in five years, the response was quick, “Right here. I do not ever plan to leave the classroom” (Amy, interview, December 20, 2021). She never doubted what she was called to do. She discussed passion more than any other participant and shared,

This is the most mentally and physically draining job you will ever have in your lifetime. But people that it’s their passion, they can say it with a smile on their face! They don’t care that it’s the most physically, and mentally draining job on Earth...that’s what they’re called to do. (Amy, focus group, February 18, 2022)

Justine discussed how the pandemic affected students’ need for attention and how it in turn affected her motivation, “It just eats at me cause I see it every day; these kids are starving for attention... and so I feel like now the desire to teach is even stronger than when I first started” (Justine, interview, December 9, 2021). She shared,

I always played teacher growing up as a child. It was nothing that I really ever had to second guess. I just knew cause that’s what I wanted to do from a long time [ago]... I think my mom was even like are you sure you want to be an educator, because you know, you definitely don’t do it for the money, we all know that. It’s just one of those things that you have to have a desire to do.” (Justine, interview, December 9, 2021)

She expressed her need to teach in several ways throughout the interview: a desire, a calling, and a passion. She said,

I think it has to be a calling and I definitely feel like it is. I can’t imagine doing anything else, even though I literally go home and just (takes a deep breath and slowly releases it), or complain on a daily basis to myself about things I see and

things I want to change. But again, I would never do anything else. (Justine, interview, December 9, 2021)

Justine would have encouraged young people who had the desire to teach to do it but to go in with realistic expectations, “Again, you have to really have a passion and a calling for this” (Justine, interview, December 9, 2021). Passion was also a qualifier for determining retention in the classroom for Justine, “I see myself as having my masters and if I’m still enjoying being in the classroom then, and I still feel that passion, that calling, then that’s what I plan on still doing” (Justine, interview, December 9, 2021).

### **Impact**

When teachers walk into a classroom, they have the desire to make a difference in the lives of their students. The impact they are able to have on their students is important as they work to help where needed and change what they can for the better not only for their students but for the world. Teachers knew when they entered the classroom that they would have the opportunity to impact their students’ lives. Amara chose to teach in public schools where she felt she could make the most impact. She shared, “I would see the kids come in for after-school care and they just had so much they needed... I thought, I’ll go to public school because there is a need” (Amara, interview, January 3, 2022). Ann and Sarai both talked about experiences they had when they were young and their desire to make the experience in their own classrooms different for children. Ann shared,

I had a teacher when I was a kid that I did not like and it was clear she didn’t care for me. It pushes me to do better for these kids and make sure they know I care about them and care about their learning and care about their life. (Ann, interview, December 8, 2021)



Sarai discussed experiences in her childhood and how she thought, “I bet there’s a lot of kids going through what I was going through and I can really make a difference with them because I kind of understand what a lot of them are going through” (Sarai, interview, December 13, 2021). Justine had always had the desire to help others, “I come from a line of educators... it’s something in my personality. I think it’s a desire to help others and there’s no real age-specific group... that call to duty to help others” (Justine, interview, December 9, 2021).

Academics was one means by which teachers could help students. Justine explained how her students had a broad range of needs this year due to the continuing covid19 pandemic, “All of them are just crying for help and I want to be a positive influence” (Justine, interview, December 9, 2021). Many of the conversations centered around helping the students become good people overall, with teachers expressing a desire for their students to learn to be compassionate and kind toward one another. Lisa expressed, “So really just trying to help mold good humans” (Lisa, interview, January 31, 2022). They are realistic in knowing everyone won’t work academically at the same level but do expect to influence the students’ character. Donna said, “I try to teach my students to be better” (Donna, interview, January 4, 2022). She tells them, “You don’t have to be [the smartest] to make the world better. Be kind.” She repeated emphasizing the importance of it, “Teach them to be kind no matter what, be kind” (Donna, interview, January 4, 2022). Sarai noted, “Just teaching them to be compassionate” (Sarai, interview, December 13, 2021).

Teachers are natural helpers and enjoy helping their colleagues. Their contributions are an investment in their school. Amy enjoyed mentoring others at Chilton

Elementary, “I have people coming and watching... how to make it work and what to work on. Then just helping out the new teachers this year” (Amy, interview, December 20, 2021). Ann mentored at Lemont Elementary, “I think I’ve been able to help teachers in our building that are new just understand how we work as a school district really” (Ann, interview, December 8, 2021). Sarai included fighting for the rights of teachers as a way to impact her school. She shared, “I want to continue to fight for the rights of teachers to teach in their own style” (Sarai, journal, December 16, 2021). For Amara helping others motivated her to be a lifelong learner. She said, “I want to work on my doctorate now. I just got National Board Certified... The more you learn, the more you can do and the more you can help other people” (Amara, interview, January 3, 2022).

Teachers saw how contributing to making a change or being an influence on students’ lives had lasting effects. Ann brought it full circle with a smile,

I want them to know how to read. I want them to know how to count. I want them to know things to be able to take care of me and the world, really. I want to make a difference in their life. (Ann, interview, December 8, 2021)

Kassi spoke confidently,

There’s always a teacher in your life... So, I feel I have made a difference, somehow. One of those students is going to go out and do wonders. And when I see it, I was a part of their life and that’s what gets you. Yes! I did something.

(Kassi, interview, December 16, 2021)

Amy saw it all as part of the “big picture”. She expressed, “One person can definitely make a difference, and that literally, the future is in your classroom. I’ve seen the

difference that it makes and so that's what keeps me in it" (Amy, interview, December 20, 2021).

### **Self-Efficacy**

Teachers' beliefs in their own capacity to effectively teach their students was a strong motivator for some teachers. For one participant this confidence grew from encouragement from others. Ann told that when she worked as a paraprofessional at her school the principal told her, "You really need to go back to school and finish your degree. You are so good at this. This is a natural talent for you" (Ann, interview, December 8, 2021). She enjoyed teaching, "It just makes me feel good that I know I'm doing what's right for kids and teaching them" (Ann, interview, December 8, 2021).

For other teachers, the feeling of being a good teacher was something they just knew. Becca shared, "I feel like I'm good at it" (Becca, focus group, February 21, 2022). However, this did not mean she would remain in the classroom setting. "I still want to teach, but tutoring or reading specialist or librarian. They just keep packing the kids in. You can't teach them effectively" (Becca, group focus, February 21, 2022).

Sarai noted, "If you put me in [grade level] because I know what it is. I can boost them even more. ... I'm not tooting my own horn but the reason they wouldn't move me from [my grade level] is because I was getting good results. And it was like, if I'm doing good, let me do good" (Sarai, interview, December 13, 2021). She preferred to teach in her own way and shared, "Everybody has ideas on how to teach, but not everybody teaches the same. My teaching style gets good results" (Sarai, journal, December 16, 2021).

Amy was confident,

I am good at very few things, but I know I am a good teacher... at least these 26 kids are getting what they need because I hold my kids to very high expectations, but I hold myself to very high expectations. (Amy, interview, December 20, 2021)

Kassi knew she wanted to pursue teaching because she felt good at it. Her family also encouraged her. She shared, "They're like, you really are good at this" (Kassi, interview, December 16, 2021). This still motivated her to teach; in five years she said she still planned to be teaching, "Still teaching, for sure. It's something I'm good at and I enjoy doing. I know what I am doing and I don't want to do anything new" (Kassi, interview, December 16, 2021). She was in the position she planned to stay in but looked to attain her master's degree in the future. "One of my goals is to eventually go back and get my masters... I don't know exactly what in. So, that's what's stopping me. I look at areas I'm good at" (Kassi, interview, December 16, 2022).

This area of discussion did not come without some counter comments. Teachers wanted to be respected and acknowledged for the work they did. They wanted to be given the opportunity to truly develop their craft to its highest level. During a focus group discussion, the participants shared their stories with each other. Receiving criticism without encouragement or a positive word was difficult. Sarai expressed, "If no one can find anything positive to say about what I'm doing, then it must be me. I'm doing it wrong. You need to say one positive thing about my room or what's going on" (Sarai, focus group, February 18, 2022). The teachers discussed being moved around from school to school and grade to grade and how it took time to develop the knowledge and tools to teach a different grade level. "They can't expect you to be proficient at your job whenever that's happening. If you're teaching a different grade every year, that's hard"

Amy commented (Amy, focus group, February 18, 2022). Lisa emphasized, “I want to be valued. I want to be valued. People thrive in consistency” (Lisa, focus group, February 18, 2022). Amy exclaimed, “Just leave me here and let me teach!” (Amy, focus group, February 18, 2022).

### **Appreciation, Recognition, and Respect**

Receiving appreciation, recognition, and respect from others was another motivational factor. The sources included students, parents, colleagues, administration, and the community.

Ann was encouraged by a principal to go to school and become a teacher. She shared how he told her, “You are so good at this. This is a natural talent for you” (Ann, interview, December 8, 2021). Without this external evaluation, Ann may have never had the confidence to become a teacher. She received appreciation from her students and from her colleagues. She appreciated when other teachers commented on her teaching, “...you do such a great job with this one. You’ve done this... different things that they acknowledge” (Ann, interview, December 8, 2021).

Justine appreciated the encouragement she received from her principal and colleagues even in the little things. However, the regard she received from her students is what made her feel accomplished. She shared,

Right now, we are doing Christmas cheer... every day the office is doing something to just keep us encouraged and keep us going, keep us motivated. Not that we really need that, but it’s just showing appreciation, just little things... positive notes, positive reminders, little things in the lounge here and there. Even as adults, we like those extrinsic rewards, keeps us going. But as far as intrinsic

rewards go, as you know, definitely from the classroom, seeing the kids come back today and them being moved to tears by seeing me teach. That's a reward... It makes you feel like you're doing something right. (Justine, interview, December 9, 2021)

Amara enjoyed the respect she received from her principal which was shown through his trust in her lessons and teaching. She explained, "[My principal] is really good at trusting that you're just going to do it. He just knows at the end of the day the kids are going to learn. I'm standard driven and he knows that. So, he's just like, okay, I know it's going to be packed full of standards, so I'm fine with it. I enjoy that."

Sarai appreciated being complimented by a parent. She said, "I had a parent reach out to me today. She said she can't thank me enough for all I have done this year" (Sarai, journal, February 12, 2022). She was also happy to get acknowledged for her teaching by the principal. She shared,

I have literally broke down and cried when the Literacy First coach has come. I told [my principal] ...next year I may need to be done. Because if no one can find anything positive to say about what I'm doing, then it must be me. I'm doing it wrong. So, we had a heart to heart... and I think he saw where he was doing wrong. He said, "I wanted to see you improve but I never said what a good job you were doing. That's where I failed you and I'm sorry for that." ... When he came in and observed me recently, he said, "I really love what I saw today." (Sarai, focus group, February 18, 2022)

Kassi said, "I get appreciation every day from my children here in the classroom and parents mainly" (Kassie, interview, December 16, 2021). She especially enjoyed

receiving respect and appreciation from the public. She expressed, “I enjoy when someone asks me, what do you do for a living? I love saying I’m a teacher and love getting that feedback. Thank you for doing what you’re doing” (Kassie, interview, December 16, 2021). Becca also appreciated the feedback from parents and being respected. She noted, “That’s from the parents. To know that they appreciate what you’re doing, and they see a difference in their kid” (Becca, interview, January 31, 2022). She also shared, “Just having that respect and it’s a nice profession to be in” (Becca, interview, January 31, 2022).

“I want to be valued. I want to be valued. People thrive in consistency” Lisa repeated (Lisa, focus group, February 18, 2022). Acknowledgment and respect were important to her. She said some appreciation is received from parents, “When they do nice things for me, it makes me feel good” (Lisa, interview, January 31, 2022). She liked, “When people compliment my class, I feel like they’re a reflection of what I teach then in here” (Lisa, interview, January 31, 2022).

Amy acknowledged that she did receive appreciation from her principal and parents, “ [The principal] is really good about that. She sends out messages. She leaves us little treats... I have really good parents this year too. They send me thank yous... there’s a lot more appreciation than people would think” (Amy, interview, December 20, 2021). But, the regard from students was especially motivating for her. She noted, “Seriously kids, you definitely see it with your students. Some of them verbal, some of them just, the aha moments for one. I had a kid tell me today, whenever you went over that at the back table today, now I know exactly what you mean” (Amy, interview, December 20, 2021).

### **Affinity for Children**

The natural love of children was not only a motivator to consider the teaching field but continued to play a part in seven participants' continued desire to teach. They expressed that they loved the children and loved being with them. That feeling was there before teaching and continued to be present. Ann shared how when she substituted, she had fun with the students. "I loved it. I could just hang out with kids. I love being with the kids so much" she said (Ann, interview, December 8, 2021). Abby mentioned, "I enjoyed being around kids, teaching came naturally to me and I enjoy teaching my students." (Abby, interview, January 6, 2021).

Kassi shared, "I knew I had a passion of being around them [kids] and it was enjoyable" (Kassi, December 16, 2021). She noted, "I have a kid here that wants me to hug nonstop and... maybe he doesn't get that at home. And I'm that one that gives him that love" (Kassi, December 16, 2021). When asked if enjoying the children still motivated her, she exclaimed,

Yes! It is! It is one thing that I always tell myself because of course you have politics and all that going on. That throws you. Of course, I have to survive. So yes, being a teacher is kind of hard, especially being a single mother too. It's tough. I don't get paid what I should. And so, you have to think about that. Should I find another profession that could help with my family? But what really gets me is the kids. That's all [that's] ever forced me to stay in my profession is, I'm going to miss the kids, being in the classroom environment with all the kids. So, I think that is what has always drawn me toward education. (Kassi, interview, December 16, 2021)



Lisa also noted the affinity for children, “I just always really liked children” and when she discussed a particular child who had been retained, “And so she knew I loved her last year, but she came back and she was able to come and learn” (Lisa, interview, January 31, 2022). Donna loved children and so she thought teaching would be a good move for her; she shared, “I still love working with children. I still love to see their faces light up” (Donna, interview, January 4, 2022). For Sarai, it’s all about the kids, “It’s not for the paycheck. You definitely better be in it to win it for these kids... you don’t just come to work, forget about it and go home” (Sarai, interview, December 13, 2021). Sarai showed the love she had for the children. Becca expressed, “I love being with the kids” (Becca, interview, January 31, 2022).

### **Security**

The importance of the paycheck, retirement, and/or insurance was mentioned by three participants. What kept Donna coming was the pay. She shared, “Right now it’d be pay. Because when you factor in insurance, I don’t know if there’s a job that would start out equivalent close to something with that” (Donna, interview, January 4, 2022). Later during a focus group discussion, Donna expressed, “I’m teeter-tottering. I don’t know if I’ll still be in education in five years or not. [I stay for] retirement and benefits, cause even if I went to work somewhere else, that’s probably a 90-day lap before benefits kick in. I don’t know that I can make it 90 days without any. Put some bubble wrap around me” (Donna, focus group, February 21, 2022). Becca expressed, “Right now, we’re committed with retirement. That’s another thing that keeps us in, I think” (Becca, focus group February 2, 2022). She had considered going back to school as a means to attain a higher salary and more options in choosing her position. Abby would have preferred to

stay home with her children and admitted she had to teach for the paycheck but also expressed, “I enjoy teaching my students” (Abby, interview, January 6, 2022). When asked what factors influenced her most in persisting in the teaching profession, she shared, “Paycheck. And one thing that keeps me there is because of the hours. I have the same hours as my kids... teaching allows me to have the same breaks with them” (Abby, focus group, February 21, 2022).

Four participants expressed how they stayed in teaching despite the pay. Sarai said, “I think [passion] that’s the key because you’re not doing it for incentives. There are no incentives. The pay is not the best. It’s not the worst, but it’s not the best” (Sarai, focus group, February 18, 2022). Lisa expressed, “It’s better than when I first started. My first paycheck, I was like, what is this?” (Lisa, focus group, February 18, 2022). Amy responded to Lisa laughing, “Do we get half now and half later?” and “The incentives are whenever you can see a change and a difference in kids and know that’s their safe place and that’s all you have to offer them” (Amy, focus group, February 18, 2022). Kassi emphasized her desire to teach despite the pay,

Being a teacher is kind of hard, especially being a single mother too. It’s tough; I don’t get paid like I should. And so, you have to think about that. Should I find another profession that could help with my family? ... But what really gets me is the kids. That’s all that’s ever forced me to stay in my profession; I’m going to miss the kids. (Kassi, interview, December 16, 2021)

### **Micropolitan District**

The teachers discussed the pros and cons of working in a micropolitan area school district. While many talked about the frustration of being moved around too much, some

of the same teachers referred to the advantages of moving. Abby mentioned, “My fear is next year, if they do redistrict, will they move teachers out of Chilton... And who gets moved out of Chilton? How do they decide?” (Abby, interview, February 21, 2022). This year she was moved by the district. She shared, “This was my first year to move schools. It was forced. I mean, I loved [my school]. I was heartbroken when they closed us” (Abby, interview, February 21, 2022). However, she also stated, “I like that there’s a lot of opportunity, though” (Abby, interview, February 21, 2022). Lisa also shared her fear of being moved, “They can come in and move you wherever, whenever. It is very scary, very, very, very, scary” (Lisa, interview, February 18, 2022). But when a colleague complained about a situation, Lisa told them, “You just need a new building” (Lisa, interview, February 18, 2022). Being forced to move was frustrating for many teachers but they do like to have the option if they choose. Kassi had this to say about River City Public Schools:

It’s family... It has pros and cons... I’ve been moved around a lot in the district. It has its pros because I know I have a lot of familiar faces. I know a lot of people. It’s nice when I do see them, I’m like, hey, I know you. I have that relationship. The bad thing about it is yes, you get familiar with those people and then you have to leave them... especially grades, if I’m teaching a certain grade and I have to move down or up, it’s just a little stressful. But, it’s a learning experience as well too... I do like the fact that River City is more, how do I say it? It challenges me basically... my brain’s always moving. (Kassi, interview, December 16, 2021)

She noted this micropolitan district had more expectations than the smaller rural schools she had taught in and liked the challenge as well as the options in the district.

## **Summary of Chapter**

Chapter IV presented perceptions of teachers' motivations to persist in the classroom in four elementary schools in a micropolitan school district. It first reviews the history of the school district and details concerning the four elementary sites of the participants. The participants and their initial motivation to enter the teaching field are addressed to provide a foundation for their current motivations. The factors influencing teachers' motivation to teach were presented in the order of relevance to the teachers. The themes which emerged through the analysis of data included: relationships, student success, passion for teaching, impact, self-efficacy; appreciation recognition and respect, an affinity for children, and security. The perceptions of the teachers were presented in their own words to reveal their motivations to persist in the classroom. Chapter V analyzes teachers' motivation to stay in the classroom through the theoretical lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The level of safety included the security of salary and work benefits such as insurance and retirement. Relationships with students, colleagues, administrators, parents, and community and an affinity for children were examined within Maslow's level of love and belonging. Esteem needs encompassed student success, impact, and self-efficacy; as well as, appreciation, recognition, and respect. A passion for teaching was examined in the context of self-actualization.

## CHAPTER V

### EXPLAINING DATA THROUGH THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of the study was to explore through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs why teachers who have taught between five and 10 years in a micropolitan public school stay in the profession. The theoretical framework selected for this study was Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943). This chapter will discuss the perceived motivation of teachers to stay in the profession in relation to their needs as filtered through the theoretical lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

#### **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory**

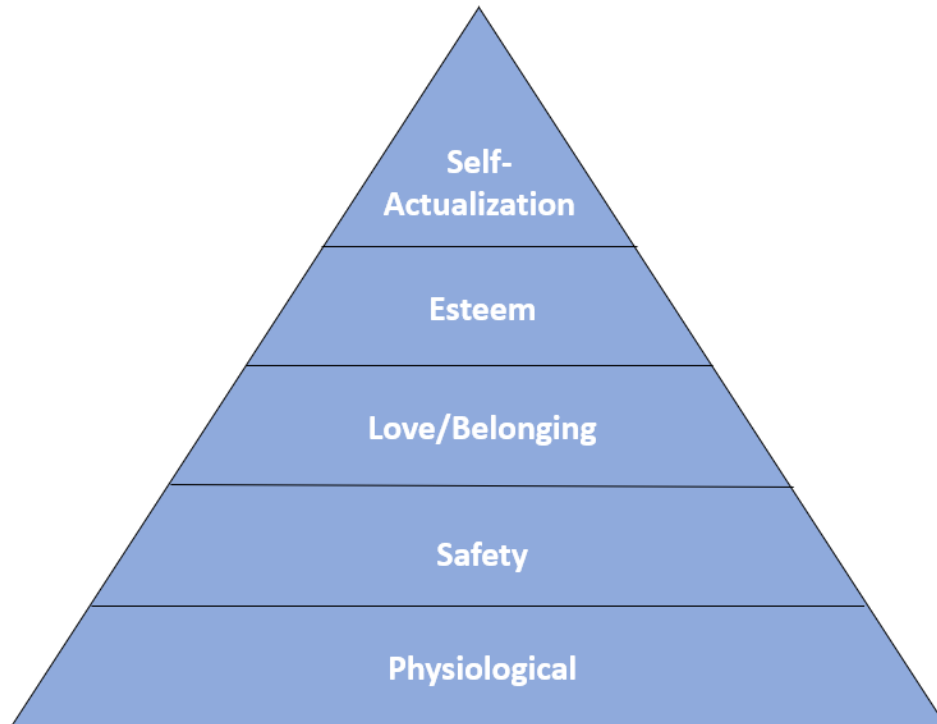
A.H. Maslow developed a theory concerning human needs on a hierarchy scale. Since the development of his theory, it has been applied to a broad range of fields both educational and non-educational (Benson & Dundis, 2003; Fisher & Royster, 2016; Freitas & Leonard, 2011; Lussier & Leonard, 2019; Primeaux & Vega, 2002; Shi & Lin, 2021).

Maslow first addressed the physiological human needs such as the need for air, water, food, and sleep. If the physiological needs were satisfied, a human would then work to attain safety. Maslow discussed how safety can be found through shelter, being safe from harm, a need for routine without surprises, financial security, and even

religious or philosophical schema to organize our world. If the physiological and safety needs were met, a person would then be free to work toward the gratification of the needs of love and belonging. Relationship needs may be met through friendship, family, romantic connections, colleagues, and through finding a place in a group; a place to belong. Once the needs of love and belonging are met, a person will seek the fulfillment of esteem needs. There is a need for both self-esteem and for receiving esteem from others. Esteem needs can be met through achievement, respect, appreciation, strength, adequacy, confidence, recognition, importance, and more. When self-esteem needs are met people can experience “feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability, and adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world” (Maslow, 2012, p. 14). When the first four levels of Maslow’s hierarchy are attained, Maslow notes, “We shall call people who are satisfied in these needs, basically satisfied people, and it is from these that we may expect the fullest (and healthiest) creativeness” (Maslow, 2012, p. 16). The fifth and final level of Maslow’s hierarchy addresses the need for self-actualization. Maslow tells us, “A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately happy. What a man can be, he must be” (2012, p. 15). Figure 5.1 shows a pyramid representing Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.

**Figure 5.1**

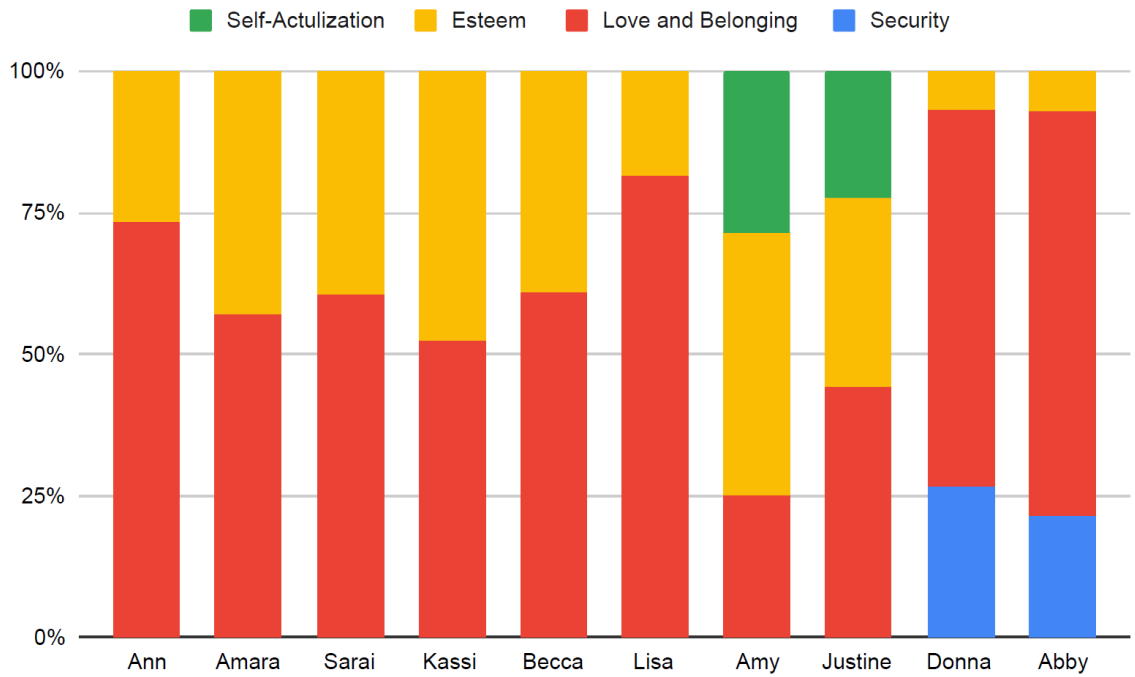
*Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs*



Maslow stated the order of the hierarchy is considered fixed but that it is not rigid. Some people may experience the needs and attain a level of satisfaction and still neglect some of the lower needs if satisfaction has at one point been secured through sheer toleration. Yet, “People who have been made secure and strong in the earliest years, tend to remain secure and strong thereafter in the face of whatever threatens them” (Maslow, 2012, p. 21). Figure 5.2 represents the satisfaction the teachers expressed as filtered through Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Figure 5.3 breaks this same data into individual factors. These charts were developed by counting the data cards in each category as manually coded.

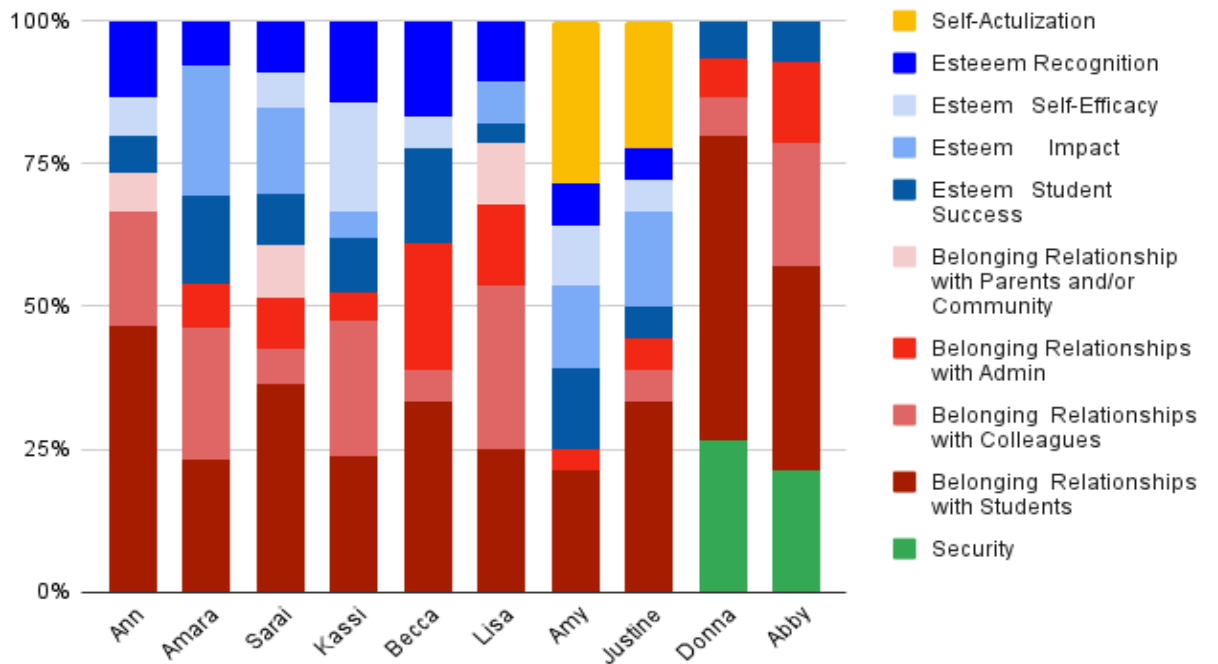
**Figure 5.2**

*Teachers’ Needs Satisfaction in Teaching Filtered Through the Lens of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs*



**Figure 5.3**

*Factors Influencing Teacher Satisfaction*



**Physiological**



The participants in this study were teachers who were employed for five to ten years. None of the participants expressed any physiological needs. Therefore, it was considered that the physiological needs of this group of teachers may or may not have been satisfied.

### **Safety**

Safety in the field of teaching in this study took on the form of financial security through salary, insurance, and retirement. The participants in this study did not express concern for their physical safety in the context of teaching.

A secure salary and benefits such as retirement and insurance were motivating factors to stay in the field of teaching. Three participants expressed that income, retirement, and insurance played a part in motivating them to continue teaching. However, they expressed this at different levels. Donna expressed doubt about being able to obtain another job that would provide the same level of salary and benefits. She stated, “[I stay for] retirement and benefits...” (Donna, focus group, February 21, 2022) She was not sure she would be teaching in five years. She commented more on security as motivation than any other participants and was the most unsure of her continued commitment to education. Abby shared that she stayed for the “paycheck” because she would have preferred to stay home with her children. This sentiment was reiterated in her individual interview and during a focus group multiple times. While Becca briefly expressed, “...we’re committed with retirement” (Becca, focus group February 21, 2022). The lower level of security did not seem to solely support the retention of teachers in the classroom. In fact, four teachers shared how they were committed to teaching despite the pay. “It’s tough; I don’t get paid like I should...” (Kassi, interview, December 16, 2021).

Considering the benefits of employment in a school extended to how the benefit of the hours of the school fit into the participant's family relationships. The motivation for relationships at school may not have outweighed the benefits the participant experienced with relationships with her children. Finances versus relationships was a defining moment for Abby. She expressed, "Paycheck" when asked what had influenced her most in persisting in the teaching profession; however, she also shared how important having time with her family was. She would have stayed home with her children while they were little if she could afford to but teaching was the next best thing for her. She stated, "I enjoy teaching my students" (Abby, interview, January 6, 2021). Relationships within her family and the relationships at school were both important to her.

### **Love and Belonging**

Teachers developed relationships with students, parents, colleagues, and administration. Beyond developing relationships, some teachers also exhibited a natural affinity or love of children. It was difficult to separate the comments of the teachers from those indicating their motivation to teach because of the relationships with students and the comments about how they simply liked/loved children. Either way 'love and belonging' in Maslow's hierarchy of needs received the most comments and discussion throughout the study of all the motivational areas.

Relationships were expressed as being important between teachers and students, between teachers and colleagues, and between teachers and administrators. Relationships with parents and the community were mentioned as well. The relevance to teachers by the comments they made fell in the order of students, teachers, colleagues, parents, and community. All ten participants discussed relationships in the school setting.

## *Students*

Building a relationship with students allowed the teachers to be trusted by the students, to be respected by the students so they received the learning available to them, and to have meaningful conversations with the students. The relationships were built in the classroom as well as in other settings. Amara shared, “I spend a lot of time with them outside of school... that helps in the classroom because they trust me” (Amara, interview, January 3, 2022) She believed her relationship conveyed, “... she really cares” (Amara, interview, January 3, 2022). Lisa had been asked to move schools but said, “I just couldn’t leave my children...” (Lisa, focus group, February 18, 2022). Amy shared that the way she felt went beyond the profession and wanted to see “...they’re taken care of and they’re getting everything they can get” (Amy, focus group, February 18, 2022). She went beyond her own students and formed relationships with students who would move up through the years.

Sarai thought of her students like her own children and enjoyed seeing them outside the school at places like Walmart and church and continued the relationship beyond the classroom. She enjoyed a lasting relationship as well, “If you can come back to me and you can bond with me... you’re always welcome to come back” (Sarai, interview, December 13, 2021). Becca also mentioned the bond she had with the students, “In those aha moments when you have that kid that does achieve it or writes you a note, ‘I love you’ ... You know there’s that bond between you and the kids. I like that” (Becca, focus group, February 21, 2022). Amy said, “I stay for the kids” and “...just give me kids all day long” (Amy, interview, December 20, 2021). Justine reflected on a day when former students came to visit her, “That made everything that I’ve ever done

worth it... a positive relationship that I still have with these kids ... that just continues to kind of drive me to keep doing what I'm doing" (Justine, interview, December 9, 2022). Donna enjoyed her relationships with students. For her, seeing her students every day, when she got hugs from them, and when former students came back to visit, were motivational factors. When Abby's school closed, she was heartbroken because she loved her students.

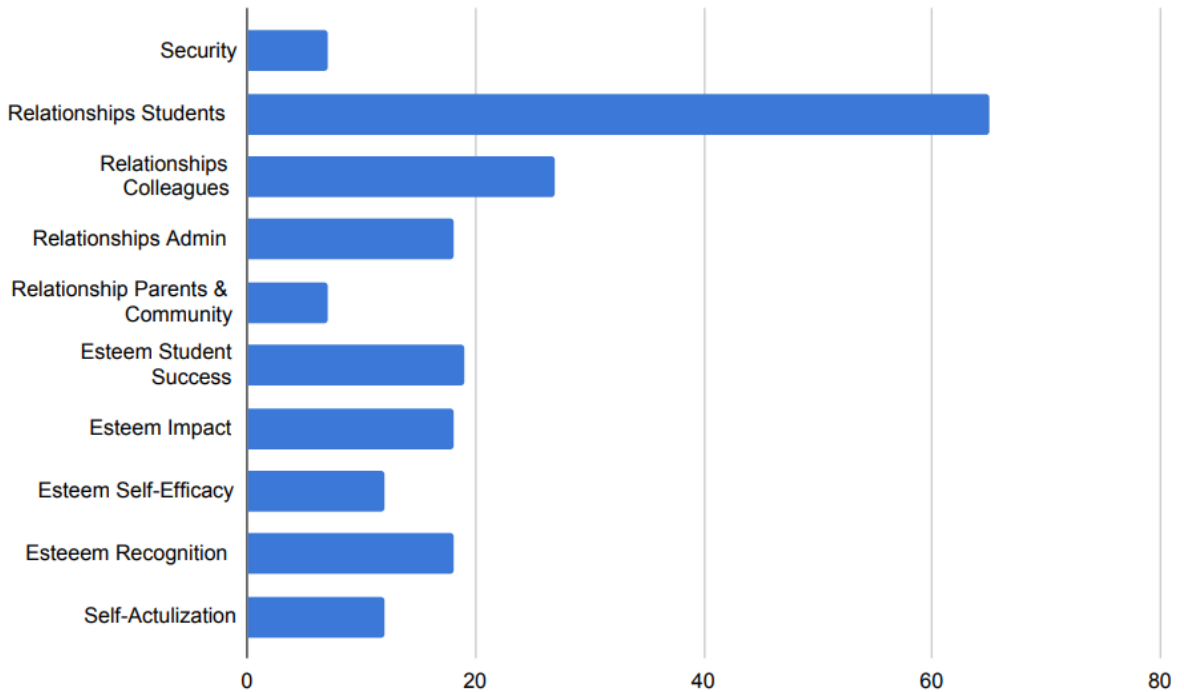
Ann loved her relationship with students "...I like making connections with them." Kassi shared, "There are things I would change but... I love my students." She emphasized the love she received from them, "...more love from the little ones than anything." (Kassi, interview, December 16, 2021).

An affinity or love for children was expressed by seven of the participants. Maslow (2014) shares that those "who have been love-need-satiated, show that although they need less to receive love, they are more able to give love. In a sense, they are more loving people" (p. 43). Perhaps that is where some of the participants fell in the sense of needing and giving love. Kassi said she had a passion for kids at a young age and her love of children continued to be a factor in her desire to stay in the classroom. This was one of her strongest motivations as she noted, "...what really gets me is the kids. That's all [that's] ever forced me to stay in my profession..." (Kassi, interview, December 16, 2022). Ann expressed, "I love being with the kids so much" (Ann, interview, December 8, 2021). Abby, Lisa, and Donna all mentioned how the affinity for children was a reason to join the profession of teaching and continued to motivate them. For Sarai, it's all about the kids, "...better be in it to win it for these kids..." (Sarai, interview, December 13, 2021). Becca also loved being with kids. The most discussed factor was relationships

with students. Figure 5.4 shows the factors impacting teachers to stay in the classroom as determined by number of manually coded data cards for each factor.

**Figure 5.4**

*Factors Impacting Teacher Persistence*



### *Colleagues*

Colleagues were important in the realm of relationships as well. Kassi and Lisa’s top motivation was relationships and a large part of that was relationships with colleagues. Kassi moved districts and came back. She had developed close relationships and commented, “...she’s my best friend now” as well as relationships that cross the district “It’s family, basically... I know a lot of people. It’s nice”. She enjoyed working at different elementary schools throughout the district, “... I fell in love with all the people that I [worked with] ...” (Kassi, interview, December 16, 2021). Lisa enjoyed her colleagues, “It just feels like a home... we’re in it together... we’re a really good team”

(Lisa, interview, January 31, 2022). She also enjoyed a close friendship, “I get to teach next door to my best friend...” (Lisa, interview, January 31, 2022). Lisa shared the importance of relationships several times, “The relationships that you get to build make it worth it... with your colleagues and your kiddos” (Lisa, focus group, February 21, 2022).

Relationships and the feeling of a school family were shared by many of the participants. Ann discussed her colleagues, “...we work really great together... I love the staff I work with” (Ann, interview, December 8, 2021). Abby and Amara loved the staff they worked with. Amara found a home at her school, “...I love the campus... I love the staff” (Amara, interview, January 3, 2022). Becca would have preferred to remain at her school too, “So the staff I work with would be, yeah, really a reason to stay in this building for sure” (Becca, interview, January 31, 2022).

Justine, Donna, and Sarai appreciated the support they got from their colleagues. Justine shared, “...I have such good backup and good support from them” (Justine, interview, December 9, 2021). Donna noted, “... nice to work together as a team with your coworkers” (Donna, interview, January 4, 2022). Sarai said, “...I do have a handful of my peer teachers and staff that I can talk with that support me” (Sarai, interview, December 13, 2021).

### ***Administration***

The relationship with administrators could be a motivating factor in different ways. Teachers appreciated receiving trust, support, and respect from their administrators. Amara shared, “[My principal] is really good at trusting that you’re just going to do it” (Amara, interview, January 3, 2022). Sarai had not always trusted her administrator but found, “He’s very open. I can talk with him and just be open and

honest. I don't fear that I'm going to lose my job or get a pushpin or anything" (Sarai, interview, December 13, 2021). Kassi knew she had her principal's support, "I really enjoy my administrator. She has my back and I love that about it. She's real... she does stick with the rules, but she really helps you if you are struggling" (Kassi, interview, December 16, 2021). Becca shared the same sentiment, "I love my principal... I'm very comfortable... She's just really supportive" (Becca, interview, January 31, 2022). Lisa reflected on how her principal cared about the staff and checked on their well-being. "[I] just feel really blessed to have her" (Lisa, interview, January 31, 2022). During the focus group, she reflected on an experience at a former school, "Relationships. It is about the children and leadership... Your principal is like the teacher of the teachers. You need to try to have a relationship with me. You want me to have relationships with kids. It is those relationships" (Lisa, focus group, February 18, 2022).

Abby noticed the difference an administrator could make, "When your staff likes each other, they honestly get along, there's a difference in your school. When we got our principal, I felt like she built a certain community within the teachers that we had there" (Abby, focus group, February 21, 2022). Amy appreciated the effort made by her principal to build relationships and "make people interact" within their school (Amy, interview, December 7, 2021). Donna appreciated how the principal did "little stuff for you" (Donna, interview, January 4, 2022).

### ***Parents-Community***

Ann included the parents when discussing relationships. "...making connections with students and parents..." (Ann, interview, December 8, 2021). Lisa noted the reason she stayed in the classroom, "The relationships, coworkers, and relationships with my

students and even parents” (Lisa, focus group, February 18, 2022). Lisa encompassed everyone in her interview, “A relationship... you know we, everybody wants that”. (Lisa, interview, January 31, 2022. Sarai shared, “... It’s the community in which I live, even if somebody was to pay me more” (Sarai, interview, December 13, 2021).

There were strong ties between belonging and esteem. Relationships allowed teachers to influence student success and receive external appreciation from the school population.

The relationships built with students allowed the teachers to impact students’ lives. While she journaled Kassi expressed, “The students... are the reason I get out of bed every morning. My devotion to kids is constant, and my desire is to positively impact their little lives every day” (Kassi, journal, April 12, 2022). This was not the first time she had shared this thought. She shared the same sentiment during her interview in December 2021. Impacting the students’ lives came from building relationships and the impact she made was motivation to continue.

Donna expressed how she loved children and still loved “to see their faces light up”; she was expressing the affinity for children but also the esteem she felt in knowing they had learned something from her teaching (Donna, interview, January 4, 2023). The relationship made the esteem possible to receive whether a teacher experienced that as internal esteem and knew they had done a good job or external esteem as they received the appreciation of a student or others. Ann received appreciation through her relationships with students. “They love me and they know I love and care about them. ...they want to do good... I think that is a big part of just the appreciation that I feel” (Ann, interview, December 8, 2021).



## **Esteem**

The participants expressed feelings of self-esteem and being esteemed or respected by others. In the context of employee motivation, self-esteem is believing one's self to be competent at what one does which was exhibited in the words of the participants. Receiving esteem from others was expressed in the form of appreciation, respect, and recognition.

## ***Student Success***

Teachers wanted to see their students succeed. It was the product of their work and the success of their students was a picture of their own success and what they could do. It was self-affirming for them and built self-esteem. This was seen in the statements when teachers referred to what "I" can do. Ann shared, "I love watching students learn to read... I know I'm doing what's right for kids and teaching them" (Ann, interview, December 8, 2021). Becca noted this as one of the factors that influenced her most to persist in the classroom, "In those aha moments, when you have that kid that does achieve it" (Becca, focus group, February 21, 2022). Amy liked to see the "aha moments" (Amy, interview, December 7, 2021). She shared, "I'm able to make sure they're getting what they need" (Amy, focus group, February 18, 2022). Amara contributed all she could, "There are so many needs... what else I can do" (Amara, interview, January 3, 2022). Success for students was measured with more than academics, Sarai loved to see the "light bulb" moments with her students but she also supported them in developing character and confidence, "I received a compliment on a student's behavior today... I have really worked on building his confidence this year and it's showing" (Sarai, journal, January 3, 2022). Amy noted she makes a difference for students "...every way possible:

attitude, discipline, academics. I mean, everything” (Amy, interview, December 7, 2021). Kassi looked forward to hearing about the future success of students, “... when I see it, I was a part of their life. ... yes! I did something” (Kassi, interview, December 16, 2021). Justine told that when she saw a student succeed it “...makes you feel like you’re doing something right” (Justine, December 9, 2021).

### ***Impact***

Making an impact in both close proximity and on the world as they saw it affected some teachers’ self-esteem. This could affect esteem needs by creating a feeling of being useful and necessary in the world. Making a difference overall was mentioned by several participants.

Ann and Sarai shared how experiences during their own school years affected their desire to contribute to the school experiences of their students. Ann expressed “It pushes me to do better for these kids” (Ann, interview, December 8, 2021) She shared “I want to make a difference in their life” (Ann, interview, December 8, 2021). Sarai believed she understood the difficulties some children had and believed she could “really make a difference” (Sarai, interview, December 13, 2021). Amara chose to teach in public schools where she felt she could make the most impact. “...because there is a need” (Amara, interview, January 3, 2022). While Justine had the desire to help others “...that call to duty...” (Justine, interview, December 9, 2021).

The participants expressed a desire to impact the character of students. Lisa wanted to help “...mold good humans” (Lisa, interview, January 31, 2022). Justine wanted to be a “...positive influence” or “...positive world model to them” (Justine, interview, December 9, 2021). While Donna taught her students “...to be better” and “to

be kind” (Donna, interview, January 4, 2022). And Sarai tried to instill compassion by “Just teaching them to be compassionate” (Sarai, interview, December 13, 2021). Amy noted, “One person can definitely make a difference and that literally, the future is in your classroom. I’ve seen the difference that it makes and so that’s what keeps me in it” (Amy, interview, December 20, 2021).

Teachers also worked to make a contribution and impact in their school by mentoring others, advocating, and continuing their education. Amy and Ann mentored other teachers. Sarai was an advocate for the rights of teachers. She believed all teachers should be allowed to teach, “...in their own style” (Sarai, journal, December 16, 2021). Amara invested time in education and completed National Board Certification. She believed, “The more you learn... the more you can help other people” (Amara, interview, January 3, 2022).

### ***Self-Efficacy***

Five of the participants expressed feeling capable of performing their jobs and completing the duties attached to them which may have made them more motivated to persist in teaching. Some invested additional attention and finances in their skills to maintain their own personal standards.

Kassi entered the teaching field in part because she felt she would be good at it and her family told her so. This still motivated her. In five years, she still planned to be teaching, “Still teaching, for sure. It’s something I’m good at and I enjoy doing. I know what I am doing and I don’t want to do anything new” (Kassi, interview, December 16, 2021). She planned to continue her education with a master’s degree and would consider

degrees"...I am good at" (Kassi, interview, December 16, 2022). Ann felt good about her teaching "...I know I'm doing what's right..." (Ann, interview, December 8, 2021).

Amy also felt good about the job she did. She confidently expressed, "I am good at a very few things, but I know I am a good teacher... I hold my kids to very high expectations but I hold myself to very high expectations" (Amy, interview, December 7, 2021). She planned to seek a master's in reading but shared, "I won't leave the classroom... there is good information in it to use in my classroom" (Amy, interview, December 7, 2021).

Sarai noted, "...I was getting good results. And it was like if I'm doing good, let me do good" (Sarai, interview, December 13, 2021). She preferred to teach in her own way and shared, "My teaching style gets good results" (Sarai, journal, December 16, 2021).

Becca shared, "I feel like I'm good at it" (Becca, focus group, February 2, 2022). However, she did not feel successful in an overcrowded classroom, "I still want to teach, but tutoring or reading specialist or librarian. They just keep packing the kids in. You can't teach them effectively" (Becca, group focus, February 21, 2022). Her desire to leave the classroom may have indicated that when a teacher is unable to be effective, their esteem could suffer because they are unable to achieve the desired goal. She would have preferred to teach in an environment where she could be successful.

### ***Appreciation, Recognition, and Respect***

Esteem can also be built by receiving appreciation, recognition, and respect from others. Eight of the participants expressed receiving esteem-building comments and

actions from others in the realm of teaching. The sources included students, parents, colleagues, administration, and the community.

Ann began her career in teaching after a principal told her, “You are so good at this...” (Ann, interview, December 8, 2021). She received appreciation from her students and from her colleagues, “...you do such a great job with this one” (Ann, interview, December 8, 2021). Amara appreciated the respect her principal showed through his trust in her “He just knows at the end of the day the kids are going to learn. ... I enjoy that.” Justine received encouragement from her principal and colleagues “...just showing even in the little things...” but the regard she felt from students was more important to her. “... as far as intrinsic rewards go, as you know, definitely from the classroom, seeing the kids come back today and them being moved to tears by seeing me teach. That’s a reward... It makes you feel like you’re doing something right. (Justine, interview, December 9, 2021)

Compliments from parents were encouraging to Sarai, “...she can’t thank me enough for all I have done this year” (Sarai, journal, February 12, 2022). She was also happy about the acknowledgment from her principal. He told her, “... “I wanted to see you improve but I never said what a good job you were doing... recently, he said, ‘I really love what I saw today’” (Sarai, focus group, February 18, 2022). Kassi said, “I get appreciation every day from my children here in the classroom and parents mainly” (Kassie, interview, December, 16, 2021). She especially enjoyed receiving respect and appreciation from the public, “I love saying I’m a teacher and love getting that feedback. Thank you for doing what you’re doing” (Kassie, interview, December, 16, 2021). Becca also appreciated the feedback from parents and being respected. She noted, “...they

appreciate what you're doing and they see a difference in their kid" (Becca, interview, January 31, 2022). Becca liked to be respected as well "...it's a nice profession to be in" (Becca, interview, January 31, 2022). Amy was acknowledged by her principal and parents "... there's a lot more appreciation than people would think" (Amy, interview, December 20, 2021). However, student appreciation was the most motivational for her, "Seriously kids, you definitely see it with your students." (Amy, interview, December 20, 2021).

Acknowledgment and respect were important to Lisa although she didn't always feel like her administration valued her, "I want to be valued... People thrive in consistency" (Lisa, focus group, February 18, 2022). Students' parents showed her appreciation, "...they do nice things for me, it makes me feel good" (Lisa, interview, January 31, 2022). She liked, "When people compliment my class, I feel like they're a reflection of what I teach then in here" (Lisa, interview, January 31, 2022).

The relationship between esteem and self-actualization may lie in the confidence individuals have in moving to achieve their highest calling. In order to become all one is capable of becoming, first one needs to feel they are competent and can attain that level of being.

Amara had a natural drive to teach. "I had thought about it all my life. I want to teach. I want to teach... and I always taught on the side" (Amara, interview, January 3, 2022). Although she noted her "drive" kept her in the classroom it may not have been enough to keep her there. "... I've been driven out of the classroom. (Amara, interview, January 3, 2022). She wanted to stay in education but in the capacity of coaching teachers. If Amara did not feel she could be all she could be in the classroom, she was not

likely to remain in that position. She would have preferred to be working where she could be at her top game and for her, it may have been in coaching other teachers.

### **Self-Actualization – Passion for Teaching**

In teaching, self-actualization may be attained if the individual is driven to teach, has a passion for teaching, or feels it is their calling to teach. To put it in Maslow's vernacular, a teacher must teach. The participants that perceived teaching as their highest calling, might have experienced self-actualization by practicing the art of teaching in the classroom.

Sarai mentioned, "... if it's truly your passion and it's truly what you want to do, you're going to go through all the struggles." (Sarai, focus group, February 18, 2022).

Although Sarai did say she believed passion was a factor, her comments were made during a focus group discussion when other teachers were talking about their passion to teach. She never stated it was her reason for staying in the classroom or commented on it in the first-person point of view. However other teachers expressed their passion fully and repeatedly.

Justine knew she wanted to teach, even at a very young age. The effects of the pandemic had strengthened her resolve. "It just eats at me... these kids are starving for attention... the desire to teach is even stronger..." (Justine, interview, December 9, 2021). She expressed her need to teach in several ways throughout the interview: a desire, a calling, and a passion. "...it has to be a calling... I can't imagine doing anything else... I would never do anything else" (Justine, interview, December 9, 2021). She reiterated the sentiment throughout the interview, "Again, you have to really have a passion and a calling for this" (Justine, interview, December 9, 2021). She would have liked to

complete her master's and continue teaching in the classroom "...I still feel that passion, that calling, then that's what I plan on still doing" (Justine, interview, December 9, 2021).

Teachers who possess a passion to teach may believe other teachers would naturally feel the same way. Amy spoke for a colleague, "... she's in it because that's her passion or she wouldn't be in it" (Amy, focus group, February 18, 2022). Amy spoke passionately throughout both her interview and during the focus group. "Once you find your niche... you're just like this is where I'm supposed to be" (Amy, focus group, February 18, 2022). She believed "It's not just a job; it's your life" (Amy, interview, December 20, 2021). Amy did not plan to leave the classroom. She never doubted what she was called to do. She expressed as she laughed,

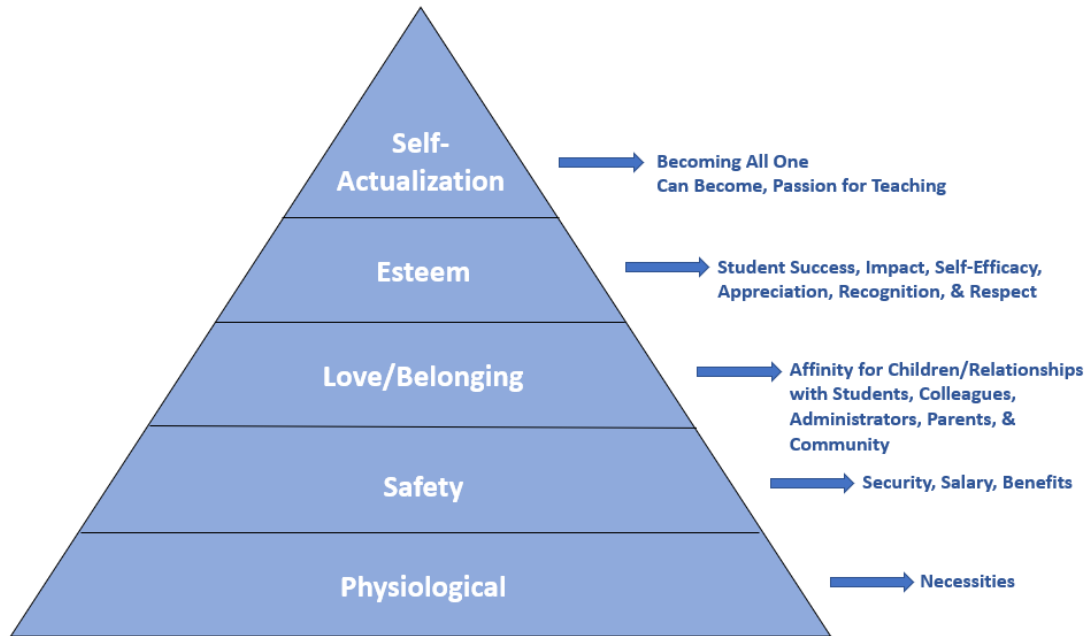
This is the most mentally and physically draining job you will ever have in your lifetime. But [for] people that it's their passion, they can say it with a smile on their face! They don't care that it's the most physically and mentally draining job on Earth because that's what they're called to do. (Amy, focus group, February 18, 2022)

Figure 5.5 shows a pyramid of Maslow's hierarchy of needs with examples of each hierarchy level from the study.

**Figure 5.5**

*Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs with Examples from the Study*





### Summary

Information presented and analyzed in this chapter was gathered through interviews, focus groups, observations, and journaling. The information was analyzed through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943). These needs included physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. The perception of information through this lens resulted in examining the connections between the levels as well as the characteristics of each need. The love and belonging needs were broken into relationships and affinity for children. The esteem needs were broken into the following areas: student success, impact, self-efficacy, and appreciation, recognition, and respect. The perceptions of the participants emerged as the factors were analyzed through the hierarchy of needs. Chapter VI presents findings of the study through answering the study's research questions. Implications for research and practice are addressed and recommendations for future research are offered.

## CHAPTER VI

### FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout the research process, data were collected and analyzed using multiple forms of data sources, including interview transcripts, focus group transcripts, journals, and field notes. Member checks were conducted to ensure the validity of the data. Chapter VI presents the findings of the study in answer to the research questions. Conclusions are drawn from the findings and implications for research, theory, and practice are addressed. Finally, commendations for future research are offered, followed by a summary of the study.

#### **Findings**

The purpose of this study was to explore through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs why selected effective teachers who have taught between five and fifteen years in a micropolitan community stay in the profession. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What factors have informed elementary teachers in an Oklahoma micropolitan community to persist more than five years in their profession?
2. How did motivational factors promote their persistence in the profession?
3. How does Maslow's hierarchy of needs explain the above?

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

**Research Question One: What factors have informed elementary teachers in an Oklahoma micropolitan community to persist more than five years in their profession?**

Teachers in this study entered the profession for reasons that stretched back to childhood. For some, individuals around them noticed their potential and encouraged them to get their degree in education; while others followed their desire to teach without support. A few grew up in teaching families and knew they wanted to follow their families in the field. Most enjoyed working with or being around children before teaching. A few felt like it was natural for them, they were good at it, and some even played the role of the teacher as young children. A couple of the teachers liked children and stated they needed an income or a better income and decided to make a living in the teaching profession. Many of their original motivations were deeply rooted and important to them as they continued through their careers.

Factors that informed elementary teachers in an Oklahoma micropolitan community to persist more than five years in their profession included many of the initial reasons to come into the field. The factors that encouraged teacher persistence included: relationships; student success; a passion for teaching; impact; self-efficacy; an affinity for children, and security. Each teacher brought their own experiences and perceptions to the factors that influenced them to stay in the classroom.

The most encompassing factor was that of relationships. All participants discussed their relationship with students first and foremost. References to student

relationships made up 70% of all relational comments. The aspect of their teacher-student relationships included their love for students, connections, carrying the relationships beyond the walls of the school, and the desire to see the students grow and learn as they moved to higher grade levels. It was interesting to see the different aspects of student relationships that emerged with different teachers as some teachers seemed to need more of a reciprocal relationship than others but all the teachers expressed a true desire to help improve the lives of children socially, emotionally, and in terms of intellectual growth. It was clear to me however, there was a balanced focus for some and a stronger emphasis on social/emotional aspects for others. The importance of student relationships was followed by the relationships with colleagues, administrators, parents, and the community respectively.

The relationship with colleagues was important to nine of the participants. This importance was identified in terms of support, teamwork, and friendship. This level of relationship was mostly one that was mutually beneficial for colleagues while they helped each other plan, learn, and achieve goals. Comradery made going to work more enjoyable. Teachers who “loved” their colleagues expressed a desire to stay in their current school. When the relationships developed into closer bonds such as best friends or the feeling of a family atmosphere the teachers’ desire to stay became stronger.

Administrative relationships were nearly as prevalent with eight of the ten participants noting this connection as a motivating factor. The teachers noted personal relationships, support, building staff relationships, showing appreciation, and caring for the teachers as the reasons this relationship was important. When administrators took a more personal role in developing relationships with and among staff, they created a

reason for teachers to stay. Relationships with students' parents were referred to by two teachers and one teacher noted community relationships. The community relationship was important in this setting because in this micropolitan area the school was an important part of the community and small enough to establish close ties to support students.

The success of their students played a part in the motivation of all participants. Seeing the "light bulb" moments of the students while they taught was impactful for these teachers. They wanted their students to be prepared for the next lesson, grade level, or future success. It was interesting to find how this student success supported the teachers drive to do even more for their students.

Passion was expressed in terms of drive, desire, passion, and calling by the participants with varying perspectives. Amara said her drive was still a reason to stay in the classroom. Justine felt that the pandemic had strengthened her desire to teach and articulated her need to teach with the words desire, calling, and passion. She planned to continue in the classroom as long as she still felt that passion. Amy spoke the most about passion and noted it drove her to care for her students like her own children. She believed she had found her niche. Her plans were to continue teaching.

The ability to impact people and the world through teaching was important to several participants. Some teachers wanted to create experiences in their classrooms to make school better than what they had experienced as children. Some hoped to influence their students' character by teaching them to be good or better people, compassionate, and kind. Others wanted to impact the world through their students. Another teacher wanted to fill the need of a Title I school and similarly one felt it was her duty to help

students especially because of all they were going through during the pandemic. Amy saw the impact she made. She saw the future in her classroom and knew the difference she made. Helping their colleagues was another way to make an impact. One teacher discussed continuing her education in order to be able to make a bigger impact. The teachers wanted to do all they could for their students and others.

Beliefs in their own capacity to effectively teach students motivated some of these teachers to persist in the classroom. Participants expressed how they knew they were doing what was right for the children. They felt good about their teaching and the results they were getting. Not all teachers expressed this self-efficacy and may or may not have possessed it but those who did not express it did appear to have a lower motivation to stay in the classroom.

Eight of the participants shared appreciation, recognition, and respect received from others were motivating. Teachers received appreciation and/or regard from students both verbally and in the aha moments. It made them feel they were doing something right. The recognition they received came in the form of compliments, notes, and little things from colleagues and principals. Trust from her principal was considered a sign of respect by one teacher. Appreciation, recognition, and respect played a small but important factor in the teachers' motivations.

Some teachers enjoyed the feedback they got from students' parents. They felt acknowledged by the parents and appreciated the parents telling them thank you and doing nice things for them. When the parents expressed seeing the difference in their children one teacher felt grateful. Two teachers like the respect they received for being a

teacher. They noted teaching was a nice profession to be in and liked getting respect and appreciation from parents and the public.

Six participants mentioned they enjoyed children or loved them as a factor for becoming a teacher and a continued factor in their motivation to stay in teaching. Five participants mentioned the love they had for being around or teaching children. This love of children was an innate and unwavering constant for some participants.

A paycheck and benefits were mentioned as a factor in teaching for three participants. One discussed staying for the paycheck and benefits. One said she had to teach for the paycheck and would have preferred to stay home with her children. One noted retirement as one factor for teachers being committed to the profession. However, she qualified this as a 'we' statement rather than an 'I' statement during a group focus discussion. While in contrast, four teacher participants shared that they stayed despite the pay.

There were pros and cons mentioned when considering working within a micropolitan area school district. Teachers were worried about being transferred to a different school but also appreciated the available opportunities. Teachers liked that if they were unhappy at one elementary school, they could request to be moved to another. One teacher liked the challenge and the options in this micropolitan district over the experiences she had in rural area schools. The opportunities as well as higher expectations within this micropolitan area school district were seen as advantages over smaller rural schools for these participants.

**Research Question Two: How did motivational factors promote their persistence in the profession?**

## **Student Relationships**

Teachers cared for their students and felt that their students cared for them as well. They were able to give and receive love. Ann and Kassi noted the kids loved them and they loved and cared about them. This relationship presented an opportunity for teachers to make things better for their students in their classrooms. Ann and Sarai's personal childhood experiences influenced their desire to make a difference in the experiences of their own students. Teachers could leverage this relationship to make a difference in the world by teaching the students to be better people in it. When this relationship was carried outside the classroom it made it more "meaningful" for Sarai. The term "bond" Sarai and Becca used pointed to a reciprocal relationship and both teachers expressed they liked this connection. Amy cared for her students like her own kids and expressed a desire to provide for all their needs. Lisa formed an attachment to her student that made her want to stay with them. Kassi noted working with children was "rewarding" and if she stopped teaching, she would miss "the kids". They drew her to education and were the reason she stayed. Donna and Justine formed relationships with students and liked to see these students come back and see them as they got older.

The acknowledgment of their continued relationship through hugs and visits was important. Justine said it continued to drive her to teach. Amara likened the relationship outside the classroom to familial and found that it built trust in the relationship. This relationship allowed teachers to impact students' lives. Kassi expressed how she loved her students and that they were her reason to stay so she could impact their lives. Ann shared the importance of making connections with students because they would be the



adults in the world when she was an old lady; Amy expressed the same sentiment. The teachers showed love for their students and wanted what was best for them.

### **Student Success**

As teachers experienced seeing their students succeed, they felt successful in teaching them. All the participants commented on student success. Student success brought joy to the teachers. They told how they liked, enjoyed, and loved seeing their students succeed. Becca expressed “Ah…” with a sigh and a smile when she spoke of her students’ achievements. Amara was “driven” by this success to figure out what more she could do to take her students to the next level. Becca had hope in preparing her students for the next grade level. Sarai, Kassi, and Justine spoke of long-term success. Sarai wanted to make an impact on her students’ growth mindset and their drive to overcome. There was a joy in the eyes of these teachers as they spoke about the success of their students.

Self-efficacy was another effect of student success. Kassi wanted to see her students “go out and do wonders” and know she was a part of their life. Student success provided Justine with an “intrinsic reward” of knowing she was doing something right. Self-efficacy was an apparent factor for Becca when she noted she had always been good at it and enjoyed watching students go through milestones. Ann shared how seeing students learn to read made her feel good and noted she was doing what was right. By making sure her student got all they needed, Amy knew she made a difference. When students succeeded the teachers saw their efforts succeed as well and felt good about their own teaching. For Ann, the students’ desire to show her what they knew was a big part of the appreciation she felt.

### **Colleague, Principal, Parent, and Community Relationships**

Collegial relationships brought a sense of belonging. Kassi noted it is nice to know people and feel like family. Her relationship with colleagues brings a desire to work where she has built these relationships. Kassi and Lisa expressed enjoying working with colleagues. For Ann, teacher relationships were mutually beneficial for professional growth. Ann and Amara both loved the staff they worked with. Amara said it was a reason to stay at her elementary school. Abby and Becca noted relationships with staff as reasons to stay. Justine enjoyed coming to work with such good support. Donna found it “nice” to have relationships with colleagues and Sarai loved people and appreciated the support. These collegial relationships were key for some teachers in their desire to stay in their schools.

Relationships with principals were appreciated because they could help build a community or family atmosphere for the staff and this supported other relationships in the school. Teachers also felt supported and cared for when they developed relationships with their principals. For example, Lisa noted she had wanted to quit at one point because of the school leadership. Getting a new principal who worked to have a relationship with her and show she cared about her well-being turned this around. The teachers even liked small gestures and gifts that made them feel appreciated.

Parental and community relationships were appreciated by three teachers. These relationships supported the teachers in teaching students by establishing a more collaborative support system.

### **Passion for Teaching**

Half of the participants indicated their desire, drive, or passion as instrumental in their decision to become a teacher; however, only three teachers brought this aspect into current motivation. Amara noted her drive to be in the classroom; however, this same drive is pushing her to take her skills to the next level and coach teachers. She may not stay in the classroom. Amy couldn't imagine doing anything else. Justine shared how she always knew she wanted to be a teacher. She said she just had the desire to do it and the needs of the students, especially during the pandemic, made that desire even stronger. She noted there were still things she saw and wanted to change.

### **Impact**

Teachers had the desire to make an impact on their students' lives. They wanted to create a good experience for their students and teach the students to be better people, to be kind, and to show compassion. Teachers also impacted others by mentoring colleagues and being an advocate for teacher rights. Amara said that helping others also motivated her to be a lifelong learner because the more you learn, the more you can help others. Ann indicated her reason for making this impact on students' lives was in part because they would one day be taking care of her and the world. Kassi wanted to know she had made a difference in her students' futures and knew she would be proud to say, "Yes! I did something" (Kassi, interview, December 16, 2021). Teachers wanted to know they made a difference. Justine saw the future in her classroom and knew she made a difference. Amy noted that seeing the difference her teaching made was what kept her in the field. Making a difference in the lives of their students meant making a difference in the future of their own community and world.

### **Self-Efficacy**

The teachers' belief in their own ability to teach produced confidence. Ann shared how she enjoyed teaching, and it made her feel good that she was doing what was right for kids and teaching them. The importance of feeling effective was shared by Becca. She felt like she was good at it but may not be teaching in five years because there were too many students being packed into classes and she didn't feel like she was as effective as she once was. Sarai said her teaching got good results but at one point, when she didn't receive any positive feedback, she began to question her effectiveness. Amy expressed she knew she was a good teacher and that her 26 kids were getting what they needed. Kassi said she knew what she was doing in the classroom and didn't want to do anything else. When the teachers felt effective their self-esteem grew.

### **Appreciation, Recognition, and Respect**

Appreciation, recognition, and respect promoted esteem. When other teachers complimented the class Ann felt acknowledged. Justine felt accomplished when her former students exhibited regard for her by coming back to visit. She said this made her feel like she was doing something right. Amara enjoyed the respect of her principal by the trust he had in her to teach the standards. Sarai was happy to be acknowledged for her teaching by her principal and also appreciated the compliments the students' parents gave. Kassi noted the appreciation she got every day from her students and parents. She enjoyed receiving respect in public for being a teacher. Becca appreciated the feedback from parents when they saw a difference in their children. It made her feel respected. Lisa repeated the phrase, "I want to be valued" (Lisa, focus group, February 18, 2022). She liked for students' parents to do nice things for her because it made her feel good. She also liked to receive compliments on her class because she felt it reflected her teaching.

Although appreciation, recognition, and respect did not create self-esteem, the esteem of others did support it.

### **Affinity for Children**

Teachers who possessed a natural affinity for children found they enjoyed and had fun being with or around children. Lisa, Ann, Abby, and Donna always liked children and still loved working with them. Kassi had always enjoyed children and they were still part of her motivation to continue teaching when difficulties arose. She knew if she left, she would miss them and miss being in the classroom environment. The joy they found in relationships with children was evident.

### **Security**

The security of having a paycheck was important to Donna and Abby. Donna noted the pay as the reason she continues to teach because she was a single mother and was not sure she could get another job with equivalent pay. She was not sure she could afford to be without insurance for the time period it would take to change jobs. Abby would have stayed home with her children if she had the choice. She needed to supplement the family income and she enjoyed teaching.

### **Research Question Three: How does Maslow's hierarchy of needs explain the above?**

Maslow's hierarchy of needs provided a framework for the factors of teachers to stay in the classroom to be examined. Viewing the factors through this lens resulted in leaving the physiological needs unaddressed as teachers did not comment on this aspect of their needs. Maslow's level of safety included the teachers' salaries and benefits. Relationships with students, colleagues, administrators, parents, and community and the

affinity for children were encompassed in the level of love and belonging. The level of esteem included the factors of student success, impact, self-efficacy, and of recognition, appreciation, and respect. Self-actualization was seen in the passion for teaching that some teachers expressed. Between each level of Maslow's, the connections seen were addressed.

### **Safety**

Safety was met for two of the participants through the salary and benefits that teaching provided. Donna and Abby stayed for the paycheck. Although Abby had to work, she also enjoyed teaching children and the hours teaching provided so she could be with her children as much as possible.

### **Love and Belonging**

The relational needs included those with students, colleagues, administrators, parents, and the community, respectively.

### ***Students***

Student relationships created an opportunity for teachers to build trust with their students which helped in the classroom to motivate their students. Amara built relationships with students in school and in the community. She believed her relationships with students conveyed that she really cared. Lisa noted she couldn't leave her children and Amy told how her students are taken care of and how she establishes relationships with younger students as they come up in her elementary school. She noted she stayed for the kids. These teachers cared about the students in their schools and invested in relationships to help them.

Sarai and Becca mentioned forming a bond with students. Through this reciprocal relationship, Sarai hoped the students would return to visit anytime they wanted. She extended this relationship in the community. Becca liked how she felt in the “aha” moments when the students found success or wrote notes that said I love you. Donna enjoyed her relationship with students and liked seeing her students every day, getting hugs, and when students returned to see her. Justine said that students coming back to visit made everything she did worth it. She noted this positive relationship gave her the drive to continue teaching.

An affinity for children was also a factor falling into this category. Love and belonging encompassed the need to give and receive love; however, Maslow also stated that those who had been satisfied with the need for love showed they need less to receive love and were more able to give love. This could be true for some of the participants.

Abby, Lisa, and Donna mentioned their love of children as a reason to join the teaching profession and a continuing motivating factor. Ann loved her relationship with students and Kassi emphasized how she loved making connections with them and getting more love from the little ones than anything. The teachers cared for their students. They expressed love for them and felt that love was reciprocated which could fill the need for love and affection in the context of teaching.

### ***Colleagues***

Teachers found enjoyment, support, friendship, and a reason to stay in their schools through collegial relationships. Lisa and Kassi both developed close friendships with a colleague. Kassi formed relationships across the district and it made the district feel like home to her. Lisa repeated the importance of relationships in her interview and

during a focus group. She expressed that the relationships you made with your colleagues and “kiddos” made teaching worth it. Amara and Ann talked about how they loved the staff they worked with. Ann noted her colleagues worked well together. Becca noted the staff at her school as a reason to stay there. Justine, Donna, and Sarai appreciated the support they received from colleagues. By supporting each other the teachers built one another up and developed a sense of kinship.

### ***Administrators***

Teachers appreciated receiving trust, support, and respect from their administrators. Amara appreciated the trust she received from her principal. Sarai developed a positive relationship with her principal and felt like she could talk to him honestly. Kassi loved that her principal was supportive and had her back. She said that her principal really would help teachers when they struggled. Becca loved her principal. She was comfortable with her and the principal was supportive. Lisa shared that for her it was all about the relationships with children and leadership. She felt blessed to have her principal in part because she had experienced a negative principal/teacher relationship in the past. She shared how her principal cared about the staff and checked on their well-being. Abby and Amy liked how their principal worked to build a community in their school and noticed the difference it made. Donna appreciated the small acknowledgments such as gifts and having small things done for her. The support and genuine relations some administrators were able to nourish made teachers feel valued, respected, and appreciated.

### ***Parents-Community***



Ann and Lisa included the parents when discussing relationships. They liked making connections with the students and parents. Lisa noted, “A relationship... you know we, everybody wants that” (Lisa, interview, January 31, 2022). Sarai found it important to teach in her community and build these relationships. Parent and community relationships supported the teachers and students as well.

Relationships allowed teachers to influence student success and to receive appreciation from the school population. When teachers formed relationships with their students, they were able to impact students’ lives. Kassi shared that her students were her reason for getting out of bed every morning. Her devotion to them was constant and she desired to positively impact their lives every day. Donna expressed how she loved children and loved “to see their faces light up”. This was an expression of both an affinity for children and the esteem she might feel during the success of her students. The relationship made the esteem possible to receive whether it was experienced as internal esteem, knowing they had done a good job, or external esteem from the appreciation of a student or others. Ann encompassed both levels, “They love me and they know I love and care about them... they want to do good... that is a big part of just the appreciation that I feel” (Ann, interview, December 8, 2021). Relationships built a bridge to esteem.

### **Esteem**

Participants expressed feelings of self-esteem and being esteemed or respected by others. Maslow includes both in his hierarchy theory with the esteem needs. The factors that supported teachers’ esteem needs included student success, impact, self-efficacy, as well as, appreciation, recognition, and respect.

### ***Student Success***

Student success is a product of a teacher's work. Within the context of teacher motivation, self-esteem is a result of one feeling confident or competent in their position. The success of their students was a mirror to their own success in teaching them. Ann shared that she knew she was doing what was right when she saw them learn to read. Justine said when her students succeeded it made her feel like she was doing something right. Teachers expressed the learning they saw in the classroom as the "aha" and "light bulb" moments. Amy and Sarai loved to see the learning take place and students succeed. Sarai also noted a compliment she received about a student and she told how she had worked to build his confidence. The compliment was an acknowledgment that the work she did was showing. Student success drove Amara to find the next thing she could use to help students get what they needed. Kassi looked forward to hearing about the success of students in the future and said she would see it and know "...yes! I did something" (Kassi, interview, December 16, 2021). They cared for their students and wanted them to succeed and in doing so the teachers experienced their own success.

### ***Impact***

Making an impact on students and the world was mentioned by several teachers. Making a difference could bolster the self-esteem of a teacher. Maslow tells us that one of the effects of satisfying esteem needs is the feeling of being useful and necessary in the world. Ann and Sarai desired to make their students' school experience good, in part due to their own negative experiences in school. They both saw this as a way to make a difference in the lives of their students. Amara chose to teach in a Title I school because there was a need there. She wanted to go where she could make the most impact. Lisa, Donna, and Sarai wanted to influence more than academics. They wanted to "mold good

humans” and teach them to be kind, compassionate, and “better”. Justine desired to be a positive role influence or world model for students. She referred to her desire to help others as a “call to duty”. Amy knew she could make a difference in the future because the future was sitting in her classroom. She knew the difference she made and said that was what kept her in it. Changing the community and world through their commitment and investment in students mattered to them.

Teachers also made an impact on their schools by mentoring teachers, advocating for teacher rights, and continuing their education. Amy and Ann mentored other teachers. Amara invested time in furthering her education. She noted the more she learned the more she could help others. Sarai believed all teachers should be able to teach in their own style and advocated for colleagues. This was one more way the teachers could extend their efforts to help others.

### *Self-Efficacy*

Participants who felt good at their jobs were expressing self-efficacy. Maslow noted meeting esteem needs could bring about feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, and capability. Half of the teachers expressed feeling they were good at their jobs.

Kassi shared that teaching was something she was good at and she enjoyed it. She stated, “I know what I am doing, and I don’t want to do anything new” (Kassi, interview, December 16, 2021). Ann said she knew that what she was doing was right. Sarai discussed how her teaching style got good results. Amy expressed her feeling of self-efficacy boldly, “I am good at very few things, but I know I am a good teacher” (Amy, interview, December 7, 2021). Becca said she felt like she was good at it. However, she

also expressed that due to her large class size, she may not stay in the classroom because she did not feel she could be effective with that many kids. Self-efficacy was one of the key drivers of teachers' desire to do more. They believed they could so they did. However, when effectiveness was in jeopardy it had an opposite effect.

### ***Appreciation, Recognition, and Respect***

Maslow tells us a subset of the esteem needs is the desire for reputation or prestige, the respect or esteem one receives from other people. The esteem received from others may lead to feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, and capability.

The participants discussed receiving esteem-building feedback from their administrators, colleagues, parents, and students. Ann, Kassi, Becca, Amy, and Lisa discussed the appreciation they received. Ann received appreciation from her students and colleagues. Sarai was encouraged by parent compliments and was also happy to be acknowledged by her principal. Lisa and Kassi got appreciation from their students and parents, but Kassi especially liked the respect and appreciation she received from the public. Becca liked for parents to see the difference in their kids and show appreciation. She liked feeling respected in general and said it was a nice profession to be in. Amy felt acknowledged by her principal and parents and expressed there was more appreciation than people would think. The students were whom she received the most appreciation from.

Justine shared the regard she felt from former students who came back to see her and noted, "That's a reward!" She also felt encouraged by her principal and colleagues for the little things they did. Amara noted how she felt respected by her principal.

The confidence individuals develop through esteem needs may move them to achieve their highest calling and toward self-actualization. In order to become all one is capable of becoming, it may be necessary to first feel they are competent in attaining that level of being. Amara had thought about teaching her whole life and worked hard to attain that goal. However, she is not certain she will remain in the classroom because she feels she may be able to fully use her abilities by coaching teachers. Amara may not have reached Maslow's level of self-actualization because she felt she had more to do beyond the position she held as a classroom teacher.

### **Self-Actualization**

Individuals in the field of teaching may have reached a level of self-actualization in relationship to their position if they felt driven to teach, had a passion for it, or felt it was their calling. Maslow shared that when all other needs were met an individual may still have a need for self-fulfillment and become actualized in what he is potentially. Individuals may desire to reach their full potential.

Sarai commented that passion was a factor in teachers' persistence in the classroom but she did not say it was a passion for her. Justine and Amy discussed the calling and passion to teach. Both participants repeated these sentiments several times throughout the data collected. Justine couldn't imagine doing anything else. Amy spoke passionately about her work with students. She expressed that she was where she was supposed to be and it wasn't just a job. For her teaching was her life. She never doubted what she was called to do. Notably, these two teachers were never moved from the elementary school they initially taught in for River City Public Schools.

### **Conclusions**

Two teachers taught in order to satisfy the need for security. Donna expressed she would not be teaching if she could get a job that paid as well as her teacher salary. She was also concerned about insurance for her and her child if she transitioned to a new job. The security of her family rested fully on her. Abby taught to supplement her family's income. The security of their jobs and benefits provided for not only their needs but the needs of their families as well. For Abby, this benefit included having the same hours as her children when they were in school.

Working in education was not without additional benefits for these two teachers. They both enjoyed the relationships they developed with their students. Relationships with their colleagues and principal existed for both; although Donna's apparent satisfaction in these relationships was lower than Abby's. The esteem needs for these teachers were the lowest of all the participants and again Donna's satisfaction was slightly lower than Abby's. However, the only esteem factor present for these teachers was student success which may have been supported by relationships with students. The presence of security needs seemed to stunt the movement up Maslow's levels of need satisfaction in the context of their jobs for these two teachers.

Conversely, two teachers reached a perceived job satisfaction at the highest level, self-actualization. Justine and Amy both conveyed strong feelings that teaching was a passion and calling and they planned to continue in the classroom. As this expression of satisfaction went up the need for relationships with students remained relatively high; however, the emergence of fewer needs for other relationships was seen in comparison with teachers who did not express the highest level of self-actualization. In comparing these two teachers, the one with the highest perceived satisfaction at the level of self-

actualization had the lowest level of needs in the area of relationships. It may be considered that meeting the level of self-fulfillment may negate the effect of relationships on the persistence of teachers in the classroom. It may also be considered that the belonging needs had been satisfied, as these two teachers had not moved schools within River City Public Schools and had the stability of the relationships which they had already fostered.

Meeting the belonging needs may support teacher retention at a school site. It could also move teachers toward higher levels of esteem and self-actualization. At the level of esteem, both teachers discussed the four identified factors, recognition, self-efficacy, impact, and student success. This supported the conclusion that as the teachers' needs were met, they may have achieved the highest level of satisfaction in the context of their job and be more likely to persist in the classroom. This coincides with Maslow's motivational theory which states, "The clear emergence of these needs rests upon prior satisfaction of the physiological, safety, love, and esteem needs. We shall call people who are satisfied in these needs, basically satisfied people, and it is from these that we may expect the fullest (and healthiest) creativeness" (Maslow, 2012, p. 20).

The relational needs of the teachers were the most discussed factors of the study and the most important relationship was with the students. Building relationships with students allowed the teachers to be trusted by the students and to respect them so their teaching would be received. It also allowed the teachers to have meaningful conversations. The relationship with students also provided an avenue for teachers to give and receive love or affection which came naturally for those teachers who possessed an affinity for children.

Six of the teachers exhibited factors that fell in Maslow's areas of love and belonging and esteem. They exhibited more perceived satisfaction in the area of love and belonging than esteem but to different degrees. Lisa, and Becca expressed relational factors as their determining reason to stay in teaching. Kassi shared the reason she taught was for her students and she had a desire to positively impact their lives. This marriage of relationship and esteem was expressed by Ann as well. Three of these teachers expressed their desire to remain in the classroom. However, one teacher's self-efficacy was affected by a large class size because she did not feel she could effectively teach them all. It might be concluded that teachers who are satisfied in the areas of love and belonging and/or esteem will be more likely to remain in the classroom than teachers who experienced needs at the level of security. However, if esteem is negatively affected, the relationship needs may not be enough for teachers to continue to serve in their position. There is another caveat.

If the full desire of a teacher is not to be a classroom teacher, they may not remain in the classroom. Maslow tells us the specific form of self-fulfillment will vary greatly from person to person. The final desire for self-actualization is very personal. Two teachers expressed satisfaction in the area of relationships and esteem and named them as reasons to stay in their positions but also shared they may not remain in the classroom. Sarai felt she may be able to have a greater impact on the lives of children and the community in a different job. She might or might not have stayed in the classroom depending on her opportunities. Amara felt she had given her all in the classroom and she had more to offer by moving to coach other teachers. Her perceived skillset was limited



by the bounds of her position as a classroom teacher; therefore, she was likely to leave this position.

Considering these motivations within the context of a micropolitan area school district reflected that teachers experiencing positive relationships were more likely to desire to stay in their assigned building. The advantage of being in a micropolitan district versus a rural one was that the option for movement within the district was available if a teacher was not satisfied. In contrast, the possible forced movement of teachers from school to school may have also affected the security of teachers in a negative way. Esteem could be a reason for retention in a micropolitan district, as the challenge and options the micropolitan district provided were stated as reasons for teaching there.

### **Implications**

Findings, implications, and applications in this study are not generalizable to all contexts, and the following implications are meant primarily for the specific context under study. However, qualitative research does lend to the possible transferability of certain findings from one context to others based on the similarity of receiving contexts (Erlandson, et al., 1993). Decisions of transferability should be based on details provided in the narrative presentation of the data in Chapter Four. Implications for research, theory and practice are delineated below.

#### **Implications for Research**

Studies have shown teacher job satisfaction can be understood in relation to teacher needs (Aydoğmus & Tükel, 2019; Fisher & Royster, 2016). This study contributed to the body of work examining teacher retention through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. It supported the body of work that found teacher retention

is higher when communication, collaboration, and collegiality between both administration and staff are present in the school (Ansley et al., 2019; Moore et al., 2018). Eight of the ten teachers exhibited satisfaction with love and belonging and esteem needs with respective levels. Five of these teachers plan to remain in the classroom and one would if her class was at a size she could be effective in teaching. The remaining two would not leave teaching because of the lack of relationships or esteem but because they may have a calling to go beyond the classroom to do what they feel is more. This study maintained that supporting teacher needs may serve to mitigate teacher shortages and develop approaches for administrators to best support all teachers (Fisher & Royster, 2016).

Teacher retention has been a topic of research for many years (Ronfelt et al., 2013; Sorensen & Ladd, 2020; Sutchter et al., 2019). However, most of the research has focused on urban and rural areas. This study highlights the need for teacher retention studies in the context of micropolitan area cities. Educational studies on teacher retention have been conducted in rural and urban areas (Cowen et al., 2012; Guarino et al., 2006; Hughes, 2012; Moore et al., 2018). Examining studies in a variety of contexts provides breadth to research. The context of the micropolitan city has been considered in very few educational studies and no studies in the area of teacher retention were found. There are 543 micropolitan areas in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). This Core Based Statistical Area provides a context beyond the basic rural and urban statistical domains that pervaded the 20th century (Ratcliffe, 2015). “Nonmetropolitan is often used synonymously with rural, and while there is overlap, these geographic entities are not identical and should not be used interchangeably” (Ratcliffe et al., 2016, p. 4).

## **Implications for Theory**

Findings demonstrate that Maslow's motivational theory (Maslow, 1943) is relevant to the understanding of teachers' motivation to persist in the classroom. Maslow's hierarchy of needs has been used in the past to describe teacher motivation. This study supported Maslow's theory by examining the factors that contributed to the motivation of teachers to continue teaching in the classroom in a micropolitan area district. The data indicated that teachers who taught in order to satisfy safety needs did not advance up the hierarchy to the extent that teachers who taught to meet relational and esteem needs did. These teachers expressed a desire to not teach. It also showed that teachers who were mostly satisfied in their needs taught because it was their passion. Their safety needs disappeared, relational needs diminished, and esteem needs increased as they moved toward or reached self-actualization. Five of the eight teachers who taught to satisfy relational and esteem needs at various levels expected to continue teaching. One teacher would consider leaving because she felt she could not teach the number of students in her classroom successfully but this could be negated with an adjustment to class size. Two teachers would consider advancing to different positions in order to use all their skills and effect change. This study supports the idea that teachers' motivational needs are met at different levels and the level of needs met in correlation with Maslow's hierarchy may affect their persistence in the classroom.

## **Implications for Practice**

State legislators and policymakers should consider the funding available to schools to support salary increases as needed to keep up with the cost of inflation and the regional average for their area. Teachers who cannot meet safety needs are more likely to

move to jobs in which they can. This is especially important for the many teachers supporting their families as single parents.

District leaders must consider the implications of teacher movement within their school district. As teachers are forced to move from one school to another, the satisfaction of the relational and esteem needs of teachers may be negatively affected. Frequent movement of teachers may also create a perceived instability of the teachers' placement and affect their need for security, as individuals crave familiar and undisrupted routines. School leaders should also consider class size limits in relation to the effectiveness of instruction. Teachers who do not feel successful may be more likely to vacate their position.

At the school site level, the relationship administrators foster with their teachers plays an important factor in meeting the relational needs of teachers. When principals build a family or community atmosphere where all teachers feel included, they are more likely to retain teachers. Fellow teachers can also build working relationships with their colleagues and contribute to teacher retention. Administrators can affect the satisfaction of esteem needs by showing signs of trust and respect to their staff, acknowledging their competence, and providing for opportunities to lead in the school. Principals must also consider the stability of the placement of teachers in their grade levels. Moving teachers can influence the level of their self-efficacy.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This research focused on factors that influence teachers to stay in the classroom through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The following recommendations for further research are provided. Relational-culture theory (RCT) by Miller (1976) could be

applied to the factors in this study as it considers the esteem and individual happiness of individuals is fostered through authentic relationships with others. Other motivational theories could be applied to the factors found in this study including Alderfer's existence-relatedness-growth theory (1969), Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation (1968), and self-determination theory by Deci and Ryan (2000). This same study could be applied to other rural, micropolitan, and metropolitan districts to compare the observations of factors influencing teacher satisfaction among differing degrees of diversity. A future study might include a comparison of the teacher's longevity in their school site with their level of satisfaction, as filtered through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Additionally, a study to examine the effectiveness of teachers in relation to their level of satisfaction observed through Maslow's motivational theory could provide insights.

### **Summary**

This study focused on factors that influence teacher persistence in the classroom. Examining the factors that influence teacher needs through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs may explain teacher motivations to stay in the profession. These factors may provide administrators with an understanding of how their leadership and decisions may affect their teachers' needs and provide a means to promote teacher retention. This study was a qualitative study carried out in a micropolitan area district and was examined through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, a motivational theory.

Chapter II provided an in-depth review of the literature and the need for continued research and study on the topic. The literature focused on teacher retention and attrition and the motivation of teachers to enter the teaching profession. It revealed factors that

affect some teachers' choice to stay in the classroom. The most prominent reasons included positive school culture with administrators who supported their teachers and showed appreciation, available resources, mentoring, autonomy, and quality professional development. It examined teacher motivation and Maslow's hierarchy of needs provided a framework to examine the many possibilities of individual needs for teachers in the classroom which may be met in part through administrative practices. The recently identified micropolitan statistical area was defined and the importance of research in the micropolitan area was supported. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic was addressed.

Chapter III described the qualitative case study methodology selected for this study. Data collection occurred during the 2021-2022 school year and included interviews, observations, focus groups, and journal entries of ten teacher participants. In addition, this chapter introduced the researcher's role, potential bias, ethical considerations, and data selection and analysis process.

Chapter IV presented a detailed description of the interviews and focus group discussions, and included data collected through journal entries. The teachers' perceptions were presented in their own words. The initial motivations of teachers to enter the profession were also explored and the history of the school district was presented.

Chapter V analyzed the data through the framework of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The hierarchy incorporated the factors influencing teacher motivation as follows: safety-security of salary and benefits, love and belonging-relationships with students, colleagues, administrators, parents, and community, esteem-student success, impact, self-efficacy, and appreciation, recognition, and respect, self-actualization-passion or calling

for teaching. Chapter VI concluded with the findings and conclusions as well as, implications for research, theory, and practice, and recommendations for future research.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A



#### Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: 11/19/2021  
Application Number: IRB-21-486  
Proposal Title: EXPLORING ELEMENTARY TEACHER PERSISTENCE IN A  
MICROPOLITAN AREA THROUGH THE LENS OF MASLOW'S  
HIERARCHY OF NEEDS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Principal Investigator: Lora Reavis  
Co-Investigator(s):  
Faculty Adviser: Ed Harris  
Project Coordinator:  
Research Assistant(s):

Processed as: Exempt  
Exempt Category:

#### Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

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The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in 45CFR46.

This study meets criteria in the Revised Common Rule, as well as, one or more of the circumstances for which continuing review is not required. As Principal Investigator of this research, you will be required to submit a status report to the IRB triennially.

The final versions of any recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are available for download from IRBManager. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be approved by the IRB. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, adviser, other research personnel, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any unanticipated and/or adverse events to the IRB Office promptly.
4. Notify the IRB office when your research project is complete or when you are no longer affiliated with Oklahoma State University.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact the IRB Office at 405-744-3377 or [irb@okstate.edu](mailto:irb@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Oklahoma State University IRB

## Appendix B



School of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Aviation

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# EXPLORING ELEMENTARY TEACHER PERSISTENCE IN A MICROPOLITAN AREA THROUGH THE LENS OF MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

## Consent Form

### **Key Information**

#### **Study Purpose:**

The purpose of this study is to explore, through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, why teachers who have taught between five and 10 years in a micropolitan community stay in the profession.

#### **Major Procedures of the Study:**

A qualitative case study will be used for this study. The study will be conducted using interviews, focus groups, participant journaling, and observations.

**Duration of Participation:** The duration of participation will be by approximately three months.

**Significant Risks:** No significant risks have been identified in this study.

**Potential Benefits:** There are no direct benefits to participants. Stakeholders in education may gain insight as to why teachers stay beyond five years in a micropolitan area school and may use the knowledge to provide needed supports to teachers.

**Compensation:** Reciprocity will be extended to each participant in the form of a \$25 gift card following the focus group member checks.

### **Background Information**

You are invited to be in a research study of why mid-career teachers stay in the profession. You were selected as a possible participant because you have taught for five to 10 years in a selected micropolitan area elementary school. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. Your participation is entirely voluntary.

**This study is being conducted by:** Lora Reavis, School of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Aviation, Oklahoma State University, Tulsa, under the direction of Dr. Ed Harris, School of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Aviation, Oklahoma State University, Tulsa.



## **Procedures**

**If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:** Each participant will participate in one interview with an expected length of 30-60 minutes. Individual interviews will be held in a neutral location at the convenience of the participant. Each participant will also be invited to participate in one of two focus groups to be held in a neutral location, such as the local library, with an expected length of 60 to 90 minutes. Both the interview and focus group will be voice recorded and fully transcribed. You will also be asked to reflect on teaching in four journal entries, and to be observed once in a daily routine, school activity, or meeting.

## **Participation in the study involves the following time commitment:**

One 30–60-minute interview

One 60–90-minute focus group

## **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study**

**The study involves the following foreseeable risks:** Potential risks in this study may include misrepresentation and identification of the participant in published papers by themselves or others. In order to assist with the offset of these risks, participants will complete member checks, a verification by the participant of the researcher's understanding of data, in order to prevent any misrepresentation of data.

There is a potential risk of breach of confidentiality which is minimized by participants' identities being protected with the use of pseudonyms and the secure storage of personal and research data. The city and school district will also be represented with pseudonyms to prevent unintended or assumed identity by location.

**The benefits to participation are:** There are no direct benefits to you. More broadly, this study may help the researchers learn more about why teachers stay beyond five years in a micropolitan area school and may give stakeholders in education insight into the job satisfaction of teachers or motivation of teachers to continue in the profession beyond five years. It may also help future researchers design interventions to help with teacher commitment to the profession.

## **Compensation**

You will receive a token \$25 gift certificate as compensation for your participation. You will receive this compensation after the completion of focus group member checks.

## **Confidentiality**

The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your information will be assigned a pseudonym. The list connecting your name to this pseudonym will be kept in a locked file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report.

Because of the nature of the focus group, I cannot guarantee your focus group data will be confidential and it may be possible that others will know what you have reported. The

researchers will make every effort to ensure that information about you remains confidential, but cannot guarantee total confidentiality. Your identity will not be revealed in any publications, presentations, or reports resulting from this research study. However, it may be possible for someone to recognize your particular story/situation/response. While we will ask all group members to keep the information they hear in this group confidential, we cannot guarantee that everyone will do so.

We will collect your information through voice recordings of interviews and focus groups; as well as, information pages, observations, and journal entries. This data will be stored in a folder in a locked file cabinet. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the code list linking names to study pseudonyms will be destroyed. This is expected to occur no later than May 2022. The audio recording will be transcribed. The recording will be deleted after the transcription is complete and verified. This process should take approximately three months. This informed consent form will be kept for three years after the study is complete, and then it will be destroyed. Your data collected as part of this research project, will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

It is unlikely, but possible, that others responsible for research oversight may require us to share the information you give us from the study to ensure that the research was conducted safely and appropriately. We will only share your information if law or policy requires us to do so. Finally, confidentiality could be broken if materials from this study were subpoenaed by a court of law.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time. The alternative is to not participate. You can skip any questions that make you uncomfortable and can stop the interview at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your employment.

\*\*\*Participation in this study is restrict to persons who are physically located in the United States.

### **COVID19**

I am vaccinated and will receive a booster shot. I will wear a mask to all in person interactions. Participants will have the option to wear or not wear a mask according to the rules of the site.

### **Contacts and Questions**

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human research participants at Oklahoma State University has reviewed and approved this study. If you have questions about the research study itself, please contact the Principal Investigator at 918-869-5406 or lora.reavis@okstate.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer or would simply like to speak with someone other than the research team about concerns regarding this study, please contact the IRB at (405) 744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu. All reports or correspondence will be kept confidential.

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

**Statement of Consent**

I have read the above information. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have my questions answered. I consent to participate in the study.

Indicate Yes or No:

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study.

Yes       No

I give consent to be contacted for follow-up in this study or future similar studies:

Yes       No

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

VITA

Lora Gail Reavis

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: EXPLORING ELEMENTARY TEACHER PERSISTENCE IN A  
MICROPOLITAN AREA THROUGH THE LENS OF MASLOW'S  
HIERARCHY OF NEEDS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Major Field: Education Leadership in School Administration

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education in School  
Administration at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May,  
2023.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Education in Reading at  
Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma in 2008.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood  
Education at Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma in 1995.

Experience:

Reading Specialist/Reading Recovery Teacher, Muskogee Public Schools  
2019-Present

Summer School Principal, Muskogee Public Schools, 2020

Instructional Specialist, Muskogee Public Schools, 2018-2019

Classroom Teacher, Muskogee Public Schools, 1999-2018