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## Workplace Factors That Contribute to Teacher Intent to Leave the Profession

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**Workplace Factors That Contribute to Teacher Intent to Leave the Profession**

by

Teresa Blount Gibbons

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of Coastal Carolina University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education  
with a specialization in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

Education Sciences and Organizations

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### **Abstract**

There is a nationwide shortage of qualified teachers, with 90% of all teacher shortages caused by teacher attrition (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). This study surveyed public school K-12 teachers in South Carolina to gain an understanding of workplace factors that contribute to teacher intentions to quit/ teacher attrition. The current design measures teacher stress perceptions of workplace factors as the relational theoretical lens to determine teacher intention to leave or likelihood of attrition. The results of a study suggest that student stressors and workload are the most important factors in teacher attrition. A qualitative analysis of student stressors found that student behavior was closely tied to administrator support, student motivation, and technology. COVID-19 has had a significant influence on student motivation, leading to behavioral and academic concerns. 84% of teachers and administrators reported lower morale levels than prior to COVID-19, in large part due to decreased student engagement, adding that they are more likely to leave teaching or retire early since working during the pandemic (Rosenberg & Anderson, 2021). Inconsistency of administrative discipline policies can also lead to increased teacher stress. Excessive workload is leading to emotional exhaustion and desire to leave the profession (Toropova et al., 2020). This study found workload is the second most stressful daily challenge often leading to mental exhaustion and anxiety. School leaders must recognize the importance of teachers' professional and personal wellbeing on job satisfaction to prevent burnout, resignations, and early retirement (Van der Vyver et al., 2020).

*Keywords:* mixed-methods, grounded theory, teacher attrition, stress, workplace factors, student stressors, workload, administrator support, COVID-19

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Teachers cite wanting to make a difference, working with young people, a love of the subject, and inspiration by their own teacher(s) as the top reasons they entered the profession (Perryman & Calvert, 2019). There is a mismatch between teacher personal goals and aspirations and the reality of the job demands and expectations that lead to demotivation (Williams, 2017). Approximately 40% of teachers who left their positions voluntarily, surveyed before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, blamed stress and “disappointments of teaching” as a factor in their decision to quit (Diliberti et al., 2021). Early career teachers in particular can face an identity conflict between “preservice expectations and in-service realities” (LaTronica-Herb & Karalis Noel, 2022, p. 2). The disconnect between personal motivators and reality cause stress, which can lead to teacher attrition.

High stress levels have been cited as one of the main reasons 25% to 50% of teachers quit within the first five years (Algozzine et al., 2011). Each year, teachers vacate positions with fewer new teachers to fill those vacancies. Enrollments in Teacher Preparation Programs (TPP) remained relatively constant in the 1990s and 2000s, but since 2008 there has been a 35% decline in TPP completers (Ramos & Hughes, 2020; Will, 2022). The negative net production of teachers graduating from traditional TPPs is a national concern; however, this study will focus only on South Carolina.

Teacher attrition tends to vary by region; the southern United States has a higher turnover rate than the rest of the country (Sutcher & Darling-Hammond, 2016). Nationally, the teacher turnover rate is around 15%, with the South averaging around 17% (Williams et al., 2021). South Carolina is representative of the southeastern United States in culture and population. Surveying

teachers in South Carolina provides data that may give insight that can be applied on a broader scale. Approximately 6,900 of South Carolina teachers employed in the 2020-2021 school year did not return to a teaching position in the same district for the 2021-2022 school year (Garrett, 2021). Of the new teachers hired to fill some of those vacancies, only 22% were recent graduates of a formal teacher education program in the State of South Carolina (Garrett, 2021).

Teacher vacancies have compounded since COVID-19; South Carolina school districts reported 1,063 vacant positions in October 2021. This is a 52% increase from the previous year, and the largest number of vacancies since the South Carolina Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement (CERRA) began reporting this data in 2001 (CERRA, 2021). The data suggest that, while teacher retention has historically been an issue, something has exacerbated the teacher exodus over the last two years; this time frame coincides with the unprecedented changes to the educational system and structure due to COVID-19.

In several national polls during the 2020-2021 school year, 20-47% of teachers responded they were considering quitting or early retirement (Antonucci, 2021). The COVID-19 school shutdowns and subsequent reopenings necessitated sudden changes to daily instruction. The uncertainty of policies and changing guidelines called for variations of socially distanced classrooms, hybrid teaching models, and completely virtual models of instruction (Pressley & Learn, 2021). These sudden changes resulted in an increased workload with insufficient training, leading to higher levels of stress (Chan et al., 2021). A survey prior to the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that 1 out of 7 teachers had never used digital media to teach (Ferran, 2022). An additional survey of 106 school districts around the country found that just over half of them provided training for teachers to teach remotely in the summer before the 2020-2021 school year, even though the majority of schools opened using a virtual model of instruction (Ferran, 2022).

These instructional changes redefined normal teacher workload and may have also led to other challenges.

In addition to new instructional pedagogies and technological shifts, teachers were also faced with the challenge of student attendance and engagement in virtual and hybrid platforms (Pressley & Learn, 2021). The day-to-day uncertainty and increased workload may have caused “diminished professional functioning” resulting from high levels of stress in the new environment (Chan et al., 2021, p. 533). All these factors may have contributed to increased attrition or intent to leave. Nearly half of the public-school teachers who left their jobs after the 2020-2021 school year began blamed longer work hours, technical problems, and difficulty working in the remote setting (Diliberti et al., 2021).

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic caused major changes to educational systems, teacher turnover was high. Teacher attrition is a national challenge for the educational system, with turnover being the highest in the Southern United States (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Diliberti et al., 2021; Ingersoll, 2001). The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated an already serious problem, with more teachers reporting increased stress levels and more frequent considerations of leaving the profession (Zammarro et al., 2022).

### **Problem Statement**

Teachers experience higher levels of stress than members of other occupations (Jepson & Forrest, 2006). This is important when considering that educator emotional distress has been connected to reductions in teacher responsiveness and professional commitment (Buettner et al., 2016). The historic disruption teachers experienced as schools shut down and adjusted to the COVID-19 pandemic guidelines created an environment of uncertainty that had a profound

impact on teachers. Schools experiencing staffing shortages since the pandemic have teachers reporting they are more stressed than ever before (Will, 2022).

When schools were shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers no longer had the normal social supports of their colleagues. Working in isolation from home, no longer face-to-face with their peers or students, teachers were suddenly challenged to adapt lessons for the new environment. This shift required them to learn new technology and/or pedagogies quickly with little instruction or help from colleagues. Teachers “experienced the single most traumatic and transformative event of the modern era” (Kaden, 2020, p. 165). The emotional effects of such a drastic and sudden change to school structure placed unique stressors on teachers with unforeseen consequences, given that stress has been found to be a contributing factor to decisions to leave the classroom (Greiner & Smith, 2006).

During the COVID-19 school closures, teachers were cut off from their Professional Learning Communities (PLC). Research shows that teachers are more likely to stay in a school setting in which they experience positive relationships with their peers (Farmer, 2020). Collegial supports and relationships are important considerations in teacher attrition, especially among new teachers (Burke et al., 2013). The new instructional models and disconnectedness from colleagues may have had a negative impact on teacher resiliency, as professional development opportunities, shared decision making, and “caring collegial relationships” have been found to support teacher resilience (Richards et al., 2016).

The underlying reasons why teachers actually leave the profession may be difficult to determine. Negative teacher-administrator relationships lead to teacher reluctance to full disclosure of the reasons they decide to leave. Some teachers have reported workplace bullying by administrators with perceived mistreatment including being ignored, not being supported, and

receiving “unfair” evaluations (Orange, 2020). In South Carolina, the majority of exit surveys allow for instinct responses exemplified by items like “because of other factors not included elsewhere” or “because of other personal life reasons” (SC-Teacher, 2021). Anecdotal evidence indicates that teachers often select “personal reasons” as a default to avoid retaliation or negative consequences (Garrett, 2021). This makes it difficult to determine exactly what teachers are feeling that causes them to leave jobs they spent a lot of time and money to prepare for and may have invested many years of their life doing.

Teachers report many reasons for leaving the profession, ranging from a lack of administrative and parent support, unmotivated students, school violence, and unrealistic workload (Farber, 2010). Despite financial incentives like higher salary or bonuses, research indicates that teachers continue to leave due to stressful environments (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2011). Teacher shortages are most often discussed from a financial deficit perspective; only recently have researchers begun to examine other factors like job satisfaction and working conditions as prominent reasons for teacher attrition (Ramos & Hughes, 2020; Sutchter et al., 2016). Teacher perceptions of various workplace factors and stress as well as the additional effects of COVID-19 are essential components of teacher intention to stay in or leave the profession.

The unintended consequences of the COVID-19 shutdowns may be contributing to teacher job dissatisfaction. Currently, all South Carolina teachers complete an exit survey when they leave a teaching position. However, those surveys are inconsistent and vary from district to district. A pilot of a common exit survey in five South Carolina school districts indicates that COVID-19 itself did not add to teacher attrition, but rather, it amplified stress and frustrations

leading to high levels of burnout (SC-Teacher, 2021). As schools return to a new post-COVID normal, it is imperative that teacher attrition be addressed.

Examining the strength and significance of teacher's perceived stress levels as related to various workplace factors will allow the researcher to identify specific workplace conditions that may increase the likelihood of teacher intent to leave the profession. The purpose of this study is to determine how specific workplace factors such as workload, motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic), student concerns, administrative support, professional investment, personal health, and job satisfaction contribute to teacher intention to leave the profession and/or attrition.

### **Nature of the Study**

Understanding how teacher stress manifests can provide clues to the underlying reasons why teachers leave the classroom. Teacher attrition has many nuanced causes that are not easily explained with one theoretical framework; therefore, the data must be allowed to form a grounded theory that fully captures the complexity of the issue. Identifying underlying causes of teacher stress could lead to pragmatic solutions and have a meaningful impact on teacher retention.

This research study will be an adapted convergent mixed methods study using data collected from a teacher concerns survey instrument. This study will follow an explanatory design model as independent and dependent variable data will be collected simultaneously (Creswell, 2018). Both quantitative and qualitative data will be collected using Likert scale stress items and open-ended responses. This will provide the opportunity to determine quantitative patterns that can be further explained by the qualitative responses.

This study will seek to determine how specific workplace factors contribute to teacher intention to leave the profession and/or attrition. To gain full understanding of the issue, the research will be focused on the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between workplace environmental factors (workload stressors, motivation, student stressors, administrative support, professional investment, personal health, job satisfaction, and COVID-19) and teacher stress?
2. How do workplace environmental stressors influence teacher attrition (intent to leave the profession)?
3. How do intrinsic and extrinsic factors influence teacher stress level?

### **Definition of Terms**

#### ***South***

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2021), the South refers to a geographic region of the United States made up of: Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi and Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas.

#### ***Stress***

A physiological or psychological response to internal or external stimuli; stress affects almost all bodily systems and influences how people feel and act (APA, n.d.). Stress can also be defined as an unpleasant experience connected to environmental factors causing feelings of anxiety, anger, and/or frustration (Kyriacou, 2001).

#### ***Occupational Stress***

“The harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker.” (NIOSH, 2022).

### ***Teacher Stress***

Includes the specific context of the school setting. Teacher stress is dependent upon environmental interactions between the individual and environment influenced by social and institutional support factors (Jarvis, 2002; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Saeki et al., 2018).

### ***Toxic Stress***

When “demands consistently outpace ability to cope” resulting in dissociation often ending in burnout (Aguilar, 2018).

### ***Burnout***

An extreme form of prolonged workplace stress that can lead to physical and emotional exhaustion and feelings of ineffectiveness, on the context of this study. Burnout is identified by three negative thought process domains: feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion causing mental distancing from the job, feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one’s job, and reduced professional efficacy (WHO, 2019).

### ***Teacher Attrition***

When teachers leave the profession (Ryan et al., 2017). This study will use teacher intention to quit as an indicator of teacher attrition, in part due to difficulty locating teachers who have left the profession. Other research indicates that teacher intentions to leave are directly related to likelihood of attrition (Madigan & Kim, 2021).

### ***Job Satisfaction***



A positive emotional state resulting from an individual's appreciation of their job. Job satisfaction has several facets including work demands, compensation, working conditions, self-esteem, and relationships (Locke, 1976).

### ***Professional Well-being***

An individual's perception of job qualities, including self-efficacy and job satisfaction (Van der Vyver et al., 2020).

### ***Well-being***

The state of being psychologically, physically, and emotionally healthy (Van der Vyver et al., 2020).

### ***Intrinsic Motivators***

Factors that tend to expand capacity and engagement stemming from internal feelings of interest or satisfaction (Di Domenico & Ryan, 2017).

### ***Extrinsic Motivators***

Factors that engage people in an activity for compensation, tangible reward, or avoidance of a consequence (Di Domenico & Ryan, 2017).

### **Significance of the Study**

Teacher attrition leaves vacancies, and when vacancies are not filled immediately, they can create shortages. Teacher workforce instability has serious consequences that hinders student learning (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Teacher attrition affects student achievement (Barnes et al., 2007), and educator stress has been shown to have negative effects on learning outcomes (Buettner et al., 2016). In addition, constant teacher turnover reduces teacher effectiveness and

overall quality (Ronfelt et al., 2013). This is significant when considering that student achievement is most impacted by the quality of teachers (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002).

There is a direct correlation between teacher vacancies and student achievement (Dickenson et al., 2021). Instructional quality and student well-being is directly related to teacher well-being; therefore, it is important to understand the consequences of traumatic events, like COVID-19, on teacher stress and job satisfaction (Seyle et al., 2013; Sharifian & Kennedy, 2019). Failing to retain teachers by ignoring their emotional well-being may further exacerbate the problem of teacher attrition. Supporting teacher mental health leads to successful learning outcomes and higher achievement (Kaden, 2020). Teacher attrition also affects the teachers who choose to remain in the classroom. Fewer teachers can lead to larger classes or the elimination of certain classes altogether (Socol & Metz, 2017). This can result in lower teacher morale due to increased workload to fill the gaps vacancies leave behind.

In South Carolina, rural and/or high poverty school districts tend to have more vacancies than urban and/or low poverty schools (Dickenson et al., 2021). This is consistent with other research that claims there are higher teacher attrition rates in schools with lower socioeconomic status (Hughes, 2012). Results from a three-year study show that high-poverty schools (including elementary, middle, and high) had the lowest teacher retention rates in South Carolina (Fan, 2020). Fewer teachers lead to vacancies that may affect access to quality education. Research indicates that low-income and/or students of color often do not receive consistent, high-quality teaching compared to white and/or high-income students (Socol & Metz, 2017). Schools with staffing shortages due to teacher attrition and resultant vacancies may have to limit the number and types of course offerings without qualified teachers to teach them. Because low-income communities are disproportionately affected by teacher vacancies in South Carolina, this could

lead to educational inequities (McVey et al., 2019). The strain placed on teachers and students by teacher turnover can negatively affect teacher-student relationships as well.

The foundation of the educational system rests on the bonds formed between the teacher and student, becoming the central relationship in education (Steiner, 2009). As students get older, success in school can be directly attributed to teacher-student relationships (Ansari, 2020). Teacher-student relationships include both positive and negative interactions. When students feel supported and understood by their teachers, they are more likely to achieve academically; reciprocally, if students experience negative interactions, achievement and sense of belonging decrease (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015). These relationships are built upon the behaviors and characteristics of both the teacher and student (Ansari, 2020). Teacher stress can lead to teacher behaviors that negatively affect student learning and access to curriculum (Dove, 2004; Kaplan & Owings, 2004) such as burnout and absenteeism (Evers et al., 2014).

School climate was impacted by the structural uncertainties due to COVID-19 shutdowns, and re-openings exacerbated already high teacher stress levels (Herman et al., 2021). Sources of teacher stress include school organization, job demands, work resources, and social and emotional interactions (Hayden et al., 2018). When schools across the country shut down, no one knew how long they would remain closed. This was followed by sudden shift to online platforms with little preparation and training. Typical classroom management skills used in traditional settings were no longer effective in online settings (Herman et al., 2021). As school re-openings began, teachers were tasked with increased bureaucratic tasks that had excessive time demands. The climate created by COVID-19 exerted a physical and mental toll on teachers as a result of the disruptions and restructuring of conventional school systems and structures (Kaden, 2020).

Constant teacher turnover not only affects student achievement, relationships, and school climate, but it also incurs additional financial burdens for schools who must continually recruit and train new teachers (Barnes et al., 2007). A report from the Learning Policy Institute estimates that the average cost of filling a teacher vacancy is \$21,000, with the total cost of turnover nearing \$8 billion a year (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). These funds could be better spent to support student and teacher needs through program or school improvements.

In addition to financial drains, teacher attrition can lead to a reduction in teacher quality. Teacher attrition affects teacher quality and student success, unnecessarily consuming financial resources that could improve teacher efficacy and student learning (National Commission on Teaching, 2007). Losing large numbers of early-career teachers and constantly training new teachers can result in a loss of teacher effectiveness. Teacher quality has been found to improve with experience, leading some to say that high turnover rates are costing the education system “half of all teachers before they reach their peak effectiveness” (National Commission on Teaching, 2007, p. 4). Teacher attrition affects student achievement, school climate, and results in increased financial cost to schools and districts (Barnes et al., 2007; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Garcia & Weiss, 2019).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study will apply a constructivist grounded theory approach in which the researcher will seek to fill in critical gaps of understanding on teacher stress and how that influences intent to leave the profession or teacher attrition. The grounded theory will be generated from a paradigm of constructivism using a mixed-methods approach. Assumptions associated with this worldview seek to gain understanding of a phenomena using the subjective perceptions of

participants. This method will result in research that will broaden understanding from the data, rather than from a specific theoretical lens (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Denzin, 2009). To study this phenomenon, this research will use various stress models and motivational frameworks as the conceptual viewpoint to build a grounded theory on the root causes of teacher attrition.

### ***Stress Models***

The amount of job stress is dependent upon the strength of workplace demands and the individual's perceived input or "decision making latitude" when dealing with them (Gallup, 2022). Stress is dependent upon the individual; it varies from person to person based on one's ability to cope and manage situations perceived as "stressful" (NIOSH, 2022). Occupational stress can be categorized into a subjective component, relating to individual capacity and the objective component referring to work related environmental factors (Andela, & van der Doef, 2019). Although often used to describe how one feels, stress itself is not a specific emotion. Rather, it is an emotional state that can include a variety of emotions.

Several stress models use workplace environmental factors as a measure of stress level. The Institute for Social Research (ISR) model for organizational stress categorizes and measures organizational stress using six factors: the objective environment, the psychological environment, mental and physical health and disease, enduring properties of the person, and interpersonal relations (Katz & Kahn, 1978). The McGrath (1976) model is a four-stage model of occupational stress based on employee perceptions and responses to the workplace environment, including cognitive appraisal, decision making, performance, and outcomes.

The Person-Environment (P-E) Fit Model examines the interaction between the person and the situation. If an employee's skills and abilities do not match environmental demands, an imbalance can occur. This means that the person and the environment are not a good fit, which could result in unmet personal needs, resulting in stress that may affect job performance (Jex, 1998). According to the P-E fit framework, a fit between the environment and individual will result in positive outcomes such as job satisfaction, whereas a mismatch has negative consequences often resulting in job dissatisfaction and burnout (Andela, & van der Doef, 2019).

### ***Teacher-Motivation Mismatch***

In order to understand why teachers leave their jobs, it is also necessary to understand their motivation for entering the teaching profession. When applied to the workplace, the motivation-hygiene theory quantifies job satisfaction by examining which workplace factors cause satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Factors like salary and benefits are important considerations when considering a career. These are classified as hygiene factors or potential dissatisfiers; they are extrinsic and include organizational policies, working conditions, and salary (Herzberg et al., 1959). Motivators, however, are intrinsic in nature and correlate to higher levels on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Knowledge workers like teachers are motivated by intrinsic rewards or what Maslow's hierarchy of needs classifies as "growth needs," such as the desire for esteem and self-actualization. However, these intrinsic motivators cannot be attained when the extrinsic, more rudimentary supports are not present or have a negative impact.

To help mitigate teacher attrition, it is necessary to examine school-based structures, or hygiene factors, including compensation, number of classes to prepare, planning, duties, and treatment by administrators to identify specific causes (Aguilar, 2018). Ineffective management

policies are the most frequent sources of dissatisfaction and weak management generates dissatisfaction and creates demoralization in the school and district (Brazer et al., 2019).

### ***Context***

The daily physical, mental, and cognitive expectations and responsibilities of teachers were completely upended when COVID-19 forced nationwide school closures. Teachers had to adapt to a completely new educational setting through remote learning with little preparation (Hodges et al., 2020). With no warning, classroom teachers were expected to learn new technology, curricula, and pedagogy all at once. Many teachers were suddenly thrust into the world of online learning, with little to no experience with this learning modality; they reported that all aspects of planning, instruction, and assessment were more challenging and made them feel less effective and unsuccessful (Huck & Zhang, 2021).

The established goals and priorities for the individual teacher and school suddenly no longer existed. Teachers had no input or understanding of the decision-making process. The Karasek Job Demand-Control Model identified the most stressful workplaces as those in which an employee does not have the ability to participate in decision making (Riley, 2007, Van der Doef & Maes, 1999;). As teachers return to the new normal following the COVID-19 educational disruption, studies are needed to determine how teachers are adapting to the new environmental factors and how these interactions may be leading to negative outcomes as evidenced through the increasing numbers of teacher vacancies in South Carolina classrooms (Kaden, 2020).

### **Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations**

The study provides information on the correlation between school-based environmental factors and stress levels, and how that translates to teacher attrition. This study broadens our understanding of what motivates teachers to leave their present positions or the profession altogether. It is assumed that all research participants will respond in an honest and forthright manner, as survey data will be completely anonymous and any identifying information will be kept confidential.

Data was collected from South Carolina K-12 public school teachers employed during academic years 2018-2019, 2019-2020, 2020-2021, 2021-2022. This included individuals who were teaching in public schools before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic school shutdowns. These academic years were studied to determine if environmental factors related to organizational changes both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic impacted teacher stress levels and job satisfaction. The survey included questions to obtain demographic information including age, gender, number of years teaching, subject, and grade level taught.

The present study had several limitations. Not only were all participants from one state in the United States, but the survey itself was distributed statewide to members of a state teacher organization. Not all South Carolina public school teachers are members of the Palmetto State Teachers Association (PSTA) and there is a membership fee. This limited the scope of the study. Therefore, the delivery method itself may have inadvertently selected a population with similar viewpoints. There is a possibility that response bias occurred, as teachers that chose to respond may have differing perceptions than the general population of teachers. Further research with a broader sample may increase the generalizability of the findings.

The validity and reliability of the survey instrument used in the current research could qualify as a limitation. The survey instrument was created by adapting items from Fimian's



(1988) Teacher Stress Inventory (TSI). The TSI consists of 63 items using a six-point Likert scale. The TSI is used to assess the areas of personal/professional stressors, professional distress, discipline and motivation, emotional manifestations, biobehavioral manifestations, and physiological-fatigue manifestations (Fimian, 1984; Weinstein & Trickett, 2016). Upon review of the TSI, several constructs identified in prior research were directly related to the constructs in the TSI. As a result, the two instruments were merged to create an updated Teacher Stress Survey that kept the original TSI survey format and several of the constructs to strengthen the validity and reliability of the instrument. To further strengthen the validity and reliability of the study, the revised survey instrument was given to a focus group of teachers take the survey and provide feedback each survey item to ensure clarity and intent.

### **Summary**

Teacher attrition and educator stress have been shown to have negative influence on student achievement (Barnes et al., 2007) and learning outcomes (Buettner et al. 2016). There is abundant research on teacher stress and attrition, however, analyzing attrition through the lens of stress in the post-COVID era can provide substantive data that can be used to recommend practical solutions to the mounting problem of teacher attrition. While factors like retirement, salary, and accountability measures are often cited as reasons for high teacher attrition this is an oversimplification of the issue (Ramos & Hughes, 2020). Stress and inability to manage stressors are some of the top reasons teachers leave the profession (Aguilar, 2018; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

COVID-19 school disruptions amplified classroom-related stressors (Kaden, 2020). This amplification of the preexisting stressors may have led to work conditions whereby dissatisfiers have reached intolerable levels, possibly resulting in burnout and/or intent to leave the

profession. This study will examine teacher perceptions of stress and work-related factors and the relationship with intent to leave the classroom. The findings will contribute to future research and development of instruments that school districts and leaders can use to examine specific workplace factors that can lead of teacher attrition.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

This study examined the specific workplace factors of workload, motivation, students, administrative support, professional investment, personal health, and job satisfaction using a teacher stress perception scale to determine influence on teacher intent to leave the profession and/or teacher attrition. “Job related stressors are the strongest predictor of poor job satisfaction for teachers” (Von der Embse, et al., 2016, p. 312). The following review of literature will provide an overview of relevant and current knowledge on the topic of teacher attrition, stress, workplace stressors, and COVID-19.

#### **Teacher Attrition**

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, school districts across the nation were already indicating severe teacher shortages, with the teacher attrition rate at 8%; even higher for beginning teachers and teachers in high poverty schools (Perryman & Calvert, 2020). In 2017, 40 states reported shortages in certain subjects and almost 70% of districts surveyed did not have enough qualified candidates for position openings, more than double the rate reported in 2014. The 2016-2017 school year saw 36 states fill 87,000 positions with applicants who were not fully certified (Sutcher et al., 2019).

Teacher attrition results in a loss of personnel and resources. Keeping teachers in the profession has an important effect on overall school climate. Teachers gain knowledge and experience with each year; therefore, teacher longevity results in more effective teachers. There is a significant investment in training early career teachers (Ryan et al., 2017). When new teachers leave within the first five years, schools and districts lose the money and time they invested (Ryan et al., 2017).

One-third of school leaders surveyed during the COVID-19 shutdowns reported higher than normal attrition rates in October 2020, with two-thirds indicating normal attrition rates (Diliberti et al., 2021). Whether the attrition rates experienced a slight decline or remained constant is likely attributed to other reasons, such as uncertain economic conditions. Nationwide shutdowns and unemployment made it difficult to find alternative gainful employment. When unemployment rises, teachers are less likely to leave their jobs (Rosenberg & Anderson, 2021). A study of six large urban districts from across the country showed that at the height of the COVID-19 school shutdowns in 2020, teacher turnover declined from 17.3% to 12.6%, with the largest decline among new teachers at high poverty schools (Rosenberg & Anderson, 2021).

Despite some indications of attrition rates leveling off or even lessening during the school shutdowns, whether due to a sense of duty or economic fears, it appears that COVID-19 accelerated teacher attitudes towards leaving. In a national survey of teachers in October 2020, a fourth reported their intention to quit before the end of the 20-21 school year. However, most of these respondents claimed they would not have left before COVID-19 (Diliberti & Kaufman, 2020). In an additional study conducted by the RAND Corporation, almost half of the 1000 teachers surveyed who voluntarily quit in the spring of 2020 claimed it was due to COVID-19 (Diliberti et al., 2021). This is supported by other research in which teachers responded that 40% of coworkers who thought about quitting due to COVID-19, did in fact leave (Zamarro et al., 2022).

Teacher attrition also tends to vary by region; the Southern United States has a higher turnover rate than the rest of the country (Sutcher & Darling-Hammond, 2016). Nationally, the teacher turnover rate is around 15%, with the South averaging around 17% (Williams et al., 2021). Before the pandemic, 65% of teacher attrition was from Southern states, and this region

accounted for 55% teacher attrition during the pandemic (Diliberti et al., 2021). Therefore, it is important to study and analyze attrition in the Southern United States. South Carolina school districts reported 1063 vacant positions in October 2021. This is a 52% increase from the previous year, and the largest number of vacancies since CERRA began reporting this data in 2001 (CERRA, 2021).

Teacher shortages have many concerned with how to get more people into the teaching profession. However, teacher attrition data suggests that preventing preretirement attrition could potentially solve the problem (Sutcher & Darling-Hammond, 2016). A common form of attrition is retirement; however, less than a third of teachers leaving the profession are due to retirements. Sixty percent of all teacher attrition is classified as “preretirement attrition” (Sutcher & Darling-Hammond, 2016), meaning that many teachers are choosing to permanently vacate teaching positions before reaching retirement eligibility. With more teachers leaving midcareer and traditional teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities graduating fewer numbers of qualified teachers, there is a teacher shortage. These shortages only exacerbate the problem of teacher attrition.

High rates of teacher attrition seem to stem from issues that compound upon themselves. In an effort to fill vacancies created by teacher exodus, school systems use alternate certification programs or hire underqualified personnel to fill vacancies, which in turn increases stress on certified teachers by creating additional responsibilities outside of their classroom (Ramos & Hughes, 2019). Teachers who have entered the profession through alternative certification initiatives with little preparation before they enter are two to three times more likely to quit than teachers who have had formal teacher preparation (Sutcher & Darling-Hammond, 2016).

The learning curve of new teachers is extremely high, demanding skills and knowledge that new teachers simply do not possess; this often causes stress and job dissatisfaction that can eventually increase turnover rates for teachers in the first few years of their career (Hughes, 2012). There appears to be a mismatch between what teachers expect to do and what they actually do that is demotivating and ultimately leads to teacher attrition (Williams, 2017).

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, fewer college students were choosing education majors due to misgivings over pay and working conditions (Will, 2022). Data shows a 35% decline in the number of teacher preparation program completers between 2008 and 2019 (Will, 2022). A recent survey by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) indicates the continuation of the downward trend in teacher education programs with 20% of institutions reporting an 11% decrease in undergraduate teacher preparation programs (Chirichella, 2022; Will, 2022).

Teacher wages are a contributing factor of attrition, but teachers listed financial considerations third in significance behind time constraints and local culture respectively (Sutcher & Darling-Hammond, 2016). While some blame low wages for teacher attrition, the recent phenomena of teachers deciding to quit despite not having another job waiting, suggests they are leaving because of nonmonetary reasons (Ramos & Hughes, 2019). Some leading reasons identified by teachers who quit are dissatisfaction, concerns with administration, lack of input in instructional decision making, accountability demands, and other working conditions (Sutcher & Darling-Hammond, 2016). A survey of 1000 teachers who left their positions in 2020 cited stress at a rate of two to one over wages; in many cases, these individuals left for jobs of equal or lesser pay; 30% went on to work in jobs with no health insurance or retirement benefits

(Diliberti et al., 2021). These findings suggest that factors other than money are critical to teacher retention and must be addressed.

## **Stress**

In general terms, stress is a physiological or psychological response to internal or external stimuli; stress affects almost all bodily systems and influences how people feel and act (APA, n.d.). Stress can also be defined as an unpleasant experience connected to environmental factors causing feelings of anxiety, anger, and/or frustration (Kyriacou, 2001). This study examined stress as related to occupational or job stress, following the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health's (2022) definition of job stress as, "the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker."

Teacher stress differs slightly given the specific context of the school setting; individuals have different capacities to manage stress and the range of variability of school-based stressors. Therefore, teacher stress is dependent upon environmental interactions between the individual and environment influenced by social and institutional support factors (Jarvis, 2002; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Saeki et al., 2018). While some stress is beneficial, this study will focus on forms of toxic stress, when "demands consistently outpace ability to cope" resulting in dissociation, often ending in burnout (Aguilar, 2018).

Stress has been reported as a primary reason for leaving the teaching profession (Liu & Onwuegbuzie, 2012). This is particularly concerning given that in a 2021 survey, 75% of teachers reported "frequent job-related stress" (Mulvahill, 2022). This seems to hold true both before and during the pandemic. In a survey of teachers who left their jobs from two years before

the pandemic and into the first nine months of the pandemic, stress was listed as the number one reason for leaving (Zamarro et al., 2022). Teacher stress has been linked to many negative outcomes including reduced self-efficacy, lower job satisfaction, decrease in professional commitment, burnout, and ultimately attrition (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015).

### **COVID-19 and School Structure**

Schools and school districts function as organized systems. A system is described as two or more interdependent parts with defined, yet porous, boundaries functioning separately within an external “suprasystem” (Kast & Rosenwig, 1973). Organizations accomplish objectives through distinct processes or workflow (Katz and Kahn, 1978). Because of the unique intersectionality of school systems through the participation of internal and external stakeholders, such as politicians, business partners, community organizations, parents, students, teachers, administrators, and district personnel, schools are constantly affected by outside factors resulting in continuous reorganization in order to accomplish their identified mission (Scott & Davis, 2007) An educational system is the product of historical, political, social, and cultural influences creating a larger system of which schools are a part; a change in any one of the subsystems can cause a change in the others (Serdyukov, 2017). These systems constantly ebb and flow with various accountability measures and initiatives, but the COVID-19 shutdowns completely disrupted normal system dynamics. There was no national guidance for how to handle school shutdowns or re-openings; many school districts were given the freedom to determine “best practices” to meet the needs of students (Zimmerman et al., 2020). This resulted in widespread differences from state to state, district to district, and even school to school, adding to teacher feelings of confusion and turmoil.



A systematic review of school districts' websites indicated a wide variety in how school districts structured student learning in response to COVID-19 shutdowns (Gross & Opalka, 2020). The disruption and resulting changes to basic school functions and structures due to COVID-19 caused an organizational crisis. Crisis management prepares organizations to handle crises and mitigate damage to the organization and stakeholders (Gainey, 2009, as cited in Grissom & Condon, 2021). However, no one was prepared for a situation like the COVID-19 school closures nationwide. Neither teachers, students, nor parents were prepared for the new roles and responsibilities COVID-19 would bring, and schools struggled to provide support and training (Morgenthaler, 2020).

### ***Organizational Stress***

Organizational factors appear to have a significant influence on teacher stress and job satisfaction. Some research suggests that teachers are leaving not because of personal attributes or even student characteristics, but because of "school level factors" (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). The Institute for Social Research (ISR) model for organizational stress categorizes and measures organizational stress using six factors: the objective environment, the psychological environment, mental and physical health and disease, enduring properties of the person, and interpersonal relations (Katz & Kahn, 1978). ISR measures individual perception of the objective environment and how those factors facilitate or are detrimental to completing their job. This illustrates the subjectivity of an individual's perception on objective environmental factors. This is similar to the McGrath four-stage model of occupational stress based on employee perceptions and responses to the workplace environment, including cognitive appraisal, decision making, performance, and outcomes (McGrath, 1987).

Multiple models of organizational stress are relevant to the educational systemic upheaval during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers had to adapt to a completely new educational setting through remote learning with little preparation (Hodges et al., 2020). The Karasek Job Demand-Control Model identified the most stressful workplaces as those in which an employee does not have the ability to participate in decision making (Riley, 2007; Van der Doef & Maes, 1999). When teachers have limited control or input into curriculum, planning, or implementation, they could “experience anxiety and hopelessness that negatively impact work performance” (Karasek, 1979, p. 287.)

The Person-Environment (P-E) Fit Model does not only focus on environmental factors, but it also examines the interaction between the person and the situation. If an employee’s skills and abilities do not match environmental demands, an imbalance can occur. This means that the person and the environment are not a good fit, which results in unmet personal needs, leading to stress that may affect job performance (Jex, 1998). The alignment of the individual and environment can become skewed, creating a “stress misfit” in which organizational demands exceed the capabilities of the individual, creating an environment in which the traditional intrinsic and extrinsic motivators no longer meet teacher needs (Andela, & van der Doef, 2019). When a teacher cannot meet the required demands and their knowledge and/or training needs go unmet, teacher efficacy is impacted (Jex, 1998).

All of the models focus on specific environmental workplace factors as indicators of stress that inform the current design. These models must be taken into consideration when most of the commonly identified sources of teacher stress are school organization, job demands, work resources, and social and emotional interactions (Hayden et al., 2018). Organizational stress

models are appropriate due to the fact structural uncertainties due to COVID-19 shutdowns and re-openings exacerbated already high teacher stress levels (Herman et al., 2021).

### **Workload**

An estimated 40-50% of early career teachers leave within the first five years (Ingersoll, 2001; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Ryan et al., 2017). Aspiring teachers believe they understand the workload demands of the profession they wish to join; however, workload has been listed most frequently as the reason for quitting or for wanting to leave in the future (Perryman & Calvert, 2020). New teachers may view job demands as beyond their capabilities. New teachers are expected to handle the same responsibilities as veteran teachers, while being evaluated using the same criteria (Farmer 2020). This can prove frustrating and be perceived as unfair to early career teachers.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers reported working on average between 42 and 49 hours per week. In contrast, during the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers reported working an average of 52 hours per week or more (Diliberti et al., 2021; Starz, 2019). COVID-19 appears to have increased teacher stress levels by requiring even more hours and necessitating switching to and/or learning new technical content delivery systems (Diliberti et al., 2021). Many teachers were suddenly thrust into the world of online learning, with little to no experience with this learning modality; they reported that all aspects of planning, instruction, and assessment were more challenging and made them feel less effective and unsuccessful (Huck & Zhang, 2021). Given the already high workload of teachers, it was unrealistic to expect staff to be able to learn new technology, curricula, and pedagogy all at once; there should have been a phased implementation (Schwartz, 1995, as cited in Riley, 2007).

The constant and time-consuming workload was given as a top reason for leaving the classroom along with trying to find a work-life balance. Teachers overwhelmingly describe an inability to find balance between job duties and home life as being detrimental to their “ability to teach” (Helmke, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, 83% of working teachers listed workload as the reason why they may leave in the future, describing it as “unmanageable,” “insane,” and “extreme” (Perryman & Calvert, 2020).

In the spring of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic caused nationwide school closures that increased typical demands on teachers, requiring changing instructional modalities and unfamiliar technology requirements. As schools began to reopen, teachers experienced combinations of in-person, hybrid, and remote learning models (Zamarro et al., 2022). Hybrid instruction differed from fully remote or fully in person instruction because it was a combination of the two. The hybrid structure reported by most schools required students to attend class in person two or three times a week, with two or three days being conducted remotely (Anderson, 2021). Teachers reported having to change instructional modes during school disruptions, especially the hybrid model, as increasing their intent to retire early or leave the profession (Zamarro et al., 2022).

Teacher working conditions include a variety of school environmental factors that affect student and adult learning, such as leadership, collaboration, accountability systems, class sizes, facilities, instructional resources, and access to technology. Accountability measures in recent years have resulted in an increase of teacher workload through maintenance, collection, and analysis of student assessment data without reduction in other professional expectations (Santoro, 2018). Paperwork and assessment are linked to personal stress and teacher attrition (Kersaint et al., 2007). Studies show that teachers who feel they are micromanaged or have

excessive bureaucratic tasks also tend to feel less organizational commitment (Fritchett et al., 2021).

COVID-19 increased demands and created policy uncertainties that had a drastic impact on working conditions. The increased professional demands and workload on teachers without providing adequate time or removing previously existing responsibilities led to the “intensification” of stress (Santoro, 2018). This could explain the most recent South Carolina educator supply and demand report indicating approximately 1,060 unfilled teaching positions from September-October 2021. At the time of the initial report, that was over a 50% increase from the previous year and the largest number of vacancies since the initial administration of the supply and demand survey in 2001. Updated data from February 2022 reports 977 additional departures, now totaling 1,121 teacher vacancies for the 2021-2022 school year (CERRA, 2022).

Teacher vacancies also contribute to the problem of teacher stress. Staffing shortages and other pandemic-related consequences have teachers reporting higher stress levels than usual (Will, 2022). Remaining teachers are left to absorb the duties of those unfilled positions, adding to the normal workload. There is a direct correlation between teacher workload perception and job satisfaction, with excessive workload leading to emotional exhaustion and desire to leave the profession (Toropova et al., 2020).

### **Motivation and Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction is strongly correlated to motivation and often manifests as a direct effect on motivation, including job efficiency (Bota, 2013). Job satisfaction is related to intrinsic motivational factors that include the nature of the work, decision making power, appreciation, responsibility, and opportunity for growth (Jahromi et al., 2018). However, the construct of job

satisfaction may be difficult to quantify due to the subjective nature of feelings of pleasure or contentment (Bota, 2013). Teachers are satisfied with aspects of their job that exemplify these motivational factors like instruction and interactions with students (Von Der Embse et al., 2016). Conversely, a lack of respect and/or a negative perception of the teaching profession contributes to burnout among teachers (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018).

Knowledge workers like teachers are motivated by intrinsic rewards or what Maslow's hierarchy of needs classifies as growth needs, such as the desire for esteem and self-actualization. However, these intrinsic motivators cannot be attained when the extrinsic, more rudimentary supports are not present or have negative impact (Herzberg et al., 1959). When applied to the workplace, the motivation-hygiene theory quantifies job satisfaction by examining which work environmental factors caused satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Factors like salary and benefits are important considerations when considering a career. These are classified as hygiene factors, or potential dissatisfiers; they are extrinsic and include organizational policies, working conditions, and salary (Herzberg et al., 1959).

Job dissatisfaction is linked to extrinsic motivators or hygiene factors, which include policy and management, supervision, salary, relationships with coworkers, work conditions, and job stability (Jahromi et al., 2018). School-based hygiene factors, or potential dissatisfiers, include compensation, number of preps, planning, duties, and treatment by administrators. Ineffective management policies are the most frequent sources of dissatisfaction and weak management generates dissatisfaction and creates demoralization in the school and district (Brazer et al., 2019). Teachers report that increasing workloads without additional compensation are a contributing factor in quitting (Hughes, 2012).

According to the labor market framework, teachers will stay in their current positions as long as teaching provides them the most perceived “rewards” as compared to alternate job options (Guarino et al., 2006). Perceived effort-reward imbalance can lead to burnout and decreased job satisfaction (Denton et al., 2021). Decreased job satisfaction increases absenteeism, employee illness, low morale, and intent to leave the profession (Von der Embse et al., 2016). It is important to note that while some literature suggests teacher attrition is driven by financial motivation (Ramos & Hughes, 2020; Sutchter et al., 2016), a recent study found stress to be the most common reason for leaving the profession before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, with nearly half of those participants indicating that teaching was not worth the stress, while only 28% blamed low pay (Diliberti et al., 2021).

### **Student Stressors**

Classrooms are filled with students from a variety of backgrounds with differing social, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive abilities. Teachers must provide meaningful instruction while meeting student needs every day, resulting in both positive and negative social interactions. Emotional fatigue experienced by teachers when dealing with high stress, emotionally charged classroom situations can take a toll, that if not relieved can contribute to teacher turnover (Farmer, 2020). Failing to meet student academic needs and ineffective classroom management can erode teacher efficacy and cause teachers to quit (Owens & Hudson, 2021). Constant teacher turnover and stress can result in classroom instability (Arizona Department of Education, 2015).

Teacher stress and turnover can negatively affect student learning and emotional wellbeing (Thorpe et al., 2020). It typically takes around three to five years for a new teacher to become effective (ADE, 2015). Unfortunately, high attrition rates among teachers within the first

five years means fewer effective teachers in the classroom. High teacher attrition rates have been linked to increased student discipline issues and decreased student achievement (Arizona Department of Education, 2015). Although it is important to note that teachers claim they leave schools because of a negative environment, not because of students (Ovens & Hudson, 2021).

Low student engagement and motivation can influence teacher stress levels as well (Farmer, 2020; Tye & O'Brien, 2002). Beginning teachers are highly motivated to continue teaching when they experience positive student engagement (Burke et al., 2013). If new teachers experience negative student interactions, they may begin to question their efficacy and/or career choice. When teachers have experiences that do not match expectations, there is a higher probability they will leave the profession (Rinke, 2013). Changing instructional modalities and decreased student engagement has 84% of teachers and administrators reporting lower morale levels than prior to COVID-19, indicating that “working during the pandemic has made them [teachers] more likely to leave teaching or retire early” (Rosenberg & Anderson, 2021).

Teacher stress tends to result in reactive classroom management strategies that exacerbate student disruptive behaviors, ending in higher teacher stress levels and creating a “cycle of stress” (Herman et al., 2020). Studies show that teachers whose emotional wellbeing has been compromised due to stress are not as effective when dealing with challenging student behaviors (Kokkinos et al., 2005). In addition, workplace stress is linked to increased teacher-student classroom conflict (Buettner et al., 2016). Student behavioral problems and lack of support has been noted as a contributing factor of teacher job dissatisfaction that can lead to higher attrition rates (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018).

In January 2022, 44% of teachers surveyed reported student behavior concerns (Mulvahill, 2022). Data from the 2015-2016 school year shows that 10% of teachers were



threatened by their students with physical injury; 6% of those were subject to physical assaults (NCES, 2022). This leads to demoralization and dissatisfaction that results in teachers leaving the profession. “The most important organizational determinant of attrition is the behavioral climate of the school; teachers are much more likely to leave a school with disruptive, inattentive, or hostile students” (Kelly & Northrop, 2015, p. 630). Effective discipline plans and student discipline have been linked directly to administrative support (Kersaint et al., 2007).

School safety can be described as “school conditions that affect the physical and psychological well-being of students and teachers” (Boyd et al., 2011, p. 308). Safety concerns affecting the physical and emotional well-being of teachers are on the rise, along with increased incidents of school and community violence (Farmer, 2020). Improving teacher working conditions has been found directly proportional to increasing teacher retention (Santoro, 2018).

### **Administrative Support**

Administrative support is defined as “the extent to which principals and other school leaders make teachers’ work easier and help them to improve their teaching” (Boyd et al., 2011, p. 307). Characteristics of effective school leadership include consistency, support with student behavior, communication, teacher autonomy, and shared decision making (Ansley et al., 2019). Administrative support is reported as a major consideration in the decision to leave, with one study indicating teachers who describe their administrators as not being supportive being two times as likely to quit than those who considered their administrators supportive (Sutcher & Darling-Hammond, 2016).

A key predictor of teacher turnover is a positive relationship with their supervisor (Wells, 2015). Teachers feel that school leaders who effectively communicate expectations and provide

disciplinary support reduce the likelihood of teachers leaving that school (Rosenberg & Anderson, 2021). Supportive administrators can reduce stress that teachers feel on a daily basis and are key to retaining teachers (Saeki et al., 2018). Ensuring supportive school leadership and effective professional development are effective ways in which school administrators can support teachers and may lead to higher teacher retention (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic may have negatively impacted educational structures, causing increased administrative directives and less teacher input and collaboration, which created an environment detrimental to teacher well-being. When schools across the country shut down, no one knew how long they would remain closed. The basic function of the school system was interrupted, causing a crisis for leaders and other stakeholders in the process. The reactive crisis management that followed led to decisions that impacted the long-term recovery of normal school functions (Grissom & Condon, 2021).

COVID-19 not only challenged fundamental beliefs in how school could be structured, but it also caused many teachers to examine the nature of their work and their role as successful teachers (Helmke, 2020). This change required a sudden shift to online platforms with little preparation and training; typical classroom management skills used in traditional settings were no longer effective in online settings. The transition to a completely new educational structure with no preparation or training caused significant teacher stress (Helmke, 2021). The uncertainties led to administrative mandates, with teachers having little input or understanding of the goals.

The shift of job requirements due to COVID-19 shutdowns resulted in teacher isolation and confusion; teachers were physically removed from their colleagues. Isolation is a risk factor for decreased teacher self-efficacy, especially among new teachers. When a school environment

does not encourage professional and social interaction with coworkers or provide opportunities to express concerns with fellow teachers, this can lead to a heightened sense of isolation and helplessness (Prilleltensky et al., 2016).

As schools began to re-open after the COVID-19 shutdowns, teachers were tasked with increased bureaucratic duties that had excessive time demands. COVID-19 protocols called for social distancing and contact tracing, causing teachers to spend time on noninstructional tasks while feeling micromanaged and limited in their instructional choices. Micromanagement or a rigid bureaucratic structure creates distrust in administration (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). This distrust can undermine the administration in a school and result in a toxic culture, especially with the notion that “teachers want to work in schools where they have greater autonomy, higher levels of administrative support, and clearly communicated expectations” (Hughes, 2012, p. 2).

Administrators set the tone and expectations for the school; as such, they can have a tremendous effect on teacher retention. A statewide study of North Carolina teacher perceptions of working conditions and their intent to leave the school found that working conditions were “highly predictive” of teachers’ employment intentions, with school leadership as the most important contributing factor (Ladd, 2011).

Despite the instability of the instructional environment, teachers were expected to continue to implement existing district initiatives and teacher evaluation and expectations were not adjusted to consider the fluidity of reality. Leaders must be flexible and open to effective solutions, including letting go of traditional methods and failed initiatives (Morgenthaler, 2020). In order to accomplish this, leaders must give up some control and create “participatory, communicative structures” that include teachers, rather than isolate them (Donaldson, 1996, as cited in Brazer et al., 2019).

## **Professional Investment**

The current study refers to professional investment as teacher involvement in planning and decision making (individually or collaboratively) along with the ability to express ideas and concerns. This construct includes collegial relationships and the resulting school culture.

Research shows that teachers are more likely to stay in a school setting in which they experience positive relationships with their peers (Farmer, 2020). Collegial supports and relationships are important considerations in teacher attrition, especially among new teachers (Burke et al., 2013).

Schools are learning communities; administrators, teachers, and students do not work or learn in isolation. Teachers feel that the school principal influences trust among collaborative teams by allowing autonomy for teachers to set goals and have an active role in the school process (Hallam et al., 2015). Effective teachers do not work in isolation, but instead act as members of Professional Learning Communities (PLC). A PLC collaboration is “a systematic process in which teachers work together interdependently to impact their classroom practice in ways that lead to better results for their students” (Dufour et al., 2016, p. 12). PLCs function as teams of teachers who collaborate to improve pedagogy and assessment to create an environment where all students succeed; they are typically arranged by grade level and/or subject area (Serviss, 2021).

In a PLC, teachers work together to identify learning targets, monitor student progress, and implement intervention strategies. These intentional meetings and conversations provide social and instructional support and lead to teachers working interdependently instead of alone (Pyhalto et al., 2015). These learning communities “foster a sense of belonging” that provide teachers with input in instructional decisions and improve school climate (Prilleltensky et al., 2016). These structures build a supportive school culture built on trust. PLCs help provide a clear

structure that addresses current challenges by providing support from all levels of the school (Pirtle & Tobia, 2014). School climate is a key predictor of stress, with low levels of stress associated with strong social support from coworkers (Saeki et al., 2018).

Higher teacher retention and job satisfaction has been reported by teachers who participate in schoolwide decision-making processes and feel they have greater autonomy on daily classroom decisions (Fritchett et al., 2021). A survey of public-school teachers who left their classrooms during the COVID-19 pandemic showed that many took jobs in private schools. Of those, 86% indicated that the most positive factor of the new private school position was a better work climate, while 77% cited more control over instructional decisions (Diliberti et al., 2021). This is consistent with a recent survey of professional occupations in which teachers ranked the lowest of all professions in feeling that their opinions mattered at work (Mulvahill, 2022).

### **Personal Health**

Stress has been found to be a major contributing factor to job-related illness (Farmer, 2020). Stress affects people in different ways and teachers perceive and react differently to it. For those teachers unable to cope with stress, it can be detrimental to their professional and personal wellbeing (Van der Vyver et al., 2020). High occupational stress can result in physical illness such as high blood pressure, ulcers, heart disease, fatigue, colds, flu, headaches, muscle pain, and insomnia (Farmer 2020; Hester et al., 2020; Thong & Yap, 2000). Consequently, high occupational stress can result in organizational outcomes like absenteeism and turnover (Thong & Yap, 2000).

Stress is associated with emotional conditions such as anxiety, depression, low motivation and/or self-esteem, tension, or alcoholism (Farmer 2020; Thong & Yap, 2000). Working for prolonged periods in high stress environments can lead to burnout (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016). Burnout includes feelings of exhaustion that causes mental distancing from the job, feelings of negativity related to the job, and reduced professional efficacy (WHO, 2019).

Even before COVID-19, high stress levels and mental health issues were often found among teachers (Jackson & Rothmann, 2005; Kern et al., 2014; Van der Vyver et al., 2020). However, the COVID-19 pandemic brought both physical and mental health to the forefront of public conversation. As a result of the disruptions and restructuring of conventional school systems and structures, teachers reported both a physical and mental toll that may have impacted their wellbeing (Kaden, 2020). Professional wellbeing relates to how an individual views their ability to complete required job tasks. A healthy wellbeing includes positive feelings of efficacy and job satisfaction (Aelterman et al., 2007; Van der Vyver et al., 2020), but poor professional wellbeing has been associated with absenteeism and medical retirement (Evers et al., 2015; Kuoppala et al., 2008). Since prolonged stress can manifest with both physical and mental symptoms, it is critical that this research explore the link between school-based environmental factors and teacher physical and mental wellbeing.

Negative working conditions lead to stress which can lead to physical illness, which in turn can affect job performance and increase teacher attrition (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). In a 2021 State of the Teacher Survey, 27% of teachers surveyed reported symptoms of depression, describing conditions as “untenable” (Doan et al., 2022). Workload and the ability to maintain work-life balance play a role in teacher stress levels. Teachers who work more than 50 hours a

week and/or take work home tend to have a lower mental wellbeing score on psychological assessments (Farmer, 2020). Supporting teacher mental health leads to successful learning outcomes and higher achievement (Kaden, 2020). Failing to retain teachers by ignoring their emotional well-being could have greater implications.

To help mitigate teacher attrition, it is necessary to examine school-based structures or hygiene factors including compensation, number of class preparations, planning, duties, and treatment by administrators to identify specific causes. Ineffective management policies are the most frequent sources of dissatisfaction. Weak management generates dissatisfaction and creates demoralization in the school and district (Brazer et al., 2019). “Until we dig down to the structural and systemic roots of the dysfunctions in our education system, we will continue to see high levels of teacher turnover” (Aguilar, 2018, p. 6). Examining different workplace factors may provide insight into the underlying causes of teacher dissatisfaction

Many teachers leave for non-retirement reasons, such as lower self-efficacy and poor administrative support (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Job dissatisfaction and stressful working conditions are good predictors of teacher attrition, whereas administrative support and positive collegial relationships are associated with teacher retention (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Several factors have been found to contribute to teacher stress and burnout, including, “workload, lack of collaboration with colleagues, lack of support from supervisors, and difficulties with classroom management” (Denton et al., 2021; Iancu et al., 2018). Stress affects teacher mental and physical health as well as job satisfaction in addition to teacher attrition (McCarthy et al., 2016). Examining teachers’ perceived stress as related to workplace factors is key to understanding teacher motivation to leave the profession.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study applies a constructivist grounded theory approach in which the researcher will seek to fill in critical gaps of understanding on teacher perception of stress and workplace factors and its influence on intent to leave the profession or teacher attrition. This approach assumes that there are in fact multiple realities, and that data is relative and situational (Charmaz, 2014). Grounded theory allows the data to serve as the basis for the theory as opposed to a specific conceptual framework. This requires the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, which when analyzed together provide “mutual verification.” Grounded theory attempts to explain the causes of relationships identified by traditional statistical analysis (Sturges & Klingner, 2005). Using an adapted convergent mixed methods study data collected from a teacher stress inventory (TSI) provides the foundation for theory development.

This study also utilizes “informed grounded theory” in which a review of the literature will provide a contextual framework of the problem and constructs developed for investigation (Thornberg, 2012). In keeping with the constructivist paradigm, scholars recognize that researcher experience and knowledge cannot be separated from the data analysis process and will prove valuable in the development of conceptual constructs that are situationally relevant but abstract enough that they can be applied in “multi-conditional” real world situations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Teacher perceptions of workplace conditions are the strongest predictor of teacher stress (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Stress has been reported as a primary reason for leaving the teaching profession (Liu & Onwuegbuzie, 2012). It appears that the COVID-19 disruptions amplified classroom-related stressors (Kaden, 2020). As we move from the COVID-19 pandemic phase to the endemic phase, it is important to examine the influence of COVID-19 and



workplace environmental stressors and their relationship to teacher intent to leave the profession or teacher attrition.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Method**

This research study employs a convergent mixed methods design using data collected from a teacher concerns survey instrument. The current study extends research on teacher stress by applying the lens of stress perception and the additional component of COVID-19.

#### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to determine how specific workplace stressors such as workload, motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic), student concerns, administrative support, professional investment, personal health, and job satisfaction contribute to teacher intention to leave the profession and/or attrition.

1. What is the relationship between workplace environmental factors (workload stressors, motivation, student stressors, administrative support, professional investment, personal health, job satisfaction, and COVID-19) and teacher stress?
2. How do workplace environmental stressors influence teacher attrition (intent to leave the profession)?
3. How do intrinsic and extrinsic factors influence teacher stress level?

#### **Research Design**

A convergent mixed methods study was used to compare and discuss similarities and differences of both quantitative and qualitative data. In this approach, survey data was used to measure the relationship between stress and workplace factors. At the same time, individual responses to open ended questions provided further explanation into the nuances of the perceived stress and how it may manifest. Collection of both quantitative and qualitative information in this

manner can determine whether the literature-based survey items differ from individual perceptions and if so, explain why the responses and perspectives differ (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

### ***Mixed Methods***

A mixed-methods research design incorporates both quantitative and qualitative research methods. This research study employs a convergent mixed methods design using data collected from a teacher concerns survey instrument. The study follows the basic steps for convergent mixed methods design as outlined by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018). In this design, the first step was to determine the procedures of the study, identify participants, and develop a plan to obtain the sample. The teacher concerns survey instrument developed for this study includes quantitative and qualitative items. Using quantitative correlations allowed the researcher to examine the frequency and strength of relationships between environmental factors and teacher stress. The use of qualitative data will increase the relevance of the data by grounding it in nuances identified by the target population (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). By collecting both quantitative and qualitative data using selected response Likert-scale stress items and open-ended responses, the researcher used the qualitative data to verify the results obtained from the quantitative analysis.

The second step of the convergent design method was to analyze the data. A benefit of the convergent design method is the collection of the quantitative and qualitative data at the same time (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This method collected different data on the same construct that is used to compliment and inform conclusions (Morse, 1991). Quantitative data was collected describing various workplace factors in terms of a stress rating scale. Demographic variables included age, gender, number of years teaching, school classification (urban, suburban,

rural), grade level taught, and whether or not it is a high needs school. Demographic information was analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine percent breakdowns and effect size. This helped to describe the sample and assess the data distribution.

Step three of the convergent mixed methods design was to merge the quantitative and qualitative results. The researcher identified points found to be shared between the quantitative and qualitative data sets. By identifying differences and similarities between the quantitative and qualitative data sets, the researcher synthesized the results and determine patterns of commonalities or inconsistencies (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The analysis was represented in a table that arranges the quantitative and qualitative results in a way conducive to comparison and/or differentiation.

Finally, step four of the convergent mixed methods design was to interpret the results. Once the data was synthesized, the researcher summarized the results. At this stage, the researcher discussed the extent to which the data overlapped as well as the extent to which the data conflicted (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Determining data relationships provided a more complete understanding of teacher stress perceptions of workplace environmental factors and how those stressors influence teacher intention to leave the profession.

Figure 1: Procedures for implementing a convergent mixed-methods design

Step 1	<p><b>Quantitative Portion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design quantitative research questions and approach</li> </ul>	AND	<p><b>Qualitative Portion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design qualitative research questions and approach</li> </ul>
Step 2	<p><b>Quantitative Data Analysis</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, and effect size</li> </ul>	AND	<p><b>Qualitative Data Analysis</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Theme development and frequency</li> </ul>
Step 3	<p><b>Merge Two Sets of Results</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify commonalities</li> <li>• Compare/contrast or synthesize</li> <li>• Create a joint display for the quantitative and qualitative data or discussion</li> </ul>		
Step 4	<p><b>Interpret Merged Results</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summarize and interpret results</li> <li>• Explain convergences, divergences, relationships</li> <li>• Plan further analysis or data collection</li> </ul>		

Source: Adapted from Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018

### *Constructivist Grounded Theory*

Grounded theory can take different forms (Glaser & Strauss, 2012). This study will construct a grounded theory as part of a theoretical discussion on teacher perception of workplace environmental stress and how this influences teacher intent to leave the profession, or attrition, using conceptual categories and related components (Glaser & Strauss, 2012). The grounded theory will be generated from a paradigm of constructivism using a mixed-methods approach. Assumptions associated with this world view seek to gain understanding of a phenomena using the subjective perceptions of participants. This method results in research that will broaden understanding from the data, rather than a specific theoretical lens (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Denzin, 2009). The incorporation of objective quantitative data acted as a check to eliminate researcher bias often associated with constructivist qualitative studies.

A grounded theoretical approach assumes that there are multiple realities, and that data is relative and situational (Charmaz, 2014). The observer's experiences and knowledge cannot be separated from the data analysis process and proved valuable in the development of conceptual constructs used in the data collection survey instrument. Combining a peer reviewed instrument with constructs and questions derived from researcher expertise and current literature ensured that conceptual constructs used in the survey instrument are relevant to the target population, but abstract enough to result in a theory that can be applied in "multi-conditional" real world situations (Glaser & Strauss, 2012).

There is an abundance of research that indicates stress is a major reason teachers chose to leave the profession (Diliberti et al., 2021; Hughes, 2012; Liu & Onwuegbuzie, 2012; Ryan et al., 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). However, reasons for leaving or workload stressors are often listed in general terms such as "workload," "administrative support," or "school level

factors” (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Rather than use a single theoretical lens to identify underlying reasons for teacher attrition, respondents need to be allowed to respond in an authentic way that provides the researcher with emergent data and themes to build a theory grounded in teacher perceptions and experience.

This research used stress theory as a unifying organizational framework and as a basis to construct a grounded theory using convergent mixed methods data collection and analysis. This approach will deepen the current understanding of the significance of teacher perceived workplace stressors and how that relates to teacher attrition. The review of literature on stress and teacher attrition provides a reference for the researcher to create constructs and starter codes for the collection and analysis of teacher perceived stress and the relationship to intent to leave the profession.

### **Participants**

Data was collected from South Carolina K-12 public school teachers employed during academic years 2018-2019, 2019-2020, 2020-2021, and 2021-2022. These academic years are specified as they sample before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey included questions to obtain demographic information including age, gender, number of years teaching, subject, grade level taught, school socioeconomic status, school setting (rural, suburban, urban), and current employment status.

### **Sampling**

Before continuing, the researcher is required to submit the research plan that communicates the intent and procedures of the study and participant informed consent to the Coastal Carolina University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB ensures that all research

complies with federal laws and regulations related to research involving human subjects. Once all the permissions have been obtained (see Appendix A) and the survey instrument finalized, the survey is distributed.

This study used probabilistic or random sampling. The distribution of the survey instrument through a group newsletter and/or social media is not conducive to specific individual selection but is appropriate for random sampling of the target population. The recommended sample size for a quantitative population survey is 350, with a minimum of 30 participants necessary for correlational analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The minimum sample size recommendation for a grounded theory research design is 20-30 (Creswell, 2007). The current design collected information from 60 participants, making it valid to use both a correlational analysis and the grounded theory research design.

The data collection instrument was distributed to members of the Palmetto State Teachers Association (PSTA). The PSTA is the largest professional organization for South Carolina Educators. This organization was chosen because it is not affiliated with any national teacher organizations or unions. This is an important distinction because South Carolina is a Right to Work state, with a long history of resistance towards unions. The southeastern United States has a history of antiunion culture rooted in individualism, poverty, and religion (Simon, 1997). Because the PSTA is not affiliated with any labor unions, there is no stigma associated with membership, which may appeal to a broader spectrum of teachers. PSTA members include teachers from all grade levels and subjects across the state of South Carolina, with over 90% of their members being classroom teachers (PSTA, n.d.).

The survey instrument was distributed via a link to the Google form in mid-January on the PSTA weekly *Thursday Thoughts* newsletter and shared through the PSTA Facebook page.

Once distributed, there was a two-week collection window that began in mid-January. After the initial dissemination of the survey, the link was sent out in the newsletter and on social media the following two Thursdays of the collection window.

The survey instrument utilized concurrent mixed methods data collection; both the quantitative and qualitative data were collected from respondents simultaneously by using both selected response items (e.g., Likert-format responses that measure stress levels) and open-ended questions (i.e., that collect qualitative information about specific school based environmental factors). This resulted in an identical data relationship, as the same respondents participated in the quantitative and qualitative data analysis portions of the study respectively (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007).

### **Instrument Development**

This study used a modified version of Fimian's (1984a) Teacher Stress Inventory (TSI) to provide a guiding framework for the data collection instrument. The original TSI was created to assess stress levels in teachers to better understand the relationship between teacher stress and workplace factors. The workplace environmental constructs identified for investigation in this study include workload stressors, motivation, student stressors, administrative support, professional investment, personal health, job satisfaction, and COVID-19. Motivation referred to those factors both intrinsic and extrinsic that act as satisfiers or dissatisfiers. Student stressors included items related to classroom management, discipline, and student engagement. The administrative support construct encompassed support concerning students, resources, professional development, and teacher efficacy. Professional investment referred to teacher involvement in planning and decision making and the ability to express ideas and concerns. The personal health construct contained items pertaining to physical and emotional needs



experienced during the workday. Job satisfaction referred to items related to satisfaction, school culture and morale. Finally, the addition of the COVID-19 construct sought to identify any perceived workload and student behavior changes directly related to COVID-19 and/or resultant organizational changes.

The original TSI consisted of 63 items using a six-point Likert scale assessing the areas of time management, work-related stressors, professional distress, discipline and motivation, professional investment, emotional manifestations, fatigue manifestations, cardiovascular manifestations, gastronomical manifestations, and behavioral manifestations. The response scale measured how strong the respondents' stress feelings are when they experience the phenomena indicated. The test utilized a Likert Scale from 1 (*no strength, not noticeable, or not applicable*) to 5 (*major strength, extremely noticeable.*) Factor analysis of the TSI subscales indicate a moderate to high internal consistent reliability in both strength and frequency and a large measure of content validity for each subscale (Fimian, 1984). The internal reliability of the TSI was found to be .90 using Chronbach's Alpha, which indicated an high level of internal consistency (Fimian, 1984; Weinstein & Trickett, 2016).

### ***Instrument Modification***

Upon review of the TSI, some of the constructs and questions were modified or omitted by the researcher to reflect current education trends, issues, and terminology. This is appropriate given that the original TSI created in 1980 used item stems created from current research at the time (Gallery et al., 1981). The survey instrument for this study (Appendix B) used the original framework, directions, and scale descriptors as the original TSI; the modifications and omissions are described as follows:

- The original constructs of “time management” and “work-related stressors” were combined into the modified construct “workload stressors.” This construct included some items from Fimian’s (1984a) TSI and combined some items into new items. By doing so, the researcher limited the number of response items from fourteen to four that encapsulated time management and workload issues.
- The original construct of “professional distress” included items about status, respect, and salary. This construct was changed to “motivation” to encompass intrinsic and extrinsic professional motivators. All three of the items in this category are from Fimian’s (1984a) TSI.
- The original construct of “discipline and motivation” was concerned about student behavior and motivation. This construct was changed to “student stressors” and three of the four items were from Fimian’s (1984a) TSI.
- The original construct of “professional investment” was retained. One of the four items in the modified survey was taken directly from the Fimian’s (1984a) TSI. One item was reworded for clarity after beta test feedback. The original item stated, “My personal opinions are not sufficiently aired.” This was changed to “I feel frustrated when my personal opinions are not valued.” Two original items were added to this section based on findings in literature.
- Fimian’s (1984a) TSI had several constructs and items inquiring about how the participant responds to stress relating to biobehavioral and physiological-fatigue manifestations. Since the purpose of this study is to determine how specific workplace stressors contribute to teacher intention to leave the profession and/or

attrition, the researcher omitted these categories and included a more general category concerning environmental factors as related to personal health.

For each construct, there were three to five stress items used to calculate the subscale average. The majority of survey items were quantitative items using a five-point strength rating scale. This rating scale is consistent with Fimian's (1984a) original stress rating scale.

### ***Original Survey Items***

After review of current research, survey constructs of administrative support, job satisfaction, and COVID-19 were added. Survey items relating to work/life balance, decision making, job satisfaction, intent to leave, and COVID-19 were added to align with the research questions of the current study. The survey format and several of Fimian's (1984a) TSI constructs were used as an outline to strengthen the validity and reliability of the instrument.

Original items were added to the modified TSI for this study to also gather data on teacher intent to leave the profession. Two items asked respondents about their intent to leave teaching, one asking about their intent to leave within the next three years with a Likert scale of 1 (*not likely to leave*) to 10 (*extremely likely to leave*), and a second asking whether or not participants had actively looked for another job in the past year.

An additional item asked respondents to rank workplace environmental factors from 1 (*least stressful*) to 7 (*most stressful*). In conjunction with this item, there was an open-ended response item that asked for examples of the participant's top three stressors. Finally, an open-ended response item asks respondents to describe the effect COVID-19 has had on the amount of stress they experienced by providing specific examples.

### ***Beta Testing***

The instrument was sent to a focus group of 12 teachers to test the instrument for clarity and validity. All focus group participants selected met the study participant criteria and were representative of the target population. Subjects consisted of doctoral cohort members or were current public-school teachers in South Carolina that worked with the researcher.

A convenience sample composed of members who met the study participant criteria was acceptable in this case due to availability and time constraints (Etikan et al., 2016). The purpose was to test the survey instrument directions, format, and terminology. Respondents were not asked to take the survey, just provide feedback on directions, terms, rating scale, and/or questions. No claims are made from the survey development. The intent of the focus group was to make sure the instrument is worked properly, and to improve validity and reliability of researcher made survey items.

A draft of the teacher concerns inventory was sent to the group with instructions to email the researcher with notes and comments about survey directions or survey items. Respondent feedback was put into a document on the researcher's laptop and used to revise the survey instrument. All identifying information was removed and emails deleted. The specific results are not to be published or shared, only used for instrument (survey) refinement. Based on responses, some of the wording of items not on Fimian's TSI was changed, or clarification was added. Descriptors of the scale responses were added to each item instead of only at the beginning of the survey.

### **Data Analysis**

Data was analyzed and respondents who did not meet the participant criteria were removed. Participants for this study must be South Carolina K-12 public school teachers

employed during academic years 2018-2019, 2019-2020, 2020-2021, 2021-2022. Descriptive statistics were run, as well as correlational tests, and outliers were identified and excluded. I also checked independent variables for multicollinearity using Field's recommendation of  $> 0.9$  (Field, 2018). This process ensured that highly correlated variables will be identified and be removed so as not to hide significance of other variables.

A multiple regression was conducted using IBM SPSS version 28 to analyze the strength and significance of variable relationships and determine influences. The independent variables are different workplace environmental stressors (workload stressors, motivation, student stressors, administrative support, professional investment, personal health, job satisfaction, and COVID-19) and the dependent variable is teacher intent to leave the classroom. A  $p$ -value of  $\leq 0.05$  is statistically significant; this indicates that the result supports a relationship that is more than likely not coincidental. Cohen's  $d$ , or effect size, was found to determine the strength or influence of the relationship between variables. Cohen's  $d$  supports the  $p$ -value because it is not dependent upon sample size; the larger the effect size, the stronger the argument to reject the null hypothesis in deference to the variables of significance (Field, 2018).

Once all the qualitative survey responses were collected, the researcher analyzed the data using the steps recommended by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018). After preparing the data, the researcher initially read through all responses to gain an overall understanding of participant responses and write down initial thoughts. Those first impressions and current literature were then used by the researcher to begin the data coding process. The researcher developed a listing of codes for a database as the initial organizing framework, as recommended by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018).

Next, the open-ended qualitative survey responses were input into Dedoose, a software for analyzing qualitative data in mixed methods research. With this program, the researcher created a code for each new idea in the responses. When analyzing the data, the researcher used various coding frames, ranging from phrases and sentences to entire paragraphs. Some codes were created using terms that were representative of commonly expressed ideas, from existing literature, or *in vivo* using respondents' own words (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2015). Related codes from specific excerpts were categorized into themes. As common themes were identified, patterns emerged that provided connections between the data and research questions. Themes were grouped to larger ideas that were connected to create a grounded theory model (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Data was represented using a word cloud that weighted responses by frequency. Frequency of codes are presented in a code-by-code frequency matrix (Salmona et al., 2019). The common themes along with the analysis of the quantitative subset frequencies, averages, and significance were represented using thematic organization with the quantitative results from the survey constructs and qualitative quotes for each construct (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

This study used triangulation as a validity measure in which data is gathered using different methods (quantitative and qualitative) and several individuals (Mathison, 1988). Qualitative data from multiple respondents were analyzed and used as the basis for code and theme development (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Triangulation through the mixed methods design and collection of quantitative and qualitative data assisted in removing researcher bias, as well as enhanced understanding of convergent, inconsistent, or contradictory findings (Mathison, 1988).

## Chapter 4

### Results

This study is framed using grounded theory with a mixed methods approach. Data were concurrently collected from quantitative selected responses and qualitative, open response items on a digital survey instrument. Then information was organized thematically, wherein the quantitative and qualitative data are combined to determine which workplace factors had the most influence on teacher perceived stress levels and intent to leave their jobs. The triangulation of the quantitative data with the qualitative data serves as the basis for a grounded theory in the contributing factors of teacher attrition.

Stressful working conditions have been reported as a common motivator when teachers decide to leave the profession (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). The purpose of this study was to determine how workplace environmental factors contribute to teacher intention to leave and/or teacher attrition.

The guiding research questions for this study were:

1. What is the relationship between workplace environmental factors (workload stressors, motivation, student stressors, administrative support, professional investment, personal health, job satisfaction, and COVID-19) and teacher stress?
2. How do workplace environmental stressors influence teacher attrition (intent to leave the profession)?
3. How do intrinsic (recognition and respect) and extrinsic factors (salary) influence teacher stress level?

Teachers were asked to rate their perceived stress level as it relates to the following workplace factors: workload, motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic), student concerns, administrative support, professional investment, personal health, and job satisfaction. Intent to continue teaching was analyzed as a direct measure of stress levels through a survey utilizing a modified TSI with the response scale found in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Survey Response Scale Descriptions*

<b>Strength of Feeling of Stress</b>	<b>1</b> <i>No strength; not noticeable or N/A</i>	<b>2</b> <i>Mild strength; barely noticeable</i>	<b>3</b> <i>Medium strength; moderately noticeable</i>	<b>4</b> <i>Great (Moderate) strength; very noticeable</i>	<b>5</b> <i>Major strength; extremely noticeable</i>
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Teachers’ intentions to leave their current positions were measured on a scale of 1 (*definitely not going to be teaching*) to 10 (*definitely will be teaching in three years*). An additional item addressed teacher intent by asking if they had actively looked for another job in the past year with a simple yes or no response.

The participants in the study were South Carolina K-12 public school teachers employed during academic years 2018-2019, 2019-2020, 2020-2021, 2021-2022. The research survey included questions to obtain demographic information including age, gender, number of years teaching, subject, grade level taught, school setting (rural, suburban, urban), and current employment status. Participants were also asked to indicate the socioeconomic status of their school by indicating if the school was a High Needs School (HNS). To ensure response validity



the survey provided respondents the following definition of a HNS as a school serv[ing] a “disproportionate numbers of students with disabilities, economic disadvantages, or other obstacles to their education” (Ansley et al., 2019, p. 3).

The data collection instrument was distributed to members of the Palmetto State Teachers Association (PSTA). The survey instrument was distributed as a Google form via a link on the PSTA weekly *Thursday Thoughts* newsletter. Once distributed, there was a two-week collection window that began in mid-January. After the initial dissemination of the survey, the link was sent out in the newsletter the following two Thursdays of the collection window. In addition to the newsletter, PSTA coordinators shared the study information with members by direct email and Facebook during the last week of the collection window.

### **Participant Demographics**

There were initially 68 survey responses. The responses were analyzed to ensure they met the study criteria, South Carolina K-12 public school teachers employed for at least the last five years. This includes the 2018-2019, 2019-2020, 2020-2021, 2021-2022, and 2022-2023 school years. Eight survey responses were removed because they did not fit the parameters of the study resulting in 60 responses. Two were removed because they were not currently teaching in a South Carolina public K-12 school. Three were removed because they were not classroom teachers (two were interventionists and one was a media specialist). Three were removed because they did not teach during the specified years.

The resulting data set ( $N=60$ ) (Table 1) is comprised of thirteen males (21.7%) and forty-six (77.7%) females and one who did not identify their gender (1.6%). This is comparable with the state and national gender makeup of the general teacher population. In the 2017-2018 school year, the national teacher population was 76% female and 24% male (NCES, 2020); South

Carolina, data from the 2018-2019 school year indicates that 81% of the teacher population was female and 19% were male (Dickenson et al., 2020), indicating that the current study participants are representative of the larger teacher population.

The ages of participants ranged from 22-60+ years old. The majority or (54.9%) of respondents ( $n = 33$ ) were between 41 and 55 years old; only 10% of respondents were 30 or younger ( $n = 6$ ). The levels of teaching experience amongst survey respondents are close to a normal distribution with the average respondent having between 16-25 years of experience. Most of the respondents ( $n = 50$ ) or 83.4%, were from middle or secondary grade levels (grade 6-12). The content area data shows a further breakdown of the secondary teachers. There is a fairly even distribution of English, math, science, and social studies, with other areas like career and technology, performing arts, and Special Education teachers. This indicates that although there is an overrepresentation of secondary teachers, this sample is diverse in terms of content area representation.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Characteristics of Respondents*

Characteristic	<i>n = 60</i>	%
Gender		
Male	13	21.7
Female	46	77.7
No Answer	1	1.6
Age		
22-25	2	3.3
26-30	4	6.7
31-35	5	8.3

36-40	6	10.0
41-45	11	18.3
46-50	8	13.3
51-55	14	23.3
56-60	6	10.0
60+	4	6.7
<b>Years of Teaching Experience</b>		
1-4	3	5.0
5-10	13	21.7
11-15	6	10.0
16-20	13	21.7
21-25	12	20.0
26-30	8	13.3
31-39	5	8.3
<b>Grade Level</b>		
Pk-5	9	15.0
5-6	1	1.6
6-8	37	61.7
9-12	13	21.7
<b>Content Area</b>		
English Language Arts	10	16.7
Math	5	8.3
Science	9	15.0
Social Studies	11	18.3
Special Education	5	8.3
World Language	2	3.3
Performing Arts	5	8.3
Physical Education	1	1.6
All Subjects	3	5.0

Career and Technology Education	7	11.7
Other	2	3.3

Participant responses were almost evenly split regarding the survey question, *Have you actively looked for another job in the past year?* (Table 2). 51.7% ( $n = 31$ ) indicated they had actively looked for another job and 45% ( $n = 27$ ) indicated they had not.

**Table 2**

*Job Search*

	<i>n = 60</i>	%
Yes	31	51.7
No	27	45.0
Missing	2	3.3

*School Information*

Teachers from suburban schools made up the majority of responses with 66.7% ( $n = 40$ ) respondents; 25% ( $n=15$ ) of teachers identified their schools as rural, and only 8.3% ( $n = 5$ ) of respondents were from urban schools. 51.7% ( $n=31$ ) of respondents identified their school as an HNS with the remaining 48.3% ( $n=29$ ) indicated their school was not a HNS.

*Demographic Analysis*

Demographic data was checked for collinearity to ensure that there is no correlation amongst the demographic variables and increase the reliability of the study. A two-tailed bivariate correlation was conducted to determine the Pearson's  $r$  correlation coefficients (Table 3); it suggests no significant relationship existed between the demographic variables of gender,

community classification, HNS, number of years taught, and grade level as compared with the dependent variable (DV) or the likelihood to be teaching in the next three years.

**Table 3**

*Demographic Variable Correlation*

		Gender	Community	HNS	# Yrs. Taught	Grade	DV
Gender	<i>r</i>	1	-.015	.068	.123	-.013	-.067
	<i>p</i>		.911	.609	.353	.926	.624
	N	59	59	59	59	54	55
Community	<i>r</i>	-.015	1	.191	-.069	.060	.146
	<i>p</i>	.911		.144	.599	.664	.281
	N	59	60	60	60	55	56
HNS	<i>r</i>	.068	.191	1	.222	-.004	.151
	<i>p</i>	.609	.144		.088	.979	.267
	N	59	60	60	60	55	56
# Years Taught	<i>r</i>	.123	-.069	.222	1	-.070	-.002
	<i>p</i>	.353	.599	.088		.614	.990
	N	59	60	60	60	55	56
Grade	<i>r</i>	-.013	.060	-.004	-.070	1	-.142
	<i>p</i>	.926	.664	.979	.614		.321
	N	54	55	55	55		51
Dependent Variable <sup>a</sup>	<i>r</i>	-.067	.146	.151	-.002	-.142	1
	<i>p</i>	.624	.281	.267	.990	.321	
	N	55	56	56	56	51	56

Note. This was a Pearson (*r*) Correlation.

<sup>a</sup> Dependent Variable: On a scale of 1-10, how likely are you to be teaching in the next 3 years?

## Data Analysis

The quantitative data was analyzed first to determine frequencies, mean, mode, and standard deviation (Table 4). Then a multiple linear regression factor analysis (Appendix C) and Pearson correlation (Table 6) was conducted to determine statistical significance and factor relationships. The qualitative data was analyzed and coded to identify overarching themes. The research questions are addressed by triangulating the qualitative and quantitative data. Research question two is presented as a thematic analysis.

## Workplace Factor Correlation

The mean for each overall philosophical construct as well as the mean for each individual survey item was calculated, along with the standard deviation, and mode (Table 4). An item with a mode of 5 suggests that the majority of the participants agree that item is a source of extreme stress, even though the overall mean may be much lower than a 5. This may be more reflective of general teacher perceptions.

*Student Stressors* had the highest mean score of 3.82 out of 5; within this construct the individual survey item, *I feel frustrated attempting to teach students who are poorly motivated*, had the highest mean value ( $X=4.48$ ;  $SD=.75$ ). The *Student Stressor* construct also had the most individual items with a mode of 5, representing *Major [stress] strength; extremely noticeable*. Three of the four survey items had a mode of 5, suggesting the most respondents experience the most stress regarding student stressors.

*COVID-19* had the second highest stress mean score ( $M = 3.7$ ). It is likely that the COVID-19 disruptions amplified classroom-related stressors (Kaden, 2020). Within this construct, technology seems to be the most stressful individual factor; *Technology demands have*

increased since COVID-19 had a mean score of 3.9 out of a possible 5. Working in isolation from home, no longer face-to-face with students, teachers were suddenly challenged to adapt lessons often requiring them to learn new technology and/or pedagogies very quickly with very little instruction. The response to COVID-19 thrust teachers into the world of online learning, with little to no experience with this learning modality; they reported that all aspects of planning instruction and assessment were more challenging and made them feel less effective and unsuccessful (Huck & Zhang, 2021).

The constructs of *Workload* and *Motivation* both had a mean score of 3.6 out of a possible score of 5. Two items within the *Workload* construct, *There is too much work to do* and *Administrative or non-instructional related tasks take up too much of my time*, had the highest reported mean scores of 3.9 and 3.8 respectively. The perceived stress of workload and the motivational items related to stress and salary ( $M = 3.6$ ) and stress and respect ( $M = 3.6$ ) suggest that teachers do not feel adequately compensated for the amount of work they do.

*Personal Health* ( $M = 3.2$ ), *Administrator Support* ( $M = 3$ ), and *Professional Investment* ( $M = 3$ ) were the lowest rated workplace stressors. However each construct had one item with a mean score of 3.5 or higher respectively; *My job causes me anxiety regularly* ( $M = 3.8$ ); *I feel frustrated that I am not supported by administration regarding student discipline* ( $M = 3.5$ ), and *I feel frustrated when my personal opinions are not valued* ( $M = 3.72$ ) This indicates that the teacher perceived stress of particular item was moderately to very noticeable.

**Table 4**

*Construct Item Means (N=60)*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mode</i>
<b>Workload</b>	3.6	1.1	3.3

<i>There is little time to prepare for my lessons/responsibilities</i>	3.3	1.3	3
<i>There is too much work to do</i>	3.9	1.1	5
<i>Administrative or non-instructional related tasks take up too much of my time</i>	3.8	1.3	5
<i>I must often take work home or stay late; taking time away from personal life/family</i>	3.4	1.5	5
<b>COVID-19</b>	3.7	1.0	4
<i>Teacher workload has increased as compared to workload prior to COVID-19</i>	3.8	1.2	5
<i>The amount of administrative paperwork or other non-instructional duties has increased since COVID-19</i>	3.5	1.2	4
<i>Technology demands have increased since COVID-19</i>	3.9	1.0	4
<b>Motivation</b>	3.6	1.0	3
<i>I lack recognition for the extra work and/or good teaching I do</i>	3.2	1.4	3
<i>I receive an adequate salary for the work I do</i>	3.6	1.4	5
<i>I need more status and respect on my job</i>	3.6	1.3	5
<b>Student Stressors</b>	3.8	1.0	5
<i>I feel frustrated because of discipline problems in my classroom</i>	3.9	1.2	5
<i>I feel frustrated when my authority is rejected by students</i>	3.9	1.2	5
<i>I feel frustrated attempting to teach students who are poorly motivated</i>	4.5	.7	5
<i>I have felt disrespected or intimidated by my students</i>	3.1	1.4	4
<b>Administrative Support</b>	3.0	.9	3
<i>I feel frustrated that I am not supported by administration regarding student discipline</i>	3.5	1.3	5
<i>I feel that administrators make my job harder</i>	3.0	1.4	4
<i>Administrators make sure I have the resources (materials, technology, etc.) I need to be successful in the classroom</i>	2.7	1.4	1
<i>My administration provides relevant and timely professional development to support my instructional needs</i>	2.8	1.4	3
<b>Professional Investment</b>	3.0	1.0	3
<i>I lack control over decisions made about classroom/school matters</i>	3.1	1.3	3



<i>I feel frustrated when my personal opinions are not valued</i>	3.7	1.3	5
<i>I fear administrative retribution for openly expressing concerns about issues in my school</i>	3.0	1.5	1
<i>I have felt intimidated by my principal or member of the administrative team</i>	2.3	1.6	1
<i>I collaborate with and value my coworkers</i>	2.8	1.6	1
<b>Personal Health</b>	3.2	.9	4
I feel valued as a person by administration	2.9	1.4	1
My job causes me anxiety regularly	3.8	1.2	5
I am given adequate time to take care of my personal needs during the day	3.4	1.4	5
My principal is sympathetic to my (emotional/physical) needs	2.9	1.5	1

### Regression Analysis

The descriptive analysis helps to provide an overall picture of the workplace factor constructs that teacher's perceive as the most stressful. To determine the most salient factors in teacher attrition, a multiple linear regression was conducted examining the relationship between the dependent variable, *On a scale of 1-10, how likely are you to be teaching in the next 3 years*, and the independent variables as measured by construct means. Results (Table 5) show that there is a significant relationship between intent to teach and *Student Stressors* with a value of  $p = .015$ . This indicates that teachers become more likely to quit teaching as stress with students increases. The workplace factor construct regression had an  $R^2 = .264$  (Table 6). Indicating that the variable means are representative for over a quarter of the population.

### Table 5

#### *Workplace Factor Construct Regression*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Variable Constant	16.013	2.630		6.089	<.001
Workload	-.366	.542	-.119	-.675	.503
COVID-19	-.1.088	.593	-.317	-1.833	.073
Motivation	-.596	.571	-.172	-1.046	.301
Student Stressor	-.1.156	.456	-.334	-2.536	.015
Administrator Support	1.324	.814	.358	1.625	.111
Professional Investment	.018	.752	.005	.023	.981
Personal Health	-.573	.646	-.158	-.886	.380

<sup>a</sup> Dependent Variable: On a scale of 1-10, how likely are you to be teaching in the next 3 years?

<sup>b</sup> Independent Variables: *Workload, COVID-19, Motivation, Student Stressors, Administrative Support, Professional Investment, and Personal Health*

**Table 6**  
*Workplace Factor Construct Regression Model Summary*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error	R Square Change	df
1	.514	.264	.157	3.070	.264	7

**Qualitative Coding and Theme Development**

Triangulation through the mixed methods design, collection, and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data enhance understanding of inconsistent or contradictory findings (Mathison,

1988). All qualitative data was input into the Dedoose<sup>®</sup> coding software. The qualitative data was coded initially with versions of the construct names: *Workload*, *COVID-19*, *Motivation*, *Student Behavior*, *Administration*, *Professional Investment*, and *Personal Health*. As more data was analyzed these starter codes were subdivided into more specific codes as necessary.

Once the comments were coded, the qualitative comments were analyzed using the code count matrix and the code cloud feature. The code count matrix was used to identify codes with the highest frequencies. The *Student Stressors* and *Workload* codes each had over 145 comments, which were two to three times as many comments as any other code. These codes were further examined and thematically organized into subcodes. Two codes were original starter codes reflecting theoretical survey constructs: *Administrator Support* and *COVID-19*. However, after reviewing the qualitative comments themselves, administrator support and COVID-19, were so interwoven into the two predominate codes of *Student stressors* and *Workload*, they could not be individually separated, but must be addressed as unifying subcodes within the construct. This process resulted in the following dominant themes: *Student Concerns* and *Overworked*. The *Student Concerns* theme encompasses other noted variables that contribute to concerns with students, including *student inappropriate behavior*, *student motivation*, *COVID-19*, *parents*, and *administrator support*. The *Overworked* theme ranges from stress with excessive paperwork, lack of time, work-life balance, COVID-19, unnecessary meetings, and irrelevant professional development.

### **Student Concerns Theme**

The *Student Concerns* theme encompassed various aspects of student behavior in the classroom. The initial workplace factor construct regression (Table 6) identified the *Student Stressors* construct as a significant factor ( $p = .015$ ) in the decision to quit teaching. To gain a

better understanding of teacher perceptions, another linear regression was performed to analyze specific items comprising the *Student Stressors* construct.

This regression (Table 7) revealed that classroom discipline problems were statistically significant with a value of  $p = .032$ . Classroom discipline problems are student behaviors that disrespectful or inappropriate and interrupt or detract from the learning process. This is consistent with the qualitative responses and other research that claims that the overall student behavioral climate of a school is the most important determinant of teacher attrition (Kelly & Northrop, 2015).

**Table 7**

*Student Stressors Regression*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Variable Constant	13.761	2.663		5.168	<.001
Discipline Problems	-1.085	.493	-.393	-2.202	.032
Students Reject Authority	1.229	.667	.451	1.844	.071
Student Motivation	-1.328	.707	-.293	-1.879	.066
Student Disrespect	-.627	.442	-.267	-1.418	.162

(DV: On a scale of 1-10, how likely are you to be teaching in the next 3 years)

The discipline problems item was related to specific student classroom behaviors. Many of the qualitative comments provided examples of general disrespectful experiences.

- *Student behavior...students telling the teacher to shut up, disregarding the rules, parents not holding children accountable...*

When students say rude comments or behave in ways that display a lack of respect towards teachers, it is demoralizing for the teacher and can lead to feelings of ineffectiveness. In addition, if teachers feel they are not supported by parents or administration, it may lead to feelings of hopelessness and teacher apathy. Student behavioral problems and lack of support has been noted as a contributing factor of teacher job dissatisfaction that can lead to higher attrition rates (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018).

- *Students frequently disrespect teachers. I see it daily. It's frustrating when a student is actively doing something that should be address[ed] in the hallway/cafeteria and when you address it, the student ignores you like you didn't say anything. In the classroom, the defiance and disrespect is much worse in recent years than it was in my early years teaching.*

This comment indicates that some students willfully violate school rules and when teachers try to enforce the rules, they are completely ignored. This may show a growing mindset of disrespect towards teachers and authority. Teacher perceptions indicated that student defiance and disrespect towards teachers is worsening.

Some responses resulted in the identification of an additional subcode related to students and electronics. Several examples of disrespectful classroom behavior were related to different devices, both personal and school provided.

*Student's behavior, particularly dealing with electronic devices has become unbearable as students are addicted to the phones to the point of arguing about being*

*on them in class. Students will outright ignore a staff member when told to correct actions and then become belligerent when confronted on the behavior.*

Devices such as cell phones, earbuds, and Apple watches are commonplace in most classrooms today. These devices are easily concealed and can become distracting to students and the learning process. In the past, teachers could see students passing notes, but today, they can send and receive text messages from their watches. Students can hide an earbud and be watching videos on their phones under their desks. All of the digital distractors can be more engaging than classroom instruction. Teachers may become discouraged when their time spent planning engaging lessons is unappreciated. These issues in addition to other inappropriate behaviors can lead to emotional exhaustion for teachers because they spend much of their time dealing with classroom management rather than teaching content. These factors, coupled with poor support from administration can undermine the effectiveness of the teacher in the classroom.

Another response referenced disrespect for the teacher and school provided Chromebook but continued to encompass another reoccurring concern with student classroom behavior, motivation.

*Student behavior and lack of respect from students is a top stressor. For example, a student told me that she shouldn't have to do work outside of school including charging her Chromebook. She told me that wasn't her job to charge it outside of school. Students also just flat out don't do class assignments when they are assigned. They will sit in class, try to get on their phones, and simply do nothing instead of the work assigned.*

Intentional non-learners are not new in education. In the past these students may not have done their homework or attempted work during class. Innovations in technology along with the demands of COVID-19 school shutdowns necessitated a massive switch to technology dependent-curriculum. Lessons are dependent on the use of these devices, so when the students do not bring them, or refuse to charge the devices, learning is affected. Either the student is unable to participate in the online activities or these behaviors add additional work for the teacher. When students are not motivated and do not take responsibility for their learning by coming to class prepared, the teacher must constantly have alternative plans for students who do not have their school provided device. The responsibility to charge the device is shifted to the teacher who must now either charge the students' laptops or provide the capabilities for charging, often at the teacher's expense. This behavior, if habitual, erodes the respect for the teacher and the educational process.

### ***Student Motivation and COVID-19***

Although the student motivation item did not meet the accepted  $<.05$  threshold of statistical significance with a  $p = .066$ , this item was rated as extremely stressful by 61.7% ( $n = 37$ ) of participants; suggesting it is an item that contributed to teacher stress levels regarding student stressors. Research has shown that low levels of student motivation and engagement increases teacher stress (Farmer, 2020; Tye & O'Brien, 2002). The qualitative responses on student behavior included several specific mentions of student motivation as a stressor. Often, teacher concerns with disruptive and off-task comments are met with the assertion that if they provide engaging lessons, student inappropriate behavior will decrease. This places the responsibility for student behavior squarely on the teacher without encouraging student responsibility. Teacher frustration with this concept was evident in the following response.

*My top stressor is poor student behavior and motivation. It doesn't matter how well planned, efficient, and creative lessons are if students refuse to do the work, are apathetic and the behavior is so poor that the entire class period is spent trying to manage problem behavior. Intentional non-learners have always been an issue, but they are becoming more and more the rule rather than the exception.*

Other comments also supported the notion that students are intentionally choosing not to engage in the learning process. Student apathy and lack of motivation can lead to emotional fatigue in teachers; instead of getting to teach, some teachers may feel more like babysitters who are there to police behavior. Emotional fatigue in high stress classrooms can contribute to teacher turnover (Farmer, 2020).

Another response, reflective of several comments, equated student motivation with policies that were established in response to COVID-19.

*It seems as though students are not motivated to complete their work. Since they were given additional time to complete work and turn in assignments, they do not think deadlines are real. Many students also simply do not do assignments in class if they aren't graded. They think they do not have to do anything unless it is for a grade. This whole mindset has really changed since COVID-19, and it has made teaching extra challenging.”*

Several responses linked student, motivation, COVID-19, and parents, as exemplified by the following: *Many students post COVID have little motivation and do not seem to understand deadlines. Parents still use COVID as an excuse for student behavior issues and lack of effort.*



The COVID-19 shutdowns and following shifts in instructional modalities required schools and teachers to be very lenient regarding student deadlines and work. This was done to relieve stress of parents and students, especially those with lack of Internet access or other resources necessary for learning. Participant responses indicate that students (and parents) seem to be struggling with completing work and meeting due dates as schools return to traditional schedules and expectations. If parents continue to enable a lackadaisical attitude towards schoolwork, teachers are undermined and discouraged. The parents inadvertently empower students to procrastinate or not do work because they know parents will complain to the teacher or administration to get their way. This can cause additional stress and work for the teacher. Teachers expect occasional misbehavior, but when students choose to not do the work, this creates an environment that is contrary to reasonable expectations. When teachers have experiences that do not match expectations, there is a higher probability they will leave the profession (Rinke, 2013).

### *Administrator Support*

While many of the environmental factors were positively correlated, the student stressor construct was positively correlated to just one other construct, administrative support  $r(60) = .272, p = .035$ . This suggested that as teacher stress levels with student stressors increased, so did the stress levels with administrative support. Some of the reported student behaviors are outright threatening to teachers. When threatening behaviors towards teachers are dismissed by administrators it creates real concerns for personal safety for the teachers and other students in the classroom. Teachers are much more likely to leave a school with disruptive and/or hostile students (Kelly & Northrop, 2015).

- *Student threatened my life last year and remained in my class. Admin said he was “just joking”. His punishment was a day of ISS and to copy an apology letter the AP wrote. Kid continued to bully the class for the remainder of the year.*
- *I wrote a referral for a student who walked into my classroom with both middle fingers held up in the air and walked all the way across my room this way towards another student. All of the students in the classroom saw this as well. The student was not punished at all. A "conference" was given.*

These comments illustrate a hostile work environment in which teachers may feel unsafe. This jeopardizes the safety of other students as well, by allowing bullying or threatening behaviors. The middle finger held in the air is a phallic symbol, referred to as “flipping the bird”; it is an aggressive gesture used to intimidate others. It is very likely that the teacher and possibly some students in this classroom felt disrespected and intimidated. Students may not want to go to that class in the future to avoid the aggressive student. The physical and psychological well-being of teachers and students are affected by school safety concerns (Boyd et al., 2011).

When administrators minimize verbal or physical threats and make excuses, teachers feel that the administration does not value their feelings or personal safety. In the above example, the only consequence for a threatening gesture was a “talk” with the administrator. This consequence does not seem proportional to the offense. The apparent inconsequential magnitude of the punishment negates teacher feelings and works to create a negative behavioral environment. Another study revealed the behavioral climate of the school as the major determinant of teacher attrition (Kelly & Northrop, 2015).

- *Students are given multiple chances to change behavior and do not. They disrupt the learning of the majority of students but administrators do not see the need to*

*expel students. This leads to dissatisfaction with my job. One assistant principal does not follow district discipline procedures and is a main cause why many teachers left*

Inconsistency of administrative discipline policies can result in increased teacher stress. When students have the perception teachers have no power and that there are zero to minimal consequences, teacher morale and job satisfaction are affected. Teachers who reported that their administrators were not supportive with students are twice as likely to quit than those with supportive administrators (Sutcher & Darling-Hammond, 2016).

### **Overworked**

The theme Overworked was identified by analyzing the qualitative responses even though a regression analysis of the *Workload* construct mean resulted in a  $p$  value of .503, well above the significance threshold of  $<.05$ . Although the regression did not show significance, a factor correlation indicated that there was a positive relationship between workload and COVID-19,  $r(60) = .520$ ,  $p = <.001$ ; between workload and motivation,  $r(60) = .452$ ,  $p = <.001$ ; between workload and administrative support,  $r(60) = .570$ ,  $p = <.001$ ; between workload and professional investment,  $r(60) = .600$ ,  $p = <.001$ ; and between workload and personal health,  $r(60) = .499$ ,  $p = <.001$ . This suggested that as the stress level for workload goes up, it also goes up for the identified areas of significance. The qualitative results supported the correlation and the significant relationships. *Workload* continually reoccurred in the qualitative comments. The *Workload* comments were subdivided into paperwork and time codes. Workload was described as a top stressor and was also linked to COVID-19.

The following participant comments illustrated a perception of being overworked. COVID-19 and administration requirements were so interwoven, they could not be separated. This feeling of being overworked, seemed to affect personal lives and feelings of efficacy at times.

- *We are overburdened with meetings, paperwork and other non-instructional tasks. I spend so much time trying to provide documentation that I am a good teacher that I lack to the time to BE the best teacher I can be. There are days that I come to school and have to make a conscious choice regarding which part of my job I'm going to do poorly that day because I literally can't do everything required of me.*
- *There is so much more to teaching than just teaching. The amount of tasks that are given to teachers to complete makes it difficult to find time to prepare for and teach. The number of meetings that teachers are required to attend gets higher each year. The amount of documentation and paperwork is suffocating. The new initiatives that you are required to weave in to the classroom structure each day is overwhelming at times.*

Teachers are so burdened with unnecessary meetings, excessive documentation, and overwhelming paperwork seemingly related to non-instructional tasks, that they report not having time to adequately plan for classes. All of these additional non-instructional tasks, like professional development (PD) and documentation is aimed at increasing academic outcomes, but in reality, it is negatively impacting a teacher's ability to prepare quality lessons that may actually increase academic outcomes. Teachers are forced to decide which parts of their jobs they are going to do well and let others slide because they physically cannot complete everything expected of them.

- *Planning is taken away for meetings and not enough time when I teach 2 subjects. Always have to work past contract hours.*
- *There is never enough time to get everything done that needs to be done! A previous question asked if I take work home. I finally stopped doing that. If I can't get it done during work hours, it won't get done and I am okay with that now.*

A teacher workday is typically from 8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., however, many teachers find themselves putting in much more time because the amount of work requires working excess hours that may take away from personal time and family that can lead to burnout. When demands are consistently more than a person can handle, the resultant stress likely leads to emotional exhaustion and burnout (Aguilar, 2018). Excessive workload and the inability to achieve work-life balance was given as a top reason for leaving the classroom. Teachers described the constant challenge of balancing job duties and home life as being detrimental to their ability to teach (Helmke, 2020).

- *Since Covid, many more requirements, especially with technology, have been added to my plate but nothing has been taken away.*

COVID-19 shifts in school instruction relied heavily on technology as the means of instructional delivery. Many teachers had to learn several new technologies in a very short period of time. The responses indicated that since COVID-19, the technology demands have remained, but no other classroom requirements or district initiatives have been removed. The increased professional demands and workload on teachers without providing adequate time or removing previously existing responsibilities led to the “intensification” of stress (Santoro, 2018).

- *Workload stressors are never-ending. Last week alone, I did not have a single day of my entire planning time to accomplish tasks that I needed to get done. At least a portion of my time was taken each day due to meetings, pd, or other events/tasks.*
- *Workload is never ending. Everything gets put on the teacher's plate to do...progress monitoring, differentiating instruction and planning all the different ways to teach every student, large class sizes mean more work, data collection, etc...*
- *Having too much of my planning time taken for professional development or watching other classes because of the lack of substitutes. Because of this I struggle to get my workload accomplished during contract hours.*

Professional development (PD) seemed to be common concern. Professional development is intended to provide teachers with relevant skills and training to help them improve teaching practices and current needs (Fischer et al., 2018). However, most of the respondents felt it was simply time consuming and, in fact, was detrimental to their ability to teach. PD and other meetings were perceived as nonessential time wasters that lead to increased stress because they take time away from perceived essentials such as planning or grading. A recent study found that teachers do not feel that the PD they receive prepare them for institutional changes or improve student achievement (Hicks, 2020).

Teachers are feeling drained because more tasks are required to be completed in the same amount of time. Larger class sizes mean more students, which in turn means the need for individualized instruction to meet each student's developmental and learning needs, which requires more planning and differentiation. Unfortunately, the time is being constantly taken away for tasks that do not improve the quality of instruction.

Just as there is a teacher shortage, some schools are having difficulty finding substitute teachers to cover classes for teachers who are out sick. This responsibility too, has fallen on other teachers, who must give up planning periods to cover classes, or the students are divided up and distributed to other classrooms, causing disturbances to the learning process in those classes as well. This could lead to stress and resentment that may impact overall job satisfaction.

In the context of this study, extrinsic motivators are defined as tangible, external compensation or reward. Conversely, intrinsic motivators are defined as factors that build capacity and engagement by satisfying internal feelings self-actualization (Di Domenico & Ryan, 2017).

**Extrinsic Motivators.** Two survey items addressed extrinsic motivators: *I lack recognition for the extra work and/or good teaching I do* ( $M = 3.18$  and  $Mode = 3$ ); and *I receive an adequate salary for the work I do* ( $M = 3.62$  and a  $Mode = 5$ ). The qualitative responses supported the moderate stress responses, “I don't personally look for external recognition or motivators, but many do and they have often expressed that they feel unappreciated and even invisible.” This response indicated that not all of the participants need external validation or recognition to stay motivated, although some do. While extrinsic motivation of recognition may be important for some, it does not seem to be particularly impactful on overall stress levels or the desire to quit teaching.

Even though 61.7% ( $n = 37$ ) of participants indicated that salary caused them great to extreme stress, only 4 specifically discussed salary in the qualitative question asking respondents to describe their top three stressors with the following: “Ridiculously low salaries for someone of my education and experience”; “It is hard to be satisfied in a job where you don't always see immediate results, and don't make enough money to actually enjoy yourself on your time off.”;

“Covid 19 has made all parts of the community stressed, however, parents, students and administration (school and district level) expect more with less compensation. For example, I received \$680 raise this year from the district and workload doubled.” This would seem to imply that although most teachers feel they deserve to be paid more, salary alone is not a significant factor in consideration of leaving the profession.

**Intrinsic Motivators.** Three survey items were related to intrinsic motivation and the stress teachers experienced as a result. “*I need more status and respect on my job*” ( $M = 3.57$ ;  $Mode = 5$ ); “*I lack control over decisions made about classroom/school matters*” ( $M = 3.12$ ;  $Mode = 3$ ); and “*I feel frustrated when my personal opinions are not valued*” ( $M = 3.72$ ;  $Mode = 5$ ). The means of the intrinsic motivation items indicated only moderate perceived stress. There were very few qualitative comments related to intrinsic motivators of respect and input, and no comments specifically about personal opinions being valued. The few responses indicated a sense of helplessness or of not being considered professionals in the field of education, as evidenced by the following: “I feel my input is useless.”

Unlike another study that found teacher retention and job satisfaction are higher when teachers are involved in the decision-making processes (Fritchett et al., 2021); the results of the current study appeared to indicate that decision making ability in the classroom was not as important to teachers as having their personal opinions valued. The distinction may be explained by teachers’ understanding that often decisions about classroom and school policies come from the district or state level and there is not much they cannot do to change things. Whereas, at the building level, teachers would like to feel that their opinion matters and administrators listen and respect them as evidenced by the following response: “My second top stressor is lack of respect



for my role as a teacher. We are constantly being bombarded with how awful teachers are, how we don't know how to do our jobs and are lazy.”

The (teacher) *Motivation* construct, was comprised of two extrinsic items and one intrinsic item, was not significant on a regression analysis with  $p = .30$ . The mean of the motivation construct was 3.46 with the majority of respondents rating the item a 3 on the stress response scale. Two additional items in the *Professional Investment* construct also measured intrinsic motivators of teacher input ( $M = 3.12$ ;  $Mode = 3$ ) and value of opinions ( $M = 3.72$ ;  $Mode = 5$ ). These combined results suggested that generally extrinsic and intrinsic motivators had a medium affect on teacher stress levels and were only moderately noticeable.

## Summary

Analyzing the relationship between the various workplace factors and teacher stress led to the development of overarching themes necessary to answer the research questions. The convergent mixed methods design required analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously. Themes were determined using both statistical regressions, correlations, and qualitative coding analytics. The independent concurrent data types provided internal verification of the findings through the triangulation process.

The data analysis seems to indicate that the most relevant factors in teacher attrition are student concerns and workload. The detailed results may enable educational leaders to understand specific how workplace factors influence teacher stress that and may result in higher teacher attrition. Understanding the motivations to leave the professional can assist in the development of programs and supports to meet teacher needs and increase teacher retention. The

next chapter will discuss implications of the findings, recommendations for future research and conclusion of the study.

## Chapter 5 Discussion

There is a nationwide shortage of qualified teachers, that has continued to increase at an alarming rate. In 2017, 40 states reported shortages in certain subjects and almost 70% of districts surveyed did not have enough qualified candidates for position openings, more than double the rate reported in 2014 (Sutcher et al., 2019). Approximately 90% of all teacher shortages are caused by teacher attrition (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Teacher attrition is a national challenge for the educational system, with turnover being the highest in the Southern United States (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Diliberti et al., 2021; Ingersoll, 2001).

The current study surveyed public school K-12 teachers in South Carolina to gain an understanding of workplace factors that contribute to teacher's intentions to leave the profession. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated an already serious problem, with more teachers reporting increased stress levels and more frequent considerations of leaving the profession (Zammarro et al., 2022). This study defines teacher attrition as the act of a teacher quitting or leaving a position at a school, to include teachers that have left the profession entirely or continued to teach at a different school or in a different district.

Teacher attrition affects student achievement, school climate, and results in increased financial cost to schools and districts (Barnes et al., 2007; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Research shows that instructional quality and student well-being is directly related to teacher well-being (Seyle et al., 2013; Sharifian & Kennedy, 2019). Failing to retain teachers by ignoring their emotional wellbeing has greater implications. In South Carolina, there is a correlation between teacher vacancies and student achievement; districts with higher

teacher vacancies tend to also have lower student test scores on the South Carolina state mandated exams (Dickenson et al., 2021).

It is important to note that while some literature suggests teacher attrition is driven by financial motivation (Ramos & Hughes, 2020; Sutchter et al., 2016), a recent study found stress to be the most common reason for leaving the profession before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, with nearly half of those participants indicating that teaching was not worth the stress, while only 28% blamed low pay (Diliberti et al., 2021). A survey of 1000 teachers who left their positions in 2020 cited stress at a rate of two to one over wages; in many cases, these individuals left for jobs of equal or lesser pay; 30% went on to work in jobs with no health insurance or retirement benefits (Diliberti et al., 2021).

Organizational factors have a significant influence on teacher stress and job satisfaction. Some research suggests that teachers are leaving not because of personal attributes or even student characteristics, but because of “school level factors” (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Stress and inability to manage stressors are some of the top reasons teachers leave the profession (Aguilar, 2018; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Some leading reasons identified by teachers who quit are dissatisfaction, concerns with administration, lack of input in instructional decision making, accountability demands, and other working conditions (Sutchter & Darling-Hammond, 2016). These findings suggest that factors other than money are critical to keeping teachers in the classroom and must be addressed.

This study measures teacher stress perceptions of workplace factors as the relational theoretical lens to determine teacher intention to leave the profession or the likelihood of attrition. Teacher stress is dependent upon environmental interactions between the individual and environment influenced by social and institutional support factors (Jarvis, 2002; Lazarus &

Folkman, 1984; Saeki et al., 2018). Understanding how teacher stress manifests can provide clues to the underlying reasons why teachers are leaving the classroom.

Determining how workplace environmental factors contribute to teacher intention to leave and/or teacher attrition, and identifying underlying causes of teacher stress, could lead to pragmatic solutions and have a meaningful impact on teacher retention. Teacher attrition has many subjective causes that cannot be understood completely through one theoretical framework, therefore, taking a grounded theory approach will allow the data to explain and capture the complexity of the issue.

Teacher intent to leave was measured using teacher perceived stress levels using a mixed methods survey instrument. The quantitative and qualitative data were used to validate the study findings through triangulation in an effort to address three research questions: (1) What is the relationship between workplace environmental factors (workload stressors, motivation, student stressors, administrative support, professional investment, personal health, job satisfaction, and COVID-19) and teacher stress? (2) How do workplace environmental stressors influence teacher attrition (intent to leave the profession)? And (3) How do intrinsic and extrinsic factors influence teacher stress level? This chapter presents a discussion of the study findings, implications, and recommendations for action and further study.

### **Limitations**

This study has several limitations. The generalizability of this study may be questioned due to the small sample size ( $N=60$ ); although the study was over the accepted validity threshold. The recommended sample size for a quantitative population survey is a minimum of 30 participants necessary for correlational analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The minimum sample size recommendation for a grounded theory research design is 20-30 (Creswell, 2007).

All participants are from South Carolina, but the survey itself was distributed statewide to members of the Palmetto State Teachers Association. This group has a \$149 a year dues requirement that may prevent some teachers from joining. If teachers do not have a lot of disposable income, they may be less inclined to join an organization due to a phenomenon known as temporal discounting, which occurs when a future result (organizational membership that may or may not be beneficial) is not valued as much as something they presently have (\$149) (Duan, et al., 2017). Therefore, the delivery method itself may have inadvertently selected a population with similar viewpoints and socio-economic status. There is a possibility that response bias occurred, as teachers that chose to respond may have differing perceptions than the general population of teachers.

The overrepresented number of secondary level educators completing the survey could influence the results. Most of the respondents ( $n = 50$ ) or 83.4%, were from middle or secondary grade levels (grade 6-12). Research suggests that secondary teachers tend to leave their jobs at higher rates than elementary teachers, with middle school teachers in particular leaving at the highest rates (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Guarino et al., 2006; Hughes, 2012). Overall feelings of dissatisfaction may be responsible for the overrepresentation of secondary teachers, specifically middle school, which could skew the findings. Further research with a broader sample may increase the generalizability of the findings.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The results of the study indicate that the most relevant factors in teacher attrition are student stressors and workload. The qualitative data suggests that both workplace factors are more complex than at first glance and have been compounded since COVID-19. Lack of

administrator support was a common thread interwoven throughout the student stressors and workload factor constructs.

***RQ1: What is the relationship between workplace factors (workload stressors, motivation, student stressors, administrative support, professional investment, personal health, job satisfaction, and COVID-19) and teacher stress?***

Data analysis shows that teachers report the highest stress levels related to student stressors, including student motivation and behavior. Qualitative data explains that higher stress levels associated with technology is not only due to residual COVID-19 instructional demands, but also to student behavior with personal and school provided devices. In addition, COVID-19 has facilitated an increase in perceived stress with teachers describing anxiety related to workload that is intensified by time lost to unnecessary meetings or irrelevant professional development. Qualitative analysis reveals the overarching influence lack of administrative support has on rising stress levels of teachers and the interconnectivity of many of the workplace factors investigated.

### *Student Stressors*

*The Student Stressors* construct had the highest overall mean score of 3.82 out of 5; *I feel frustrated attempting to teach students who are poorly motivated*, had the highest mean score ( $M = 4.48$ ). The *Student Stressor* construct also had the most individual items with a mode of 5. Three of the four survey items had a mode of 5, suggesting the majority of respondents experience the most stress regarding student stressors. The *COVID-19* construct had the second highest stress mean score ( $M = 3.7$ ). It is likely that the COVID-19 disruptions amplified classroom-related stressors (Kaden, 2020). Within this construct, technology seems to be the most stressful individual factor; with a mean score of 3.9.

Safety concerns affecting the physical and emotional well-being of teachers are on the rise along with increased incidents of school and community violence (Farmer, 2020). Data from the 2015-2016 school year shows that 10% of public-school teachers were threatened by their students with physical injury; 6% of those were subject to physical assaults (NCES, 2022). In January 2022, 44% of teachers surveyed reported student behavior concerns (Mulvahill, 2022). Student behavior had the most qualitative comments than any other issue. Teachers in this study report being cursed out and threatened by students; teachers indicate a general perception that administrators do very little to help control student behavior.

A qualitative analysis of student stressors found that student behavior was closely tied to student motivation and technology (school provided and personal) that has worsened since the COVID-19 pandemic due to lenient student behavioral and academic expectations. 84% of teachers and administrators reported lower morale levels than prior to COVID-19, in large part due to decreased student engagement, adding that they are more likely to leave teaching or retire early, since working during the pandemic (Rosenberg & Anderson, 2021). This study suggests poorly motivated students may not engage with course material and can become intentional non-learners intensifying behavioral stress for teachers to include academic concerns.

Since COVID-19, technology has become embedded in most classrooms from kindergarten to twelfth grade, many schools provide some sort of device for student academic use whether it be an iPad or Chromebook. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, only 40% of elementary students and 60% of middle and high school students were provided a school issued digital learning device. By 2021, public schools reported that 84% of elementary students and 90% of all middle and high school students were given a school supplied device (Bushweller, 2022).



Technology in the classroom (school provided and personal) lead to other stresses for teachers. The qualitative findings from this study indicate that students who are not motivated may not charge devices or bring them to class with the intention to not participate in the lesson. Poorly motivated students can engage in off-task behaviors, including inappropriate use of personal electronic devices such as cell phones, ear buds, and/or Apple watches. Attempts by teachers to address these behaviors may result in defiant or disrespectful behaviors; when coupled with ineffective or non-responsive administrator action leads to working conditions that are extremely stressful and can lead to burn out.

#### *Administrative Support*

The student stressor construct was positively correlated to just one other construct, administrative support  $r(60) = .272, p = .035$ . This suggest that as teacher stress levels with student stressors increased, so did the stress levels with administrative support. Some identified qualitative variables that contribute to concerns with students, include student inappropriate behavior, student motivation, COVID-19, parent, and administrator support. Some of the reported student behaviors are outright threatening to teachers. When threatening behaviors towards teachers are dismissed by administrators it creates real concerns for personal safety for the teachers and other students in the classroom. Teachers are much more likely to leave a school with disruptive and/or hostile students (Kelly & Northrop, 2015).

Student behavior, motivation, and inappropriate use of technology pose classroom challenges that cause significant stress, unfortunately, this study found that that stress can be magnified by perceived lack of administrator support. These results are consistent with other anecdotal explanations for teacher attrition ranging from lack of administrative and parent support, unmotivated students, school violence, and unrealistic workload (Farber, 2010). Student

behavioral problems and lack of support has been noted as a contributing factor of teacher job dissatisfaction that can lead to higher attrition rates (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018).

### *Workload*

Correlational data indicate a strong positive relationship between workload and COVID-19,  $r(60) = .520, p = <.001$ . This means that increased stress caused by COVID-19 causes an increase in workload related stress. During the COVID-19 pandemic, 83% of working teachers listed workload as the reason why they may leave in the future, describing it as “unmanageable,” “insane,” and “extreme” (Perryman & Calvert, 2020).

In addition, there is a strong positive relationship between workload and administrative support  $r(60) = .570, p = <.001$ . In other words, as teachers become more stressed with workload, they perceive administrative support as increasingly stressful instead of beneficial. Teachers have the perception that administrators do not understand how unreasonable workload demands effect their personal well-being. A qualitative dissection of the workload construct found that teachers are not only overwhelmed by the amount of work required daily with teaching, differentiated planning, grading, documentation, and technology demands but time necessary to complete these tasks is often taken up with unnecessary meetings or irrelevant professional development. Teacher self-efficacy can be negatively affected if the demands of a job exceed ability potentially resulting in burnout (Jex, 1998).

Teachers overwhelmingly describe an inability to find balance between job duties and home life as being detrimental to their “ability to teach” (Helmke, 2020). Many teachers indicated having to work past contracted work hours to a degree that affected their personal lives. Working long hours causes mental exhaustion and the time away from family may lead to emotional stress. Resulting in moderately positive correlations between workload and

motivation,  $r(60) = .452, p = <.001$ , and between workload and personal health,  $r(60) = .499, p = <.001$ . Teachers report that increasing workloads without additional compensation are a contributing factor in quitting (Hughes, 2012).

***RQ2: How do workplace factors influence teacher attrition (intent to leave the profession)?***

The results of this study show that there is a significant relationship between the likelihood of not continuing to teach in the next three years and *Student Stressors* with a value of  $p = .015$ . The most significant student stressor pertains to classroom discipline problems ( $p = .032$ ). Teachers who report that their administrators do not provide support with student behavior are twice as likely to quit than those with supportive administrators (Sutcher & Darling Hammond, 2016).

Classroom discipline problems are student behaviors that disrespectful or inappropriate and interrupt or detract from the learning process. This is consistent with the qualitative responses and other research that claims that the overall student behavioral climate of a school is the most important determinant of teacher attrition (Kelly & Northrop, 2015). When administrators minimize verbal or physical threats to teachers and make excuses, teachers feel that the administration does not value their feelings or personal safety. Inconsistency of administrative discipline policies can result in increased teacher stress. School leadership that provides fair and equitable discipline policies “may help mitigate the harmful aspects of external events such as the pandemic on teacher well-being” (Herman, et al., 2021, p. 492).

*Workload*

Study results indicate that as stress from workload and COVID-19 increase, intent to continue teaching goes down. Data show there is a negative relationship between the item, *On a scale of 1-10, how likely are you to be teaching in the next three years* and *workload*,  $r(56) = -$

.279,  $p = .037$ ; *COVID-19* and  $r(56) = -.292, p = .029$ . During the COVID-19 pandemic, 83% of working teachers listed workload as the reason why they may leave in the future, describing it as “unmanageable,” “insane,” and “extreme” (Perryman & Calvert, 2020). Other studies suggest there is a direct correlation between teacher workload perception and job satisfaction, with excessive workload leading to emotional exhaustion and desire to leave the profession (Toropova et al., 2020).

The qualitative data indicate that other than student behavioral concerns, workload is the second most stressful daily challenge. The comment, *because of the high demands and lack of time to get everything done, I am always tired. Always. I am physically and mentally exhausted all the time*, is indicative of a larger issue. School leaders must take steps to support teachers’ professional and personal wellbeing to improve job satisfaction and prevent burnout, resignations, and early retirement (Van der Vyver et al., 2020).

***RQ3: How do intrinsic and extrinsic factors influence teacher stress level?***

Data indicate that decision making ability in the classroom was not as important to teachers as having their personal opinions valued. The distinction may be explained by teachers’ understanding that often decisions about classroom and school policies come from the district or state level and there is not much they can do to change things. Whereas, at the building level, teachers would like to feel that their opinion matters and administrators listen and respect them as evidenced by the following response. “My second top stressor is lack of respect for my role as a teacher. We are constantly being bombarded with how awful teachers are, how we don't know how to do our jobs and are lazy.” These responses differ from other research that found teacher retention and job satisfaction are higher when teachers are involved in the decision-making processes (Fritchett et al., 2021).

Extrinsic and intrinsic motivators (as defined by the study) had a medium affect on teacher stress levels and were only moderately noticeable. Even though 61.7% ( $n = 37$ ) of participants indicated that the extrinsic factor of salary caused them great to extreme stress, only 4 specifically discussed salary in the qualitative question asking respondents to describe their top three stressors. The means of the intrinsic motivation items indicated only moderate perceived stress. There were very few qualitative comments related to intrinsic motivators of respect and input, and no comments specifically about personal opinions being valued suggesting these types of intrinsic motivators are not important stressors.

### **Implications**

South Carolina teacher departures continue to rise; the continuing teacher shortage is leaving more and more classrooms without teachers. In 2022, South Carolina school districts reported a 39% increase in vacant teaching positions (CERRA, 2022b). This has several implications for education in South Carolina, the southeastern United States, and possibly the entire country. The current study found the workplace factors of student stressors and workload are important variables in the decision to leave the teaching profession. Qualitative responses, however, clearly show that COVID-19 and administrator support have a significant influence on teacher perception of stress within these areas.

COVID-19 is responsible for many changes in the educational process. The pandemic necessitated the implementation of many new technologies and policies to provide support for students learning remotely. Typical behavioral and academic expectations were adapted for the unprecedented situation. Teachers are experiencing residual COVID-19 effects that are making daily conditions even more stressful. One respondent in this study summarizes the problem:

*Since COVID-19, it seems there is a greater lack of accountability for students. Because they*

*were constantly "given grace" during COVID and online learning, they still expect to do nothing and pass. With this, instead of placing accountability on students, administration has placed it on teachers.* Along with lack of accountability, the lax requirements for students during COVID-19 has impacted student motivation.

Since COVID-19 teachers report more frequent student defiance and general disrespect when they attempt to correct off task behaviors, especially behaviors related to technology. When students were at home during remote learning, many accessed media and technology excessively, including television, computers, smart phones, video games, and social media, often leading to academic procrastination (Turel & Dokumaci, 2022). As students returned to the physical classroom, it seems to have been difficult to stop nonacademic uses of technology during the day. Another study found that students reported that technology devices can be distracting and cause an increase in off-task or inappropriate behaviors in class (Ge, et al., 2021). This is consistent with the findings of this study, in which teachers indicated student behavior and motivation tend to be negatively influenced by personal and school provided devices. Appropriate expectations for personal and school provided technology must be established and upheld by school leaders to decrease teacher stress and increase student academic outcomes.

Teacher's report that they receive little support from administrators, resulting in a negative school climate and low teacher morale. Administrative support is reported as a major consideration in the decision to leave the profession with one study indicating teachers who describe their administrators as not being supportive being two times as likely to quit than those who considered their administrators to be supportive (Sutcher & Darling Hammond, 2016). Ineffective management policies are the most frequent sources of dissatisfaction and weak management generates dissatisfaction and creates demoralization in the school and district

(Brazer et al., 2019). Improving teacher working conditions has been found directly proportional to increasing teacher retention (Santoro, 2018).

### **Recommendations for Actions**

It is vital that workplace factors contributing to teacher attrition be addressed, to keep quality teachers in the classroom. Teacher stress levels related to certain workplace factors can have significant influence on the decision to leave the teaching profession. In education, the focus is on student outcomes, however, school leaders must consider the importance of the teacher in the process. Teacher wages are a contributing factor of attrition, but teachers listed financial considerations only as the third most significant behind time constraints and local culture respectively (Sutcher & Darling-Hammond, 2016). There are more effective strategies for retaining teachers than token salary increases (Shuls & Flores, 2020).

#### ***Provide Differentiated Professional Development***

Given the amount of teacher stress related to workload and the wasted time spent in unnecessary and irrelevant meetings, district and school level administrators need to spend more time planning and implementing targeted professional development. Teachers, like the students they teach, are different; they are different ages, have differing levels of experience and content knowledge, varying technological skills, and pedagogical training. A recent study claims that an individualized approach to professional development that allows for teacher choice better fits teacher needs and may even encourage growth (Shuls & Flores, 2020). If the following comment is an indication of how teachers feel, then administration is failing to support teachers. *We meet every Monday afternoon after school. We are talked at and not listened to. They ask about policy and procedures and would like input but either don't change or change to what admin said. PD is irrelevant to my teaching.*

If daily instruction can be reimaged practically overnight due to COVID-19 to meet the differing needs students, then professional development can be updated to meet the differing needs of teachers. Instead of mandatory meetings during planning or after-school, provide guidelines for professional development requirements monthly. Offer a variety of in-person sessions or online modules that allow teachers to choose topics personally relevant. This would address the following teacher perceptions; *I feel as though we are trying to close the educational gap created by Covid in all the wrong ways. Rather than letting teachers teach, we are focusing on learning models and PD too much; We are required to complete some training that is not relevant to our classroom.*

Teachers do see the value in professional development. A study of recent graduates found professional development received during teacher preparation to be a helpful component in their initial success as an educator (Darden, 2022). This underscores the importance of providing relevant professional development to give teachers the skills they need to be successful in the classroom. A school structure that utilizes a collaborative approach to professional development could increase teacher efficacy and decrease teacher frustration with unnecessary meetings.

Create school-wide professional development committees in which teachers help to identify and plan professional development. Leadership must be willing to adjust their perceived teacher professional development needs based on teacher input, because teachers are on the front lines working with students daily. This would help to empower teachers by providing input on an issue that directly affects them; *Sometimes we make suggestions but they are not heard or not valued by others that are not in the classroom.* Teachers are not only a resource for students, but administrators as well. If positive student behavioral and academic outcomes are the goal,



administrators must listen to teacher concerns and start creating policies to improve working conditions and teacher wellbeing or teachers will continue to leave in high numbers.

***Include Teacher Feedback and School Teacher Retention Data in Administrator Evaluations***

In a system that is focused on student outcomes, an emphasis is placed on teacher evaluation, but this study provides data that indicates teachers may be more effective if administrators supported them in meaningful ways. School administrators indirectly influence students because their leadership establishes school climate, is responsible for ensuring quality instruction, and is essential in recruiting and retaining teachers (Burkhauser, 2017). One participant comment describes administrator/teacher disconnect; *I have an administrator who has never taught. This seems to often make it hard for her to relate or understand the full responsibilities that come with teaching.* This may be indicative of the need for an evaluation process for administrators that include metrics other than student achievement data.

The current principal evaluation process in South Carolina is the Program for Assisting, Developing, and Evaluating Principal Performance (PADEPP), which focuses on instructional leadership and the principal's role in the academic success and well-being of students. Principals can ensure a quality education for their students by helping teachers provide effective instruction, promoting student learning, and creating a positive environment (Burkhauser, 2017). A recent study found superintendents tend to focus on instructional leadership to evaluate principals, however, principals arguably, have a tangential influence on student achievement, with some studies claiming managerial leadership has more impact on student achievement (Burkhauser, 2017; Donaldson et al., 2021).

It is difficult for district level administrators to know how effective building level administrators are daily. Considering the direct influence administrators have on the daily

workplace factors teachers encounter teacher feedback is vital to provide meaningful supports. It also provides insight into how policies are being carried out, as this qualitative comment demonstrates: *This [unaddressed student behavior] leads to dissatisfaction with my job. One assistant principal does not follow district discipline procedures and is a main cause why many teachers left.*

Principal evaluations should be expanded to include teacher feedback. A recent study indicates that including and teacher feedback on administrator performance can provide important information that can lead to improvement in school leadership and student achievement (Kozakowski, et al., 2021). When teachers feel that school leaders work to support them, they are more willing to continue facing challenges if it means improved student achievement (Lanbersky, 2016).

There is one important metric missing from the principal evaluation tool in South Carolina: teacher retention and attrition numbers. There are some schools that teachers rarely leave, while there are others with constant teacher exits. Leaders should monitor these numbers for patterns. Effective administrators may be able to provide insight into strategies that may be transferrable to other schools that may be helpful in retaining teachers.

School teacher attrition rates in addition to anonymous teacher feedback about the principal and other building administrators could provide district leaders with insight into turnover rates at individual schools. Studying the leadership at schools that consistently retain teachers could provide specific strategies that may be helpful in assisting principals with frequent teacher turnover. District leadership should focus on changing policies that will keep the teachers they have.

***Ensure Supportive, Fair, and Consistent Discipline Policies for Students and Teachers***

Administrators' reluctance to address issues dealing with student behavior is adding to teacher stress and will only continue to create the kind of toxic environments from which teachers will continue to flee. For teachers to be able to provide quality instruction, students must have respect for learning and/or the educational leaders, starting with classroom teachers. When inappropriate student behavior is not effectively addressed by administration it undermines the teacher, inadvertently eroding teacher respect and authority. Teachers in this study seem to feel they are fighting a losing battle; *I have been cursed out and nothing happened. A student tried to fight the teacher next door to me and nothing happened. Student behaviors have increased as well District policies of just passing kids along when they lack the curricular knowledge to move forward. Kids are being passed that do next to nothing. I am expected to "close the gap" for 60 kids each on different levels with NO additional resources or help.*

Teachers are expected to ensure student academic success all while maintaining effective classroom management. The comments show the troubling reality of little behavioral support from administration and no meaningful assistance academically. Teachers feel undermined by administration when students are promoted to the next grade, even though they did not demonstrate the necessary learning outcomes. This practice empowers intentional nonlearners and causes teachers to become less invested in the process.

Administrators may be less willing to address student misbehavior because of some of the standards and domains on the PADEPP. Standard 4 (climate) states "an effective educational leader fosters the success and well-being of each student by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a positive, equitable climate." Standard 4, criterion 4 states the principal "develops, implements, communicates, and evaluates practices and procedures that align with district policies and address student misconduct in a prompt, unbiased, and effective manner" (SCDOE, n.d.).

However, listed among examples of substantiating evidence are school discipline records, referrals to district office, intervention plans, discipline records, incident reports, and lack of calls to district office. Administrators may choose not to address problem behavior to make it appear that they have fewer number of student discipline issues in order to score higher on the PADEPP.

This may create a dangerous environment for teachers and students alike. When students are allowed to demonstrate aggressive and threatening behavior with minimal to no consequences, teachers believe administrators do not value their safety or emotional wellbeing. The following is one of several troubling qualitative comments reported. *Student threatened my life last year and remained in my class. Admin said he was “just joking”. His punishment was a day of ISS and to copy an apology letter the AP wrote. Kid continued to bully the class for the remainder of the year.* With school shootings and violence in news often, it is irresponsible to allow this type of behavior. If administrators are afraid to address student behaviors because of poor evaluations, push back from the district level, or parent demands, there should be a concerted effort to reevaluate contributory policies and build strong partnerships with parents and community to establish a supportive, fair, and consistent discipline policy that protects students and teachers and creates a better learning environment.

### ***Realign District/School Initiatives with Expectations***

Teachers feel almost paralyzed by the amount of paperwork and meetings. They view many of these noninstructional daily tasks as actual deterrents to teaching. Leaders must be flexible and open to effective solutions, including letting go of traditional methods and failed initiatives (Morgenthaler, 2020). The teachers in this study are overwhelmed by the excessive workload as represented by the following qualitative comment, *There is so much more to teaching than just*

*teaching. The amount of tasks that are given to teachers to complete makes it difficult to find time to prepare for and teach. The number of meetings that teachers are required to attend gets higher each year. The amount of documentation and paperwork is suffocating. The new initiatives that you are required to weave in to the classroom structure each day is overwhelming at times.* Teachers also reported that district and school initiatives can be cumbersome, and they do not always see the value. In fact some policies, although well intended, may be reinforcing problem behaviors.

One such policy pertains to grading. Before COVID-19, many school districts in South Carolina had implemented a “No-zero” grading policy. The basic premise being that a grade of zero disproportionately affects a student’s grade, and in fact, may be mathematically impossible to overcome thereby acting as a demotivator for students (Reeves, 2014). This means that teachers cannot give a grade lower than a 50, in some cases a 45, even if the student has done absolutely nothing. The idea of no zeros is supposed to encourage an emphasis on the learning and not the grade, which allowed for incompletes and flexible deadlines (Anderson, 2018). Many teachers feel that this policy has reduced the value of the learning and created an environment in which students and parents expect to be allowed to turn in subpar work, sometimes weeks late, and receive a passing grade.

COVID-19 policies added to the expectation that grades would be given for little to no work. District and school leaders must reevaluate current initiatives and policies that are overburdening the teachers, in particular policies that may be perpetuating student motivational issues by rewarding minimal effort and procrastination. Comments such as *I literally have students who do not turn in a single assignment in my class all semester, and I am made to override their grade to a 45 when the student should have a zero; and Many students post*

*COVID* have little motivation and do not seem to understand deadlines indicate that teachers in this study find these types of policies to be very stressful and contributory to the decline in motivation and academic achievement of their students.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

Although the focus was the influence of perceived stress towards specific workplace factors and possible teacher attrition, data collected reveals the need for future study analyzing job satisfaction and teacher wellbeing. A multiple linear regression using the dependent variable of “On a scale of 1-10, how likely are you to be teaching in the next 3 years” and the independent variables of job anxiety and job satisfaction found that both appeared to have a statistically significant relationship with values of  $p = .009$  and  $p = .033$  respectively. Correlational analysis reveals there is a significant relationship between job satisfaction and student stressors ( $p = .009$ ) and personal health stressors ( $p = <.001$ ).

Further study related to the mental and physical health and wellbeing of teachers may be important in the development of a system of support that may retain more teachers. The significant findings regarding job anxiety and the workplace factor construct *personal health stressors* suggest teacher physical and mental wellbeing should be studied more in depth. Several study participants referenced mental health problems. *Being a teacher has caused me to have panic attacks, take medication for anxiety, and seek continued mental health support, Physical and mental wellbeing...the stress has caused me to have panic disorder, major stress, and I am now on medication.* These responses are concerning and show a need to develop protocols dedicated to the mental and physical health of teachers.

Unlike the overall study findings that teacher intrinsic and extrinsic motivators like salary and respect are not the highest contributors to teacher intent to leave, it may be for teachers in a

HNS. A comparison of means using an independent samples t-test there was a significant difference between the HNS classification and the *motivation* construct ( $p = .018$ ). Indicating that intrinsic and extrinsic motivators are very important to teachers who work at a HNS. This warrants further study as teachers at HNS or school with high poverty are significantly more likely to leave (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Additional study into motivational theory and teachers at HNS could be significant in reducing teacher attrition at these schools. This is important because nationally, schools with a high poverty and/or high minority population tend to have some of the highest teacher turnover (Sutcher et al., 2019).

### **Conclusion**

There is abundant research on teacher stress, job satisfaction, and attrition, however, analyzing attrition through the lens of stress in the post-COVID era provides data that can be used to recommend practical solutions to the mounting problem of teacher attrition. Lawmakers and school leaders often claim factors like retirement, salary, and accountability measures are the reasons for high teacher attrition, however, this is an oversimplification of the issue (Ramos & Hughes, 2020). Stress and inability to manage stressors are some of the top reasons teachers leave the profession (Aguilar, 2018; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

The results of the study indicate that the most relevant factors in teacher attrition are student stressors and workload; the qualitative data suggests that both workplace factors have been compounded since COVID-19. Administrator support, or lack thereof, seem to influence many of the workplace factors that cause teachers the most stress, supporting the view that administrator behavior drives individual workplace factors (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009).

Administrators are extremely important in teacher attrition as they can either mitigate or intensify the most significant workplace factors related to teacher intention to stay or leave the

profession. Lack of administrator support was a common theme that provides the most opportunity for actionable steps to implement policies and strategies that will increase student achievement by keeping qualified teachers in the classroom and reducing high attrition rates.



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**Appendix A**  
**Organization Approval Letter**



December 13, 2022

Teresa Gibbons has permission to distribute her research survey to the members of Palmetto State Teachers Association for the purpose of gathering information. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me at [tchewning@palmettoteachers.org](mailto:tchewning@palmettoteachers.org) or 803-256-2065.

Thank you,

Toni Chewning, M.Ed, NBCT  
Director of Association Activities  
Palmetto State Teachers Association

## Appendix B

### Teacher Stress Survey

#### Workplace Factors and Teacher Attrition

You are being invited to participate in a research study titled Workplace Environmental Factors That Contribute to Teacher Attrition. This study is being done by Teresa Gibbons a Ph.D. candidate at Coastal Carolina University.

You were selected to participate in this study because you currently teach in a South Carolina public K-12 school.

**The purpose of this research study is to determine how specific environmental factors such as workload, motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic), student concerns, administrative support, professional investment, personal health, and job satisfaction contribute to teacher intention to leave the profession and/or attrition.**

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete an online survey/questionnaire. This survey/questionnaire will ask about perceived stress levels as related to different workplace environmental factors, and it will take you approximately 15-30 minutes to complete.

During this research study, no risks or discomforts are anticipated.

Unless you provide consent to the contrary, the confidentiality of your participation in this research study, your responses or any individual results will be maintained by the researcher.

Note that confidentiality will only be violated when required by law or the ethical guidelines of the American Psychological Association. This usually includes, but may not be limited to, situations when your responses indicate that you, or another clearly identified individual, is at risk of imminent harm or situations in which faculty are mandated reporters, such as instances of child abuse or issues covered under Title IX regulations. For more information about Title IX, please see the University's webpage at: <https://www.coastal.edu/titleix/>.

**Your participation in this survey, and all responses you give, are anonymous.**

The data collected for this study will be stored until January 2028. Results of this study, not any individual responses, may be shared through class presentation, dissertation publication, and or conference presentations, etc.

You do not have to agree to participate in this research study. If you do choose to participate, you

may choose not to at any time once the study begins by simply closing out of the survey. There is no penalty for not participating or withdrawing from the study at any time.

If you have any questions about this research study, please feel free to contact me by phone 803-397-5154 or [tgibbons@coastal.edu](mailto:tgibbons@coastal.edu).

My faculty advisor on this study is Anthony Setari and he can also be contacted by phone 843-349-2112 or email [asetari@coastal.edu](mailto:asetari@coastal.edu).

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) under the Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Services is responsible for the oversight of all human subject research conducted at Coastal Carolina University. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant before, during or after the research study, you may contact this office by calling (843) 349-2978 or emailing [OSPRS@coastal.edu](mailto:OSPRS@coastal.edu).

This research study has been approved by the IRB on December 19, 2022. This approval will expire on December 18, 2023 unless the IRB renews the approval prior to this date.

\*\*\*\*\*

Consent

**By clicking next below you are indicating that you are at least 18 years old, have read this consent form and agree to participate in this research study.** You are free to skip any question that you choose. Please print a copy of this page for your records.

Please identify those environmental factors which cause you stress in your present position. **Read each statement carefully and decide if you ever feel this way about your job. Then, indicate how strong the feeling is when you experience it by circling the appropriate rating on the 5-point scale.** If you have not experienced this feeling, or if the item is inappropriate for your position, circle number 1 (no strength; not noticeable). The rating scale is shown at the top of each page.

**Response Scale Description**

<b>Strength of Feeling of Stress</b>	<b>1</b> <i>No strength; not</i>	<b>2</b> <i>Mild strength;</i>	<b>3</b> <i>Medium strength;</i>	<b>4</b> <i>Great strength;</i>	<b>5</b> <i>Major strength;</i>
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	<i>noticeable or N/A</i>	<i>barely noticeable</i>	<i>moderately noticeable</i>	<i>very noticeable</i>	<i>extremely noticeable</i>
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**Examples:**

*I feel insufficiently prepared for my job.* 1 2 3 4  
5

If you feel very strongly that you are insufficiently prepared for your job, you would circle number 5.

*I feel that if I step back in either effort or commitment,* 1 2 3 4  
5

*I may be seen as less competent.*

If you never feel this way, and the feeling does not have noticeable strength, you would circle number 1.

<b>Work Load Stressors</b>					
There is little time to prepare for my lessons/responsibilities (RQ2) (F)	1	2	3	4	5
There is too much work to do (RQ2) (F)	1	2	3	4	5
Administrative or non-instructional related tasks take up too much of my time (RQ2)	1	2	3	4	5
I am able to keep a work/home life balance (RQ2)	1	2	3	4	5
I must often take work home or stay late; taking time away from personal life/family (RQ2)	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Motivation</b>					
I lack recognition for the extra work and/or good teaching I do (RQ1) (F)	1	2	3	4	5
I receive an adequate salary for the work I do (RQ1) (F)	1	2	3	4	5

I need more status and respect on my job (RQ1) (F)	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Student Stressors</b>					
I feel frustrated because of discipline problems in my classroom (RQ2) (F)	1	2	3	4	5
I feel frustrated when my authority is rejected by students (RQ2) (F)	1	2	3	4	5
I feel frustrated attempting to teach students who are poorly motivated (RQ2) (F)	1	2	3	4	5
I have felt disrespected or intimidated by my students (RQ2)	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Administrative Support</b>					
I feel frustrated that I am not supported by administration regarding student discipline (RQ2)	1	2	3	4	5
I feel that administrative support makes me more effective in the classroom (RQ2)	1	2	3	4	5
Administrators make sure I have the resources (materials, technology, etc.) I need to be successful in the classroom (RQ2)	1	2	3	4	5
My administration provides relevant and timely professional development to support my instructional needs (RQ2)	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Professional Investment</b>					
I lack control over decisions made about classroom/school matters (RQ2) (F)	1	2	3	4	5
I feel frustrated when my personal opinions are not valued (RQ2)	1	2	3	4	5
I fear administrative retribution for openly expressing concerns about issues in my school (RQ2)	1	2	3	4	5
I have felt intimidated by my principal or member of the administrative team (RQ2)	1	2	3	4	5

<b>Personal Health</b>	
I feel valued as a person by administration (RQ2)(RQ1)	1 2 3 4 5
My job causes me anxiety regularly (RQ2)	1 2 3 4 5
I am given adequate time to take care of my personal needs during the day (RQ2)	1 2 3 4 5
My principal is sympathetic to my personal (emotional/physical) needs (RQ2)	1 2 3 4 5
<b>Job Satisfaction</b>	
My job is satisfying (RQ2)(RQ1)	1 2 3 4 5
30. The culture in my school is positive and supportive (RQ2)(RQ1)	1 2 3 4 5
31. I collaborate with and value my coworkers (RQ2)(RQ1)	1 2 3 4 5
<b>COVID-19</b>	
Teacher workload has increased as compared to workload prior to COVID-19 (RQ2)	1 2 3 4 5
The amount of administrative paperwork or other non-instructional duties has increased since COVID-19 (RQ2)	1 2 3 4 5
Technology demands have increased since COVID-19 (RQ2)	1 2 3 4 5
On a scale of 1-10, how likely are you to be teaching in the next 3 years (RQ3)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 1- definitely not going to be teaching  10- definitely will be teaching in three years
Have you actively looked for another job?	Yes No

Please rank workplace environmental factors in order from most stressful (7) to least stressful (1).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Workload ...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of re...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student be...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Administr...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of in...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Physical/e...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Job satisf...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

On a scale of 1-10, how likely are you to be teaching in the next three years? 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10

Have you actively looked for another job in the last year? Yes or No

**Open ended response:**

Please provide examples of your top 3 stressors. (Ex. If lack of input or decision making was one of the top 3 most stressful environmental factors, give a specific example(s) of a time when your lack of ability to be a part of the decision-making process resulted in stress for you.)

Describe the effect COVID-19 has had on the amount of stress in your job. (Provide a specific example if possible)

**Demographic Variables**

Gender: male/female

Is your school a High Needs School (HNS)? Yes or No

[“HNS serve disproportionate numbers of students with disabilities, economic disadvantages, or other obstacles to their education” (Ansley et al., 2019)].

How would you describe your school (rural, suburban, urban)

Number of years you have taught: 1-3, 4-5, 5-10, 11-15, 16-20, 21-25, 26-30, 31-39, 40+

Your age: 22-25, 26-30, 31-35, 35-40, 41-45, 46-50, 51-55, 56-60, 60+

Are you currently employed as a K-12 public school teacher in South Carolina?

Grade level you teach: K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12

Subject area you teach (if applicable): N/A, teach all subjects, English, Math, Social Studies, Science, Performing or visual arts, PE, SPED, Other



<i>I lack recognition for the extra work and/or good teaching I do</i>	10	16.7	9	15.0	15	25.0	12	20.0	14	23.3
<i>I receive adequate salary for the work I do</i>	8	13.3	5	8.3	10	16.7	16	26.7	21	35.0
<i>I need more status and respect for my job</i>	4	6.7	9	15.0	15	25.0	13	21.6	19	31.7
<b>Student Stressors</b>										
<i>I feel frustrated because of discipline problems in my classroom</i>	2	3.3	8	13.3	10	16.7	15	25.0	25	41.7
<i>I feel frustrated when my authority is rejected by students</i>	1	1.6	12	20.0	7	11.7	15	25.0	25	41.7
<i>I feel frustrated attempting to teach students who are poorly motivated</i>	0	0.0	1	1.6	6	10.0	16	26.7	37	61.7
<i>I have felt disrespected or intimidated by my students</i>	12	20.0	9	15.0	13	21.7	14	23.3	12	20.0
<b>Administrative Support</b>										
<i>I feel frustrated that I am not supported by administration regarding student discipline</i>	6	10.0	10	16.7	13	21.6	13	21.7	18	30.0
<i>I feel that administrators make my job harder</i>	12	20.0	11	18.3	11	18.3	15	25.0	11	18.3
<i>Administrators make sure I have the resources (materials, technology, etc.) I need to be successful in the classroom</i>	16	26.7	14	23.3	12	20.0	9	15.0	9	15.0
<i>My administration provides relevant and timely professional</i>	13	21.7	14	23.3	16	26.7	6	10.0	10	16.7

<i>development to support my instructional needs</i>										
<b>Professional Investment</b>										
<i>I lack control over decisions made about classroom/school matters</i>	8	13.3	9	15.0	21	35.0	12	20.0	10	16.7
<i>I feel frustrated when my personal opinions are not valued</i>	6	10.0	5	8.3	12	20.0	14	23.3	23	38.4
<i>I fear administrative retribution for openly expressing concerns about issues in my school</i>	15	25.0	10	16.7	12	20.0	11	18.3	12	20.0
<i>I have felt intimidated by my principal or member of the administrative team</i>	30	50.0	7	11.7	8	13.3	3	5.0	12	20.0
<i>I collaborate with and value my coworkers</i>	23	38.3	6	10.0	7	11.7	11	18.3	13	21.7
<b>Personal Health</b>										
<i>I feel valued as a person by administration</i>	15	25.0	10	16.7	14	23.3	10	16.7	11	18.3
<i>My job causes me anxiety regularly</i>	2	3.3	7	11.7	16	26.7	13	21.7	22	36.6
<i>I am given adequate time to take care of my personal needs during the day</i>	7	11.7	11	18.3	12	20.0	9	15.0	21	35.0
<i>My principal is sympathetic to my personal (emotional/physical) needs</i>	17	28.3	7	11.7	16	26.7	6	10.0	14	23.3
<b>Job Satisfaction</b>										
<i>My job is satisfying</i>	9	15.0	10	16.7	21	35.0	13	21.7	7	11.6