

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF
TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF
ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT
INFLUENCING RETENTION IN TITLE I
SCHOOLS

Brian S. King, Doctor of Education, 2020

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Title I schools, those with high percentages of students qualifying for Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS), face many challenges in serving their students. Among the most significant challenges these schools face is the likelihood they will be staffed by larger numbers of inexperienced teachers and inexperienced administrators than non-Title I schools (Cardichon et al., 2020; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Machtinger, 2007). This study focused on the teacher experience level equity gap, or TELEG, between Title I and non-Title I schools in Soto County, a school system in a mid-Atlantic state. The researcher created the term TELEG to specify the equity gap being studied, namely, a teacher experience level equity gap. TELEG is calculated by comparing the percentage of inexperienced teachers at a school or

group of schools to another school or group of schools. Teacher experience gaps impact student outcomes, district finances, and school culture.

TELEG are often compounded by low teacher retention rates in Title I schools. Research indicates that a perceived lack of administrative support is the most predictive factor in teacher retention decisions (Ingersoll, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2017; Boyd et al., 2011; Burkhauser, 2016; Player, 2012; Thibodeaux, 2015; Pogodzinski, 2012; Ladd, 2011). The qualitative study aimed to investigate inexperienced and experienced teachers' preferences regarding specific support provided by school-based administrators. The study sought to inform a change initiative that could test the theory that improving school-based administrative support for inexperienced teachers at Title I schools could improve those teachers' perceptions of support. The intended outcome is to decrease TELEG in Soto County by improving the retention of inexperienced teachers at Title I schools.

Data was collected using focus groups and individual interviews. Analysis of the data sought to answer the study's two research questions: (1) how do inexperienced and experienced teachers describe desired and non-desired administrative support at their Title I school and (2) in what ways, if at all, do inexperienced teachers consider school-based administrator support in their decisions to remain teaching at their Title I school? The study found that inexperienced and experienced teachers desire support that is individualized and provides access to school-based administrators. The study also found that inexperienced teachers consider school-based administrator support in retention decisions to a lesser degree than experienced teachers.

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF
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RETENTION IN TITLE I SCHOOLS

by

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my wife, Michele, and my two daughters, Isabelle and Ava. Michele, you are an amazing mother and wife and the heart of our family. Thank you for your unconditional support throughout this process. Isabelle and Ava, remember that success is the result of hard work and the support you receive from others. I am so proud of each of you. To my parents, Stephen and Debra, you are role models for achieving a successful career and marriage. To my aunt, Mary Ann, thank you for your support and encouragement throughout this process. I would not have pursued this degree without your support. Finally, I dedicate this work to the students and teachers I have worked with during my 20 years in public schools. I have learned from each of you and wish you every success.

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Section I: INTRODUCTION

A. Problem Statement

Title I schools, those with high percentages of students qualifying for Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS), face many challenges in serving their students. These challenges include high rates of inexperienced teachers and administrators, limited resources and technology, high rates of family instability, low rates of parental involvement and family literacy, low rates of participation in extracurriculars, and high rates of turnover among staff (Mullen & Kealy, 2013; Suggs, 2017; U.S. Department of Education 2016, n.d.). To assist in meeting these challenges, many high poverty schools receive federal Title I funds. Title I funds are federal monies allocated to schools with high percentages of FARMS eligible students. The allocation of additional federal funding to high poverty schools is an explicit recognition of the challenges they face to produce positive student outcomes.

Among the most significant challenges faced by Title I schools is the likelihood that these schools will be staffed by larger numbers of inexperienced teachers and inexperienced administrators than schools with lower rates of FARMS eligibility (Cardichon et al., 2020; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Machtinger, 2007). The resulting equity gap impacts student outcomes, district finances, and school culture. The U.S. Department of Education defines an equity gap as the difference in the rate of access to ineffective, out-of-field, or inexperienced

teachers between low income families or students of color and other students (Williams, Adrien, Murthy, & Pietryka, 2016). This study will focus on the equity gap related to teacher experience levels.

The fact that students at high poverty schools are significantly more likely to be taught by inexperienced, ineffective, and out of field educators when compared to students at low poverty schools is well documented (Goldhaber, Quince, & Theobald, 2016; Goldhaber, Lavery, & Theobald, 2015; Orfield, Frankenberg, Ee, & Kuscera, 2014; Darden & Cavendish, 2011; Peske & Haycock 2008; Sanders & Horn, 1998; Volrath & Feldman, 2016). Further, research indicates that teachers' impact on student outcomes and school culture grows with experience, especially during the first five years (Goldhaber, Lavery, & Theobald, 2015; Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain 2005). It is important to note some research indicates inexperienced teachers from alternative certification programs, namely Teach for America and the New Teacher Project Teaching Fellows, and traditional certification programs can produce strong student outcomes (Kelly & Northrop, 2015). However, alternative certification programs produce less than 10% of the teachers in the districts they work, and teachers from alternative certification programs are 25% more likely to leave their initial placement school (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Kelly & Northrop, 2015).

The two most recent reauthorizations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 include regulations that required states to implement policies

that attempt to address teacher effectiveness, specifically in high poverty schools. The highly qualified teacher provision of 2001 No Child Left Behind reauthorization required all core academic classes to be taught by a highly qualified teacher by the 2005-2006 school year (Sawchuk, 2016). The 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) required all state education agencies to measure and report disproportionate student access rates to ineffective, out-of-field, and inexperienced teachers.

ESSA required SEA to:

Describe how low-income and minority children enrolled in schools assisted under this part are not served at disproportionate rates by ineffective, out-of-field, or inexperienced teachers, and the measures the State educational agency will use to evaluate and publicly report the progress of the State educational agency with respect to such description (Sec 1111(g)(1)(B))

ESSA requirements, when combined with the U.S. Department of Education equity gap definition, highlight the importance of equitable access to teachers across student groups. Research finds that disproportionate access to experienced teachers contributes to 2% of the overall achievement gaps between high poverty and low poverty students (Peske & Haycock, 2006; Isenberg et al., 2013). Teacher experience is not the only factor for improving achievement among students in high poverty schools. Still, it is a foundation piece and a factor that can be addressed by schools and school systems. Improving the equity of access to experienced teachers across

student groups holds the potential to improve student outcomes, especially those at high poverty schools.

In response to the specific requirement to measure equity in access to teachers, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators (MSDE Equity Plan) was released in 2015. Table 1 details the MSDE definition for each teacher category mentioned in the ESSA's equity of access provision.

Table 1

MSDE Teacher Category Definitions

Category	MSDE definition
Inexperienced	(1) An educator in the first year, includes educators with a year of experience or less (2) An educator with one to three years of experience
Ineffective	An educator deemed unsuccessful by a state-approved local evaluation model
Out of field	An educator teaching in a subject they are not certified to teach

Teacher equity gaps are measured by comparing the percentage of students served by one of the listed teacher categories at one school or group of schools to another school or group of schools. MSDE does not report the equity gap for

ineffective teachers; this is likely because under 1% of teachers in the state are rated as ineffective according to local evaluation systems (Volrath & Feldman, 2016).

The equity gap for out of field educators was less than 5% for the state (MSDE Equity Plan, 2015). Using data from the 2013-2014 school year, a statewide equity gap of access to inexperienced teachers was 6.8% (MSDE Equity Plan, 2015). The equity gaps related to ineffective and out of field educators are not the focus of this study.

This study will focus on the teacher experience level equity gap, or TELEG, between high poverty and low poverty schools in one school system, Soto County, in a mid-Atlantic state. The researcher created the term TELEG to specify the equity gap being studied—namely, a teacher experience level equity gap. TELEG does not include data related to ineffective and out of field equity gaps. The MSDE Equity Plan (2015) reported a TELEG of 5.9% in Soto County.

TELEG is calculated by comparing the percentage of inexperienced teachers at a school or group of schools with less than three years of teaching experience to another school or group of schools. For example, School A is a Title I school with 50 certified teachers, 20 of which have less than three years of experience. Therefore, 40% of School A's teachers are classified as inexperienced. School B is a non-Title I school with 55 teachers, 10 of which have less than three years of experience. Therefore, 18% of School B teachers are classified as inexperienced.

The TELEG between School A and School B would be 22%, the difference between each school's percentage of inexperienced teachers (40%-18% = 22%). TELEG can be measured between individual schools, as in the example above, or between groups of schools.

Table 2 provides TELEG data between Title I and non-Title I schools in Soto County. The percentages in Table 2 represent averages across groups of schools. During the 2015-2016 school year, 49% of teachers at Title I schools were inexperienced. In the same year, 37% of teachers at non-Title I schools were inexperienced. This equates to a 12% TELEG for the 2015-2016 school year (49%-37% = 12%). The MSDE Equity Plan (2015) set 5% as the threshold in defining an equity gap as disproportionate. TELEG data from Soto County is above the disproportionate significance threshold for all reported school years. Data for the 2018-2019 school year was not available at the time of this study.

Table 2

Average Percentage of Inexperienced Teachers in Soto County, by school type

School year	% inexperienced teachers in Title I schools	% inexperienced teachers in non-Title I schools	Teacher experience level equity gap (TELEG)
2015-2016	49% (80/162)	37% (150/402)	12%
2016-2017	44% (71/162)	38% (154/402)	6%
2017-2018	40% (65/162)	30% (122/402)	10%

The contraction of TELEG in the 2016-2017 school year was caused by an approximate 10% decrease in the number of inexperienced teachers at Title I schools from SY 2015-2016 to SY 2016-2017 (from 80 to 71). The number of inexperienced teachers at a non-Title I school increased from 150 to 154 during the same time. These two factors contributed to the decrease in TELEG from 12% to 6%. The gross number of inexperienced teachers at both Title I schools and non-Title I schools speaks to the scope of the issue in Soto County. Further, the data presented in Table 2 indicates that TELEG in Soto County has grown since the 2015 MSDE Equity Plan publication.

TELEG between high poverty and low poverty schools impact student outcomes, district finances, and school culture. Many studies have demonstrated that teacher years of experience are positively correlated with increased effectiveness in producing student achievement gains (Goldhaber, Lavery, & Theobald, 2015; Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain 2005). It is important to note that some research indicates that the effects of teacher years of experience plateaus after the fifth year of teaching (Kini & Podolsky, 2016). As previously mentioned, research finds that access to experienced teachers contributes 2% to the overall achievement gaps between high poverty and low poverty students (Peske & Haycock, 2006; Isenberg et al., 2013).

Teacher retention decisions may also impact TELEG at Title I schools. The results of several studies show teachers from high poverty schools are more likely to transfer or leave the profession than those teachers at low poverty schools (Ingersoll, Merrill, and Stuckey 2014; Orfield et al., 2005). Low teacher retention rates at high poverty schools create vacancies often filled with yet another inexperienced teacher (Simon & Johnson, 2013). The cyclical dynamic of TELEG can be seen when a Title I school hires an inexperienced teacher, struggles to retain him/her, hires another inexperienced teacher, struggles to retain him/her, etc. This cycle leads to the question of why teachers leave high poverty schools at higher rates than low poverty schools. Research has a clear answer: teacher perception of a lack of administrative support is the top factor in individual teacher retention decisions (Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, & Syckoff, 2011; Burkhauser, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll, 2011; Ladd, 2011; Player, 2012; Pogodzinski, 2012; Thibodeaux, 2015). When teachers strongly disagree that their school-based administration is supportive, they are more than twice as likely to move schools or leave teaching when they strongly agree that their administration is supportive. This finding is consistent with other studies that similarly have found that more effective principals were associated with higher teacher satisfaction rates and lower teacher turnover, especially in high-needs schools (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Importantly, Boyd (2011) notes that research has yet to answer what the administrator does or does not do that leads to teacher perception of administrator support. This finding indicates that an investigation of teacher perception of administrative support could provide information on desired and non-desired support. This study focused on school-based administrator support, defined as the actions of the principal and vice/assistant principal.

The financial costs associated with TELEG include spending on teacher recruitment, hiring, and induction. Research estimates the cost of replacing a teacher ranges from \$15,000 to over \$20,000 (Carroll, 2004; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Learning Policy Brief, 2017; Kini and Podolsky 2016). Research has also shown that school culture suffers when the faculty is transient, and an absence of experienced teachers lowers the school's instructional capacity (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014; Kini & Podolsky, 2016). Considering this research, reducing TELEG between high poverty and low poverty schools may improve student outcomes, district finances, and school culture in Soto County Public Schools.

B. Scope of Problem

The following section presents data on teacher experience levels in the national, state, and district context.

National. ESSA required that each state submit a plan to ensure equitable access to teachers across student groups. The concept of a problem stream, developed by John Kingdon details in *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (2010), is useful in recognizing the national scope of TELEG. The inclusion of the TELEG provision in ESSA speaks to its presence in the problem stream of federal education policy.

An analysis of the state equity plans reveals that TELEG are common across all states, regardless of region. For example, the New York State Equity Plan (2015) reports that teachers in the highest poverty schools are four times more likely to be in their first year of teaching than teachers in low poverty schools (Metz & Socol, 2017). In 2006, Wisconsin reported that 14% of teachers in the lowest-poverty schools had three or fewer years of experience while the percentage rose to 26% of teachers in the highest-poverty schools (Peske & Haycock, 2006). Additionally, TELEG within a state can vary widely from the state-wide statistic. For example, in a district near Tahoma, Washington, 82% of low income students attend a school with a high percentage of inexperienced teachers. This percentage is significantly higher than the 24% of high income students that attended a school with high rates of inexperienced teachers (Metz & Socol, 2017). The occurrence of varying TELEG within and across states and districts highlights the national scope of the issue.

Goldhaber, Quince, and Theobald (2016) provide further evidence that TELEG have increased over the past thirty years. The study analyzed data from the

North Carolina Education Research Data Center and the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction concerning teacher assignment to schools and student assignment to teachers. The researchers found that schools with high proportions of underrepresented minority (URM) students have higher percentages of inexperienced teachers. In 1988 Washington URM students were 10% more likely to have an inexperienced teacher; in 2013, URM students were 34% more likely to have an inexperienced teacher (Goldhaber, Quince, & Theobald 2016). This research seems to indicate TELEG are expanding in many states and districts.

Further, Goldhaber et al. (2016) found low income and minority students are disproportionately likely to be served by inexperienced educators. The authors assert that every measure of teacher quality is inequitably distributed across schools with varying FARMS and minority student populations:

...we pause to note a fundamental conclusion from these figures. In every single year of observed data in each state, and across every combination of student disadvantage and teacher quality, the TQG [teacher quality gap] is positive; i.e., disadvantaged students are more likely to be exposed to lower quality teachers (Goldhaber, Quince, & Theobald 2016, p. 20).

Research also indicates that low teacher retention at high poverty schools may contribute to the presence of TELEG. In its 2016 Non-Regulatory Guidance for Title II, Part A, the U.S. Department of Education reports that, between SY

2011-2012 and SY 2012-2013, 22% of teachers in high poverty schools either moved to a low poverty school or left the teaching profession. The results of several studies show high poverty schools experience turnover rates of about 20%, approximately twice the rate of turnover at low poverty schools (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; Carroll, Reichardt, & Guarino, 2000). Low retention rates at high poverty schools may contribute to TELEG as the resulting vacancy is likely to be filled with an inexperienced teacher (Simon & Johnson, 2013). The research presented indicates that TELEG is a problem with a national scope.

State. According to 2014 data from the Office of Civil Rights, 25.39% of teachers in Maryland high minority schools were inexperienced; and high minority schools are more likely to serve high poverty student populations (Orfield, Frankenberg, Ee, & Kuscera, 2014). The same study found only 6.78% of teachers in Maryland's low minority schools were inexperienced (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). When calculated as a ratio, these two statistics produce a ratio of 3.74 ($25.39/6.78 = 3.74$). This ratio means that students enrolled in high minority schools are almost four times more likely to have inexperienced teachers than students at low minority schools. At the time of the report, Maryland's inexperienced teacher ratio was the highest of any state in the country (Sutcher et al., 2016). Overall, the report assigns Maryland a teacher equity rating of 2.2 on a five-point scale. These statistics indicate a significant portion of the teaching force in Maryland is inexperienced. Further, high poverty,

high minority schools have the greatest concentration of inexperienced teachers (Cardichon et al., 2020).

An MSDE presentation to the Maryland State Board of Education in November 2016 provides further context to the scope of access to experienced teachers in the state:

- Inexperienced teachers at a low poverty, low minority school are five times as likely to be rated highly effective than are inexperienced teachers at a high poverty, high minority school (41.3% vs. 8.3%)
- Students in low poverty and low minority schools are five times more likely to have a highly effective teacher than students in high poverty, high minority schools. (58.8% vs. 12.8%) (Volrath & Feldman, 2016)

The 2016-2018 Maryland Teacher Staffing Report, using data from the 2014-2015 school year, found 29.6% of teachers in the state have 0-5 years of experience. A more recent report from the Maryland Equity Project indicates 40% of all Maryland teachers have 0-5 years of experience (Janulis, 2017). This data clearly shows that the teaching workforce in Maryland is increasingly classified as inexperienced. The Equity Project report finds that new hires are more likely to be inexperienced, first-year teachers than experienced teachers (Janulis, 2017). The 2015 report indicates that eleven of the twenty-four local education agencies (LEA)

have inexperienced teacher equity gaps between high poverty and low poverty schools, ranging from 4% to 25% (Maryland State Department of Education, 2015).

The growing percentage and inequitable distribution of inexperienced teachers in Maryland is an issue with statewide scope.

Soto County. Soto County serves approximately 27,000 students. At the time of this study, there were twenty-one elementary schools in the district, seven of which were classified as a Title I school. There were no middle or high schools classified as Title I in Soto County at the time of this study. As mentioned earlier, Title I status is determined by the percentage of students receiving Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS). It is an indicator that a school serves a high poverty student population. Across the seven Title I elementary schools, the percentage of FARMS students ranges from 48% to 69% (Maryland Report Card, 2019). The district has reported the percentage of new teachers in each of the twenty-one elementary schools since the 2015-2016 school year. Soto County defines 'new teacher' as one with three or fewer years of experience. This definition matches the MSDE definition of an inexperienced teacher and allows for an accurate calculation of TELEG.

Table 2 provided TELEG data for Soto County over the past three reportable school years by comparing groups of schools, namely Title I and non-Title I. The

scope of TELEG within the district is further revealed by comparing individual schools:

- During the 2017-2018 SY, the highest percentage of inexperienced teachers at a Title I school was 64%, the highest non-Title I school percentage was 47%. The TELEG between these two schools is 17%.
- Four of the seven, or 57% of Title I schools had inexperienced teacher rates above 40% during the 2017-2018 SY. Only four of the fourteen, or 29% of non-Title I schools had rates above 40%.

The scope of TELEG in Soto County is significant when comparing groups of schools or individual schools.

C. Consequences and Impact of Not Addressing the Problem in Soto County

A review of the research concerning the impact of TELEG results in three potential consequences of not addressing the problem: (1) harm to student outcomes for those students taught disproportionately by inexperienced teachers, (2) harm to district finances to address teacher retention, and (3) harm to school culture. This section will discuss each potential consequence in detail, relying on research and data to describe the potential impact of not addressing TELEG in Soto County.

Student outcomes. The relationship between teacher experience levels and teacher effectiveness has been the topic of extensive research. A 2016 report from

the Learning Policy Institute reviewed thirty published studies from the past fifteen years that analyzed the effect of teacher experience levels on student outcomes.

The report concluded that teacher experience is positively associated with effectiveness throughout a teachers' career and is steepest during the teachers' initial years of teaching (Kini & Podolsky, 2016). Approximately two-thirds of the reviewed studies utilized longitudinal datasets with teacher fixed effects. Teacher fixed effects mean researchers compared a teacher with multiple years of experience to that same teacher when they had fewer years of experience. Every study that used teacher fixed effects found a "positive and significant relationship between teacher experience and student performance on standardized tests" (Kini & Podolsky, 2016). The report includes a 'days of learning' standard deviation calculation to quantify the impact of teaching experience on student outcomes. Kini & Podolsky (2016) report, using this calculation, the effect of a student having an experienced teacher can range from one week to one month of additional days of learning in a given year. The authors caution that their findings do not mean that the simple passage of time makes teachers better at improving student outcomes. The development of teacher skills and knowledge positively impacts student outcomes (Kini & Podolsky, 2016).

A significant body of additional research indicates that teacher quality is the top predictor of student achievement gains (Goldhaber, Lavery, & Theobald, 2016; Peske & Haycock, 2008). The research has also shown teacher effectiveness shows

substantial progress during the first five years of a teachers' career (Murnane 1975; Rivikin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff 2005; Goldhaber, Quince & Theobald 2015; Partee, 2014; Imazeki & Goe, 2009). When considered in concert, these two research findings indicate disproportionate access to experienced teachers, or TELEG, may contribute to the achievement gaps between high poverty, minority students and low poverty, non-minority students (Peske & Haycock, 2006; Max & Glazerman, 2014; Fuller, Hollingworth & Pendola, 2017). The disproportionate impact on student outcomes for students in Title I schools is the primary consequence of not addressing TELEG in Soto County.

A second consequence of not addressing TELEG is the resulting inequity in resource allocation (experienced teachers) across schools and groups of schools in Soto County. Darden and Cavendis (2011), in *Achieving Resource Equity Within a Single School District: Erasing the Opportunity Gap by Examining School Board Decisions* argue that inequitable resource allocation leads to opportunity gaps between student groups. The researchers reference a report from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Education Department, a *Call for Action in Education*, which finds schools with the most significant disproportionality of inexperienced teachers tend to serve the most disadvantaged students. Further, a study at the University of Tennessee Value-Added Research and Assessment Center found that when a student has three weak teachers in a row, the

academic ground that is lost is difficult to recover, even if the student later has a highly effective teacher (Sanders & Horn, 1998). The inequitable allocation of experienced teachers disproportionately harms students at high poverty schools because they are more likely to be served by inexperienced teachers.

It is essential to acknowledge a final consequence of TELEG: the harm done to the individual student and family. When a student is disproportionately taught by inexperienced teachers it can result in diminished learning rates, a lack of preparation for future schooling, and harm to the perceived value of self in the construct of academic ability. Peske & Haycock (2006) summarize the impact of TELEG on student outcomes:

The simple truth is that public education cannot fulfill its mission if students growing up in poverty, students of color and low-performing students continue to be disproportionately taught by inexperienced, under-qualified teachers (p. 15)

Financial. Schools with high percentages of high poverty and minority students have lower teacher retention rates than schools with low percentages of high poverty and minority students (Parte, 2014; Kirabo, Jackson & Bruegmann, 2009). Research estimates the cost of replacing a teacher ranges from \$15,000 to over \$25,000 (Carroll, 2004; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Learning Policy Brief, 2017; Kini and Podolsky, 2016). Nationally, the cost of teacher

turnover is estimated at \$7 billion annually (Carroll, 2004; Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Garcia & Weiss, 2019). The financial cost of replacing teachers at high poverty is a consequence of not addressing TELEG.

A second financial cost of not addressing TELEG is the loss or delay of federal Title II, Part A funds. The U.S. Department of Education's Non-Regulatory Guidance for Title II, Part A (2016) suggests state agencies, when reviewing local education agency applications, "should require an LEA to address any existing deficiencies prior to its receipt of Title II, Part A funds" (p. 22). The consequence of delayed or lost Title II, Part A funding holds the potential to be a disruptive and impactful consequence of Soto County not addressing TELEG.

School culture. The effect of equity gaps are often discussed in the context of their impact on student outcomes and district finances. Impact on school culture is a final consequence of not addressing TELEG in Soto County. This study defines school culture as: "the extent to which the school environment is characterized by mutual trust, respect, openness, and commitment to student achievement" (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012). School culture is established and strengthened as teachers, administrators, and parents work toward a common goal.

Research has shown that a stable core of experienced teachers can confer benefits to inexperienced peers and general school culture (Kini & Podolsky, 2016). An eleven-year longitudinal study in North Carolina found that inexperienced

teachers can produce higher student achievement levels when they work with colleagues with at least four years of experience (Jackson & Bruegmann, 2009). The cited research indicates schools with higher percentages of experienced teachers may be better able to maintain and develop a school culture that produces high student achievement levels. This assertion is further supported by research that finds teachers improve their ability to communicate with parents, deal with student behavior, and improve student self-esteem as they gain experience (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014). The research indicates that a transient faculty will struggle to establish the trust, respect, and openness necessary for strong school culture.

In summary, the potential consequences of not addressing TELEG include harm to student outcomes, district finances, and school culture.

D. Causal Systems Analysis

Indian philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti once wrote, "freedom from the desire for an answer is essential to the understanding of a problem" (Krishnamurti Foundation Trust, 2020). This thought provides a useful moment of reflection before engaging in a discussion of the factors which may contribute to the presence of TELEG in Soto County.

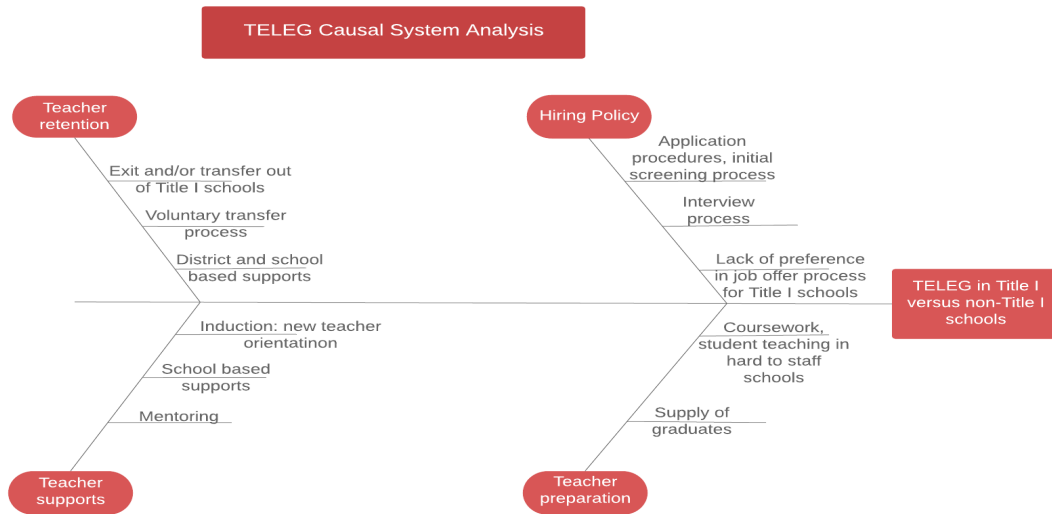
The goal of a Causal Systems Analysis (CSA) is to produce a heightened understanding of forces contributing to a problem of practice. This CSA will discuss four major causal factors that may contribute to TELEG: (1) district hiring policy, (2) lower rates of teacher retention at high poverty schools compared to low poverty schools, (3) teacher supports, and (4) teacher preparation programs. These broad factors will be examined to identify how they may contribute to TELEG.

The four causal factors described in this section are not meant to be viewed as an exhaustive list. They were identified after consideration of current research and district structures. It is important to note that the CSA was developed in the context of the district and school factors that may influence the presence of TELEG.

Additionally, this CSA does not fully incorporate state or national non-education factors such as the national economy or demographic trends. Limiting the analysis to district and school factors allowed the researcher to analyze the problem of practice within his sphere of influence for developing an improvement initiative. Figure 1 presents the causal systems analysis for TELEG in the district.

Figure 1

CSA of TELEG in Soto County



Hiring policy. A description of Soto County's hiring policy provides the context for its discussion as a causal factor. In Soto County, teacher applications are initially reviewed by the Human Resources Department (HR). A specialist within the department determines, based on current vacancies and perceived fit, which schools will have the opportunity to interview the candidate. The teacher candidate interviews at several schools, a school-based administrator must be a part of the

interview team. Principals then notify the HR specialist if they would like to offer the candidate a teaching position. The candidate is presented with all job offers and decides which, if any, to accept. This hiring process is typical for many Maryland districts as hiring and placement policy is determined by the negotiated agreement between the school district and the teacher union.

Fuller, Hollingworth, & Pendola (2017) found that teacher candidates make their initial position placement decisions based on student achievement data, FARMS rates, word-of-mouth reputation, quality of facilities, and the overall perception of school quality. This finding indicates a teacher candidate, when given a choice, may be more likely to accept a position at a non-Title I school over a position at a Title I school. This finding may result in teacher vacancies at high poverty schools remaining unfilled later into the hiring season. Research indicates that hiring a less experienced teacher becomes increasingly likely as schools move further into the hiring season (Fuller et al., 2017; Garcia & Weiss, 2019). District hiring policy creates conditions in which Title I schools may have difficulty competing with non-Title I schools in filling vacancies.

In *Teacher Turnover in High Poverty Schools: What We Know and Can Do*, Simon & Johnson (2013) comment on the impact of district hiring policy at high poverty schools:

Not surprisingly, schools that have trouble retaining teachers also struggle to fill vacancies as they arise, contributing to a cycle of chronic turnover as

principals who have trouble finding strong candidates are forced to settle for teachers who are not a good fit for their school (Neild, Useem, Travers, & Lesnick, 2003). Shallow applicant pools couple with poor hiring practices leads to "mismatches," and subsequently, to more "dissatisfaction and turnover" (Liu, Rosenstein, Swan, Khalil, 2008, p.299)

Contributing to the impact of hiring policy is the profile of the current teacher workforce. According to data from the national Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), in 2011-2012, 6.8% of teachers had less than two years of experience. In 2015-2016 the percentage of teachers with fewer than two years of experience increased to 9.4% (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). When combined with the district's hiring policy that disadvantages high poverty schools, the increasingly inexperienced teacher workforce may contribute to TELEG.

Teacher retention. Research has shown that teachers at high poverty schools are more likely to transfer or leave the profession than those at low poverty schools (Ingersoll, Merrill, and Stuckey (2014); Orfield et al., 2005). This finding leads to the question of why teachers are leaving high poverty schools at higher rates than low poverty schools. Research has a clear answer: teacher perception of a lack of administrative support is the top factor in individual teacher retention decisions (Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, & Syckoff, 2011; Burkhauser, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll, 2011; Ladd, 2011; Player, 2012; Pogodzinski,

2012; Thibodeaux, 2015). When teachers strongly disagree that their administration is supportive, they are more than twice as likely to move schools or leave teaching than when they strongly agree that their administration is supportive. This finding is consistent with other studies that have found that more effective principals were associated with higher teacher satisfaction rates and lower teacher turnover, especially in high-needs schools (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Additionally, the Maryland Staffing Report of 2016-2018 indicates that 59% of hires came from outside of Maryland, and only 41% of new hires came from within the state (Maryland State Department of Education, 2016). Teachers from out-of-state often accept teaching jobs with the intent of moving home once jobs become available. The frequency of teachers leaving Soto County to return to their home state is significant but cannot be reported because the county does not have consistent exit interview protocols. Maryland's status as an import state relates to the causal factor of teacher retention rates.

The casual factors of hiring policy and retention rates are related. As inexperienced teachers leave high poverty schools, district hiring policy makes it difficult for high poverty schools to fill the resulting vacancy.

Teacher supports. In Soto County, teachers are provided with district-based support and school-based support. A discussion of each support reveals how they impact TELEG.

District-based support. In Soto County, induction is the initial support offered to all newly hired teachers. The current induction program includes two main components: a three-day new teacher orientation (NTO) and an on-going mentoring program. All new teachers to the district, regardless of previous years of experience, participate in a three-day NTO in August. The orientation provides information on county curriculum, resources, and supports. Special education teachers are provided with additional two days of NTO. Soto County NTO is standardized; it is not differentiated according to teacher experience level or school placement. This means an experienced teacher who has accepted a position at a low poverty school receives the same induction experience as a first-year teacher who has accepted a high poverty school position. The lack of differentiated induction for new teachers at high poverty schools is a potential contributing factor to TELEG. A lack of differentiation may limit the effectiveness of NTO in preparing new teachers for success at their placement school.

Soto County also provides an on-going mentoring program to all new teachers. Each new teacher is assigned a mentor for their first two years in the county, regardless of previous years of experience. This mentor is usually a retired teacher or administrator from the district. Throughout the school year, the mentor visits the new teacher at their placement school and provides feedback and supports. The support may include written feedback, one-on-one meetings, arranging experienced teacher observations, and assistance in acquiring resources. As in NTO,

the new teacher mentor program is not differentiated based on prior years of teaching experience or placement school. Standardized induction and mentoring programs may contribute to TELEG as inexperienced teachers in high poverty schools may require greater mentoring and different support types than experienced teachers or teachers at low poverty schools.

School-based support. Currently, Soto County has no guidelines, expectations, or requirements for documenting the amount, or type, of school-based support provided to teachers. This makes it challenging to examine the quality and design of school-based support available to inexperienced teachers. Anecdotally, school-based support may come through administrator feedback, informal peer mentoring, new teacher book studies, or opportunities for a teacher to observe a colleague. The lack of system-wide expectations regarding school-based support may contribute to teacher retention decisions. As previously mentioned, a significant body of research finds that teacher perception of school-based supports is a significant factor in teacher retention decisions (Goldhaber, Lavery, & Theobald, 2015; New Teacher Center, 2015; Peske & Haycock, 2006).

In Soto County, the school principal is responsible for designing and implementing school-based support for teachers. Research finds that principals at Title I schools are more likely to be less experienced than principals at non-Title I schools (Peske & Haycock, 2006). This finding indicates that inexperienced leaders are responsible for designing support for inexperienced teachers at Title I schools. At

the time of this study, five of the seven Title I principals in Soto County had less than three years of experience as a principal. New principals are assigned a mentor during their first year. The program is informal and does not have suggested activities or benchmarks.

A review of state ESSA equity plans finds fifteen states mention the inequitable distribution of principals as a root cause for equity gaps. However, only 5.8% of states explicitly connected teacher turnover and inequitable principal distribution (Fuller, Hollingworth, & Pendola, 2017). Peske and Haycock (2006) argue that districts could break this cycle by incentivizing, using salary bonuses, more experienced principals to work at high poverty schools.

Teacher preparation programs. Teacher preparation programs produce the teacher workforce. The coursework included in the program impacts the skills a new teacher possesses upon entering the workforce. Much like the district support discussed earlier, many teacher preparation programs lack differentiation in coursework and field experiences to prepare teachers to teach in a high poverty school effectively (Maier & Youngs, 2009; Warsame & Valles, 2018).

There are twenty-three certified teacher preparation programs in Maryland. The top six programs produce 75% of the new teacher candidates (Janulis, 2017). In a pilot designed in collaboration with MSDE, teacher preparation programs in the state have begun to offer coursework specific to the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively prepare for a teaching position in a high poverty school (Maryland State

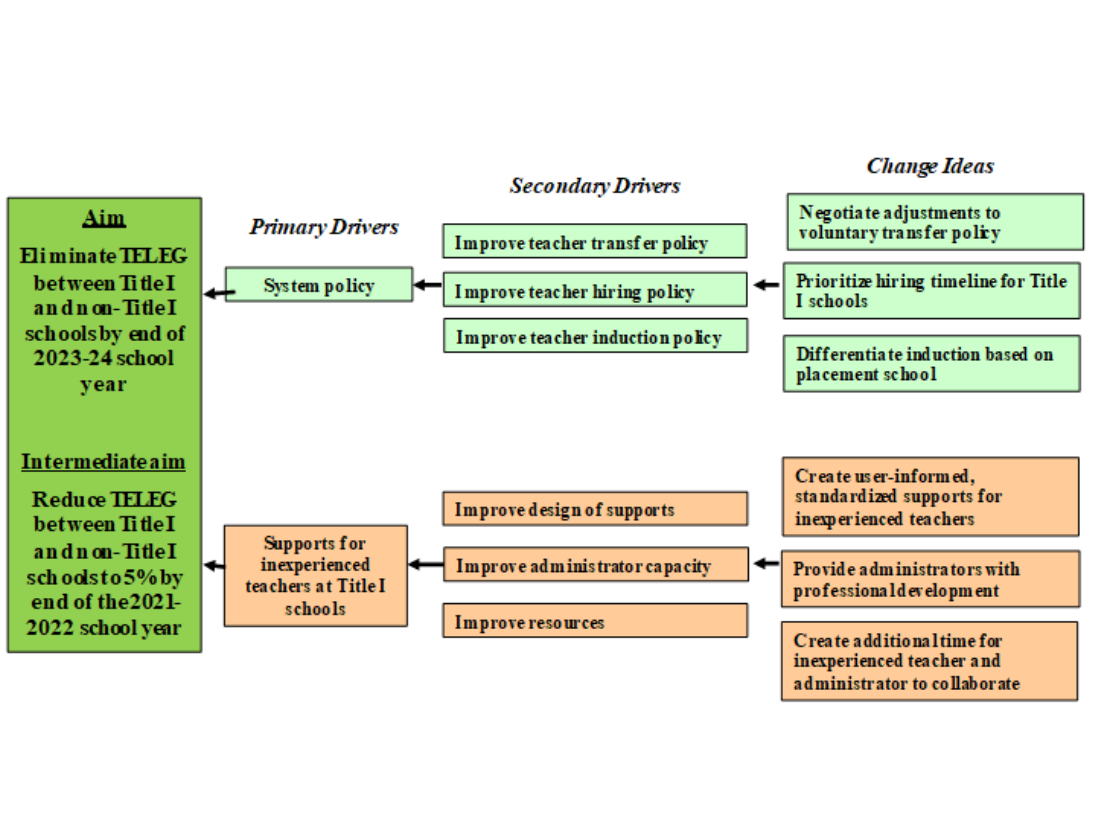
Department of Education, 2015). The pilot acknowledges the need for teacher preparation programs to train new teacher candidates for placement in a diversity of school types. Without differentiation in teacher preparation programs, many new teachers will lack the skills and knowledge necessary for success at a high poverty school and be more likely to leave at higher rates than those at low poverty schools (Cardichon et al., 2020).

E. Driver Diagram

This study identifies two primary drivers in decreasing TELEG in Soto County: (1) system policy and (2) support to inexperienced teachers at Title I schools. The primary drivers are both district-level drivers and are in the author's sphere of influence. The drivers are not meant to be exhaustive but instead provide a sense of clarity surrounding potential drivers of change regarding TELEG in the district. The long-term aim is to eliminate TELEG between Title I and non-Title I elementary schools in Soto County by the end of the 2023-2024 school year. The intermediate aim is to decrease TELEG in Title I versus non-Title I schools to 5%, MSDE's threshold of significance, by the end of the 2021-2022 school year. Figure 2 is a visual representation of the TELEG driver diagram.

Figure 2

TELEG Driver Diagram



As cited earlier, research suggests the cyclical nature of TELEG is compounded by lower rates of teacher retention at Title I schools when compared to non-Title I schools. To illustrate the connection, assume that no inexperienced teacher leaves or transfers out of any Title I school for three consecutive years. TELEG would be eliminated as each teacher would become classified as 'experienced' as they enter the fourth year of teaching. The relationship between

TELEG and retention rates calls for a theory of action and change idea focused on improving inexperienced teacher retention at Title I schools.

Research indicates a perceived lack of administrative support is the most predictive factor in teacher retention decisions (Boyd et al., 2011; Burkhauser, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll, 2011; Ladd, 2011; Player, 2012; Pogodzinski, 2012; Thibodeaux, 2015). Further, research indicates that teacher perception of administrative support at urban schools has an even more significant impact on retention than suburban schools (Hanushek, Rivkin, 2007). Similarly, research indicates that teacher perception of the administrator support becomes increasingly negative as the student population's poverty and diversity increases (Louis, K. S., Leithwood, K., Wahlstrom, K. L., & Anderson, S. E., 2010). This research, and its potential to impact inexperienced teacher retention rates at Title I schools, is the focus of this study.

To further complicate retention efforts, research finds that teachers at Title I schools need more support, but principals themselves are more likely to be inexperienced and struggle to provide necessary supports (Cardichon et al., 2020; Fuller, Hollingworth, Pendola, 2017; Mullen & Kealy, 2013; Partee, 2014). Designing and implementing the necessary teacher supports, which require skilled and experienced leaders, may include developing professional learning communities and other teacher leadership initiatives.

Figure 3 presents the theory of action for improving the design of support for inexperienced teachers as a driver of reducing TELEG in the district.

Figure 3

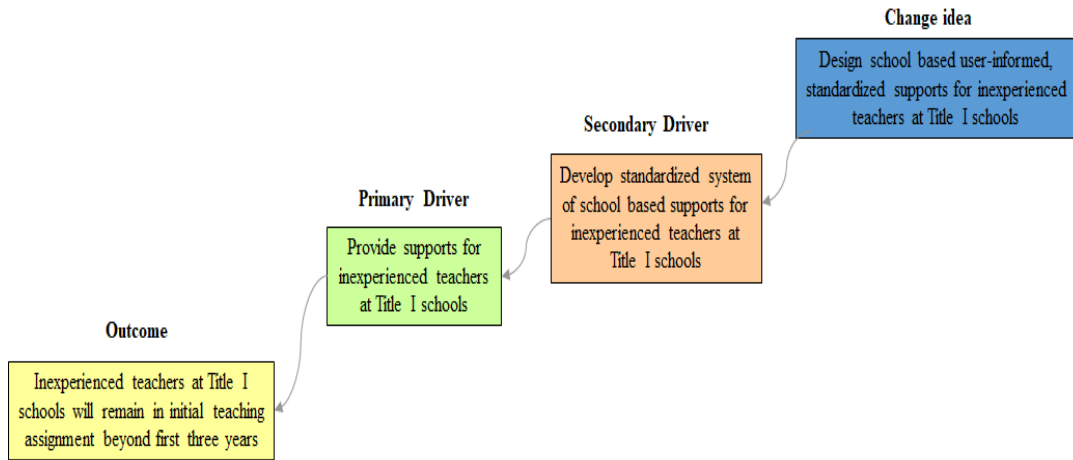
Theory of Action

<p>If I can determine what support teachers at Title I schools prefer or want</p> <p>Then I can better design a system of school-based support that has the potential to be effective for helping inexperienced teachers at Title I schools</p> <p>And inexperienced teacher perception of administrators and available school-based support will increase at Title I schools</p> <p>Resulting in improved retention of inexperienced teachers at Title I schools beyond their first three years of teaching</p>
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Improving teacher perception of administrative support may lead to higher retention rates of inexperienced teachers at Title I schools. TELEG would decrease as more inexperienced teachers remain in their initial teacher placement beyond three years. Figure 4 provides a visual of this logic, beginning with the change idea of user-informed support and ending with the desired outcome of inexperienced teachers remaining in their initial teaching assignment beyond three years.

Figure 4

Theory of Action Driver Diagram



The following section provides a further discussion of each primary driver.

System policy.

Several school system policies influence the ability of the district to address TELEG effectively. The policies include teacher transfer policy, induction policy, and hiring policy.

Transfer policy. Change initiatives focused on teacher transfer policy may support work toward reducing TELEG between Title I and non-Title I schools. The current negotiated agreement between Soto County Public Schools and the Education Association of Soto County includes several teacher transfer policy provisions. Article 8, titled Voluntary Transfer, describes how teachers can participate in the voluntary transfer process. The transfer process begins with the teacher making a

written transfer request before the March 1st deadline. The teacher can then select up to seven schools to which they would like to transfer. Teachers can only apply for a transfer after two years of satisfactory employment in the county (Education Association of Soto County, 2019). The district holds a transfer interview fair in the spring, after which principals make offers to transfer candidates. The transfer offer must be for an existing vacancy at the school. The transfer process concludes with the teacher receiving a list of all offers and deciding which, if any, to accept.

As discussed earlier, research indicates the most common outcome of teacher transfers is sorting of experienced teachers away from high poverty schools to low poverty schools (Goldhaber, Lavery, & Theobald; 2015; Goldhaber, Quince, & Theobald, 2016; Orfield, Frankenberg, EE, & Kuscera, 2014; Darling-Hammond, 2004). Orfield et al. (2014) note that "experienced educators systematically move away from segregated minority schools to largely white or integrated schools where the students are better prepared and the external problems less severe" (p. 35). Nationally, between the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years, 12% of teachers transferred out of a high poverty school while only 6% of teachers transferred out of a mid-low or low poverty school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Further, the Indiana State Department of Education reported that teachers rated as effective and highly effective were twice as likely to transfer out of the state's highest poverty schools (Metz & Socol, 2017).

Change initiatives related to teacher transfer policy could decrease the frequency of experienced teachers leaving Title I schools, thereby impacting TELEG. Changing transfer policy in Soto County would involve adjustments to the negotiated agreement, something beyond my sphere of influence. The transfer policy is not the focus of this study.

Induction policy. Change initiatives focused on induction policy in Soto County Public Schools may also reduce TELEG. Currently, all new teachers to the county, both experienced and inexperienced, participate in a three-day new teacher orientation in August. The training includes sessions on district policy, curriculum, employee expectations, and benefits. Anecdotally, teachers report the information presented is useful and helpful in their transition process. It is worth noting that NTO does not provide differentiated sessions based on a teacher's school placement or prior experience. This means an experienced teacher who has accepted a job at a low poverty school receives the same induction program as a first-year teacher who has accepted a high poverty school job. Change initiatives focused on differentiating orientation based on placement school and experience level may better prepare teachers for their initial teaching assignment. This change of policy is not impossible to achieve. According to one source, 24 states have identified the strategy of improved induction in their ESSA equity plan to address equity gaps (Williams, Adrien, Murthy, & Pietryka, 2016).

Maryland State Senator Paul Pinsky sponsored Senate Bill 493, the Teacher Induction, Retention, and Advancement Act of 2016. The bill aimed to improve induction and decrease first-year teachers' workload by providing them 20% more time for mentoring, peer observations, assistance with planning, and other preparation. The program was 80% state-funded, with the local education agency covering the remaining cost (Maryland Senate Bill 493, 2016).

The second component of Soto County's current induction policy is a district-wide mentoring program. The district assigns each new teacher a mentor during their first two years of teaching. The mentor teacher has the discretion to dedicate additional time and more individualized supports to inexperienced mentees. In the Soto County Public School system, new teacher mentors must complete an application and training process consisting of professional development on mentoring best practices. Improvements to current induction policy, most notably the differentiation of NTO, could drive progress toward reducing TELEG in the district.

Hiring policy. Hiring policy changes have the potential of reducing TELEG in Soto County. Namely, adjusting hiring timelines and creating preferential hiring for Title I schools may assist in reducing TELEG. The district has made significant improvements in its hiring timelines after realizing that surrounding counties held interview fairs earlier in the hiring season. Adjustments to hiring timelines may impact TELEG by allowing high poverty schools to fill vacancies earlier and with more desirable candidates. The district could also explore, as a change initiative,

preferential hiring policies for Title I schools. Preferential hiring policy may also result in more desirable candidates accepting teaching positions at Title I schools. Hiring more desirable candidates could improve Title I schools' retention rates if those candidates are better equipped to teach and remain teaching at a high poverty school.

Research indicates districts could improve hiring policy by identifying the best teaching talent in the system and then back-mapping where the talent came from (Barfield, 2015). A focus on improving the quality of the talent pipeline to the district may enhance the quality of new teacher candidates. Combining this back-mapping strategy with hiring policy adjustments could improve the quality of teacher candidates that accept teaching positions at high poverty schools.

This section has discussed potential change ideas related to transfer policy, induction policy, and hiring policy. Adjustments to the transfer policy would involve a renegotiation of the current teacher contract, a change initiative beyond my sphere of influence. Improvements to induction involve cross-departmental coordination and would entail additional financial costs. Hiring policy change initiatives also involve negotiated agreement adjustments. For these reasons, the system policy driver is not the focus of this study.

Support for inexperienced teachers (primary driver). The primary improvement driver is support for inexperienced teachers at Title I schools. Support

can refer to either district-based or school-based support; this study's theory of action focuses on improving the design of school-based support.

This study will focus on improving school-based support for inexperienced teachers because it focuses on changing how existing employees perform already assigned job responsibilities, does not require significant financial investments, and is within my sphere of influence. The following sections will discuss each of the three secondary drivers related to improving supports for inexperienced teachers: (1) improve the design of school-based support, (2) improve administrator capacity, and (3) improve resources.

Design of support. As a school principal, I directly influence school-based support for inexperienced teachers, the primary driver of this study. The desired outcome of improving school-based support for inexperienced teachers is to increase the retention of those teachers, especially in Title I schools. Increased retention of inexperienced teachers at Title I schools could drive progress toward reducing TELEG if more inexperienced teachers remaining in their initial placement beyond three years. This theory is not to suggest an independent causal relationship between administrator support and teacher retention. Research cited throughout this study shows that support is one factor in retention decisions; the author acknowledges that other factors may outweigh it.

The term administrative support has been the topic of a significant body of research. Table 3 presents the variety of definitions researchers have assigned to this term.

Table 3

Research on the term Administrative Support

Source	Term	Definition
Darling-Hammond (2017)	Administrative support	Ability to encourage and acknowledge staff, communicate a clear vision, run a school well
Boyd (2011)	Administrator behaviors	Communicate respect and appreciation for teachers, encourage teachers to change practice if it is not going well, work with teachers to solve problems, encourage staff to use data, develop mission
Burkhauser (2016)	Principal actions	Address concerns, provide feedback, establish respect and trust
Player (2017)	Principal behaviors	Communicate vision, supportive to instruction, address student discipline
Ladd (2011)	Working conditions	Relationship between school leaders and teachers
Moore (2017)	School environment	Support of administration, enforcement of rules, shared beliefs and values, communication among

		principal and staff, cooperation, recognition by principal
Pogodzinski (2012)	Administrative climate	Routine beliefs and actions associated with administration-teacher relationship

Table 3 illustrates a lack of consistency and consensus for defining the principals' role in providing support to teachers. Boyd (2011) notes that research has yet to answer what the administrator does or does not do that leads to teacher perceptions of support. Some research has begun to identify the specific administrative actions that impact teacher perceptions including *Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do*, a 2001 report from the National Association of Elementary School Principals. The report discussed specific administrator actions, such as decreasing teacher workload, creating opportunities for teachers to work, planning and thinking together, and creating opportunities for teachers to observe one another as potentially effective actions. Additionally, a joint research project between the University of Ontario and the University of Minnesota identified several effective administrator support actions. They include keeping track of teacher professional development needs, general support/open-door policy, backing up teachers with student discipline and parents, and providing mentoring opportunities for new teachers. The reports attempt to

address Boyd's assertion that research has yet to identify specific administrator support actions.

Several studies support the assertion of a relationship between teacher perception of administrative support and teacher retention decisions. They include:

- ✓ Survey of first-year teachers in New York City; the survey was given in the spring of 2005, and a follow-up survey was given one year later. The authors found that new teacher perception of administration has the greatest influence on retention decisions (Boyd et al., 2012).
- ✓ Analysis of teacher survey data from 2005-2006 through 2011-2012 in North Carolina. The author found that the principal is a significant factor in teacher perception of working conditions (Burkhauser, 2016)
- ✓ Analysis of data from 2011-12 Schools and Staffing Survey and 2013 Teacher Follow-up Survey in which the authors conclude that leadership practices have more influence on teacher retention decisions than person-job fit. The authors found that teachers reporting strong principal leadership of one standard deviation above the norm are 25% more likely to stay in their current position (Player et al., 2012).
- ✓ Analysis of data from the 2006 North Carolina survey reported that respondents believe a principal can impact working conditions. Teachers cite working conditions as a significant factor in retention decisions (Ladd, 2011).

Research further suggests that work toward addressing equity gaps should focus on school-level retention data as teacher perception of favorable teaching conditions, including administrative support, results in higher retention rates (Bromberg 2016; New Teacher Center, 2016).

The driver of improving the design of support for inexperienced teachers is the focus of this study. It may have the potential to produce improving retention of inexperienced teachers at Title I schools. Improving retention rates of inexperienced teachers at Title I schools will impact TELEG once those inexperienced teachers become classified as experienced during their fourth year of teaching. This logic is supported by research which suggests schools should focus on intensifying efforts to help inexperienced teachers to increase the potential of retaining them beyond the first few years (Talley, 2017).

This study proposes that teacher input is a critical component of improving support for inexperienced teachers. In *Learning to Improve: How America's schools can get better at getting better*, the authors argue that good design focuses first on people—the users (Byrk et al., 2015). The support users are the inexperienced teachers, and the implementers of the support are school-based administrators. Byrk et al. (2015) indicate that inexperienced teachers' support should be user-informed, meaning input from inexperienced teachers is intentionally and systematically collected. Standard work processes are routines that help make complex tasks less

stressful (Mintrop, 2016). Standard work processes for supporting inexperienced teachers would identify the specific actions administrators can take to impact teacher perceptions of support positively. The proposed investigation results will inform the change idea of designing school-based, user-informed support for inexperienced teachers.

Administrator capacity. Change initiatives focused on improving school-based administrator capacity to support inexperienced teachers may also reduce TELEG between Title I and non-Title I schools. In Soto County, school-based administrators are responsible for providing support to teachers. However, there is a lack of explicit professional development for school-based administrators for giving support to inexperienced teachers. The U.S. Department of Education (2016) recommends that districts develop training for school leaders to improve feedback to teachers and create favorable working conditions for teachers. Partee (2014) noted that efforts to improve working conditions at high poverty schools might need to include additional professional development and training for school leaders.

Improving school-based administrator capacity to provide support to inexperienced teachers as a means of improving teacher retention was not widely identified in state equity plans. Fewer than five states mentioned principals as a managing factor for teacher turnover in their equity plans (Fuller, Hollingworth, Pendola, 2017). An investigation of what leads to teacher perception of school-based

administrative support is necessary before providing administrators with professional development.

Resources. Change initiatives focused on improving resources, including time and standard practices, for supporting inexperienced teachers may reduce TELEG in the district. A lack of dedicated time and standard practices for supporting inexperienced teachers may result in a wide variety of support within and across schools. Some school-based administrators may prioritize and excel at supporting inexperienced teachers, while others may struggle to find the time and resources to support inexperienced teachers effectively. The district could explore negotiating additional compensated, contractual time for inexperienced teachers during the school year or summer. School-based administrators and inexperienced teachers could use this time to set goals, standard practices, and teacher support benchmarks.

Equity gaps related to teacher experience levels at Title I and non-Title I schools constitutes a significant problem of practice in the district. The CSA and driver diagram presented in this study have detailed the causes of, and potential solutions for, TELEG in the district.

F. Purpose of Investigation

This study investigated inexperienced and experienced teacher preference for school-based administrator support with the goal of using the information to improve the design of support. The study tested the theory that supports for inexperienced teachers at Title I schools can be improved if teachers have input into the support design. The study solicited input from two teacher groups: (1) inexperienced teachers at Title I schools, and (2) experienced teachers at Title I schools, specifically those with 4-7 years of experience. The next section details the design of the study.

Section II: STUDY DESIGN

A. Purpose Statement

This study investigated the preferences of inexperienced and experienced teachers for school-based administrator support. The study tested the theory that teacher perception of school-based administrator support can be improved if the supports are designed with teacher input. In using the term 'school-based administrator,' the researcher assumed the participants knew the term was referring to principals and vice/assistant principals, as that is how the term is commonly used in Soto County. No participants asked for clarification on the meaning of the term. The aim is to decrease TELEG in Soto County by increasing teacher perception of school-based administrator support. Research has shown teacher perception of support to be a critical factor in teacher retention decisions.

The qualitative study used focus group and individual interviews to solicit data from inexperienced and experienced teachers in Title I elementary schools. Inexperienced teachers were defined as those with three or fewer years of teaching experience in their Title I school. Experienced teachers were defined as those with 4-7 years of teaching experience in their Title I school. The data gained during the focus groups and interviews were analyzed using coding, peer consultation, and theme identification.

B. Research Questions

Two research questions guided the study:

1. How do inexperienced and experienced teachers describe desired and non-desired school-based administrative support at their Title I school?
2. In what ways, if at all, do inexperienced teachers consider school-based administrator support in their decisions to remain teaching at their Title I school?

C. Design

The study design was qualitative, gathering data using two focus groups and four individual interviews. Five inexperienced teachers and six experienced teachers participated in the study. One selected participants could not attend the inexperienced teacher focus group due to a last-minute scheduling conflict. All participants were teaching at a Title I school at the time of this study. A qualitative design was selected because qualitative methods are best when the researcher wants to explore human experiences with a specific phenomenon (Creswell, Hanson, Plano, Clark & Morales, 2007). In this case, the shared phenomenon is experience with school-based administrator support during the first three years of teaching at a Title I school.

Additionally, a qualitative design was selected as its goal is to understand, to discover, and to describe data or experiences (Curry, 2015; Yin, 2015). Qualitative research design is flexible and evolving. The researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and "brings his/her own perspective to the selection and meaning of data" (Center for Qualitative Research, 2015). Conversely, a quantitative research design is structured and predetermined and seeks to establish causal inferences

between variables. These defining characteristics of quantitative research do not fit the purpose of this exploratory study of teacher perception of school-based administrator support.

Focus groups are one of several qualitative methods. Focus groups were selected for their ability to generate data on participant experiences and perceptions of school-based administrator support (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The focus group prompts were scenario-based. Scenarios were used to increase the participants' comfort level in discussing their opinions, experiences, and preferences. The scenarios were intended to be neutral; the researcher was careful not bias responses toward a specific definition or framework for administrator support. The second round of data collection utilized individual interviews. Individual interview participants were selected using purposeful sampling from the focus group participants. Participants were selected based on their input during the focus groups and the likelihood they could further discuss the themes from the focus groups. The purpose of individual follow-up interviews was to gather personalized data on teacher experience and perception of school-based administrative support. Research suggests that individual interviews effectively solicit extensive descriptions of an individual's experiences with a specific phenomenon (Frances, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2006). A qualitative study, based on two focus groups and four individual interviews, aligns with the investigation's purpose: investigating teacher perception of school-based

administrator support. The study's goal is to inform a change initiative to improve school-based administrator support at Title I schools in Soto County.

D. Methods and Procedures

This section details the procedures and processes for participant selection, the development of instruments, and the process for data collection and analysis.

Participants. All participation in the study was entirely voluntary. The goal was to have six participants in each focus group, considered an optimal size for data collection and diversity of experience (Curry, 2015). The participant characteristics for each focus group are detailed below in Table 4. The teaching placement, school placement, and years of experience characteristics were chosen to ensure participants could discuss each research question. The certification characteristic was used to ensure data solicited was from teachers the district desires to have in every teaching position: fully certified teachers.

Table 4

Focus Group Participant Characteristics

Focus group	Participant characteristics
Inexperienced teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Currently teaching at a Title I elementary school in Soto County ✓ Three or fewer years of teaching experience as of April 2020 ✓ All teaching experience at same Title I elementary school ✓ Fully certified, not on a conditional teaching certificate

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ General education or special education teacher assigned to the 3-year old program through 5th-grade students also includes Related Arts (Music, Art, Physical Education, Media Specialist)
Experienced teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 4-7 years of teaching experience as of April 2020 ✓ All other participant characteristics listed for an inexperienced teacher

The researcher recruited from a potential participant pool of 53 inexperienced teachers and 52 experienced teachers. A high level of participant interest made the modification of these desired participant characteristics unnecessary, as enough participants were recruited and selected for each focus group. As mentioned earlier, purposeful sampling was used in the selection of individual interview participants. Participation in the focus group was required for eligibility for an individual follow-up interview.

Recruitment. At the time of this study, there were seven Title I schools in Soto County. The researcher is the principal at a Title I school; due to this conflict of interest, no teachers from his school were considered for participation in the study. The focus group and interview participants were selected from the remaining six Title I elementary schools. The researcher began participant recruitment by requesting, via email, permission from each school principal to conduct research with his/her staff. The email to principals described the study's purpose and method, detailed the

proposed participant characteristics, and requested the principal respond via email as to whether he/she approves for teachers from the school to participate in the study. The email noted that the proposed research had been approved by the University of Maryland IRB and Soto County. All six principals approved for their staff to participate in the study. The researcher then requested the following information from each principal: a list of teachers with less than three years of teaching experience that met all characteristics from Table 4, and a list of teachers with 4-7 years of teaching experience that met all characteristics from Table 4. (See Appendix B for a copy of the principal permission email)

All potential participants received a recruitment email. The email described the purpose of the study, highlighted that the proposed research had been approved by the University of Maryland IRB and Soto County, told the selection process for participants, shared that participants would be compensated with a \$25 Amazon.com gift card, noted that participation was voluntary, and shared that the information collected was for the researcher's dissertation and that the identity of all focus group participants would be protected to the maximum extent possible. Protecting participants and school information included deidentifying all information obtained during the focus groups and interviews. The data was analyzed and summarized so that no names were reported in the dissertation or any subsequent reports. The participant recruitment email requested a response, within one week, if the teacher wanted to be considered for participation in the focus group. The initial teacher

recruitment email was sent using the bcc: email feature, allowing the email to be sent to many recipients without identifying individual recipients. (See Appendix C for a copy of the participant recruitment email)

Selection. Once all interested participants responded, the researcher randomly selected six inexperienced teachers and six experienced teachers for participation in the study. To encourage a diversity of experience with school-based administrator support, the researcher's goal was to select one teacher from each of the six Title I schools for participation in each focus group. All interested participants' last names were entered, grouped by school placement, into a random selection tool at <https://www.textfixer.com/tools/random-choice.php>. The research recognized this selection process would need to be flexible, particularly if a principal did not agree for his/her school to participate or if a principal agrees to participate or if no teachers from a school respond to the recruitment email. Although all principals approved, there was one school where no inexperienced teachers expressed an interest in participating in the study. This required the researcher to randomly select a second inexperienced teacher, using the random generator, from another school. The selection process resulted in six teachers being invited to participate in each focus group for a total of twelve study participants. (See Appendix D for a copy of the participant selection email)

Instruments. Due to the COVID-19 state of emergency in Maryland, participants were invited to a virtual focus group using Zoom, a videoconferencing

website. One week before the scheduled focus group, participants were sent, via email, a consent form, and a short survey. The consent form was sent electronically using DocuSign, an online electronic agreement software company. The survey was also sent electronically, using the Forms feature of Microsoft Office 365. The survey's purpose was to gather demographic information from each participant to enhance the personification of results and findings. All selected participants were able to view and electronically sign the consent form approved by the University of Maryland Internal Review Board. All chosen participants also completed the survey. The survey had six open-response questions, asking each participant to self-identify the following: grade level taught, current years of teaching experience, teaching certification endorsements, gender identification, age identification, and racial identification.

The researcher used a focus group discussion guide to ensure that data was collected for each research question. The discussion guide included two scenarios for participants to consider and discuss. The discussion guide also prompted participants to discuss their reactions to the research finding that teacher perception of school-based administrator support is a top factor in teacher retention decisions. The researcher intentionally did not ask teachers to complete surveys, questionnaires, or prompts that implied a definition, or framework, for school-based administrator supports. For example, “What experience have you had with [common school-based administrator support action]” or “Please rank the following school-based

administrator support actions according to your preferences.” The intent of using broad prompts was to allow participants to discuss the topic of school-based administrator support from their own perspective, experiences, and framework.

As a principal, the researcher did not want to bias the discussion with his, or any other organizations, predetermined definition or framework for school-based administrator support. Instead, the researcher wanted to know how teachers discuss and express their school-based administrator support preferences independent of any guiding comments or predetermined definitions. The researcher acknowledges this approach's risk in that it could result in a discussion that is too broad or unfocused. This risk was considered, but the researcher determined it was outweighed by potential benefits and insights of hearing participants shared perspectives and experiences without the constraints of lists, ranking requests, or overly prescriptive prompts.

Before beginning each focus group, the researcher reviewed the session's procedures and highlighted the research questions and confidentiality norms. Participants had an opportunity to ask questions before the focus group discussion began; no participants expressed concern or asked questions. (See Appendix E for the focus group discussion guide)

E. Detailed process for collecting information/data.

The researcher, with participant consent, recorded all focus groups and interviews. A verbatim transcript was automatically generated by Zoom software.

Research indicates that there are several potential benefits of virtual focus groups, including an increased sense of participant freedom and willingness to disclose perspectives related to sensitive issues, positive impacts on group dynamics, and a decreased sense of power structure between participants and the researcher (Fox, Morris, & Rumsey, 2007). A loss of internet connection was a potential challenge to the research; additionally, an equity concern was present in participant selection because of the need to have internet access (Fox et al., 2007). These limitations did not impact this study, as all selected participants had access to a laptop and Internet connection; there were no interruptions to the research due to technical issues.

Plan for analyses. Data analysis occurred in two phases: first, the focus group transcripts were analyzed and coded; second, the transcripts of the four follow-up individual interviews were analyzed and coded. It is also important to note that, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), data analysis begins as the data is being collected. In this research study, the researcher started analyzing data as the focus groups and interviews were occurring. This analysis was captured in anecdotal notes and assisted the researcher in asking follow-up questions and prompts. The real-time analysis and subsequent transcript analysis informed the purposeful sampling of individual interview participants.

Regarding transcript analysis, the researcher printed a hard copy of the transcript and read it several times over several days to develop a deep familiarity with the discussion's flow and content. The researcher highlighted and marked

participant comments to create codes for the data. The goal of coding the transcript was to assign single words or phrases which captured various aspects of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To increase the coding's validity, the researcher used a grounded theory, emergent coding approach, and utilized a cyclical process of reviewing and refining previous coding (Turner, 2019; Saldana, 2009). The researcher did not approach the data with a predetermined set of codes or theory. The cyclical process entailed the researcher reflecting on the data and codes over several readings over several weeks. The researcher chose to use hard copies of the transcripts during coding and highlighted, cut, and sorted the data according to code. This method was selected due to the researcher's processing preference to use tangible materials rather than coding software.

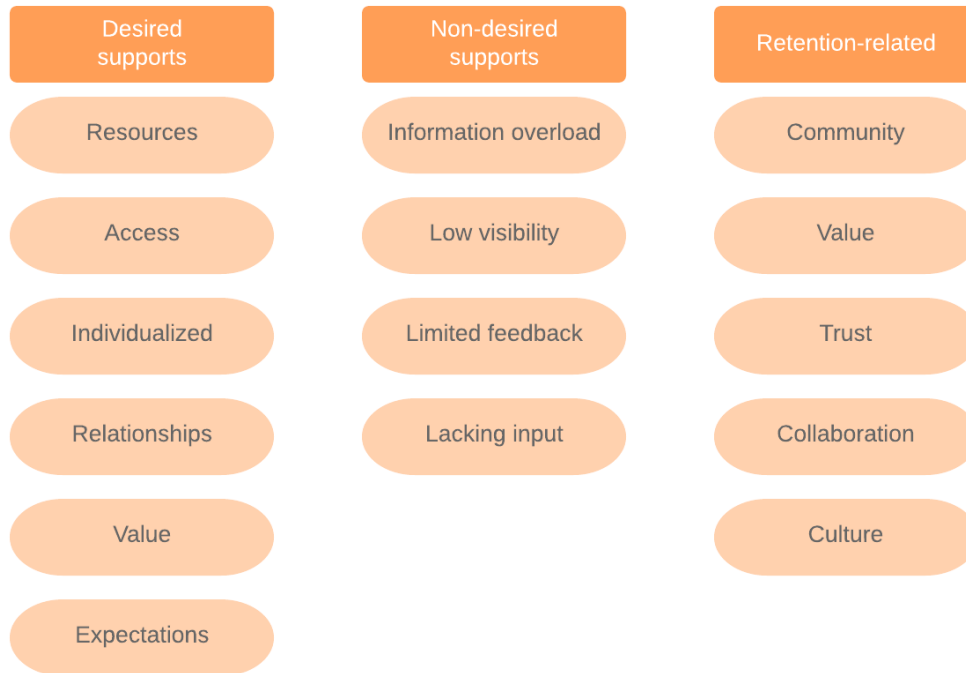
After coding the focus groups' data, the researcher identified two inexperienced teachers and two experienced teachers for individual interviews. The interview participants were selected using purposeful sampling based on their ability to discuss further the codes identified from the first round of data analysis. The individual interview prompts were broad, inviting each participant to discuss their experiences with the focus group's codes. All four participants accepted the invitation for an individual interview. The interviews were recorded and transcribed using Zoom. The researcher used the same coding process for individual interview transcripts as described for the focus group transcripts.

To further support the coding's validity, the researcher used peer consultation before grouping the codes into themes. Two colleagues, one a teacher and one a supervisor in Soto County, reviewed the transcripts and code scheme and provided verbal feedback to the researcher. Peer consultation increases validity and helps minimize researcher bias in analyzing the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Research indicates that validity is enhanced when a researcher intentionally maintains reflexivity during the research process (Berger, 2015). Reflexivity includes being aware of biases, beliefs, and personal experiences in the research (Berger, 2015). Berger (2015) notes that reflexivity is crucial, especially when studying the familiar or when the researcher has personal experiences with the phenomena being studied. The researcher was a teacher in a Title I school for approximately ten years and is now an administrator in a Title I school. These personal experiences made it essential that reflexivity be a continual reflection point during data collection and analysis. The goal was to find the appropriate balance between involvement and detachment with the data (Berger, 2015). Finally, to support the study's validity, the researcher actively looked for disconfirming evidence and alternative explanations throughout the research process. The coding scheme for each focus group and individual interview is presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Coding Scheme



The themes and conclusions of the study are presented in the next section.

Themes emerged when groups of codes from Figure 5 were analyzed in the context of the study's research questions (Kriukow, 2019; Saldana, 2009). The researcher focused on ensuring the unit of analysis for qualitative research was the group, not the individual (Curry, 2015). According to Creswell et al. (2007), the qualitative research goal is to reduce the participants' experiences to "a description of the universal

essence” of the group. The researcher kept this goal in mind throughout the process of coding and theme identification (Creswell, 2007).

Researcher stance. The researcher has worked in Title I schools as both a teacher and as a school-based administrator. His interest in equity of access to experienced teachers is based on a belief that professionals generally become more effective in their job performance over time. In the context of the teaching profession, improved job performance results in higher levels of student achievement. Higher levels of student achievement benefit the district, school, and individual students and families. For this reason, the researcher acknowledges a bias and belief that students at Title I schools are disadvantaged when they are disproportionately taught by inexperienced teachers when compared to their non-Title I peers.

The researcher also acknowledges a bias concerning prior research on administrator support. The researcher believed that previous research was limited when the definition for administrator support was too narrow. For this reason, the researcher held his interpretations of what administrator support is or could be during the development of the focus group discussion guide. The researcher acknowledges the risk of collecting data that is too broad, as ‘support’ has different meanings in different contexts to different people.

F. Protection of Human Subjects.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and every effort was made to protect participants' identities. Individual schools were not identified by name or

location. Schools were randomly assigned a letter ranging from School A to School F. Participants were not identified by name or work location. For quote attribution and analysis discussion, participants were given a pseudonym first name. (See Appendix F for the University of Maryland IRB initial application and consent forms).

Summary. This section has detailed the purpose, design, and methods for the proposed study. The next section will discuss the results and conclusions of the study.

Section III: RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

This section presents the results, conclusions, and impacts of the study.

A. Results

Focus groups. Two focus groups were conducted during the study. The inexperienced teacher focus group had five participants; the experienced teacher focus group had six participants. Each focus group was run virtually and lasted approximately 75 minutes. The researcher followed the recruitment, selection, and consent procedures approved by the IRB and described in Section 2. It should be noted that participants discussed experiences with administrator support from a pre-COVID-19 context.

Inexperienced teacher focus group. All participants completed a brief background survey before the focus group. Table 5 presents the survey results.

Table 5

Inexperienced Teacher Survey Results

	School	Years of experience	Gender	Age	Race/ethnicity
Karen	A	1	F	20-29	Hispanic
Sonja	A	1	F	50-59	Caucasian
Jocelyn	B	2	F	40-49	Caucasian
Hope	C	3	F	20-29	African-American
Michele	D	2	F	40-49	Caucasian

The focus group began with the researcher providing background on the purpose and format of the discussion. Each participant briefly introduced themselves and confirmed they could hear and see one another.

Hope and Karen were the most vocal focus group participants. They were the most likely to offer an initial response to each prompt and provided highly descriptive comments on their preferences and experiences with school-based administrator support. The researcher noted that Jocelyn seemed nervous throughout the discussion. She limited her input to agreeing with others and did not share any personal anecdotes. Sonja and Michele were significant participants in the discussion and seemed comfortable offering opinions, preferences, and personal experiences. The discussion flow was consistent, and there were very few awkward pauses or moments where multiple participants began speaking simultaneously. The researcher made intentional efforts to give participants wait time after presenting a scenario or after a participant finished commenting, this strategy enhanced the flow of the discussion.

The researcher began by presenting the group with a scenario where Juan, a first-year teacher, had been provided feedback from a vice-principal during a formal observation conference, suggesting that he focus on improving small group instruction and classroom management (Appendix E). The scenario intended to encourage participants to discuss preferences related to instructional support offered

by school-based administrators. Participants were asked to discuss the administrator support they would like to see provided to Juan. The discussion began with several participants expressing a desire for the new teacher to observe a colleague who could provide a model for small group instruction and classroom management. Jocelyn commented, “Being allowed to go into the classroom of, you know, a senior teacher and being able to take the afternoon or morning and observe....just to be able to see how they’re doing things.” Sonja and Hope stressed the value of Juan being able to see the administration’s expectations modeled by a veteran teacher in a classroom setting. Hope stated, “...set it up for me to go see [another classroom would have] been very helpful as well.”

Karen suggested Juan be given resources for each growth area to review them independently and then discuss them with the administrators. She said, “...having the resources and sometimes if you give me like a resource and I can like, take it away. And then we come back and then we can actually have a conversation [about it].” Jocelyn followed up on this comment by cautioning administrators from providing too many resources to new teachers, “I was getting a lot of pieces all at once, and I didn’t necessarily know how to fit all the pieces together...I needed time to be able to navigate and make it fit, the pieces together in a way that made sense to me.” Hope echoed the importance of allowing Juan time to process the resources independently before then discussing them with other new teachers or administrators, saying, “We talk about students need to be scaffolded, so teachers need that as well.

Teachers also need differentiat[ion] in the classroom...What resources can I give her [the teacher] that would integrate nicely into what [she's] already do[ing] or something that could be improved.”

Participants discussed their preference that school-based administrators offer scaffolded and differentiated support according to individual teacher need. Hope said, “What works for me might not work for someone else...” On the topic of differentiating supports, Karen said, “As teachers, we need support from each other, and we need the scaffolding. And we need to know that we are not all the same. And if administration would just sit down, for like 10 minutes, with [me], like I said, [get to know] my personality.” At this point in the focus group, the researcher realized that Hope and Karen were very comfortable discussing school-based administrator support preferences.

In the second scenario, Ayesha, a second-year teacher, struggled with parent communication and student relationships and decided to seek support from her school-based administrators. This scenario intended to encourage a discussion of preferences related to non-instructional support offered by school-based administrators. Participants reacted by discussing the need for administrators to be available and willing to listen to Ayesha’s concerns. Participants also discussed the value of administrators using this opportunity to build a relationship with Ayesha and express appreciation for her work. Sonja said, “You just want an administrator that, you know, has your back, and they’re going to listen to their teacher.” Hope echoed

this thought, saying, “I would just go to my principal, and she would always be ready and available to help me out, kind of sit down with me...an administrator [should] always try to be available.”

Participants were then asked for their reactions to the research finding that teacher perceptions of school-based administrator support are a significant factor in teacher retention decisions. Hope shared that she considered transferring schools but changed her mind after discussing her perspectives and concerns with the administration. She reported that she wished she had more check-ins with administration throughout the year where she could express her input, saying, “I wish I had, probably throughout the whole year, would be that administrator check-in. Kind of how everybody else was saying, you know, just that little bit of time to actually get out how you’re feeling and how things are going.” Sonja echoed the idea of administrator availability to teachers as being an essential means of providing support. In her initial reaction, Karen stated, “I was going to leave my school, but I don’t really think it had anything to do with my kids. It really didn’t have a ton to do with admin[istration] either. I did feel like that if I left, it wouldn’t have been a big deal to them.... I guess I don’t know the one answer.” Participants also discussed other factors that influence teacher retention decisions, including teacher resiliency, teacher persistence, class size, and the ability to manage student behaviors.

Experienced teacher focus group. All participants completed a brief background survey before the focus group. Table 6 presents the survey results.

Table 6*Experienced Teacher Survey Results*

	School	Years of experience	Gender	Age	Race/ethnicity
Sophia	A	8	F	30-39	Caucasian
Ava	B	6	F	20-29	Caucasian
Victor	C	4	M	20-29	Caucasian
Brittany	D	5	F	30-39	Caucasian
Deja	E	5	F	20-29	Caucasian
Isabelle	F	6	F	40-49	Caucasian

Throughout the session, Brittany showed an ability to focus her comments on school-based administrator support; this skill significantly enhanced the entire discussion's quality. She was able to refocus the discussion on the prompt or scenario without abruptly altering the discussion flow. Victor, Deja, Ava, and Isabelle shared personal anecdotes but often did not explicitly connect the anecdote to preferences related to school-based administrator support; instead, they simply reported on their own experiences. With some success, the researcher attempted to ask follow-up questions to encourage the participants to discuss how those experiences informed their perception of school-based administrator support. For example, the researcher followed up a broad comment with “when you think about

that phrase, 'teachers weren't being supported' or 'I'm not supported,' when you hear that what are the actions that you think [those comments] are being based off?"

Sophia continually mentioned her role as a special education teacher and how it impacted her school-based administrator support experiences.

Participants were presented with the scenarios of Juan and Ayesha mentioned in the previous section. Much like the inexperienced focus group, several participants discussed the value of administrators supporting Juan by creating the opportunity for him to observe a colleague model small group instruction and classroom management skills. Isabelle said, "I think it's really important not only to know what the expectations are but also to see it in action." Participants also cautioned administrators not to overwhelm Juan with supports and resources. Victor offered the analogy of providing Juan with "training wheels" and suggested administrators take a coaching, rather than an authoritative, approach in providing support. Brittany stressed that resources and supports should be modeled for the new teacher so that expectations for implementation are straightforward, saying, "Show us, model. I mean, you guys [administrators] have all been in teacher shoes. So, show us what they should look like, what should we be doing better."

Concerning the Ayesha scenario, participants spoke about how administrators can show support by listening to teacher concerns, being available to teachers, being visible in classrooms, and showing appreciation for what teachers are doing each day. Sophia stated, "I think supports could just be as simple as listening...just

listening and not turning it all off and saying, ‘no, it’s my [school-based administrator’s] way.’ Really listening to your teachers when they need the help.” Victor followed up on this thought by saying, “just being able to go to talk to them, and whether it is about school-related things or not. Sometimes, as humans, we just need to talk.” Brittany also stressed the importance of administrator availability, saying, “I’m sure we’ve all heard administrators over the past say, oh, I have an open-door policy. But that kind of falls on deaf ears if every time you go [to meet with them] you know they’re [the administrator] saying, oh, can we meet later or can we meet another day? Whereas if you’re a priority, they make the time then and there if it’s a necessary thing for you [the teacher].”

Sophia, a special education teacher, spoke about how she feels special education teachers are often left out of being offered support from school-based administrators. She said, “...sometimes special ed[ucation] is left out. They [administrators] kind of don’t come to see us because we’re not attached to a classroom....they [administrators] never came and saw me. Even when I asked.” The dynamic of school-based administrator support for traditional classroom teachers versus special education teachers was not the focus of this study but is a possible focus of additional research.

Participants were then presented with the research finding that teacher perceptions of administrator support are a significant factor in teacher retention decisions. Sophia and Isabelle shared anecdotes from their early teaching years in

which they considered leaving their Title I placement school but instead decided to stay because of positive examples of administrator support. Both anecdotes focused on feeling overwhelmed by their workload, either as a general education teacher with class size or as a special education teacher with case management. Each expressed that they recently considered quitting or transferring to a new school. Sophia stated, "...I was ready to quit because there were extreme behaviors, and I was overwhelmed....well, I went to admin[instration], and I was like, listen, I'm not sure how to keep going...so when I went to them [administration] I knew that my principal was fighting to get another special ed[ucation] teacher in because she knew that we needed it....I think I would have transferred at the end of the year if I didn't have that support." Isabelle said, "Our kindergarten, we only had two classes, and I had 32 kindergarten students to start the year off..., and he [current administrator] was hearing my concerns, I was telling him I can't do my small groups the way I should be able to do them...our previous administrator, I wanted to quit. If she would have stayed on board I probably wouldn't have stayed at that Title I school just because, same thing, no support whatsoever in that situation."

Brittany reacted to the research finding by saying she thought teacher retention had improved at School D due to a change in administration. She reported that the new administration created a school culture where teachers felt valued and appreciated. She attributed the increase in teacher retention to the actions of the school-based administrator, saying, "For the first time in nine years or so [School D]

is not going to see a massive turnover, I think it is administration support. Administrators can, you know, create a climate and culture where the teachers enjoy coming to work. We feel like we as a staff are now a community as well, which we lacked my first few years at [School D]. I think that that allows teachers to want to be where we are...I still want to go back to work next year for that administration because they support me, they value me, and they appreciate what I do.”

Individual interviews. The researcher conducted four individual interviews during the second round of data collection. The purpose of these interviews was to further discuss the codes from the focus group transcripts by prompting participants to discuss their personal experiences. Hope and Karen (both inexperienced) and Brittany and Sophia (both experienced) were invited for an individual interview based on their contributions to the focus group discussion. Additionally, the researcher was aware of inviting a diverse group of interview participants. The four interview participants' diversity is seen in teaching assignment, age identification, and racial identification. Each interview was conducted virtually and lasted for approximately 30 minutes. The researcher followed the recruitment, selection, and consent procedures approved by the IRB and described in Section 2.

Hope (inexperienced teacher). During the focus group, Hope expressed a sense of feeling overwhelmed during her first year of teaching. The researcher began the interview by asking her to speak more about how school-based administrators

could support teachers as they transition into the profession. Hope shared that administrators should seek the teacher's input when creating a plan for support as teacher input allows for supports to be differentiated according to individual teacher need. She suggested that administrators invite teacher input using “multiple data points”; she explained that these data points could be surveys and individual meetings with teachers. She said, “administrators, they do have to build that relationship, build rapport with their teachers because when you get to know them, that’s when you can really see what they need. Kind of just based on how they speak and what kind [of support] they say they need.” She said that seeking teacher input would likely benefit teacher buy-in in the support process.

The second interview prompt encouraged Hope to discuss the support of valuing and appreciating teachers. She shared, “I am not going to say that I’m not the kind of teacher that needs as much of that [valuing and appreciation] because you know everybody likes that phrase and likes to feel good about themselves...I won’t really believe it until I start seeing growth in my kids.” She stated that she believes many teachers at School C value when administrators express appreciation. She went on to share an anecdote about staff email shout-outs as being an effective way to show appreciation, saying “...I really liked that [email shout-outs] because it was uplifting and it was kind of like you got recognized in front of the whole school for even the smallest of things that other people appreciate.”

When asked about how administrators could confront the challenge of finding time to meet with teachers, the participant spoke at length about using group and individual new teacher meetings. At School C, she shared that a new teacher meeting was held each Friday morning before students arrived. The principal would share the agenda beforehand so that teacher knew the topics of discussion and could prepare their thoughts accordingly. She expressed having access to the principal and being able to hear answers and expectations directly from her was very helpful in her feeling supported, saying, "...you know, you [hear something] from the principal to make sure you know you're doing it right...[that was] very helpful." The participant expressed that she wished this same formal, routine meeting be set up for new teachers to meet individually with principals throughout the school year. Her comments indicated that administrators who create access and availability for teachers benefit from stronger interpersonal relationships with their teachers, resulting in an increased perception of support from the teacher. She said, "I was on like a WebEx meeting with them, and I was able to talk about everything that bothered me this year, which had nothing to do with administration, but I was able to have that transparent conversation with them, and they reassured me about a lot of things that I had concerns with. Ultimately, you know, that made me want to stay."

Karen (inexperienced teacher). This interview began with a prompt on how administrators can support teachers from feeling overwhelmed during their transition into the profession, a topic Karen had mentioned during the focus group

discussion. Karen suggested that administrators set up check-in times for each new teacher, saying, "...a huge issue I ran into was never finding the right time to go up to an administrator and, I have like all these questions, but if I had a time and knew I'd be like, okay, this is what I'm going to ask." She reported that these check-ins could help alleviate teacher stress and also assist in building the relationship between the administrator and teacher. She suggested that a healthy relationship allows the teacher to receive and implement administrator feedback, "You're more in a mindset to be like, okay, this is my time with the administrator, and I'm ready to receive feedback."

Karen was then asked to share her thoughts on how administrators might balance instructional and personal feedback with teachers, a topic that she discussed during the focus group. She began by speaking about personal feedback saying, "I think just recognizing someone on just a daily basis can be super simple, like 'I like what you did there' [or] 'Your whole line of kids looks really good walking down that hallway,' just really small things. I don't think it has to be a huge thing to just say thanks for what you're doing today or nice job today. So personal feedback like that would have made a huge difference to me, just to hear that I was doing like one right thing today. It's like I can just focus on that and then just keep going because some days you just need that one comment to keep you going." She went on to say she also values instructional feedback but did not express the same level of interest or preference for it as when she spoke about appreciation-based, personal feedback.

When asked if there were any other comments she would like to share about school-based administrator support, she offered a concluding statement cautioning administrators from “dumping so much information at once” on new teachers. This comment further emphasized her desire for administrator support to be differentiated and scaffolded.

Hope and Karen contrast (inexperienced teachers). Hope and Karen each spent considerable time during the interview discussing the need for teachers to have access to administrators, in both individual and group settings, so that relationships can be built and collaboration can occur. Additionally, both participants agreed that asking for teacher input would increase teacher buy-in for support. When compared to Hope, Karen expressed a stronger preference for administrators to show appreciation to teachers.

Brittany (experienced teacher). During the focus group, Brittany expressed that teachers viewed the new administration at School D as “more supportive” than the previous administration. The interview began by asking her to speak more about what she thought contributed to this change. Brittany said that the new administration had created a sense of community and support by listening to and expressing appreciation for teachers. She explained that the new administration is also more visible than the previous administration and holds staff accountable. She said, “Teachers realize that they got to get their crap together because this administration cares, and they know what we’re doing every day. So, it was huge. I can’t stress

enough that the culture and climate has drastically changed in our building in the last two years.”

The next prompt asked her to discuss what administrators can do to help prevent a new teacher from feeling overwhelmed during their transition into the profession. She said that having teachers self-assess their areas of weakness would be a good way for administrators to invite their input into the supports. She suggested that asking for teacher input will help create teacher buy-in for the support process, saying, “...the teacher needs to be willing and see their weakness as well. So administrators making sure that the teacher has buy-in to whatever it is you want to support them in because if you don’t get buy-in from the teacher, you’re going to be spinning those wheels. You know, it’s, it’s not going to go anywhere.”

When asked how school-based administrators can create a sense of community, Brittany spoke about how her administrator encouraged staff to sit with colleagues from across grade levels in staff meetings instead of sitting in grade-level groups. “So, for years, I’d sit with my own team. And that’s just how it flew. Whereas, you know, last year I remember the first staff meeting everyone was like, whoa, why is my nameplate somewhere [else]....something as simple as that forced us then to say, you know, of course, I could name all the teachers in my building but I would [not] know if Sally has kids or a husband, you know, I didn’t know anything about her. So I think that was one of the pieces last year.” She described how the administrator encouraged teachers to share ideas and strategies

across grade levels. She also mentioned that the teacher's lounge was renovated. She said, "I think when you feel as though you have a community and you have friends that you can rely on across grade levels, it does help to boost that morale of coming to work for each other."

To conclude the interview, Brittany was asked what she thought about the relationship between school-based administrator support and teacher retention decisions. She shared that she is the only one of eight teachers from her cohort still teaching at the school from five years ago. She said, "four of them have left the profession due to the fact that in their first three years of teaching, they didn't get the support they needed. Were they meant to be teachers? Who knows? I can't say that. But I do feel like they weren't given a fair go with the profession because they didn't have the support that they need at the time." She cautioned against the idea of assuming exiting teachers leave the profession due so due to lack of ability or effectiveness, saying, "I've heard administrators say that, you know, they [exiting teacher] wouldn't have been good in five years anyway. I don't think that's a fair statement to make about somebody after two years of teaching. You don't know their true effectiveness or their true ability if they weren't given a chance."

Sophia (experienced teacher). During the focus group, Sophia shared that she had worked with two different principals at School A. The interview began by asking her to share experiences regarding the support she received from the different principals. Sophia said she felt one administrator had provided effective personal

support while the other offered effective instructional support. She reflected that she valued effective personal support early in her teaching career and now, as an experienced teacher, preferred instructional support over personal support. She commented, “I’d rather have the support in school with the behaviors, with getting me what I need to get [my job] done [sic]. Now I have like a family down here. I get it now. I don’t need all that [personal supports] like when you [are] just starting out somewhere new”.

Sophia then spoke at length about teacher preparation programs, asserting that they do not prepare teacher candidates “for the real world” of teaching. She suggested that teacher candidates need more real-world experience in diverse settings to be better prepared to teach in a Title I school. Although not the focus of this study, her comments on teacher preparation programs are worth mentioning. They were the focus of a significant portion of her remarks during the interview.

The researcher then prompted Sophia for her thoughts on, and experiences with, administrator feedback and its relationship to teacher perception of support. The participant said she sees value when administrators give general feedback, “Hey, I appreciate you. I see how hard you are working”; and also instructional feedback, “I know a lot of them [new teachers] did like it [administrator classroom visits] because it gave you some feedback to change things, but then it also gave you those little boost up. Well, I really like what you did in this lesson.”

The interview concluded with the researcher asking if she had any final thoughts on administrator support from her special education teacher's perspective. Sophia shared that she valued discussing instructional strategies with her administrator and feels supported when the administrator listens to her concerns regarding caseload and paperwork demands. Concerning instructional support, she said, "My principal [that] I have now, she is very supportive [when] I have an issue with a kid or need some ideas. I know I can go to her because she does have some really neat ideas and different things to try with like those harder kids." Regarding her administrator listening to workload concerns, she said, "I had three IEP's [Individualized Education Program] due the same week. I said, listen, I need either a sub or can I just [tell] my teachers that, hey, things are going to be different today. I need to do this paperwork. She is very helpful when it comes to that. She's like, yeah, and you can do it....to me, she was very supportive in that sense because sometimes things get a little overwhelming in the paperwork department."

Brittany and Sophia contrast (experienced teachers). Brittany and Sophia offered ideas for how school-based administrators can provide direct or indirect support to teachers. Brittany discussed how school-based administrators could create the conditions for teachers to collaborate with another. At the same time, Sophia provided an example of a school-based administrator working directly with an individual teacher. The contrast indicates administrator support can be directly and indirectly offered; this was a new insight for the researcher. Sophia continued to

stress a desire for school-based administrators to understand and support special education teachers with workload concerns.

Interview sets contrast (inexperienced/experienced). Each set of interviews included a discussion of a desire for teachers to have input into the supports offered by a school-based administrator. Hope and Brittany specifically mentioned the idea of a teacher self-assessment survey to help inform potential areas for support. Hope and Brittany also explicitly stated that inviting teacher input would improve teacher buy-in for support. Karen made statements that implicitly linked input and buy-in but did not do so expressly, saying, "...okay, this is my time with the administrator, and I'm ready to receive feedback." Sophia did not discuss the topic of teacher input and buy-in during the interview.

Additionally, Sophia spent considerable time discussing the need to redesign teacher preparation programs. With limited success, the researcher attempted to provide prompts and follow-up questions to refocus Sophia's comments on the focus groups' codes; for example, "it was mentioned in the focus groups..." or "can you talk about your experiences with school-based administrator supports concerning..." The researcher, due to his own decisions and limitations, considers Sophia's interview to be a missed opportunity in data collection. The researcher's inability to refocus the interview discussion from teacher preparation programs to school-based administrator support was the cause of the missed opportunity.

Table 7 provides examples of the supporting data the major codes identified during analysis. The data in Table 7 consists of quotes from the focus groups. The codes and themes from this data assisted in the development of individual interview prompts.

Table 7

Major Codes and Supporting Data

Major Code	Supporting Data
Access	<p>“I would just go to my principal, and she would be ready and available to help me out, kind of sit down with me...One thing I hope [is] that an administrator does is offer [always to try] to be available.”</p> <p>“I wish I had [sic] throughout the whole year would be that administrator check-in, kind of how everybody else was saying, you know, just that little bit of time to actually get out how you’re feeling about how things are going.”</p> <p>“We need them [administrators] to be available when they say they’re going to be available.”</p> <p>“Nobody would come, or it would take an hour to get somebody to come to my room [for a misbehaving student]. And I’m like, you know I’m five minutes from the office.”</p>

	<p>“I think it goes back to the availability. I mean, I’m sure we’ve all heard administrators over the past, you know, say, oh, I have an open-door policy. But that kind of falls on deaf ears if every time you go, you know, they are saying, oh, you know, can we meet later or can we meet another day.”</p>
Value	<p>“She’ll [administrator] just randomly put notes in our mailboxes, kind of, you know, you could have the worst day, and she’ll just put like a kind note in there, and it just fills up your buck again...just to have somebody say, hey, I appreciate you.”</p> <p>“You’re doing good, you know, that kind of random kind of feedback and appreciation...that was [sic] something I would probably benefit from.”</p> <p>“I think it’s so important for new teachers to know that we [administration] see you. We see what you’re doing.”</p> <p>“Despite, you know, despite the fact that I have some crazy behaviors. I still want to go back to work next year for that administration because they support me, they value me, and they appreciate what I do.”</p>
Individualized	<p>“We need the scaffolding, and we need to know that we’re not all the same. And if administration would just sit down for just like</p>

	<p>10 minutes, with my administration like I said, [and get to know] my personality.”</p> <p>“What works for me might now work for somebody else.”</p> <p>“So having multiple things [supports] that I can kind of pick and choose [from] and tweak it and figure out what works for me.”</p> <p>“Administrators really trying to know your staff...a way to communicate that they understand us individually and what we need individually [sic], like, do you need a kick in the pants or do you need me to give you a hug.”</p>
Community	<p>“Administrators can, you know, create a climate and culture where teachers enjoy coming to work. We feel like we as a staff are now a community as well, which we lacked my first few years.”</p> <p>“My administrator trusts me to make the right decision, and that’s very impactful, and that makes me want to stay where I’m at because it makes me feel like I have a say in what I want to do in the community.”</p>
Relationships	<p>“More time spent with teachers to talk, there’s [sic] just never enough time.”</p> <p>“If administrators can take the time to build relationship[s] with us and understand that we’re co-worker[s]. Yes, you’re my</p>

	<p>administrator, but we're in this together and basically, get to know me.”</p> <p>“Just being able to know that I could go to administration and just talk and for her to just [get to] know my personality a little bit better.”</p> <p>“I also think supports could just be as simple as listening...just listening and not just turning it all off and saying ‘no, it’s my way.’ Really listening to your teachers when they need the help.”</p>
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The coding process began by labeling participant comments according to the type of response. Individual words, such as individualized or access, were used to sort and interpret the data. Major codes were identified based on the frequency of participant response appearing during focus group transcripts analysis. The researcher then reviewed all of the data assigned to a specific code. Data related to the access and individualized codes were most dominant in the discussion of preferred administrator support. Most access and individualized comments focused on a desire for supports to reflect teacher input and for teachers to have consistent access to their school-based administrator. Data related to non-desired support focused on teachers feeling overwhelmed or lacking a vision for building a sense of community.

Data analysis resulted in the identification of five themes, three related to desired supports, and two on non-desired supports. The desired support themes were (1) an expressed desire for school-based administrators that are available, listen, and show appreciation for teacher efforts, (2) an expressed desire for consistent access to school-based administrators for check-ins and relationship building, and (3) an expressed desire for support to be individualized according to each teacher's needs. The non-desired support themes were (1) an expressed non-desire of support that contributes to a sense of feeling overwhelmed with job responsibilities, and (2) an expressed non-desire of support that lacks a vision for building a sense of community.

B. Conclusions

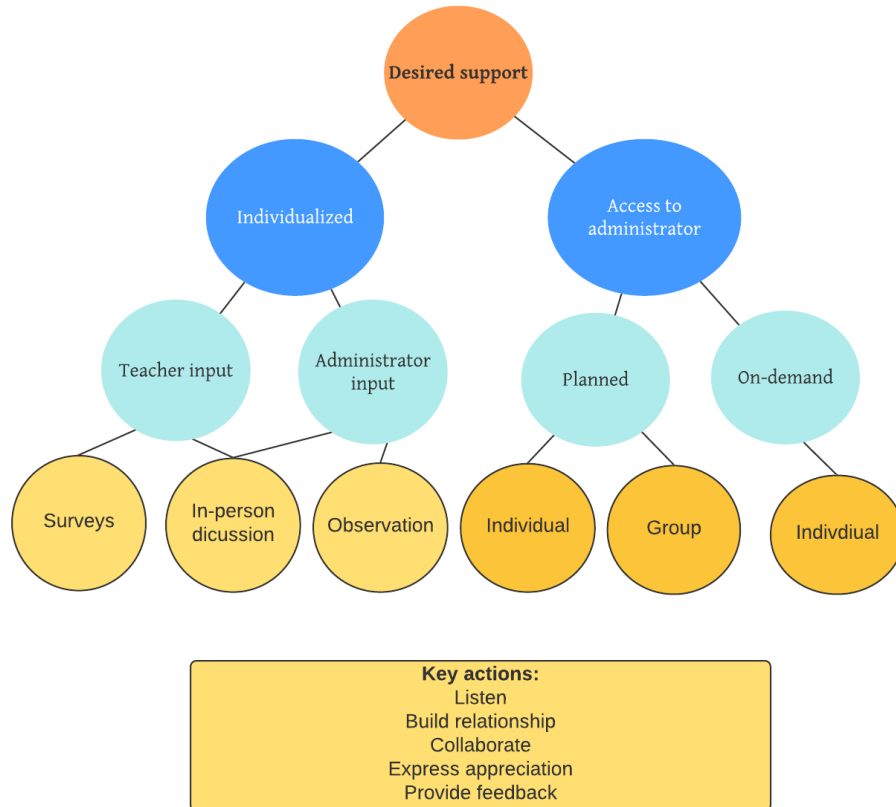
This section will present the conclusions of the study.

Research Question 1. How do inexperienced and experienced teachers describe desired and/or non-desired school-based administrative support at their Title I school?

Conclusion 1. Inexperienced and experienced teachers desire individualized school-based administrator support according to the teacher's perceived needs and preferences. Further, inexperienced and experienced teachers desire planned and on-demand access to school-based administrators for support. Figure 6 presents Conclusion 1.

Figure 6

Desired School-based Administrative Support



Evidence for this conclusion is found consistently across the focus groups and individual interviews. Study participants expressed a desire for individualized support that is based on teacher and administrator input. Teachers indicated that individualization of support could include resources, professional development, and time with administrators. Both inexperienced and experienced teachers expressed a

strong desire to access school-based administrators, both planned and on-demand. Figure 6 conveys that planned access can include both individual and group meetings. In contrast, on-demand access is limited to individual settings as it is more likely to be event/concern specific. It is important to note that a desire for individualization and access was universal to each teacher group. Inexperienced teachers were more likely to mention a preference for individualized support, while experienced teachers were more likely to talk about a preference for access.

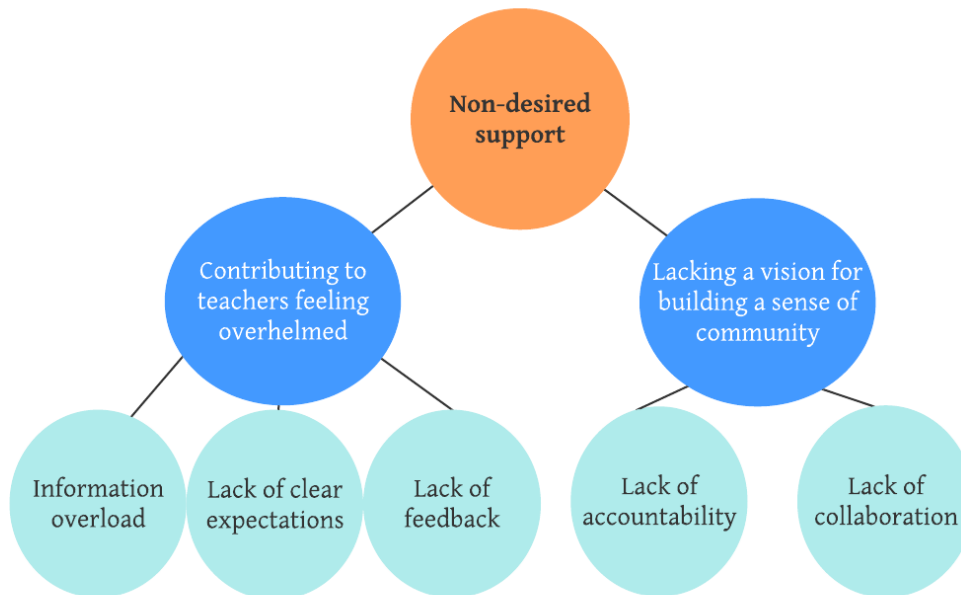
Within the desired context of individualization and access, teachers express a preference for school-based administrators to listen, build relationships, collaborate, express appreciation, and provide feedback. For example, collaboration and feedback can inform the individualization of support while planned or on-demand access can facilitate an opportunity for listening, relationship building, and expression of appreciation.

Conclusion 2. Inexperienced and experienced teachers do not desire school-based administrator support that contributes to teachers feeling overwhelmed with job responsibilities. Further, inexperienced and experienced teachers do not desire support that does not promote a sense of community among teachers.

Figure 7 presents Conclusion 2.

Figure 7

Non-desired School-based Administrator Support



Teachers, both experienced and inexperienced, consistently expressed a non-desire for support that contributes to a sense of feeling overwhelmed with job responsibilities. Inexperienced teachers more often mentioned the contributing factor of ‘information overload’ while experienced teachers were more likely to say the contributing factor of ‘lack of feedback.’ The reader will note that Figure 7 does not include the ‘Key Actions’ box included in Figure 6. Teachers most often described non-desired support by mentioning the absence of an action rather than the presence of an action or behavior. For example, concerning ‘lacking a vision for building a sense of community’ as a non-desired support Hope said, “...it really does take a

special kind of teacher to want to stay in a Title I school...it does take a certain kind of personality, a certain resiliency, a certain persistence to want to stay and work...that's important for administrators to know." Hope's comment indicates an implicit desire for school-based administrators to build a sense of community based on the shared beliefs and personal characteristics of the 'special kind of teacher' that want to stay in Title I schools. Figure 7 attempts to capture that when a school-based administrator fails to acknowledge this desire, it lacks 'vision for building a sense of community.'

Research Question 2. In what ways, if at all, do inexperienced teachers consider school-based administrator support in their decisions to remain teaching at their Title 1 school?

Conclusion 3. Inexperienced teachers consider school-based administrator support in retention decisions but to a lesser degree than experienced teachers.

Inexperienced teachers were not as straightforward as experienced teachers in discussing how they consider school-based administrator support in their decisions to remain teaching at their Title I school. Experienced teachers used 'huge,' 'big deal,' and 'astronomical' when discussing how they consider school-based administrators support actions in their individual retention decisions. Inexperienced teachers attributed some relationship between retention decisions and school-based administrator supports but not with the same degree of clarity as experienced teachers. At the end of a wandering explanation of different thoughts on the topic,

Karen's comment of 'I guess I don't know the answer' is a perfect synopsis of how inexperienced teachers struggled to express how they consider school-based administrator support in their individual retention decisions. Inexperienced teachers also mentioned the school's proximity to home as a consideration. No experienced teachers mentioned proximity to home in their comments on the topic.

The researcher noted two important discussion topics during data collection that were not the topic of this study but are worth noting. First, several participants spoke of the need to enhance teacher preparation programs to better equip teacher candidates with the skills and knowledge necessary for a successful placement in a Title I school. The participants discussed the need for a greater diversity of student teaching placement schools and additional coursework on equity, diversity, and classroom management. Additionally, the topic of support for special education teachers was discussed during focus groups and individual interviews. Participants expressed that special education teachers may not receive the same support as classroom teachers and that special education teachers may need a different type of support than classroom teachers. While neither topic was the focus of this study, it does not diminish the potential value of data collected regarding teacher preparation programs and special education teachers

Limitations. As with any qualitative study, the composition of the study participant group is a limitation. The inexperienced teacher focus group composition was limited when one teacher could not attend due to a last-minute scheduling

conflict leaving School E without representation in the focus group. Also, no inexperienced teachers from School F expressed an interest in participating in the research study; this necessitated the inclusion of two teachers from School A. All participants were female; this lack of gender diversity is also a limitation.

Additionally, there were no special education teachers in the inexperienced teacher focus group. Finally, the experienced teacher focus group composition was limited by a lack of racial/ethnicity diversity as all participants identified as Caucasian.

The research sought to limit the impacts of diversity concerns by carefully selecting participants for individual interviews. Teachers 1, 4, 6, and 9 participated in individual interviews. They encompass a diversity of teaching assignments, school assignments, and racial/ethnicity characteristics.

Researcher bias is also a limitation of this study. Analysis of the transcripts and real-time follow-up questions include imperfect decisions from the researcher. The researcher sought to minimize these impacts by implementing research best practices, including a focus group discussion guide. The validity of transcript analysis was aided by implementing peer debriefing. Two colleagues reviewed and discussed the transcripts with the researcher.

The virtual format of the focus groups and individual interviews was necessitated due to COVID-19 restrictions. There were no technological challenges, and all participants were able to log in to the system and remain connected throughout the discussion. However, the research's virtual format could be cited as a limitation

of the study. It may have altered the flow of discussion and comfort of participants in engaging with one another. In-person focus groups allow participants to communicate non-verbally and for the researcher to observe and analyze non-verbal communication. The researcher sought to limit this by setting norms for discussion at the outset of each focus group and interview.

C. Impact for Soto County

This section will detail the potential impacts of the study results in Soto County Public Schools.

The learned and still unknown. As Section I detailed, a significant body of research indicates teacher perception of a lack of school-based administrator support is the top factor in individual teacher retention decisions. Boyd (2011) noted that research has yet to answer what the administrator does or does not do, which leads to teacher perception of administrator support. Further, the research findings summarized in Table 3 indicated a lack of consensus for defining the term ‘administrative support.’ This study attempted, using the input of inexperienced and experienced teachers from Title I schools, to begin answering Boyd’s (2011) question of what precisely an administrator does or does not do, which leads to teacher perception of administrator support. The researcher presented the findings in Figure 6 and Figure 7. The researcher learned that inexperienced and experienced teachers desire individualized support that provides access to school-based administrators.

The researcher discovered that teachers do not desire support that contributes to feeling overwhelmed with job responsibilities, and does not build a sense of community. The researcher also learned that experienced teachers express a more substantial consideration of school-based administrator support in retention decisions than inexperienced teachers.

Further study and data collection are needed to better understand the relationship between teacher perception and retention decisions. The data does not show how teacher perception of school-based administrator support influences individual teacher retention decisions. Soto County could begin to generate data on this relationship by including additional questions on the letter of intent survey that teachers complete each spring. The letter of intent asks each teacher to indicate their intent for the next school year. The non-binding survey responses are to remain teaching at current school, remain teaching in Soto County, seek a transfer, or plan to leave employment with Soto County. The letter of intent could be updated to include voluntary or mandatory questions designed to investigate the factors teachers consider when expressing their intent. This could provide the county with new data on the relationship between teacher perception of school-based administrative support and retention decisions.

Further, the data does not show why experienced teachers express a more substantial consideration of school-based administrator support in retention decisions than inexperienced teachers. Finally, the data does not show how teacher perception

of school-based administrator support varies across teacher groups. For example, do special educators develop a perception of support in similar ways to non-special education teachers?

Next steps. The researcher will take the following steps to design an actionable change initiative based on this study: (1) share the study with Title I principals and the Director of Title I Programs, (2) create a working group that is interested in exploring the potential impacts of the study on Soto County Title I schools, (3) share the working group's change initiative recommendations with the Superintendent and other relevant district leaders, and (4) implement any approved change initiatives and track progress.

Title I principal working group. The researcher intends to invite all six principals of Title I elementary schools and the Director of Title I Programs to participate in a working group based on this study's findings. Participation will be voluntary, and the intent is to engage a minimum of four leaders, in addition to the researcher. Information from the study will be presented in the aggregate, and any information which could potentially identify a specific person will be removed. Sessions would be designed to produce a collegial discussion of the leaders' diverse experiences and perspectives within the context of this study and additional relevant research. Sessions would occur outside of the workday, and the location would rotate among the different Title I schools. The purpose of holding evening meetings at differing locations is to contribute to a sense of collegiality and shared purpose.

The purpose of this study was to provide a set of findings that brings new information to the leaders of Soto County Title I schools to help identify possible strategies for improving the retention of inexperienced teachers in those schools. The study was viewed as the first step toward developing actionable solutions, so bringing together a small group of interested principals to discuss the findings and reflect on how the results may or may not resonate with their experiences will help determine if further research is needed or what additional information might be required to develop change initiative recommendations. The working group's intended outcome is to understand teacher perceptions of school-based administrator support better. Title I principals who agree to participate in the discussion will develop ideas for how the study findings could inform potential change initiatives to support inexperienced teachers in Title I schools. Change initiatives could be designed as district-wide or specific to an individual school or a subset of Title I schools.

The working group will present the proposed change initiative(s) to the Superintendent and other relevant district leaders. Change initiatives could include a funding request for specialized professional development for Title I school-based administrators and inexperienced teachers, adjustments to inexperienced teacher job responsibilities to create time for additional support or the development and adoption of standard work processes for inexperienced teacher support. Approved initiatives will be implemented, and data will be collected on the degree to which, if at all, they

contribute to the intended outcome of increased rates of retention of inexperienced teachers at Soto County Title I schools.

D. Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate the preference of inexperienced and experienced teachers for school-based administrator support. This purpose was identified in response to a lack of a consistent definition in the research literature for the term administrator support. The researcher believed the resulting data and findings could inform change initiatives to address teacher experience level equity gaps, or TELEG, in the district. The national, state, and local scope of the problem was presented. The researcher identified three consequences of not addressing TELEG: harm to student outcomes, harm to district finances, and harm to school culture. Hiring policy, teacher retention, teacher supports, and teacher preparation programs were identified as the four major causal factors of TELEG in Soto County. The primary driver was identified as improving supports for inexperienced teachers at Title I schools. System policy was also discussed as a primary driver.

Using focus groups and individual interviews, a qualitative study was designed to investigate the research questions: (1) how do inexperienced and experienced teachers describe desired and non-desired school-based administrative support at their Title I school?; and (2) in what ways, if at all, do inexperienced teachers consider school-based administrator support in their decisions to remain

teaching at their Title 1 school? The study found that inexperienced and experienced teachers desire support that is individualized and provides access to school-based administrators. The study also found that inexperienced teachers consider school-based administrator support in retention decisions but not to the same degree as experienced teachers. The data did not show how teacher perception of school-based administrator support influences individual teacher retention decisions. Additionally, the data did not indicate why experienced teachers express a more substantial consideration of school-based administrator support in retention decisions than inexperienced teachers.

The researcher proposed creating a working group of Title I principals and district leaders as the next step in using the study findings to inform a change initiative. The change initiative aims to eliminate TELEG between Title I and non-Title I schools in Soto County by improving the retention of inexperienced teachers at Title I schools.

Appendix A

Definition of Terms

Administrative support: actions taken by school-based administration with the intent of supporting teachers

High poverty school: a school serving high poverty student populations as defined by the percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch; a Title I school

Inexperienced teacher: a teacher with less than three years of experience

Low poverty school: a school serving low poverty student populations as defined by the percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch; a non-Title I school

Perception: a way of regarding, understanding, or interpreting something

Retention: a teacher that stays at their current school placement

School-based administrator: a principal, vice/assistant principal, or any other title tasked with supervising teachers (dean of students, etc.)

School culture: the extent to which the school environment is characterized by mutual trust, respect, openness, and commitment to student achievement (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012)

Teacher experience level equity gap (TELEG): a comparative measure of the percentage of teachers with less than three years of experience between two schools or two groups of schools

Appendix B

Initial email to Title I principals

To: All Title I principals

Subject: Requesting permission for research

Principal __ (last name) __,

I am writing to request your permission to invite teachers from your school to participate in my dissertation research. I am currently enrolled in a Doctoral program at the University of Maryland. I have obtained permission from Charles County Public Schools and the University of Maryland's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the research. After reading this email, I hope you will grant permission for teachers in your building to participate in my research study.

Background

As you know, Title I schools face many equity-related challenges in providing our students with an excellent education. I am focusing on the equity issue of access to experienced teachers in Title I versus non-Title I schools. Research indicates that students at Title I schools are significantly more likely to be taught by inexperienced teachers when compared to students at non-Title I schools. MSDE defines an inexperienced teacher as one with less than three years of teaching experience. In my study, I have found that the teacher experience level equity gaps, or TELEG, impact

student outcomes, district finances, and school culture. My theory of action for addressing TELEG in our district centers on the goal of improving retention of inexperienced teachers at Title I schools. Retaining our inexperienced teachers beyond their first three years of teaching may help address TELEG. It would break the cycle of inexperienced teachers leaving our Title I schools only to be replaced by yet another inexperienced teacher.

Proposed study

Research indicates teacher perception of administrative support is the most significant factor influencing teacher retention decisions. Therefore, the purpose of my study is to investigate the preferences of inexperienced and experienced teachers regarding specific supports provided by administrators. The study will test the theory that improving administrator supports for inexperienced teachers at Title I schools can improve retention of those teachers and that the supports can be improved if teachers have input into their design. This qualitative study will solicit input from teachers through virtual focus groups. Experienced teachers will be defined as those with 4-7 years of teaching experience in their Title I school. The intent is to analyze and summarize information gained during the focus groups to design school-based administrator supports for inexperienced teachers at Title I schools. The chart below details the participant characteristics for each of the focus groups.

Focus group	Participant characteristics
Inexperienced teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Currently teaching at a Title I elementary school ✓ Three or fewer years of teaching experience as of April 2020

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ All teaching experience at same Title I elementary school ✓ Fully certified, not on a conditional teaching certificate ✓ General education or special education teacher assigned to the 3-year old program through 5th-grade students also includes Related Arts (Music, Art, Physical Education, Media Specialist)
Experienced teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 4-7 years of teaching experience as of April 2020 ✓ All other participant characteristics listed for an inexperienced teacher

Requesting permission and information

I have two requests which I am asking you to consider:

- (1) Grant permission to include teachers from your school in my research study, and
- (2) Provide me with a list of teachers at your school that are considered inexperienced (less than three years of experience) and experienced (4-7 years of experience).

Participants and schools will not be identified by name or school location. Each teacher will be assigned a pseudonym, and schools will be randomly assigned a letter (School A through School F). I look forward to hearing of your decision, and I am happy to answer any questions you might have about my study.

Thank you for considering this request and for all you do for our students.

Brian King

Appendix C

Teacher recruitment email

To: All eligible teacher participants (separate emails will be sent, using bcc: to potential inexperienced teacher participants and potential experienced teacher participants)

Subject: Would you like to participate in a research study?

Good morning,

My name is Brian King; I am the principal at ##### Elementary School. I am writing to see if you are interested in participating in research related to my dissertation. Your principal has already permitted me to contact you and for you to participate, if interested, in my research.

I am currently enrolled in a Doctoral program at the University of Maryland. I have also obtained permission from Charles County Public Schools and the University of Maryland's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the research. After reading this email, I hope you will express an interest in participating in my research.

Background

As you know, Title I schools face many equity-related challenges in providing our students with an excellent education. I am focusing on the equity issue of access to experienced teachers in Title I versus non-Title I schools. Research indicates that

students at Title I schools are significantly more likely to be taught by inexperienced teachers when compared to students at non-Title I schools. MSDE defines an inexperienced teacher as one with less than three years of teaching experience. In my study, I have found that the teacher experience level equity gaps, or TELEG, impact student outcomes, district finances, and school culture. My theory of action for addressing TELEG in our district centers on the goal of improving retention of inexperienced teachers at Title I schools. Retaining our inexperienced teachers beyond their first three years of teaching may help address TELEG. It would break the cycle of inexperienced teachers leaving our Title I schools only to be replaced by yet another inexperienced teacher.

Proposed study

Research indicates teacher perception of administrative support is the most significant factor influencing teacher retention decisions. Therefore, the purpose of my study is to investigate the preferences of inexperienced and experienced teachers regarding specific supports provided by administrators. The study will test the theory that improving administrator supports for inexperienced teachers at Title I schools can improve retention of those teachers and that the supports can be improved if teachers have input into their design.

I am going to facilitate two focus groups, one with inexperienced teachers and one with experienced teachers. The focus group will last 60-90 minutes and will be held virtually using Zoom. Participants will be given a \$25 Amazon gift card as

compensation for their time. The intent is to analyze and summarize information gained during the focus groups to design improvements of building based administrator supports for inexperienced teachers at Title I schools. There may be an opportunity to participate in an individual interview a few weeks after the focus group. The purpose of the interview would be to discuss your experiences with administrator support further.

Confidentiality

Participants and schools will not be identified by name or school location. Each teacher will be assigned a pseudonym, and schools will be randomly assigned a letter (School A through School F). I look forward to hearing of your decision, and I am happy to answer any questions you might have about my study.

I hope you are interested in participating in this research study. Your voice and perspective could help to drive positive change in our school system.

Please respond to this email if you are interested in being considered for participation in the study. Thank you for considering this request and for all you do for our students.

Brian King

Appendix D

Teacher selection email

To: All selected focus group participants (separate emails will be sent to potential inexperienced teacher participants and potential experienced teacher participants)
Subject: Congratulations! You've been selected!

Congratulations, you've been selected to participate in the focus group! I look forward to hearing your thoughts and perspective on administrator supports for teachers at Title I schools. I greatly appreciate your interest and your willingness to contribute to my dissertation research.

Here's what to expect next:

- ✓ Later today, you will receive an email with links to complete a short survey and consent form; please complete these forms as soon as possible
- ✓ One week prior to the focus group, you will receive a Zoom invitation. Your focus group is scheduled for June ## at ## PM.
- ✓ After the focus group, I will send a \$25 Amazon e-gift card to your personal email address.

Thank you in advance for your participation in the focus group. Please email me with any questions or concerns at any time.

Appendix E

Focus group discussion guide

Welcome: Thank you for attending today's focus group session. I appreciate your willingness to discuss your experiences as a teacher at a Title I school. Before we begin, I would like to review a few procedures. First, you can click on the icon in the upper right corner so that we can all see one another. Second, with your approval, I would like to record this session to assist in accurate data analysis. I will also transcribe the audio recording; a copy will be made available to you upon request. Thank you for completing the electronic consent form and survey prior to today's session. As a reminder, no names or identifying information will be used in the transcription or when results are reported. Does anyone have questions or concerns regarding these procedures or the informed consent form?

Opening: Let's begin! As an ice breaker, I would like everyone to share their years of teaching experience, current teaching assignment, and favorite content area to teach. (Participants respond). Great, thank you, everyone.

Research question: I'm going to read a brief scenario and ask for your thoughts and reactions. Juan is a first-year teacher at Sun Elementary. He teaches second grade. His first formal observation was done with the Vice Principal in December. He received satisfactory scores; the vice principal suggested improving his small group reading instruction and classroom management skills.

Prompt: What types of support would you advise an administrator to provide to this new teacher?

Prompt: Think back to a time you desired a different type of support than was provided, talk about that experience.

Prompt: What types of experiences have you had with school-based supports?

Prompt: Tell me about an example of when you felt supported by an administrator.

Prompt: Think back to your first few months of teaching. When did you feel supported or not supported?

Prompt: If the discussion is slow, the facilitator will offer an example of administrator support actions and ask participants if they have experience: personalized feedback, mentoring, observation feedback, personal meeting with an administrator, professional development, etc.

Prompt: Tell me about any support you seek from colleagues or people outside of the school or school system.

Research question: I'm going to share another scenario with you. Ayesha is a second-year teacher; she struggles to build relationships with students and effectively communicate with parents. She has decided to seek administrative support with these challenges. What supports would you hope Ayesha would receive?

Research question: In what ways, if at all, do you consider school-based administrator support in your decision to remain or leave your current school?

Prompt: Talk about factors you consider each spring when you get your letter of intent for the following school year.

Prompt: Research finds that teacher perception is the top factor in teacher retention decisions. Do you agree? What is your reaction to this research finding?

As a means of wrapping up today's session, I'd like to give each of you a chance to reflect on our discussion. Would anyone like to share a final thought on our discussion? (All participants will be given an opportunity to speak.)

Our focus group session has concluded. Thank you again for your participation in my research study.

Appendix F

University of Maryland IRB approval and consent form

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DATE: May 8, 2020

TO: Brian King
FROM: University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1593266-1] An Exploratory Study of Teachers' Perceptions of Administrative Support Influencing Retention in Title I Schools

REFERENCE #:
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: May 8, 2020
EXPIRATION DATE: May 7, 2021
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # 7

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

Prior to submission to the IRB Office, this project received scientific review from the

departmental IRB Liaison.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulations.

This project has been determined to be a MINIMAL RISK project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of May 7, 2021.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Unless a consent waiver or alteration has been approved, Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UPIRSOs) and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of seven years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Office at 301-405-4212 or irb@umd.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB's records.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Project Title	An Exploratory Study of Teachers' Perceptions of Administrative Support Influencing Retention
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<p>Purpose of the Study</p>	<p>This research is being conducted by Brian King at the University of Maryland, College Park as part of his dissertation research. It is directed by Dr. Margaret J. McLaughlin, advisor. The purpose is to solicit information from teachers at Title I schools about their perception of administrator supports, specifically during their first three years of teaching.</p>
<p>Procedures</p>	<p>You are being asked to participate with five other teachers in a focus group discussion lasting approximately 60-90 minutes. The discussion will be organized around three main topics: your preferences and experiences with administrator support, your thoughts on how administrator supports relate to your decision to continue teaching at a school, and if/how your perspective concerning administrator supports has changed over time. For example, you may be asked: what types of experiences have you had with school-based administrator supports? The focus group will be conducted virtually, using a web-based video conferencing service. Prior to the focus group session, you will also be asked to respond to an anonymous six question survey prior to the group discussion. The survey will take less than 5 minutes to complete. The survey will request the following information: grade level taught, current years of teaching experience, teaching certification endorsements, gender identification, age identification, and racial identification.</p> <p>Our discussion will be taped and then transcribed and will not contain any identifying information such as your name or school. I will be the only person who will have access to the transcriptions and any reports of the information obtained during the focus group will be reported in summary form and will not contain any information that will identify you or your school.</p>
<p>Potential Risks and Discomforts</p>	<p>There are no known risks to participants. Participants can skip any question they do not wish to answer. All findings will summarize comments by category of teacher and any quotations that might accompany the analyses will use</p>

	pseudonyms.
Potential Benefits	There are no direct benefits from participating in this research. However, it is hoped the district's increased understanding of teacher perceptions of administrative support may support design improvements to the supports offered to teachers.
Confidentiality	Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized: note, transcripts and other research materials will not contain individual names, each participant will be assigned a pseudonym prior to the focus group and that code will be used in all documents. Digital recordings, transcripts, and notes will be maintained on a password protected computer and no one other than me will have access to these materials. Any written reports of the findings of this research will not focus on a specific participant or school but will be presented in the aggregate.
Compensation	At the completion of participation in the focus group you will receive a \$25 gift card at your personal email address.
Right to Withdraw and Questions	<p>Your decision to participate or not participate will not have a positive or negative impact on your employability or relationship with your respective school. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized. However, you may not be eligible to receive the gift card.</p> <p>If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Brian King</i> 4700 Lancaster Circle</p>

	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Waldorf, MD 20603 bking@ccboe.com 202.744.2107 Or Dr. Margaret J. McLaughlin College of Education, University of Maryland mjm@umd.edu</i></p>	
Participant Rights	<p><i>If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 1204 Marie Mount Hall College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail: irb@umd.edu Telephone: 301-405-0678</p> <p><i>For more information regarding participant rights, please visit:</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">https://research.umd.edu/irb-research-participants</p> <p><i>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</i></p>	
Statement of Consent	<p><i>Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form. If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.</i></p>	
Signature and Date	NAME OF PARTICIPANT [Please Print]	
	SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT	
	DATE	

Appendix G

Soto County research approval



Charles County Public Schools

5980 Radio Station Road
P.O. Box 2770
La Plata, MD 20646
Main line: 301-932-6610
www.ccboe.com

Brian King
Principal, Barnhart Elementary School
Charles County Public Schools

May 11, 2020

Dear Mr. King,

This letter is to inform you that your qualitative study using focus groups of teachers at Title I elementary schools, as partial completion of your doctoral degree at the University of Maryland, is approved. Your research may take place at the following elementary schools: [school names deleted]. You are to adhere to the methods described in your research request (virtual interviews). You may seek the assistance of the principals at your target schools for identifying teachers to participate in our study.

If you have any questions or need assistance following through with your research, please contact my office.

All the best with your dissertation study.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Emily Cole Bayer".

Emily Cole Bayer, Ph.D.
Coordinator of Evaluation
Charles County Public Schools
Tel: (301) 934-7304
Email: ecolebayer@ccboe.com

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