Retaining the Dreamkeepers[1]:

Leadership Influences on Working Conditions in Minority-Majority Schools

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A Capstone Project

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The Faculty of the Curry School of Education

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Doctor of Education

By

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[1] The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African-American Children (Ladson-Billings, 2009)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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America is failing to invest in the future of its children in significant, consequential ways. Among a host of inequities faced by children of color and low socioeconomic status (American Institutes for Research, 2019; Berliner, 2009; Carrion &Wong, 2012; Rothstein, 2015; Yoshikawa, Aber, & Beardslee, 2012), children of historically minoritized populations are those impacted the most by the large and growing national teacher shortage (Carver-Thomas, 2016; Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2018; Podolsky et al., 2016; Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016).

While many forces contribute to the current national shortage of teachers, the challenge of attrition is the single greatest factor driving the inability to staff classrooms with teachers (Sutcher et al., 2016). Prior research has shown strong correlations between teacher mobility decisions and the nature of the working conditions in which teachers teach; conditions that are often more challenging in schools serving historically marginalized students (Allensworth et al., 2009; Boyd et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2012; Johnson & Simon, 2015; Ladd, 2011; Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005; Marinell & Coca, 2013; Podolsky et al., 2016). Of these working conditions, it is school leadership that emerges as the in-school factor influencing teachers' working conditions the most (Burkhauser, 2017; Boyd et al., 2011; Grissom, 2011; Kraft et al., 2016; Ladd, 2011; Podolsky et al., 2016).

This study endeavored to better understand teacher attrition problem in the school division of Corolla County. A county whose student population has shifted dramatically

in recent years with the community's rapidly shifting racial demographics, the school division's teacher attrition rate (10.9%) is the second highest in its state (Maryland Longitudinal Data System Dashboard, 2019). Through a case study of leavers, stayers, and school and district leaders of one elementary school, I explored how leadership practices in the domains of "*developing people"* and "*redesigning the organization*" (Leithwood & Louis, 2012) could best interact to meet teachers' intrinsic motivational needs (Herzberg, 1968; Ryan & Deci, 2000) and drive their desire to persist in their work.

A construct of nine elements of working conditions, drawn from prominent studies in the field (Johnson et al., 2012; Ladd, 2011; Podolsky et al., 2016), framed the study. Using a mixed-methods case study approach, I triangulated survey and interview data from stayers, leavers, and school and district leaders of a minority-majority elementary school. Surveys with stayers and leavers from this high-attrition suburban elementary school provided descriptive statistics on the experience of working conditions in the school. Following the survey, interviews provided more detailed description of these experiences, and interviews with leaders provided insight into their perceptions on the practices and challenges that influenced working conditions in their organization.

The results of these analyses have informed findings, recommendations, and action communication products in the hopes of improving teaching retention in minority-majority schools. Primary findings included:

1. The migration of human capital from the study school to schools serving fewer minoritized students negatively impacted Freewill Elementary.
2. Relationships were critical to teacher satisfaction. Teacher satisfaction at Freewill was enhanced by strong relationships between colleagues and leaders, and diminished by less strong connections with students' families and a sense of mission for teachers' work.

3. Student behavior had a substantial negative influence on teacher working conditions at Freewill, particularly among leavers.
4. The teachers' working environment at Freewill Elementary was significantly shaped by normative dimensions of state and local accountability policies, influencing the core of instruction itself.
5. There was tension between desires for competence and autonomy in advancing the school's improvement. Teachers and leaders often lacked the supportive communities of practice, leadership development, or access to coaching and mentoring that would promote the optimal development of human capacity in the system.

From these five findings, five recommendations were offered for practitioners in Corolla County Schools. These included:

1. Incentivize the recruitment of talent to high-needs schools.
2. Prioritize the cultivation of trust throughout the system.
3. Employ practices of improvement science to target high-leverage change drivers such as student behavior.
4. Develop transformative visions of instruction and supportive instructional guidance infrastructure to achieve the vision.
5. Build a comprehensive system of adult development, helping to develop the system's adults, with all their various talents and motivations, to their fullest capacities.

Keywords: teacher retention, working conditions, leadership, minority-majority schools

Department of Educational Leadership, Foundations and Policy

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University of Virginia

Charlottesville, VA

APPROVAL OF THE CAPSTONE PROJECT

This capstone project, Retaining the Dreamkeepers: Leadership Influences on Working Conditions in Minority-Majority Schools, has been approved by the Graduate Faculty of the Curry School of Education and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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Date

DEDICATION

To Kayla and Bryson: May I prove worthy as *your* dreamkeeper. You are the light, love and laughter that this whole world needs.

To Jim: For being the yin to my yang, the peace to my chaos, the earth to my clouds. Every page of this capstone bears the marks of your encouragement and partnership. I could never thank you enough.

To Mom, Dad, Grandma Jinny, Grandpa Norman, Grandpa Mark, and Noni; my first teachers. I know my work ethic, love of learning, and belief in working towards a better world have been absorbed over a lifetime of learning from you.

To Gram-Gram, Jenny, Ganesh, Steve, and our Maryland friends: You are the village that helped raise my children when this program consumed my days. For your network of kindness, I am forever grateful.

To those with whom I've been blessed to share this incredible vocation of education: Charna Brooks, Shiquita Walker, Greg Miller, Kristie Brown, Trish Changcoco, Gary Lesko, Megan Parsons, Nyesha Lanes-Sherman, Principal Blue, Merrell Dade, Wiatta Padmore, Dave Gillmarten, Mary Flint, Denise Bruno, and so many others. For your mentorship and camaraderie; for the scheming, laughing, crying and dreaming in which we have so joyfully spent our days. It is because of you that I know life-affirming working conditions in schools are possible and are real.

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To my UVA professors; most especially to the indefatigable advisor whose contagious enthusiasm helped me see this journey through to the end. Dr. Mitchell and colleagues: May I be worthy of transforming all you have taught me into leading inspiring working environments for teachers and children.

To the teachers and the incredibly supportive leader of “Freewill Elementary” who so generously shared their time and their thoughts. Thank you for trusting me with your stories. Your students are so lucky to have you.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

A Problem of Practice

Each September, over 27,000 children will walk through Corolla County's[2] schoolhouse doors. Unfortunately, not all of these young faces will walk into a classroom staffed with a qualified teacher ready to help them realize their full potential. Like public schools across the country, Corolla County Schools are struggling to retain qualified teachers for its minoritized and low-income students who need them the most. At 10.9%, the school division's attrition rate exceeds the state average of 6.7% as the second-highest in the state of Maryland, falling only behind Baltimore City (Maryland Longitudinal Data System Dashboard, 2019).

Boarding buses in neighborhoods ranging from old tobacco plantations to sprawling exurban developments of a major metropolis, the students of Corolla County are children of increasingly rich diversity and increasingly poor socioeconomic status. Over the past two decades, the Caucasian student population has decreased from 69% to 24%, and the percentage of students receiving free and reduced meals has increased from 20% to 38%. Currently, 56% of students identify their race/ethnicity as African-American, 9% as Hispanic, and 8% as being of two or more races (Maryland State Report Card, 2019). Adopting the United States Census Bureau's term for a jurisdiction whose population is comprised of less than 50% non-Hispanic Whites (U.S. Census Bureau

[2] Pseudonyms have been used to protect confidentiality for personal and place names and for public documents used in my research.

https://www.census.gov/), Corolla County and its schools might be classified as "minority-majority."

Unfortunately, not all of these young faces are met by educators equipped to help them realize their full potential. The teacher rate of attrition from the county has been steadily rising each year; the earliest data available show a 2011-2012 attrition rate of 3.4%, far below the state average (Maryland Longitudinal Data System Dashboard, 2019). Corolla County is not alone in the challenge of staffing classrooms with quality teachers. In a 2016 report by The Learning Policy Institute, Sutcher et al. estimated a national shortage of approximately 112,000 teachers. While many factors contribute to this overwhelming undersupply of teachers, research suggests teacher attrition is a major contributing factor.

> Although the number of teachers who leave the profession has not dramatically changed in recent years, it constitutes the lion's share of demand, representing anywhere from two-thirds to nearly 100% of the demand for teachers in any given year. Thus, the most important driving factor of teacher shortages is high teacher attrition. (Sutcher et al., 2016, p. 38)

While factors ranging from geographic location to teacher pay and pipeline barriers all present challenges to the supply of teachers in Corolla County, teacher attrition is a primary contributor to its shortage of teachers (Maryland Longitudinal Data System Dashboard, 2019).

More recently, a study by Garcia and Weiss of The Economic Policy Institute (2019) concluded that Sutcher et al.'s 2016 teacher shortage estimates were, if anything, underestimated. Garcia and Weiss looked to account not only for the lack of supply to meet future teacher demand but also to consider the number of those currently teaching who are underqualified in terms of credentials and preparation. They summarized,

> The teacher shortage is real, large and growing, and worse than we thought. When indicators of teacher quality (certification, relevant training, experience, etc.) are taken into account, the shortage is even more acute than currently estimated, with high-poverty schools suffering the most from the shortage of credentialed teachers. (Garcia & Weiss, 2019, p.1)

At 8%, the United States' attrition rate of teachers nationwide is nearly double that of high-achieving educational systems like Finland; Singapore; and Ontario, Canada (Sutcher et al., 2016). Outpacing the national average, Corolla County's attrition rate of 10.9% (Maryland Longitudinal Data System Dashboard, 2019) is not unique among schools serving mostly students of color. Teacher turnover rates have been found to be 36% higher in schools with the largest numbers of minoritized and low-income students (Grissom, 2011), and 50% greater in Title I than in non-Title I schools (Carver-Thomas, 2016). Nearly half of all teacher turnover takes place in just one-fourth of the nation's schools, with high-poverty, high-minority, urban, and rural schools losing the greatest number of teachers (Ingersoll et al., 2018).

Teacher attrition rates in Corolla County reflect these national inequalities in disproportionately impacting students of color and students of low socioeconomic status (Maryland State Report Card, 2018). A positive relationship exists between the percentage of the student population that is White and the percentage of teachers in that school who hold advanced certification from the state. In the seven elementary schools with the student bodies in which the highest percentage of the children are White, there are 13% more teachers with masters' degrees than in the seven elementary schools with the lowest percentage of children who are White (Figure 1).

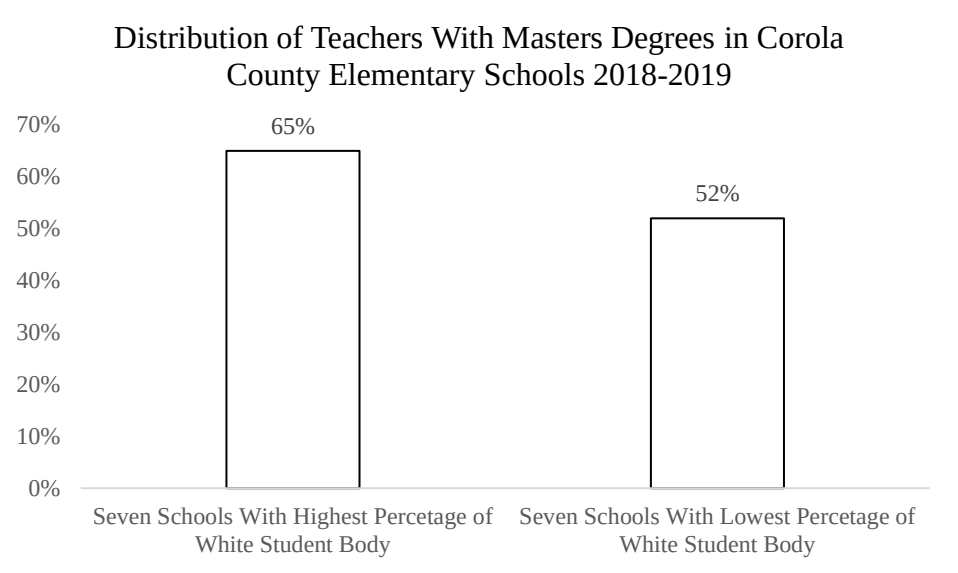


Figure 1. Distribution of Teachers with Advanced Certificates in Corolla County Elementary Schools.

These high teacher attrition rates leave historically marginalized students to be taught by a revolving door of less-experienced teachers. Data from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights indicate that students in high-poverty districts are twice as likely to be taught by teachers with temporary alternative licenses as students in low-poverty districts; Black students are more than four times as likely to attend a school where at least one out of every five teachers does not meet state certification requirements; and high-poverty students and students of color are the least likely to be taught by well-prepared, high-quality teachers (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014).

This lack of teacher experience is problematic, as research indicates that teachers who lack experience have lesser abilities in classroom management, content knowledge, and pedagogical expertise (Rice, 2013), and that novice teachers' effectiveness increases significantly in their second year of teaching (Henry, Bastian, & Fortner, 2011). Novice teachers have been found to produce student achievement gains that are from 0.03 to 0.20

standard deviations less than otherwise similar teachers with 10 to 15 years of experience (Rockoff, 2004). Teachers demonstrate steep gains in effectiveness over the first four years of their career, with increasing returns through at least twelve years of experience - both in the form of increased test scores as well as in behavioral effects, such as reduced student absenteeism and increased student reading for pleasure (Ladd, 2017). And teacher effectiveness is important; while student achievement is impacted by many factors, the quality of a student's teacher is a primary determinant of a student's academic success (Aaronson, Barrow, & Sander, 2007; Nye, Konstantopoulous, & Hedges, 2004).

Moreover, high teacher attrition presents a loss of economic capital for schools. A 2007 report estimated the effects of teacher turnover to cost up to $7 billion a year nationally. Teacher attrition represents a significant loss of investment in teacher recruitment and training, and the cost is nearly twice as great for urban as nonurban schools (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007). A 2017 report by Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond estimated the average cost of filling a teaching vacancy to be $21,000.

Ultimately, teacher turnover also negatively impacts a school as a whole. Turnover has been found to interrupt schools' efforts to increase rigor in the curriculum, to track students' progress from grade to grade, as well as to promote healthy relationships with the community (Donaldson & Johnson, 2011). In studying the effects of teacher turnover on 850,000 New York City fourth- and fifth-grade students over eight years, Ronfeldt, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2013) found negative effects of turnover on the entire school culture, even among the students of the teachers who remained in place. The authors hypothesized that "one possibility is that turnover negatively affects collegiality or relational trust among faculty; or perhaps turnover results in loss of institutional

knowledge among faculty that is critical for supporting all student learning" (Ronfeldt et al., 2013, p. 18).

The cumulative impact of the economic, social, and professional capital drained away by teacher attrition significantly affects the educational experience of the public's children. These inequities are illustrated by the significant gaps in performance between Black and White students on national measures of educational achievement (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). In Corolla County, as well, most assessments reveal a 25-percentage point gap in results between Black and White students (Maryland State Department of Education, 2018).

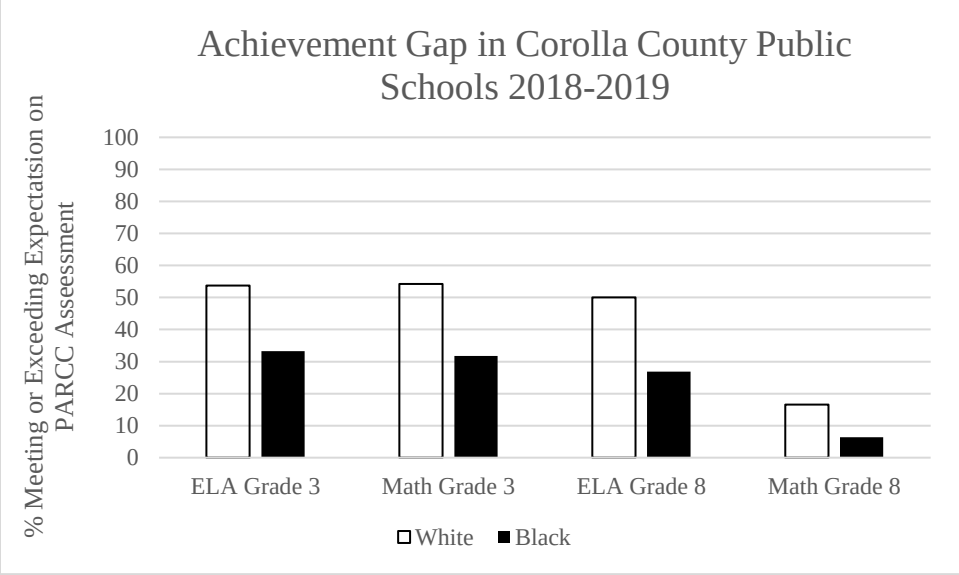


Figure 2. Black-White Achievement Gap on PARCC State Assessments in Corolla County Public Schools.

Poor academic achievement, of course, represents a significant disadvantage for a student. Students with higher quality teachers (as measured by value-added outcomes on students' test scores) have been shown to have higher earnings at age 28 (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockofchild, 2014). In a country where 39.7 million people live in poverty

and Blacks and Hispanics fall below the poverty line more than twice as often as Whites (Fontenot, Semega, & Kollar, 2018), one cannot ignore the loss in economic security and social mobility wrought by poor academic achievement of historically marginalized students in high-turnover schools.

The potential that is lost for individual students when society fails to retain quality educators for all its students is only magnified by the loss of this potential for the greater society. As Darling-Hammond (2015) argued, the United States' future in a global society is determined by how it educates the growing populations of students of color and English Learners who have historically been structurally marginalized in its schools. Analyzing the United States' performance on international assessments of educational achievement reveal how heavily national results are impacted by inequalities in the system; while the United States' White and Asian students largely score above average in comparison to other industrialized nations, the scores of African American and Hispanic students are much lower than the national average bands in the bottom tier of the rankings (Darling-Hammond, 2015). She wrote,

> The result of these trends is that, while the United States must fill many of its high-tech jobs with individuals educated overseas, more and more of its own citizens are unemployable and relegated to the welfare or prison systems, representing enormous personal tragedy as well as a drain on the nation's economy and social well-being, rather than a contribution to our national welfare. (Darling-Hammond, 2015, p. 23)

In an increasingly diverse county in an increasingly diverse country, then, there is enormous potential to be realized by Corolla County Public Schools successfully educating all children, from all their diverse backgrounds, to their greatest abilities. As a literacy instructional coach in the county, I have too often seen this potential wasted. As a school leader, I saw instructional reform efforts fail to take root as, year after year,

teachers who left the school took their professional learning with them. On many levels, therefore, I feel it is critical to find ways in which schools can retain the teachers who can realize the great breadth of student potential.

Preview of the Literature

There is, in fact, a great deal that is known about teacher retention in minority-majority schools. In the literature review that constitutes the second chapter of this capstone, I will explore a knowledge base that has found strong correlations between teachers' mobility decisions and the nature of the working conditions in which they teach (Allensworth et al., 2009; Boyd et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2012; Johnson & Simon, 2015; Ladd, 2011; Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005; Marinell & Coca, 2013; Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, & Darling-Hammond, 2016); this research indicates, even, that improvements in working conditions over time can lead to improved rates of teacher retention (Kraft et al., 2016).

Three prominent research studies in the field have been utilized to outline a definition of "working conditions" for the purposes of this study (Podolsky et al., 2016; Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012; Ladd, 2011). An inductive process of mapping themes of salient elements in these three major studies, illustrated in Appendix A, suggested that teachers' working conditions consist of the following nine elements: (a) resources; (b) time; (c) collegial relationships; (d) a shared social justice mission; (e) supports for pro-social student behaviors; (f) connectedness with families; (g) professional learning; (h) professional identity and agency; and (i) evaluation, growth and development. School leadership emerged as among the most important of working condition elements (Boyd et al., 2011; Burkhauser, 2017; Grissom, 2011; Kraft et al., 2016; Ladd, 2011; Podolsky et

al., 2016), and was separated out as an overarching element with the potential to influence all other nine elements of working conditions within a school. These nine elements of working conditions and the process by which they are determined is discussed in greater detail in the literature review presented in Chapter Two.

Preview of Conceptual Framework

In framing the forthcoming literature review and methodological design of study, many theoretical constructs are utilized to conceptualize the relationship of working condition elements to the teacher retention problem of practice. While these are discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters of this capstone, here I present a brief overview of the constructs that interact to form my conceptual framework.

The conceptual framework illustrates a theoretical understanding of the working conditions within the organization of the school. The framework begins with the premise, established in the literature above, that teacher retention decisions are influenced by the conditions in which teachers work and that school leadership is a primary driving force of school working conditions. To understand *how* school leaders exercise influence over the elements of school working conditions, I draw upon two domains from the well-established leadership framework of Leithwood and Louis (2012): redesigning the organization and developing people. Leadership practices of redesigning the organization are framed in terms of open-system influences from the external environment, and those of developing people are understood by attuning to the psychological bases of human motivation.

As leaders apply organizational and human resource lenses to redesigning the organization and developing people, the framework defines nine working condition

elements that can be influenced in how they are experienced by teachers in the context of a school environment. Should these working condition elements be influenced positively, I theorize, it will favorably impact teachers' motivation to remain at a school.

Purpose of Study

Research documenting the negative effects of teacher attrition from minority-majority or high-poverty schools is well established; so too is a substantial body of research illustrating potential steps for mollifying these trends. As Garcia and Weiss (2019) argued,

> There is no sign that the large shortage of credentialed teachers—overall, and especially in high-poverty schools—will go away. In light of the harms this shortage creates, as well as its size and trends, it is critical to understand the nature of the problem and the complexity of the teacher labor market. Only when we understand the factors that contribute to the growing shortage of high-quality teachers can we design policy interventions—and better guide institutional decisions—to find the "missing" teachers. (Garcia & Weiss, 2019, p. 11)

It is in the hopes of contributing to this understanding of the nature of this complex problem that I endeavor to study the experiences of teachers in minority-majority schools. While many factors powerfully impact teacher retention, this study will focus on working conditions; one subset of factors over which school and division leaders have the most control.

It is with this optimistic lens of leaders' agency that I consider working conditions and the leadership practices by which they might be favorably influenced. Through an in-depth mixed-methods case study of one minority-majority school, I hope to explore the ways in which current and former teachers do or do not reflect experiencing leadership practices that have been found to favorably impact working conditions in minority-majority schools.

While the research has substantiated a relationship between working conditions and teacher retention, there is still much to be learned. Little is known about the quantitative impact of individual working condition elements as independent variables, as many of these elements are intertwined and can be difficult to assess discretely. At the same time, we lack a complete qualitative picture of the ways in which various working condition elements interact with one another, the ways in which they are experienced by teachers, and the processes by which they are impacted by leaders in minority-majority schools. This study aims to help paint a more complete picture.

Likewise, this study aims to fill another important gap in the literature: knowledge of how, exactly, working conditions interact in suburban schools. Most knowledge of minority-majority schools has been generated through research in urban settings. It is not yet known how this research might translate to a suburban setting where the socioeconomic demographics may be similar but less concentrated; where racial demographics may be similar but more diverse; and where the community's socioeconomic status may have more recently experienced transformation.

Utilizing knowledge generated by surveys and interviews with stayers, leavers, and school leaders of three minority-majority schools in the division, I intend to guide strategic work for building the capacity of leaders to improve working conditions for teachers throughout the whole division. I also hope that the lessons learned in making improvements around the teacher attrition problem of practice in this one school division can generate knowledge; contributing to the literature informing the practices of *all* leaders struggling to retain high-quality teachers to change the educational trajectories of historically marginalized students in minority-majority and low-income schools.

Research Questions

To better understand the experience of working conditions experienced by teachers and leaders in the minority-majority school division of Corolla County, I plan to conduct an in-depth, mixed methods case study of one elementary school in the division. I endeavor to answer the following questions:

1. What is the nature of teachers' working conditions in the subject school, as described by leavers, stayers, and leaders?
2. What are teachers' perceptions of the influence of leadership practices on working conditions in the subject school?
3. What are school and district leaders' perceptions of their influence on teacher working conditions in the subject school?

Definition of Relevant Terms

For clarity, the following terms are defined with their intended meaning for their use throughout this study.

- *Attrition* – used to describe teachers who have left the school being studied.
- *Black* – those who identify as having an African diasporic heritage.
- *Leavers* – teachers who have left the school being studied. Unlike others in the literature, however, this researcher does not distinguish whether "leavers" from a school have left the profession or school division altogether; this researcher defines "leaver" only as a teacher who has left the school under study.
- *Minority-Majority Schools* – used by the United States Census Bureau to describe an area or jurisdiction whose population is comprised of less than 50% non-Hispanic Whites. The term is utilized similarly in this study, as a term to define

the 30 out of 35 Corolla County schools in which the student population is less than 50% non-Hispanic Whites. While the term minority-majority is used for ease of describing school demographics for the purposes of this study, the term minoritized is preferred when describing students of color. As explained by Theoharis and Scanlan (2015), the use of the terms minoritized or marginalized reflects that the minority status of these students is not to be taken for granted; rather, they are shaped by social constructions of power in society.

- *Stayers* – teachers who remained and continued teaching in the particular school under study.
- *Working Conditions* – As Johnson, Berg, and Donaldson (2005) summarized, working conditions include the following: (a) the physical features of the workplace; (b) the organizational structure; and (c) the sociological, political, psychological, and educational features of the work environment. I have deduced the following nine elements that constitute working conditions: (a) resources, (b) time, (c) collegial relationships, (d) shared social justice mission, (e) supports for pro-social student behaviors, (f) connectedness with families, (g) professional learning, (h) professional identity and agency, and (i) evaluation, growth and development.

Role of the Researcher

As a current practitioner wishing to impact change in the school division being studied, I assume the role of scholar-practitioner. As Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, and LeMahieu (2015) described the process of continuous improvement in schools, they

assert that the importance of practitioners in generating knowledge that is based on what works on the "job floor" of schools.

> Practicing educators must be core participants in generating practice-based evidence. The problems we seek to solve exist on the job floor, so the refinement of tools, materials, and routines must happen there, too. In an improvement-centered world, practitioners are not just passive recipients of others' research, but active agents of change; they own problems, examine causes, and collaborate with researchers and others. (Bryk et al., 2015, pp. 182-183)

The intent of this research study is to impact real change on the job floors of Corolla County Public Schools, and with the dual role of practitioner and scholar I aim to conduct research that I hope will inform my practice in my setting.

In addition to shaping the intended use and aim of the research, another implication of my role as a scholar-practitioner springs from my ongoing work as a practitioner in the school system of study. Having worked as a practitioner in elementary and middle schools in the division for four years, I have personal relationships and experiences with individuals, processes, and cultures in the system being studied. Such subjectivities will necessarily shape sense-making of the data collected. I will guard against bias by member-checking and regularly asking others to read my work and challenge my sensemaking.

Additionally, the role of scholar-practitioner also has implications for the lens of my research agenda. As a practitioner, I operate with a lens of social justice leadership (Theoharis, 2007) that informs my research orientation as well. As one who practices social justice leadership, I am actively concerned with impacting educational processes for the sake of equity in my practice, and such values necessarily shape my interest and orientation to this study.

Methodological Approach

This study was conducted as a mixed-methods investigation of a single site case study. The case of study was a minority-majority elementary school in Corolla County in which teacher attrition has been an ongoing challenge. As qualitative researchers Hays and Singh (2012) argued, a case study provides an opportunity to examine a phenomenon as it exists in its natural context; a way to document life stories and events. In studying the case of teacher working conditions at Corolla County's Freewill Elementary School, I had the opportunity to study individuals and processes of a bounded system (Creswell, 2006).

In studying this case with both quantitative and qualitative methods, I drew upon a wide range of complementary tools to provide the most comprehensive picture of the case (Borland, 2001). The study involved three phases. In the first phase of the study, a quantitative survey of teachers about their working conditions helped determine the degree to which teachers—both stayers and leavers—perceived experiencing various elements of working conditions in the study site school environment (Research Question #1).

In Phase Two, I triangulated the survey data with interviews with a heterogeneous sample of stayers, leavers, and school leaders from each study site. Semi-structured individual interviews with teachers helped paint a more robust picture of the nature of the conditions of teachers' work (Research Question #1) and probed for their perceptions on the influence of leadership practices on those conditions (Research Question #2). These in-depth semi-structured interviews helped paint a more nuanced picture of the working conditions experienced by leavers and to generate an understanding of how leaders might

have impacted those conditions in ways that could have influenced their decision to stay. At the same time, interviews with stayers provided insight into the working condition elements that were of the most importance in their decision to remain committed to the school. Meanwhile, interviews with school and district leaders provided additional insight as to how they perceived their agency and challenges in influencing teacher working conditions (Research Question #3).

Review of survey and interview instruments by practitioners and expert scholars in the field improved the reliability and trustworthiness of the study, and pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of research participants. The unit of analysis is teacher and leader perceptions of teacher working condition elements in their school.

Limitations

This is a small-scale study that generated knowledge of one school in one division. Findings in this study came from a small, non-randomized sample of teachers and leaders; the findings are representative only of those surveyed and interviewed. It is not, therefore, generalizable to a broader population.

An additional limitation lies in the self-reporting of data by study participants. Such self-reported perceptions were not assessed against observations of working conditions, reports by students of their experiences, student achievement data, or other such data that could have provided a more robust picture of the working conditions in the school being studied. Efforts were made to triangulate interview data with survey results and the perspectives of multiple different stakeholders, but such triangulation still provide a limited perspective in painting the picture of working conditions in the school.

Delimitations

There are several boundaries that frame the scope of this study. Foremost among the delimitations of this study is the focus on working conditions' in considering teacher attrition in minority-majority schools. The research indicates that many other factors impact a teachers' decision to stay or leave a school, including many factors that may be more influential than working conditions in impacting a teacher's decision. Podolski and colleagues (2016) found working conditions to be only one of five major factors that influence teachers' decisions to enter, stay in, or leave the teaching profession, and this study will not attend to the other four influential factors: salaries and other compensation, preparation and costs to entry, hiring and personnel management, and induction and support for new teachers. Similarly, by using the lenses of Two-Factor and Self-determination Theories to frame the study of human motivation, the study is limited primarily to intrinsic motivators. While extrinsic motivators such as recognition and compensation would likely have an impact on human motivation as well, their impact will not be considered in this study. Additionally, there exists a large body of research on influential human resource practices (e.g. job embeddedness, person-environment fit, supply and demand) that is beyond the scope of this study.

This study is limited in scope to leadership practices' impact on working conditions as they are experienced by teachers in an elementary school. The findings will only reflect the context of schools servicing a Kindergarten—Grade Five age group. Additionally, I have decided to focus, in this study, on working conditions that can be impacted by leadership practices. Other important influences on working conditions of

public school teachers, including many impacts of public policy, are beyond the scope of this research.

While focusing on leadership in this study, I have delimited this research to a study of leadership practices as they influence working conditions for *teachers.* It is important to note that teachers' working conditions are largely leaders' working conditions, and that, with a turnover rate of 21%, principal attrition in high-poverty schools is a problem of serious consequence to minoritized students as well (Levin & Bradley, 2019). Leadership is central to this study; as the literature will reveal, school leadership is an element of primary importance in a school's working conditions and the voices of leaders will provide critical perspectives in this study. It is beyond the scope of this study, however, to endeavor to explore the complex issue of school leader retention; in this study, school leaders are included to inform an understanding of how their leadership practices influenced school working conditions as they are experienced by teachers.

Assumptions

A primary assumption of this study is that the research on minority-majority schools in high-poverty urban contexts holds applicable insights for a minority-majority school division in a suburban context. Indeed, Corolla County was considered to have the 19th highest median income in the country in the 2010 census (U.S. Census, 2010) and is not characterized by large communities of concentrated poverty that exist in more urban contexts. Nevertheless, the school system's rapid growth in recent years has been fueled primarily by racial minorities, and the challenges educators face in meeting the needs of this new population reflect many of the same challenges described in the research of

hard-to-staff urban schools. With 73% of its students being of African-American, Hispanic, or mixed race, many of the division's students face the challenges of economic inequality and institutionalized racism that have been documented as challenges faced by students in urban communities (Wilson, 2011). As Eddy-Spicer, Anderson, and Perrone (2017) argued, "in-between" districts like Corolla County have been the subject of rapid demographic and economic shifts in recent years, yet have been widely under-studied in the field of educational research on school decline and turnaround. For much of the study that informed this research, literature was drawn from research in urban communities.

Additionally, the premise of this study is founded on an assumption that teacher attrition is a negative force and that teacher retention should be regarded positively. Certainly, this is not always the case. The dismissal of an underperforming teacher can be a benefit to students and to a school overall. Adnot, Dee, Katz, and Wyckoff (2017), for example, studied Washington, D.C.'s public schools (DCPS) in the years 2011-2013, a period marking the implementation of an aggressive teacher evaluation policy. While DCPS experienced an 18% turnover rate during this period—one of the highest in the nation—the authors found that a large share of those leaving were those who had been rated as low performers, and that this period marked a time of improved student performance. Nevertheless, while acknowledging the need for some teacher attrition, in this paper I take the position that the current levels of teacher attrition are detrimentally impacting students and schools.

Conclusion

By multiple measures at both local (Condo, 2018; Maryland Longitudinal Data System Dashboard, 2019) and national (Darling-Hammond & Podolsky, 2019; Garcia &

Weiss, 2019; Podolsky et al., 2016) levels, teacher retention is a problem of practice that is reaching crisis levels. Given its disproportionately adverse impact on minoritized and low-income students of color, the problem of teacher retention has significant and severe consequences for the future of our children and our society.

Yet, as Darling-Hammond and Podolsky (2019) pointed out, there are nations, states, and individual schools in which no teaching shortage exists at all. While working conditions are only one factor in the complex equation that leads to teacher attrition, working conditions are worthy of consideration in that they are highly influential and most easily impacted by school leaders. This study of leadership influences on working conditions will seek to better understand the ways in which leaders can redesign school organizations considering open-system environments and can develop people by feeding their deepest needs of human motivation. Although limited in its generalizability and scope, this mixed-methods multi-site case study of stayers, leavers, and leaders at a minority-majority elementary school will help us better understand the complexity of teacher retention.

Organization of This Capstone

In the dissertation that follows, I convey my efforts to generate knowledge about teacher retention as it relates to working conditions in minority-majority schools. I begin with a comprehensive review of the literature on working conditions and teacher retention, drawing upon what has already been learned about this topic in the field to date.

Building upon constructs of working conditions, leadership practices, open-system organizational theory and human motivation theory that are found to be of

significance to researchers before me, I will develop a conceptual framework to serve as a lens for bringing these constructs into relationship for study. As Chapter Three outlines, this conceptual framework guides the methods by which I selected, collected, and analyzed data as I explored the working conditions and leadership practices in a case study of one minority-majority elementary school.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The current study aimed to address the problem of practice of teacher retention in minority-majority schools. In this literature review, I first synthesize the research base substantiating teacher working conditions as a factor worthy of analysis in teacher's mobility decisions. I then draw on empirical studies with various definitions of working conditions to delineate and operationalize nine elements of working conditions to form the foundational construct of my study.

In this analysis, I identify school leadership to be a factor of primary importance in teachers' working conditions. I will draw upon theories of leadership practice, organization, and human motivation to form a framework for conceptualizing teacher working conditions. This framework will position nine working condition elements to be viewed through a lens of leadership practices aimed at redesigning the organization and developing people. With this framework, I lay a foundation for investigation of Research Question One, a question that seeks an understanding of the nature of working conditions at the study site: "What is the nature of teachers' working conditions described by study participants in the subject school?"

The foundation of this framework also guides a review of empirical research on aspects of working conditions that have been found to positively impact teacher retention. A review of the research on each of these elements enabled an investigation of Research Question Two, "What are teachers' perceptions of the influence of leadership practices

on working conditions in the subject school?" and Research Question Three, "What are school and district leaders' perceptions of their influence on teacher working conditions in the subject school?" In understanding the working condition elements of which leaders are and are not aware and over which they do and do not feel they have agency, I hoped to better understand the frame through which leadership practices were exercised.

From this analysis, I offer considerations for recommendations for school or division leaders who desire to improve working conditions to mitigate teacher attrition in minority-majority schools.

Methods Used to Develop Literature Review

The review of literature to inform this study included journal articles, books, and agency reports, with a heavy emphasis on peer-reviewed journal articles. Such sources were acquired through the University of Virginia's online catalog, EBSCO Information Services Databases, and Google Scholar. Search terms included "teacher retention," "teacher attrition," "high-poverty schools," "hard-to-staff schools," "minority-majority schools," "educational leadership," and "working conditions." Various handbooks (Boyd, Lankford & Wyckoff, 2018; Akiba, Letendre, Katz, & Wyckoff, 2017; Day, 2017) were utilized to identify high-leverage studies and key researchers in the field. Valuable research was located by reviewing reports from organizations such as The Learning Policy Institute and Harvard Graduate School of Education's Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, and by pursuing research conducted by active leaders of those organizations such as Linda Darling-Hammond and Susan Moore Johnson. In total, 97 sources were examined to inform this study.

Working Conditions: A High-Leverage Change Driver

Retaining teacher talent is critical to realizing the potential of every child in Corolla County and in the United States' public schools at large. One area of research of importance to leaders of minority-majority schools is that of school working conditions. The research on school working conditions offers evidence supporting the importance of working conditions on teacher retention in general, as well as offering elements to inform a framework of how important aspects of working conditions might be defined.

In the Learning Policy Institute's 2016 report *Solving the Teacher Shortage: How to Attract and Retain Excellent Educators*, Podolsky and colleagues offered a comprehensive review of the teacher retention research. They identified the following five major factors to influence teachers' decisions to enter, stay in, or leave the teaching profession: (a) salaries and other compensation, (b) preparation and costs to entry, (c) hiring and personnel management, (d) induction and support for new teachers, and (e) working conditions. Of these, the final factor—*working conditions*—is that over which school leaders can exert the greatest influence and, therefore, the factor selected for this study.

Much of what is known about teacher retention in high-minority schools is through the work of Susan Moore Johnson and her colleagues at The Harvard Graduate School of Education's Project on the Next Generation of Teachers. In a synthesis of research, Johnson and Simon (2015) reviewed six large-scale quantitative studies (Allensworth et al., 2009; Boyd et al., 2011; Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005; Johnson et al., 2012; Ladd, 2011; Marinell & Coca, 2013) that, unlike earlier studies in the field, analyzed teacher turnover as a function of school context independent of student

demographics. In summarizing the findings of this research, Johnson and Simon emphasized the importance of studying working conditions when considering teacher attrition, noting, “The poor working conditions common in America’s neediest schools explain away most, if not all, of the relationship between student characteristics and teacher attrition. This is important because, unlike demographic characteristics of students, working conditions can be addressed” (Simon & Johnson, 2015, p. 1).

Two foundational studies—Ingersoll’s analysis of the nationally representative School and Staffing Survey (SASS) data (2001); and Loeb, Darling-Hammond, and Luczak’s (2005) phone surveys with a representative sample of 1,071 California teachers—were the first to establish this distinction between the demographics and the working conditions of a school. In these two studies researchers found that, while the racial and economic composition of a school did have a strong correlation with teacher mobility decisions, such correlations were significantly reduced when school working condition factors were factored into the statistical models. Such studies led Borman and Dowling to conclude, in their 2008 meta-analysis, that teacher retention might more heavily moderated by working conditions than previously thought (Borman & Dowling, 2008).

Subsequent research substantiated these findings. Two quantitative analyses of large-scale data sets from statewide TELL (Teaching Empowering, Leading and Learning) school working conditions surveys of K-12 public school teachers and administrators offered particularly compelling evidence. TELL, a working conditions survey developed by The New Teacher Center, has been utilized by over 1.5 million educators in 18 states since its inception in 2008 (The New Teacher Center, 2019).

Analysis of TELL results by Johnson, Kraft, and Papay of Massachusetts (2012) and Ladd of North Carolina (2011) found important links between teacher working condition survey data, teacher turnover data, and student achievement measures.

Johnson and colleagues (2012) employed standard regression models with various control factors to assess the relationships between student achievement and teacher retention outcomes with overall conditions of work. Like researchers before them (Hanushek et al., 2004), Johnson et al. found a strong correlation between a school's student demographics and the retention rate for the school. When factoring in the conditions of work, however, the apparent relationship between teacher career plans and student demographics was substantially reduced. After accounting for the measure of work context, the effects of student demographics on teachers' job satisfaction was reduced by 70%. The researchers concluded, "Teachers who leave high- poverty, high-minority schools reject the dysfunctional contexts in which they work, rather than the students they teach" (Johnson et al., 2012, p. 4).

Similarly, Ladd's 2011 analysis of working condition survey data from over 70% of teachers in North Carolina also revealed teacher mobility decisions to be more closely predicted by working conditions than by student race or socioeconomic status. In comparing multiple linear regressions of working conditions amidst control variables on intended and actual teacher departure rates, the correlation of independent variables on teacher mobility intentions increased from 0.027 when no working conditions were included to 0.044 in the model for which working conditions were accounted. Most notably, the contribution of the working conditions to the explanatory power of the model exceeded that of the school characteristics such as student demographics. In fact, when

positive working conditions were factored in, the percentage of teachers intending to leave schools with high proportions of Black students fell by 16%.

Notably, Johnson et al. (2012) and Ladd (2011) both found that working conditions correlated not only with teachers' retention decisions, but directly with student achievement measures themselves. Evidently, as the authors noted, "Organizational contexts in schools are both teachers' working conditions and students' learning environments" (Johnson et al., 2012, p. 29).

Results of these quantitative analyses of surveys of thousands of teachers are clear: the conditions of work in a school are consequential for the achievement of its students and the retention of its teachers. To operationalize this knowledge, however, the question remains: what conditions? How, exactly, might a researcher define the elements that characterize the conditions of work in a school?

A Framework for Defining Working Conditions

The literature lacks a consistent agreement on a definition for working conditions (Gulosino, Franceschini, & Hardman, 2016). As the researchers (2016) lamented,

> Yet, despite the contribution and the growing interest in school climate and working condition improvement, there remains no consistent agreement in the literature on the proper definition, measurement, and disparity in its use by practitioners and academics (Ladd, 2011; Johnson et al., 2004). Measuring working conditions is complex, with many of the factors in the different domains appearing to be interrelated, making it difficult to understand relationships between variables. (Gulosino, Franceschini & Hardman, 2016, p.4)

Lacking a consistent definition in the literature, a construct for defining working conditions for this study has been informed by many prominent researchers in the education policy field. The constructs for working conditions utilized in the previous two studies (Johnson et al., 2012; Ladd, 2011), as well as the 2016 Learning Policy Institute

report (Podolsky et al., 2016), outline various elements that have been utilized to define "working conditions." Taken together, Table 1 (Appendix A) reflects the researcher's development of a framework to synthesize the elements from these researchers and articulate the working condition elements most under the influence of school leaders in minority-majority schools.

In a 2005 review of the literature, Johnson defined working conditions, at the most general level, as including: the physical features of the workplace; the organizational structure; and the sociological, political, psychological, and educational features of the work environment (Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005). From this review of the literature, Johnson and colleagues (2012) developed key theory-based categories to capture the overall quality of the work environment, and selected individual items from the TELL survey that closely corresponded with these elements. Adjusting these categories based on item analysis and principal components analysis, the authors developed a set of nine measures to reflect the broad-based conditions in which teachers work: colleagues, community support, facilities, governance, principal, professional expertise, resources, school culture, and time. The authors found each of these nine elements to have a strong, positive relationship with teachers' mobility intentions, but noted that those with the greatest influence were those that were social in nature: collegial relationships, principal leadership, and school culture.

In her 2011 study, Ladd also extrapolated from Johnson et al.'s 2005 literature review, using an inductive approach to sort the broad range of working condition questions into categories. This exploratory factor analysis allowed Ladd insight into how teachers thought about their working conditions and, unlike Johnson et al. (2012),

generated only a focus on those working condition elements teachers considered to be most important. The constructs Ladd found to be important to teachers' working conditions emerged as the following: (a) leadership, (b) expanded roles, (c) time factor, (d) professional development, (e) evaluation, and (f) facilities and resources.

Podolsky and colleagues' (2016) synthesis of the literature on teacher retention also identified certain interdependent working condition elements as consistently being the most highly related to teachers' decisions to remain teaching in each school: (a) school leadership and administrative support, (b) opportunities for professional collaboration and shared decision-making, (c) high-stakes accountability systems, and (d) resources for teaching and learning.

As displayed in Appendix A, through the process of categorizing the working condition descriptors from each of these research studies (Johnson et al., 2012; Ladd, 2011; Podolsky et al., 2016) in Appendix A, I worked to inductively determine commonalities between the three. The elements defined in the left-hand column of Appendix A denote the constructs I developed to capture the essence of the descriptors from the three different studies defined throughout the rows. This inductive process resulted in the elements of working conditions defined, for this study, as: resources; time; collegial relationships; shared social justice mission; supports for pro-social student behaviors; connectedness with families; professional learning; professional identity and agency; and evaluation, growth and development. Underlying all of these elements is the influence of school leadership.

School Leadership

A Condition of Primary Importance

Whatever the literature lacks in clarity around the definition of "working conditions," it coalesces in findings on the importance of one element of working conditions: that of school leadership. Leadership matters significantly to teachers' retention decisions in minority-majority schools (Podolsky et al., 2016; Sutcher et al., 2016).

In one comprehensive quantitative study, Boyd et al. (2011) studied the relationship between school contextual factors and teacher attrition in New York City schools. In comparing the career decisions of 4,360 teachers against school contextual factors assessed by other teachers in their schools, the authors found teachers' dissatisfaction with the administration was most commonly cited as the most important factor in their decision to leave. Likewise, Ladd's (2011) analysis revealed the most influential element of working conditions to be that of school leadership, accounting for about 40% of the intended and actual departure rates at elementary and middle schools and 30% at high schools. Notably, while school leadership was positively associated with teacher retention in all schools, school leadership exhibited the most powerful increase in teacher retention in schools that had high proportions of Black students (Ladd, 2011).

Grissom's 2011 analysis of nationally representative SASS data provided additional evidence of the powerful impact of effective principals. Grissom revealed that a significant degree of teacher turnover might be impacted more by the quality of the principal in a disadvantaged school than in an average school. A 1.5 standard deviation increase in principal effectiveness reduced teacher attrition "enough to offset the turnover

differential between disadvantaged schools and other schools, as defined by student demographics" (Grissom, 2011, p. 2575). Kraft, Marinell, and Shen-Wei Yee (2016), moreover, found school leadership to exert a powerful impact on teacher retention in New York City middle schools. Their ten-year longitudinal study found that improvements in working conditions over time corresponded with decreases in teacher turnover. One standard deviation increase in the quality of leadership, in particular, was associated with approximately an 11% reduction in turnover.

As these studies illustrate, leadership matters, and it matters especially in minority-majority schools. Given the prevalence of findings of school leadership as an influential component of working conditions, in the analysis in Appendix A, I separate out "Leadership;" conceptualizing it not as a *component* of working conditions (as it was in the studies reviewed thus far), but instead as an active *influencer* of working conditions.

What scholars are less clear on is *how* such leadership comes to matter. The studies reviewed thus far have generally been quantitative analyses of large survey data sets that lack the qualitative nuance of studying impactful leadership in action. A few studies have utilized inductive approaches to explore the ways in which leaders of high-needs schools have worked to retain teachers. Brown and Wynn's (2009) qualitative study in a high-attrition small urban school district described a variety of ways in which successful principals retained teachers by fostering unofficial professional learning communities that increased teacher satisfaction and commitment. Likewise, Hughes, Matt and O'Reilly's (2014) surveys of teachers and principals of hard-to-staff therapeutic schools in a Southwestern state provided insight about which forms of principal support

(emotional, environmental, instructional, or technical) teachers found most important to their decision to stay or leave the school. The authors found all forms of support to be influential, with emotional support the most influential of all.

What is not provided, however, by these or other studies, is a comprehensive consideration of working conditions as they are influenced by leadership practices. What might be learned of leaders' influences on working conditions through lenses of theoretical frameworks of effective leadership practices in the literature? What practices do strong school leaders employ generally, and how do these relate to the specific aspects of working conditions found to be important to teacher retention in minority-majority schools?

Theoretical Frameworks of Leadership Practices

As few scholars of working conditions in minority-majority schools have studied leadership practices as their focus, analysis of this problem of practice can be informed by theoretical frameworks of effective leadership practices more generally. One such framework of effective leadership practices is offered by Leithwood and Louis (2012).

In their comprehensive research on the relationship between leadership and student learning, Leithwood and Louis' (2012) empirical analysis established leadership as second only to classroom instruction in its influence on student learning. Over five years across a representative sample of 180 schools, the researchers confirmed the impact of a "leadership effect" on successful student learning outcomes. Of this large-scale, five-year study on educational leadership, the authors concluded: "To date we have not found a single documented case of a school improving its student achievement record in the absence of talented leadership (p. 3)."

In their mixed-methods investigation, therefore, Leithwood and Louis (2012) considered the practices through which successful leadership was enacted. A focus on leadership *practices* is important, as research indicates that these practices reveal more than a study of leaders' characteristics or traits. Shen, Leslie, Spybrook, and Ma (2012), for example, looked specifically at the varying impacts of principal characteristics and school processes on teacher job satisfaction. In their hierarchical linear modeling of SASS survey data, Shen and colleagues found school process measures to be far more important to teacher job satisfaction than principal education and experience background characteristics.

Leithwood and Louis (2012) found widespread consensus around the importance of four categories of core leadership practices: setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organization, and improving the instructional program. When considering Leithwood and Louis' four categories of practices considering the literature on teacher retention in minority-majority schools, two of the core leadership practices emerge as being of importance: *redesigning the organization* and *developing people*.

Redesigning the organization: Organizational theory. Much of the literature suggests that leaders hoping to retain teachers in minority-majority schools employ practices of what Leithwood and Louis (2012) called *redesigning the organization*; creating schoolwide structures and relationships that "establish workplace conditions that will allow staff members to make the most of their motivations and capacities" (p. 60). In advocating for this structural element of instructional leadership, they wrote,

> Classroom practices occur within larger organizational systems that can vary enormously in the extent to which they support, reward, and nurture good instruction. School leaders who ignore or neglect the state of this larger context can easily find their direct efforts to improve instruction substantially frustrated.

> Successful principal leadership includes careful attention to classroom instructional practices, but it also includes careful attention to many other issues that are critical to the ongoing health and welfare of school organizations. (Leithwood & Louis, 2012, p. 67)

As Brazer, Bauer, and Johnson (2019) argue, the use of organizational theory enables leaders to enlarge their perspectives on the structural and human resource forces shaping behavior in their organization. Research indicates that such organizationally-minded leadership practices can positively impact teacher retention. In one study, the responses of 62,000 teachers to the Tennessee TELL survey were analyzed using The Competing Values Framework—a model of organizational effectiveness widely used in the business and public policy worlds (Gulosino, Franceschini, & Hardman, 2016). The researchers found schools with higher measures of organizational effectiveness to be correlated with higher rates of teacher retention.

In utilizing organizational theory as a theoretical framework for understanding leadership practices that impact working conditions, Connolly and Kruse (2019) cautioned that focusing on "Redesigning the Organization," as Leithwood and Louis (2012) describe it, could imply a managerial perspective that is not substantiated in the literature. They argue against a growing popularization of promoting organizational culture as a management tool—something a school *has* that a leader must shape to accomplish organizational goals. Rather, they argue that organizational culture is something a school *is*; social interactions through which meaning is developed within an organization. This distinction necessitates that the study of leadership practices for redesigning the organization involve a nuanced approach of studying the organization from the various perspectives of numerous subgroups involved.

When utilizing organizational theories to study how leaders impact working conditions in minority-majority schools, the literature suggests the need to be cognizant of Scott's (1975/2003) argument that organizations are open systems; systems that are necessarily shaped by the macrosystem of the larger societal environment surrounding the school. Kraft, Papay, Johnson, Charner-Laird, Ng, and Reinhorn's (2015) qualitative study of six high-poverty urban schools examined how different school leaders responded to the complexities of their surrounding macrosystems with an open or closed system approach. In interviews with 95 teachers and administrators in six high-poverty urban schools, Kraft and colleagues (2015) identified the consistent need articulated by teachers for organizational responses to address the intensified uncertainties introduced into the school environment by the high-poverty contexts in which their students lived. Such redesigning of the organization considering open-system forces was critical because, Kraft and colleagues noted, "uncoordinated individual efforts alone are not sufficient to meet the needs of students in high-poverty urban communities" (p. 754).

Open-system organizational challenges. The framework of an open-systems organizational theory perspective on working conditions in minority-majority schools allows for a study of schools that also considers the greater body of research on the macrosystem surrounding the schoolhouse walls. Such an expanded perspective brings important understanding to the leadership practices that might impact working conditions and teacher retention within.

Sociological research documents how centuries of racial discrimination have created a systemic power structure that disenfranchises students of color in many ways. For example, White families in the United States hold 90% of the nation's wealth while

Black families hold only 2.6% (Dettling et al., 2017), and Blacks and Hispanics fall below the poverty line more than twice as often as Whites (Fontenot et al., 2018). And income inequality and poverty are rising in the United States overall. Child poverty, food insecurity, and homelessness in the U.S. have climbed to the highest levels in the industrialized world: Nearly 1 in 4 American children live in poverty and 1 in 30 is homeless (Bassuk, DeCandia, Beach, & Berman, 2014; National Center for Children in Poverty, 2019).

The social and economic disadvantages associated with living in poverty present numerous challenges to student flourishing: from less access to medical care, resulting in greater absenteeism; to food insecurity, resulting in coming to school inadequately nourished with diminished energies available to dedicate to learning (Rothstein, 2015; Berliner, 2009). Housing and employment insecurity lead to greater mobility and interrupted schooling, and fewer resources for enriching out-of-school activities can lead to less academic background knowledge (Rothstein, 2015).

The social consequences of living in poverty can also severely impact students' mental, emotional, and behavioral health (Yoshikawa et al., 2012). The stress on one's family from living in poverty can be compounded by the day-to-day stress of moving through dangerous neighborhoods to get to and from school (Berliner, 2009; Rothstein, 2015). While only one of every 57 White children have a parent who is incarcerated, one in every nine Black children do (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010). Psychologists at Stanford's Early Life Stress Research Program have reported "staggering" rates of post-traumatic stress in inner-city youth, with an estimated one-third of children having witnessed a homicide (Carrion & Wong, 2012). The stress on families living in poverty

can translate into chronic stress for children as they suffer higher rates of aggressive behavior, depression, anxiety, decreased social competence, and diminished academic performance (Carrion & Wong, 2012).

The cumulative effects of these challenges can present significant challenges for students in minority-majority schools, with children of lower socioeconomic status displaying gaps in cognitive and noncognitive skills as early as entry into Kindergarten (Garcia, 2015). Accumulated exposure to physical (e.g. substandard housing) and psychosocial (e.g. family turmoil, separation from adult caregivers) stressors place great demands on physiological response systems that are designed to respond to such stressors infrequently. As a result of this chronic stress, children's brains become less able to self-regulate and to cope with external demands (Evans & Kim, 2013).

An open-systems theoretical perspective brings these factors of the surrounding society into the study of working conditions in the organizations of minority-majority schools.

Theories of human motivation. The second important bucket of leadership practices in Leithwood and Louis' (2012) framework is that of developing people; practices for building the capacity of staff members to accomplish shared goals. This complement to the structural perspective of organizational theory is necessary because, as Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2019) noted, "Even the grandest system is made up of people," (p. 2), and, "Changing the system is human work" (p. 9). Foundational theories of Herzberg's (1968) Two-factor theory and Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-determination theory of human motivation can together provide a useful framework for considering leadership practices for *developing people.*

In considering the human side of leadership practices in an organization, frameworks of human motivation theory can help guide an understanding of teachers' drive to persist in their work. Herzberg's Two-factor theory of motivation (1968) posits that satisfaction at work arises from the presence of high-level motivators such as achievement, recognition, and the work itself. Dissatisfaction, on the other hand, arises from an absence of basic hygiene factors. While basic hygiene factors like salary, preparation time, and effective organization policies are not necessarily what will motivate and satisfy teachers, their absence will certainly dissatisfy them. Consideration of the motivators for human work can be further informed by Deci and Ryan's Self-determination theory of human motivation (2000). Deci and Ryan's Self-determination theory (2000) posits that motivation encompasses innate needs and socio-cognitive elements. Deci and Ryan argued that humans have three intrinsic psychological needs: those of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. The degree to which the extrinsic surrounding social and cultural context supports or thwarts these basic needs, Ryan and Deci argued, will determine the level of human motivation in that setting (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

While Herzberg's research involved engineers rather than teachers and Ryan and Deci's research often focused on children, both provide widely accepted theoretical frameworks for conceptualizing the basis of human motivation. Though theories of motivation cannot capture the entire complexity of forces that shape the development of teachers, they do provide a useful framework for the human drives that leaders will need to inspire as they aspire to help teachers grow and persist in minority-majority schools.

Leadership Practices Which Impact Working Conditions

The literature suggests ways in which leaders might attend to each of the nine elements of working conditions synthesized from the work of Johnson et al. (2012), Ladd (2011), and Podolsky et al. (2016) (Appendix A). Some constitute hygiene factors that could create employee dissatisfaction if not addressed, while other factors could address the innate needs of relatedness, competence, and autonomy that, when fulfilled, could create working environments that enhance teacher motivation.

Hygiene Factors

Two elements that emerged in the synthesis of factors for a working conditions construct (Appendix A) were resources and time. Though these might fall under Hertzberg's category of satisfiers rather than motivators to human work, teacher motivation in schools would be negatively impacted if favorable amounts of these factors were not present. Moreover, Johnson et al. (2012) cautioned against the use of any construct for defining working conditions that failed to take into consideration the full range of factors defining a teacher's workplace environment.

Resources. Quantitative (EdBuild, 2019) and qualitative (Kozol, 2012) accounts alike document a significant disparity in resources afforded to public schools in America. This can have problematic implications for teacher retention in under-resourced schools, as facilities and resources—defined as "sufficiency of teacher access to appropriate instructional materials, technology, office supplies, and professional space, and to the cleanliness and safety of school environments" (Ladd, 2011, p. 241)—have been found to be a significant element contributing to teacher's mobility decisions (Johnson et al., 2012; Ladd, 2011; Podolsky et al., 2016). Positive influences on teacher retention have been

found with improved quality of physical school facilities (Buckley, Schneider & Shang, 2005), while a lack of instructional resources and supplies have been shown to negatively influence teacher morale (Johnson, 2005).

Time. The research suggests that teacher attrition decisions are also related to demands on their time. Johnson et al. (2012) defined time as "the extent to which teachers have sufficient time to meet their instructional and noninstructional responsibilities in the school" (p. 14); an element that Ladd (2011) found to be predictive of elementary and middle school teachers' intended departure from a school. Demands of time can threaten teachers' resilience for persevering with commitment in minority-majority schools. In Day and colleagues' longitudinal mixed-methods study of 300 teachers over the course of four consecutive years in England (2007), the most frequently reported cause for a decline in teachers' resilience— "the capacity to maintain equilibrium and a sense of commitment and agency in the everyday worlds in which teachers work" (Gu & Day, 2013, p. 26) —was excessive workload; the theme of 68% of teacher comments (Day et al., 2007). Excessive workload emerged as a factor in the attrition decisions in Olsen and Anderson's qualitative study of 15 early-career teachers in Los Angeles (2007) as well. Olsen and Anderson wrote the following:

> None of the teachers in our sample could conceive of being a successful urban teacher without an extraordinary—perhaps unsustainable—commitment to the work. In these teachers' opinions, successful teaching in these schools required an enormous commitment; this kind of commitment may be something that idealistic, dedicated urban teachers will only be willing or able to supply for a limited time. (p. 14)

Leaders in minority-majority schools might gain some insight into structural means of lightening teacher workload by looking at high-performing nations abroad. After all, Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, and Orphanos' (2009) multi-year

study of the status of professional development revealed how in other, high-performing, countries, teachers enjoyed more time to plan and learn together; only 60% of their working time was engaged in classroom instruction, as opposed to 80% of time for teachers in the U.S. (Wei et al., 2009). Retention of teachers will necessitate demanding sustainable levels of teacher commitment.

Elements of Human Motivators

In conceptualizing the organizational context of open-systems influences on working conditions in minority-majority schools, one can see how challenges wrought by macrosystem forces of poverty and racism might present challenges to all three intrinsic needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Yet, research illuminates some potential practices for leaders hoping to shape working environments in which these motivational needs can be met.

Relatedness. Researchers have documented significant challenges to relatedness – the will to interact, be connected to, and experience caring for others (Ryan & Deci, 2000) - for some teachers in minority-majority schools. Currently, over half of the United States' public school student population is comprised of students of color, while this is the case for only 20% of public school teachers (McFarland et al., 2018). This "racial mismatch" (Renzulli, Parrott & Beattie, 2011) is problematic, as biases in teachers' expectations of students of minoritized racial groups can lead teachers to tend to underestimate the abilities of minority students, and these low expectancies perpetuate inequality in education (Weinstein, Gregory, & Strambler, 2004).

Moreover, low expectations for minoritized students can be held not only by individual teachers but by a school as an entire organization (Diamond, Randolph, &

Spillane, 2004). Diamond, Randolph and Spillane summarized, “Our work suggests that in predominately lower- income and African American schools, the current of belief and practice tends toward lower expectations followed by a decreased sense of responsibility for students” (p. 76). This disconnect in relatedness between White teachers and their minoritized students can negatively impact both student achievement and teacher retention. Renzulli, Parrott, and Beattie (2011) found that teachers who worked in racially heterogeneous school settings were likely to be less socially integrated and, therefore, less satisfied with their jobs. Renzulli and colleagues observed that teachers perceived racial threats from their students, theorizing this may have been due to group threat (as students outnumber their teacher), and to race-based stereotypes (a cultural stereotype that characterizes minorities as criminals). Teachers were more satisfied teaching in a school where most students were White. In surveying the research for leadership practices to address these challenges to relatedness in minority-majority schools, three of the elements of working conditions in Appendix A are of importance: a shared social justice mission, connectedness with families, and collegial relationships.

A shared social justice mission. Considering these many challenges Blacks experience because of institutionalized and personal racism, success in minority-majority schools requires that teachers work to right these injustices. While building a shared vision and focusing the group on shared goals for student achievement is a necessary practice for all school leaders (Leithwood & Louis, 2012), leaders of minority-majority schools may favorably impact teacher retention when this vision frames teachers’ work as an act of social justice.

As defined by Theoharis (2007), social justice leadership is enacted when principals make issues of marginalizing conditions in society "central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision" (p. 223). Teachers who choose careers in minority-majority schools often do so with a strong sense of purpose that leaders might mobilize. Ongoing capacity for resilience for teachers in low-income schools has been found to be a product of teachers' sense of vocation, or "calling" to the profession (Day et al., 2007). Likewise, Ronfeldt, Kwok, and Reininger's (2016) quantitative study of 1,000 teachers in a large, urban district in the U.S. found teachers with a preference for serving underserved students and teachers of color are more likely to enter underserved schools. Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, and Freitas (2010), in their review of the research on retention and turnover of teachers of color, also found that those who chose to teach in high-minority schools, did so due to a "humanistic commitment" to give back to their communities (p. 71).

When such a mission of social justice is not shared by a teacher's leaders or colleagues at a minority-majority school, retention of such teachers can suffer. For example, in Achinstein and Ogawa's (2011) study of 21 teachers of color, they found that teachers cared deeply about whether their colleagues shared their perspective on social justice. Teachers choosing to leave a school reported that they felt alienated by mainstream coworkers and administrators who did not support their approaches to creating culturally relevant lessons for their students. Leaders' stewardship of a shared social justice mission among a staff of teachers can be aided by building teachers' capacities for racial literacy and culturally responsive teaching. In one correlational study in a large southeastern school district, Callaway (2017) found a positive correlation

between culturally responsive teaching practices (Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2009) and teacher efficacy. Tinsley's (2018) study of primary school teachers' experiences of "racial stress" (Harrell, 2000) led him to urge that teacher preparation programs "purposefully include curriculum that incorporates culturally appropriate pedagogy as well as adopting knowledge of how to properly acknowledge, engage, and competently address social issues so that race-related problems are resolved in a healthy and effective manner" (Tinsley, 2018, p. 135). Racial and cultural knowledge is a necessary component for successful teaching and learning in urban schools (Howard & Milner, 2013).

Connectedness with families. Leadership practices that enhance relatedness between teachers and students across divisive cultural lines must conjointly aid teachers' connectedness with families. Teachers' perceived disconnect between themselves and their students' families has been found to be a contributing factor in attrition decisions (Allensworth et al., 2009), and "efforts to engage parents" are found to be one type of coordinated organizational response schools used to successfully address the environmental uncertainty of work in low-income schools (Kraft et al., 2015). Examples of successful efforts included hosting open houses at off-site locations in students' neighborhoods, hosting regular events to help parents in assisting their child with homework, and conducting regular visits to children's homes throughout the year. As Bryk and Schneider (2002) noted, engaging parents with school is essential for developing trust between teachers and parents in minority-majority schools where "power asymmetry" (p. 28) can impede productive home–school relationships; relationships that are important to sustaining teachers' sense of relatedness in their work.

Collegial relationships. Another important source of relatedness for teachers is the relationships they hold with their colleagues. Found to be among the most influential of working condition elements, Simon and Johnson (2015) hypothesized, "In schools where students' needs are greater—as they often are in high-poverty schools—it is plausible that teachers depend on one another even more than they do in other schools" (p. 20).

In a study of over 2,000 current and former California teachers, one of the most important factors cited for why teachers chose to stay at a school was the quality of the relationships among the staff (Futernick, 2007). Likewise, surveys of 184 novice teachers revealed those who perceived a more collegial climate are more likely to report an intent to remain at their school (Pogodzinski, Youngs, & Frank, 2013). "Positive, trusting, working relationships" (p. 25) are found to be the most influential condition on a teacher's retention decisions in 400 Chicago schools (Allensworth et al., 2009). One-year stability rates are4-5 percentage points higher in schools where teachers reported a strong sense of collective responsibility. In Day et al.'s (2007) longitudinal study, 75% or more of resilient teachers in each of six professional life phases rated "supportive relationships with colleagues" as a critical factor in their capacity for maintaining their calling to teach. By enhancing relationships between teachers and their colleagues, teachers and students and families, and teachers and the mission of the work itself, leaders can help fulfill teachers' need for relatedness and enhance their motivation to persist in their work.

Competence. The challenges to relatedness experienced by teachers in minority-majority schools can lead to barriers in realizing a second psychological need as well: that of competence; the drive to control outcomes and experience mastery (Ryan & Deci,

2000). The challenges of managing student behavior and realizing academic success in minority-majority school environments disadvantaged by the open system of the larger society can leave teachers feeling incompetent and unsuccessful in their work. In one longitudinal, qualitative study by Johnson and Birkeland (2003), for example, the researchers conducted 50 interviews with new teachers over four years of teaching. Of all the factors influencing teachers' career decisions, the factor with the greatest influence was if the teachers felt they could be effective with their students. Likewise, Boyd and colleagues' comparison of teacher turnover and student achievement data in New York City Schools over five years indicated that when teachers are more effective at impacting student learning, they likely to leave the teaching profession (Boyd et al., 2011). Leadership practices that enhance working condition elements of "supports for pro-social student behaviors" and "professional learning" can help fulfill teachers' psychological need to feel that they are competent in realizing their students' success.

Supports for pro-social student behaviors. In developing the framework of defining elements of working conditions for this study (Table 1), a common theme was the importance of school leadership as it pertained to support with student behavior. Johnson (2012) noted, "Principal: the extent to which school leaders create an orderly and safe environment" (p. 14) and Ladd (2011) described, "Leadership, especially with respect to teachers' efforts to maintain discipline in the classroom" (p. 241). Leadership practices that influence working conditions in minority-majority schools were, in the eyes of teachers, clearly related to student discipline and behavior. Student discipline and behavior has been found to be the most influential factor in teacher attrition from high

schools (Allensworth et al., 2009). Researchers with the Chicago Consortium on School Reform in Chicago wrote:

> We cannot ignore the fact that student classroom behavior is the strongest predictor of teacher mobility in the high schools. CCSR researchers have visited classrooms throughout Chicago and seen many examples of exemplary teaching and orderly classrooms. But we also regularly see classrooms in chaos. It is difficult to imagine how a teacher would return day after day to a work environment where students are so disruptive that no learning can occur. Moreover, many teachers seem to lack strategies for dealing with students' behavioral issues and appear to get little support with these classroom management issues. There is clearly a need to help teachers address classroom management, develop school policies that improve discipline, and work to develop students' non-cognitive skills (e.g., perseverance, study skills) so that they can more effectively engage in learning. These are basic conditions necessary for successful teaching to occur. (Allensworth et al., 2009, pp. 30-31)

Likewise, student behavior was identified by 18% of teachers as the most important factor in their decision to leave New York City schools (Boyd et al., 2011). One of the most frequently reported causes for a decline in teachers' capacities for resilience in the longitudinal study by Day et al. (2007) was pupil behavior. New teachers in schools with higher rates of behavioral problems have reported lower rates of satisfaction with teaching (Stockard & Lehman, 2004), and improvements in school safety have been shown to correlate with reductions in teacher turnover in quantitative factor analyses of a New York City school climate surveys (Kraft et al., 2016). This is problematic, as Garcia and Weiss' (2019) recent analysis of National Teacher and Principal Survey data estimates that one in five teachers have experienced threats to their safety and one in eight say they have been physically attacked by a student at their current school.

Fortunately, research indicates that supports can help teachers better manage student behavior and facilitate students' development of social and emotional capacities

for behaving successfully in the classroom. Tsouloupas, Carson, and Matthews (2014) found that teachers' efficacy in handling student misbehavior was correlated with higher levels of professional development in this area. Meta-analyses of research on comprehensive social emotional learning programs have demonstrated the potential of these programs to translate into improved social and emotional outcomes for students. Durlak et al.'s (2011) meta-analysis of 213 studies involving over 270,000 students indicated that students who received SEL programs performed better than students who did not, showing an 11% gain on measures of academic achievement, and similar significant improvements in conduct and discipline, prosocial behavior, and/or emotional distress. More recently, a meta-analysis by Taylor et al. (2017) of 82 school-based, universal social and emotional learning interventions demonstrated such interventions' positive effects on youth development collected even after intervention (six months to 18 years post intervention) in terms of development of social-emotional skills, attitudes, and indicators of well-being.

Kraft et al. (2016) noted the importance teachers in high-poverty schools placed on organizational responses of "systems for order and discipline" and "socioemotional and psychological supports for students." Teachers in successful high-poverty schools felt they could count on administrators and their peers to uphold the school's norms and to enforce important rules. The schools provided access to support services (i.e. a formal support team, dedicated administrative positions) beyond what the teachers themselves could provide. Such whole-school approaches to fostering students' social-emotional learning and teaching and reinforcing norms of positive behavior are critical for leaders

working to ameliorate the negative effects of student behavior and discipline on teacher retention.

Professional learning. For teachers to develop the competence needed to help students succeed in the classroom, ongoing professional learning is an important element of their work. Ladd (2011) found professional development - the sufficiency of funds, resources, and time for teachers to take advantage of professional development opportunities – to be a salient dimension of working conditions influencing teacher retention. In Charner et al.'s (2017) qualitative study of six teacher teams in high-poverty urban schools, they noted the importance of professional learning in high-needs schools, as teachers can face greater challenges in bringing all of their students up to high standards of achievement.

The research is mixed, however, on if professional development experiences positively impact teacher retention. Allensworth et al. (2009) found that teachers' access to professional development was not strongly related to retention. Day (2017) posited that this may be because governments worldwide are persistently emphasizing professional learning intended to promote teachers' productivity without attending to the need to promote teachers' enduring commitment and sense of professional identity. Wei and colleagues' (2009) comprehensive synthesis of professional development research revealed that well-designed opportunities for professional learning are quite rare for teachers in the United States. Wei and colleagues analyzed data from a nationally representative sample of 130,000 teachers to compare the findings on effective professional development with the qualities of the professional development teachers

reported that they had received. They summarized their findings on the conditions that led to powerful professional learning as follows:

> Professional learning can have a powerful effect on teacher skills and knowledge and on student learning if it is sustained over time, focused on important content, and embedded in the work of professional learning communities that support ongoing improvements in teachers' practice. When well-designed, these opportunities help teachers master content, hone teaching skills, evaluate their own and their students' performance, and address changes needed in teaching and learning in their schools. (Wei et al., 2009, p. 7)

Unfortunately, the authors found that such well-designed opportunities were, for educators in the United States, quite rare. Attendance at one-time workshops, conferences, or training sessions are the primary types of in-service professional development for nearly all teachers, while forms of development shown to be more effective are experienced much less often. When teachers' professional learning takes the form of a "social, school-led endeavor" (Day, 2017, p. 110), however, the payoff in teacher competence in the classroom can be substantial. Johnson, Reinhorn, and Simon's (2018) study of teacher teams among 142 teachers and administrators in six high-poverty, high-performing urban schools illustrated how teams are a valuable mechanism for both increased achievement among students and increased job satisfaction and decreased isolation among teachers. Kraft and Papay (2014) found that teachers in Charlotte-Mecklenberg, North Carolina improved at much faster rates in schools with strong professional environments. Teachers' overall effectiveness was more influenced by the professional environment in which they worked then by individual teacher characteristics.

Professional learning cultures can lead to collective efficacy; a belief that in working together teachers can help students succeed. Goddard, Skrla, and Salloum's (2017) mixed

methods study of elementary and middle schools in a large urban district revealed that collective efficacy was systematically associated with not only raising overall student achievement but also with closing achievement gaps; one standard deviation increase in collective efficacy was associated with a 50% reduction of the Black-White achievement gap. Interviews revealed that schools with high collective efficacy had professional learning opportunities that allowed them to view direct observation of teaching and learning in classrooms. Ware and Kitsantas (2007) found similar evidence of a positive relationship between teacher efficacy and teacher commitment. Thus, the research indicates that supports for pro-social student behaviors and professional learning can help teachers more effectively impact student outcomes. Further research is needed to confirm more clear links between forms of professional learning or supports for pro-social student behaviors and teacher retention directly. Yet, it stands to reason that leaders working to address these elements can help increase teachers' effectiveness in the classroom, building their competence and success and fueling their desire to persist in the profession.

Autonomy. Finally, research indicates that the working environments in minority-majority schools can present challenges to a third intrinsic need: autonomy, or the desire to be a causal agent of one's life (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The literature suggests that leaders work to fulfill teachers' need for autonomy by supporting teacher professional identity and agency and by considering best practices in teacher evaluation, development and growth.

Professional Identity and Agency. In Day et al.'s (2007) study of teacher commitment and effectiveness over the span of a career, the authors found teachers' sense of professional identity and agency to stand at the core of their success with

students over the course of their professional lives. Teachers who exercised agency can exert influence and make choices about their work. Leadership practices that enhance professional identity and agency include supporting teachers in sharing decision-making on matters of importance in their schools, providing autonomy for teachers' pedagogical decisions in their classrooms, and fostering innovation in teachers' practice of their work.

Multiple studies have demonstrated the need to give teachers a voice in the decision-making of a school (Johnson et al., 2012; Ladd, 2011; Podolsky et al., 2016). Yet, teachers in low-income schools share in less decision-making than do those in schools with higher-income populations. Ingersoll and Collins (2017), for example, in analyzing TELL survey data from almost 900,000 teachers in 16 states over the course of four years, found that in nine of 11 elements measuring shared decision-making and autonomy, faculty in high-poverty schools rated their school lower than did faculty in low-poverty schools. On school decisions ranging from having input in hiring colleagues to having a role in decision-making around curricula or discipline, teachers in high-poverty schools are given less of a voice.

When teachers are in organizational contexts that grant them greater levels of autonomy, they experience higher levels of satisfaction with their work. Renzulli, Parrott, and Beattie's (2011) analysis of 2,770 public and charter school teachers' SASS data revealed that charter school teachers' greater satisfaction in high-minority schools could be attributed to their greater levels of autonomy. The researchers summarized; "Autonomy has the potential to ameliorate the negative impact of racial mismatch on work attitudes" (p. 21).

Likewise, while representing a much smaller sample size, Glazer's study of "invested leavers" (2018) painted a vivid picture of the detrimental impact of a lack of teacher autonomy. The 25 subjects of Glazer's interviews—some, though not all, of whom came from minority-majority school settings—had left the profession after becoming fully credentialed, teaching for at least three years, and reporting feeling successful in the classroom. A recurring theme of the interviews was frustration with an imposed curriculum and a lack of control over pedagogical decision-making. Summarizing these experiences, Glazer noted how the "administrative support" desired by these teachers differed from that described in earlier sections; what mattered to these teachers was "support for their pedagogical judgment" (p. 66).

Leaders may also positively influence teachers' professional agency by adopting organizational practices that foster innovation. Henkin and Holliman's (2009) surveys of teachers in 13 urban middle schools revealed strong associations between organizational commitment and the organization's support for innovation. Where teachers and teams are encouraged to pursue new ideas in improving outcomes for their students, their organizational commitment increased as they are determined to see change efforts through to successful implementation. In considering how teachers' professional agency might influence their retention decisions, one might consider what Ladd (2011) termed "Expanded roles: empowerment of teachers in terms of expanded responsibilities like selecting instructional materials, setting grading and assessment practices, hiring new teachers, and school improvement planning" (p. 241). Teacher retention can be enhanced with personnel management systems that include a career ladder of increasing responsibility, recognition, and advancement within and beyond the classroom, with

incentives and supports for moving up these steps (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Such a system could improve the retention of "shifters," like the 20% of early-career teachers studied by Olsen and Anderson (2007), who weren't leaving urban education but were leaving full-time classroom teaching to pursue other roles supporting urban schools. While reflective of a small sample size, Olsen and Anderson's argument for the need for "more dynamic, fluid models of careers in urban education" (p. 18) that encompassed "complex and varied plans for the teaching responsibilities to change and grow over time" (p.11) would pertain to many educators in the profession today.

*Evaluation, development, and growth***.** Finally, a consideration of working conditions to support teachers' need for autonomy must encompass a consideration of the organization's approach to helping teachers develop and grow. Teacher evaluation processes hold great potential for fostering either the growth and retention of quality teachers or sowing great teacher dissatisfaction (Johnson et al., 2012; Ladd, 2011; Podolsky et al., 2016).

As early as 2005, Johnson and colleagues observed how mandated curricula and test preparation activities of the high-stakes accountability movement served to "de-skill" teachers, prompting some teachers to seek other workplaces where they could do their best work (Johnson et al., 2005). A decade later, evidence from Podolsky et al. (2016) indicated a rise in teachers citing frustration with high-stakes testing policies as a reason for leaving the profession early. Likewise, an analysis by Kraft, Brunner, Dougherty, and Schwegman (2018) revealed that after states put in place new evaluation and tenure rules, the number of new teaching licenses issued dropped significantly. Even when controlling for a variety of economic factors, the data indicated an average 15% decline in the

number of individuals pursuing a teaching job after the adoption of high-stakes evaluation or repeal of tenure reforms.

Qualitative studies lend some advice for leaders looking to implement the requirements of recent teacher performance evaluation requirements in ways that positively impact teachers' work. In Reinhorn, Johnson, and Simon's (2017) study of how teacher evaluation policies affected teachers and their work in six high-performing, high-poverty schools, they found that the principals of the 142 teacher interviewees prioritized the goal of developing teachers over that of holding them accountable. The principals carefully framed the evaluation process in a growth-focused way, going beyond regulations to provide teachers with more frequent observations, feedback, and support than evaluation policy required. The authors concluded, "Principals must help teachers see opportunity in a comprehensive evaluation system and feel confident about seeking help, taking risks, and acting on good advice. How principals frame the purpose and character of evaluation for their teachers will influence teachers' readiness to benefit from it" (p. 402).

Similarly, Hill and Grossman (2013) cautioned against assuming an accountability system built for evaluation would systematically support teachers in improving their practice. They advocated for the construction of a complementary system for instructional improvement, one that includes instruments that are subject-specific, involves content experts in the process of observation, and provides information that is both accurate and useful for teachers. As Darling-Hammond (2014) articulated, teacher evaluation alone is not enough to develop the professionals our children need. She wrote, "In short, what this country really needs is a conception of teacher evaluation as part of a

teaching and learning system that supports continuous improvement, both for individual teachers and for the profession as a whole" (Darling-Hammond, 2014, p. 5). In schools where leaders are retaining and developing expert teachers of children, they do not mistake evaluation alone as the lever to improve teacher expertise. Evaluation is positioned as one small component of a larger system for teacher learning aimed at helping teachers to continually improve.

Conclusion

Working conditions have great potential to improve teacher retention and include many variables which school leaders can favorably influence. While minority-majority schools are open-system organizations that face many significant challenges, school leaders have been shown to have the potential to build the capacities of organizations and individuals to meet these challenges and create learning environments in which teachers stay and minoritized children succeed.

The literature offers knowledge to define the elements of teacher working conditions most important for study (Johnson et al., 2012; Ladd, 2011; and Podolsky et al., 2016). The research reveals how dissatisfying hygiene factors of insufficient resources of time can lead to attrition at all professional life stages (Day et al., 2007) and in idealistic early-career teachers (Olsten & Anderson, 2007). It illustrates see how challenges to teachers' need for relatedness can be addressed with leadership practices focused on improving working condition elements of a shared social justice mission (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011; Day et al., 2007; Ronfeldt et al., 2016); connectedness with families (Allenswoth et al., 2009; Kraft et al., 2015); and collegial relationships (Day et al., 2007; Futernick, 2007; Johnson et al., 2012; Pogodzinski et al., 2013).

The literature indicates that teachers' need for competence is challenged by student behavior (Allensorth et al., 2011; Boyd et al., 2011; Day et al., 2007; Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Ladd, 2011; Moore-Johnson et al., 2012; Podolsky et al., 2016) and can be enhanced with professional learning (Ladd, 2011). It relays how teachers' need for autonomy is challenged in high-poverty schools (Ingersoll & Collins, 2017), but that leadership practices that enhance teachers' professional identity and agency can elevate their investment in their work (Henkin & Holliman, 2009; Glazer, 2018; Renzulli et al., 2011). The research suggests that teachers might be better retained under conditions that value their development over their accountability (Podolsky et al., 2016; Reinhorn et al., 2017) and offer a career ladder for their ongoing growth (Ladd, 2011; Olsen & Anderson, 2007).

The research offers less to illustrate how, exactly, working conditions interact in suburban schools. Most of this knowledge of minority-majority schools has been generated through research in urban settings. It is not known how this research might translate to a suburban setting, where the socioeconomic demographics may be similar but less concentrated; where racial demographics may be similar but more diverse and having more recently experienced transformation. There are dynamics unique to Corolla County's character as a suburban district that may influence its schools in different ways: from the fact that its parents undergo some of the longest daily commutes in the country, leaving less time available to spend with their families and school communities; to lacking external partners and organizational expertise for meeting the needs of ethnically and linguistically diverse students. Further study of suburban districts is needed to better understand ways to mitigate dynamics of decline in suburban districts and understand

what particular expertise and support would be most effective for addressing opportunity gaps in these contexts (Eddy-Spicer, Anderson, & Perrone, 2017).

It is also not known what the quantitative significance of individual working condition elements might be, as many of these elements are intertwined and can be difficult to assess discretely. At the same time, the literature lacks a complete qualitative picture of the ways in which various working condition elements interact with one another, the ways in which they are experienced by teachers, and the processes by which they are impacted by leaders in case studies where positive working conditions have been established in minority-majority schools.

There is still much to be learned about the working condition elements that matter most to teachers and how they are most effectively influenced by leaders. The studies reviewed here demonstrate that valuable knowledge of working conditions is built through both quantitative and qualitative research. More mixed-methods research is needed to ascertain the relative quantitative importance of various working condition factors, as well as to qualitatively explore the nuance of working conditions as they are shaped and experienced in schools. There is a need for research that draws upon empirical frameworks of effective leadership practices more generally in order to more coherently study how such practices play out in minority-majority schools specifically. Finally, there is a need to explore how a body of research primarily based in high-poverty urban schools translates to minority-majority suburban school settings.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study sought to build knowledge about the ways in which leaders can favorably influence working conditions in minority-majority schools and improve retention of teachers. In this chapter, I first describe the conceptual framework that shaped this study. Next, I explain the research questions and methods that were informed by this conceptual framework. Following this discussion of methodology, I discuss the selection of the study site and participants. Finally, this chapter discusses my data collection tools, data analysis procedures, and efforts to maximize trustworthiness and minimize bias.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study begins with the premise that teacher retention decisions are influenced by the conditions in which they work—and that school leadership is a primary driving force in shaping these conditions. To understand *how* school leaders exercise influence over the elements of school working conditions, I drew upon the well-established leadership framework of Leithwood and Louis (2012). For the purposes of this study, I focused on the interplay between two of Leithwood and Louis' four domains of leadership practices that are found to lead to student learning; those of *redesigning the organization* and *developing people*. As Leithwood and Louis emphasized, a narrow view on improving the instructional program would fail to capture

the complexity of the organizational and human resource forces upon which such instructional improvement rests (Leithwood & Louis, 2012).

As shown in Figure 3, these two leadership practices of redesigning the organization and developing people overlap to form the organizational environment that shapes—and is shaped by—teachers' work. This organizational environment is not, of course, impervious to the external environment, but is an open system shaped by the forces at play in the macrosystem of the larger society (Scott, 1975/2003). These two leadership practices are considered in terms of theoretical frameworks of human motivation theory—What is it that drives a human's desire to persist in one's work? Herzberg's (1968) Two-factor and Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-determination theories shape a foundation for this thinking. The conceptual framework for this study categorizes elements like time and resources as basic hygiene factors, while other elements are considered in terms of Deci and Ryan's (2000) innate psychological needs of relatedness (the will to interact with, be connected to, and experience caring for others), competence (the drive to control outcomes and experience mastery), and autonomy (the desire to be a causal agent of one's life).

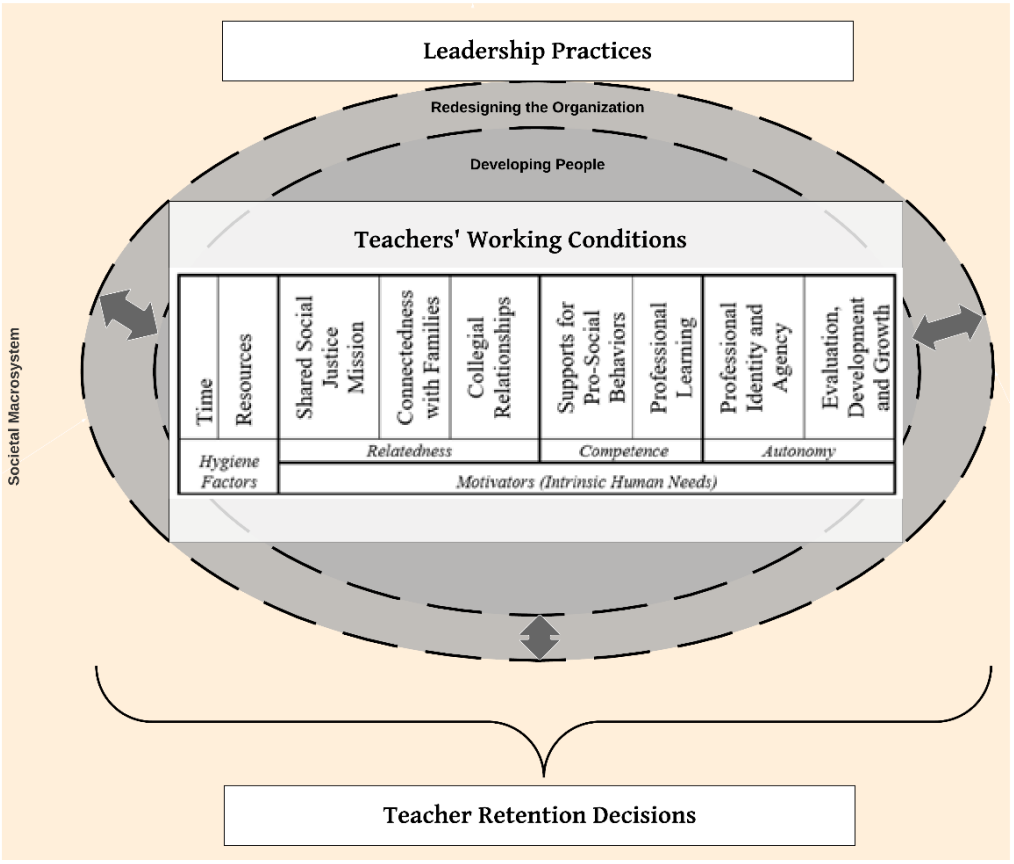


Figure 3. Conceptual Framework of Leadership Practices' Influence on Teacher Retention Decisions, Mediated by Teachers' Working Conditions.

Finally, at the core of the framework that defines this study are nine elements that serve to operationalize the term "working conditions." Drawing from three prominent studies in the field (Johnson et al., 2012; Ladd, 2011; and Podolsky et al., 2016), an inductive process of mapping themes of salient elements of working conditions (Appendix A) yielded the following nine elements as critical components defining the conditions of teachers' work: resources; time; collegial relationships; shared social justice mission; connectedness with families; supports for pro-social student behaviors; professional learning; professional identity and agency; and evaluation, growth and development. Organized by the way in which they support the drivers of human motivation described above (hygiene factors, factors that support relatedness, factors that

support competence, factors that support autonomy), all these elements lie under the influence of school leadership.

The conceptualization guiding this study, therefore, is supported by a framework of theories of school leadership practices, organizational theory, human motivation theory, and literature on teacher retention and working conditions. As the framework shows, leaders might optimize teacher working conditions to inspire teachers' greatest motivations by nurturing an environment that provides hygiene factors and supports the three intrinsic needs of relatedness, competence and autonomy. When such are the conditions in which teachers work, the research suggests that teacher retention outcomes in minority-majority schools are improved.

Role of the Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework supports this study in several ways. First, it defines and operationalizes the construct of *working conditions* in elements that are grounded in empirical research. These elements, so defined, come to serve as factors that will serve as the focus of investigation in survey and interview questions. Second, this conceptual framework serves to bound the scope of this study, delimiting the investigation to the study of two leadership practices as they are related to nine particular working condition elements.

Meanwhile, the framework situates teacher working conditions visually as they exist in the organization of a school: at the intersection of the school's people, the structures of the organization, and the forces of the surrounding society. This visual suggests an interconnected holding environment through which leaders and researchers can see the forces influencing conditions of work for teachers in a school.

Finally, this conceptual framework provides a logic model grounded in foundational theoretical constructs. In so doing, it provides one map for "seeing the system;" a perspective Bryk and colleagues (2015) argue is necessary for identifying drivers that might leverage high-impact change. In acting upon such fundamental theoretical constructs, continuous improvement efforts might be better able to address root causes of this problem of practice in ways that can truly result in lasting, systemic change.

Research Questions

The research in this study was intended to better understand teachers' working conditions—as well as the perceptions of leaders in positions to influence those conditions—in one minority-majority school. In so doing, I hoped to elucidate leadership practices that could positively influence working conditions in this school division and to contribute to the literature on teacher retention in minority-majority schools more generally. To this end, I sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the nature of teachers' working conditions in the subject school, as described by leavers, stayers, and leaders?
2. What are teachers' perceptions of the influence of leadership practices on working conditions in the subject school?
3. What are school and district leaders' perceptions of their influence on teacher working conditions in the subject school?

The first question, "What is the nature of teachers' working conditions described by study participants in the subject school?" was designed to establish a basis of understanding the phenomenon of interest: the world of teachers' working conditions in

the context of this minority-majority school. In investigating the nature of working conditions as described by leavers, stayers, and leader, I sought to understand and illustrate the phenomenon of working conditions in this context in a full and rich way, providing a record of the daily lived experiences of several individuals and groups (Hays & Singh, 2012). The second research question, "What are teachers' perceptions of the influence of leadership practices on working conditions in the subject school?" was intended to understand how the working conditions outlined in Question One were related to leadership practices, from the perspective of the teachers.

The third question, "What are school and district leaders' perceptions of their influence on teacher working conditions in the subject school?" was designed to better understand the opportunities and challenges in establishing positive teacher working conditions from the perspectives of those whom the literature suggests have substantial potential to do so: leaders. In interviews with school and district leaders, I hoped to better understand how (if at all), leaders viewed their role in influencing the working conditions in the division's schools. What (if anything), did leaders perceive as elements that of importance to the working conditions in the school? What practices (if any), did leaders employ to influence working conditions for teachers? What did leaders see as challenges to establishing positive conditions for teachers' work?

Research Design

This study was conducted as a mixed-methods investigation of a single site case study. The case of study was a minority-majority elementary school in Corolla County in which teacher attrition had been an ongoing challenge. As Hays and Singh (2012) argue, a case study provides an opportunity to examine a phenomenon as it exists in its natural

context; a way to document life stories and events. In studying the case of teacher working conditions at Freewill Elementary School, I had the opportunity to study individuals and processes of a bounded system (Creswell, 2006). This non-experimental design occurred in a naturalistic setting and was not intended to be generalized to the larger population but, rather, to provide a detailed account with thorough description such that others might find transferability from the study to settings of their own work (Hays & Singh, 2012).

In studying this school both with quantitative and qualitative methods, I drew upon a wide range of complementary tools to provide the most comprehensive picture of the case (Borland, 2001). The methodological design can be best described as a *sequential explanatory* approach, in which initial quantitative data collection and analysis were followed by qualitative data collection and analysis to more fully interpret the broader quantitative findings (Hays & Singh, 2012); illuminating a story with greater depth and clearer quality than could be seen through numerical statistics alone.

The use of these tools involved a study of three phases. In the first phase of the study, a quantitative survey of teachers about their working conditions helped determine the degree to which teachers—both stayers and leavers—perceived experiencing various elements of working conditions in the study site school environment (Research Question One).

Results of survey data were used to inform the study's subsequent phases: qualitative interviews. Semi-structured individual interviews with teachers helped paint a more robust picture of the nature of the conditions of teachers' work (Research Question One) and their perceptions of leadership practices that influenced these conditions

(Research Question Two). Meanwhile, interviews with school and district leaders provided additional insight as to how they perceive their agency and challenges in influencing teacher working conditions (Research Question Three).

Participants

Site Selection

The site selected for this study was a large elementary school serving grades K-5. (As stated previously, school and district names have been changed to pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the participants; for purposes of this study the school is named "Freewill Elementary.")

Freewill Elementary served as an "information-rich case" (Hays & Singh, 2012) worthy of study for the detailed insight it could provide in addressing the stated research questions. It was a site of both a high-minority student population and a high level of attrition among its teachers.

Of Freewill Elementary's 728 students, 89% of its students identified as students of color. Seventy-eight percent identified as African-American and 9% identified as having two or more races. Ten percent identified as Hispanic. The school served many students who presented significant needs: 43% participated in the Free and Reduced Meals (FARMs) program and 12% had documented learning disabilities. While less than 5% of students were limited in their English proficiency, this was an emerging population that was growing rapidly in the school (Maryland State Report Card, 2019).

Among the schools' yearly staff of 40 teachers, high turnover rates had resulted in a staff of many novice educators. In the 2019-2020 school year, approximately one-third of the staff was untenured (having less than three years of teaching experience). Its

attrition rate—15% in 2016-2017, 23% in 2017-2018, and 25% in 2018-2019—had continuously fallen above the county average. In the classrooms of these novice teachers, students struggled to achieve. In 2016-2018, no more than 40% of students met or exceeded expectations on any state English Language Arts or Mathematics assessment (excluding third grade English Language Arts in 2018, where the pass rate was 52%) (Maryland State Report Card, 2019). The school leadership team, meanwhile, had remained relatively stable over the past three years. The same principal and vice principal led the school for the three years from which participants were selected for this study, with a second vice principal being added to help alleviate student behavior concerns at the school in the year 2018-2019.

Participants

Within the bounds of the site, a variety of sampling methods were employed. In Phase One of the study, the teacher survey, sampling was not used. Instead, I reached out to the entire population of the school site: approximately 20 leavers who taught at the site in school years 2018-2019, 2017-2018, or 2016-2017 who left before 2019-2020 (excluding those who retired), and approximately 30 stayers from the school year 2018-2019 who remain at the study site in the School Year 2019-2020.

From this, in Phase Two of the study I selected a sample of five stayers and five leavers. Seeking maximum variation in teacher experiences and backgrounds (Hays & Singh, 2012), I determined five interview subjects from both populations (those who have stayed and those who have left), selecting participants with differing years of experience, differing durations of time spent at Freewill, differing grade levels taught, and differing career paths following Freewill.

Sampling for Phase Three, that of school and district leader interviews, consisted of a convenience sample of available leaders from the school and district leadership team members who were available and interested in participating.

Electronic Survey

The first source of data for my study was an online survey of teachers—both stayers and leavers—from the study site. These data helped to characterize the nature of the working conditions in the school; information that helped to address Research Question One. Participants' responses on a four-point Likert scale indicated how strongly teachers perceived having experienced various elements that have been shown, in the literature, to typify positive working conditions in minority-majority schools.

Survey design. I designed a survey instrument to gather information about the conditions in which teachers spend their working days. In designing the survey, I worked to maximize the validity of the instrument in several ways: utilizing constructs that were supported by the literature; utilizing items drawn from a number of widely used existing surveys; incorporating feedback from practicing teachers and school leaders; and integrating input from an expert panel of professors in the field.

The survey included 44 statements written to operationalize teachers' experience of nine elements of working conditions in a school. These nine elements and the experiences that define them were derived from the literature review outlined in Chapter Two and the subsequent conceptual framework. The elements include: resources; time; collegial relationships; shared social justice mission; connectedness with families; supports for pro-social student behaviors; professional learning; professional identity and agency; and evaluation, growth, and development (see survey instrument in Appendix D).

The survey item statements were informed by a variety of existing surveys. Eighteen of the items derive from TELL (Teaching Empowering, Leading, and Learning), a widely used statewide survey of working conditions in K-12 public schools developed by The New Teacher Center. Originally developed in 2008, TELL has been utilized by over 1.5 million educators in 18 states (The New Teacher Center, 2019).

Additional survey items were curated from other sources, and from my personal experience as an educator, to provide a broader picture of some of the working condition elements in my conceptual framework that were under-addressed in common surveys like TELL. Learning Forward's Standards Assessment Inventory of professional learning (SAI), an instrument designed to measure the alignment of a system's professional learning to the 2011 Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2016), provided six valuable items for gaining understanding of teachers' experiences with professional learning.

Hawley and Wolf's Diversity Responsive Principal Tool (2011), promoted by Teaching Tolerance and the University Council for Educational Administration, provided nine important, actionable items to address issues of equity and diversity that I felt were under-represented in TELL. Likewise, Dusenbury, Calin, Domitrovich, and Weissberg's 2015 CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning)'s brief—*What does evidence-based instruction in social and emotional learning actually look like in practice? A brief on findings from CASEL's program reviews*—helped provide three items to operationalize a vision of best practices in schools supporting students' social and emotional learning.

Taken together, these items provide a picture of what practices and actions the research suggests would characterize quality working conditions in minority-majority schools. Items were field tested among a sampling of graduate students and teacher colleagues and reviewed by an expert panel of professors in the field. Statements were re-worded for clarity and efforts were made to shorten the length of the instrument.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The second source of data for this study was semi-structured interviews. The protocol (see Appendix I) for the interviews with teachers (both stayers and leavers) was designed to provide a thick narrative of working conditions (Research Question One) and their perceptions of leadership practices influencing those conditions (Research Question Two). Similarly, a protocol of open-ended questions for leaders provided insight into their sensemaking around various elements of working conditions and how they perceived their agency and challenges in influencing these working conditions (Research Question Three).

The interview protocol served as a guide and starting point for the interview experience, with follow-up probes that encouraged richer detail. As Hays and Singh (2012) explain, the benefits of qualitative research lie in giving participants an opportunity to describe what is meaningful or important using their own words; to gain participants' stories. The interview protocol was shared with participants ahead of time and focused on behavioral/experience questions: questions designed to garner a thick description of what occurred (rather than why) and to complete a picture of sensory experiences lived by participants (Hays & Singh, 2012). Interviews probed for participants' interpretations of statistical findings from the survey of Phase One and

sought input on their experiences—or lack of experiences—with the nine elements of quality working conditions derived from the literature.

Data Collection Process

The surveys were administered through Qualtrics software that participants completed anonymously. The survey began with a short paragraph about the purpose of the study and included an informed consent agreement (see Appendix C). The survey was open for a period of two weeks in late November. I reached out to stayers directly with their work email addresses located on the school website. I located most of the leavers through Facebook and sent them the secure survey link through the private messenger application. Following initial contact, participants were issued two reminders with the Qualtrics survey link.

The interview data were collected in December, following completion of the survey. Interview data were kept confidential but were not anonymous, as participants' identities were known to me. All interviews were conducted over Zoom except that with the school leader, which occurred at the study site. Teachers and leaders were provided an informed consent agreement before participating (see Appendix G). Interview data were stored as recorded audio files and transcribed using Temi, an online transcription service. The files and transcriptions were stored on a password-protected computer. Each interview transcript was named using a naming scheme that identified the interviewee with initials and date, but results were reported anonymously.

Data Analysis Process

Electronic Survey

In analyzing the survey data from stayers and leavers, I calculated descriptive statistics to analyze survey data in ways that described the measures of central tendency and distribution of the experiences indicated from teachers' responses (Ravid, 2015). These statistics attempted to describe teachers' degree of agreement with various statements about experiences with nine elements in their working environment.

Utilizing these descriptive statistics to learn from trends and contrasting or interesting responses from stayers and leavers, I summarized and organized data teachers shared. As no pilot study was done to predetermine whether items in any one section could hang together as single constructs, such combining of survey items was done only in an exploratory way.

Semi-Structured Interviews

For the analysis of the qualitative data in this study, I simultaneously collected and analyzed data (Hays & Singh, 2012). Utilizing an iterative process of memoing and coding as described by Bailey (2007), I employed a recursive process of reduction and expansion of the amassed data into summaries, codes, patterns and themes. I recorded field notes to capture noteworthy aspects of participants' affect throughout the interview and engaged in reflective memoing within 24 hours of the conversation.

The interview data was analyzed with the assistance of MAXQDA software; a secure digital platform that supports qualitative and mixed-methods researchers with data management, excerpting, coding, and analysis of data. I utilized a structured coding frame for my coding scheme, employing etic codes derived from my conceptual

framework while remaining committed to seeking alternative explanations and emic codes emerging from the data themselves. In coding, I sought evidence of various qualities of working conditions described in the literature (e.g. supports for students' pro-social behaviors, professional learning), and looked to characterize teachers' and leaders' feelings of their experience with those elements as negative or positive. Additionally, I compared practices and perspectives across teachers and leaders. A code list can be found in Appendix J.

Researcher Bias

As stated earlier in this capstone, the focus of this study was on a problem of practice critical to student success in my setting. As such, I conducted this research in the role of a scholar-practitioner, and there are several biases that come with this position. These inherent biases were both an asset and a disadvantage in my research. As Hays and Singh (2012) note, there is bias inherent in any research, and quality research can only arise when such potential biases are openly acknowledged and efforts are made to improve the trustworthiness of the research.

The selected school of study is one at which I worked for three years. This experience, along with my continued work as a practitioner in the school division of study, means that I had many preexisting relationships with the people, processes and environment. I knew many of the participants personally and had felt the impacts of the school's teacher retention problem of practice intimately, both as the school's reading teacher and as a parent. While I was no longer a parent or staff member of the school, these previous relationships had the potential to influence both the way in which participants responded to me and the way in which I interpreted their results.

Researcher Ethics and Trustworthiness

I designed this study with several measures to minimize bias and maximize the trustworthiness of my results. Primary among these were the triangulation of multiple points of data to inform the results. My understanding of the case was balanced amidst survey data, leaver and stayer interview data, and school and district leader data, representing triangulation both of methods and of sources. In triangulating methods, descriptive survey statistics were analyzed in relation to teachers' qualitative descriptions of working conditions in interviews, and vice versa. In triangulating sources, data from leavers was considered in relation to the data gained to lend the perspective of those who were stayers. Likewise, interview data of teachers was considered in relation to that of school and district leaders, with leaders' perspectives reciprocally considered in light of the data shared by teachers. By triangulating data in this way, I worked to compensate for limitations of any one method and seek for validity of findings across multiple stakeholders and forums (Patton, 2002).

I worked, additionally, to maximize objectivity by reducing bias in my interviewing and my data analysis. In utilizing interview protocols that were semi-structured, I outlined a clear set of interview questions and sought feedback from fellow researchers to ensure the protocol does not reflect any prejudices I may have held as the researcher. Use of these clearly outlined questions when interviewing helped me avoid leading questions. Later in the process I also worked to reduce bias when I conducted my data analysis. Practices like peer debriefing—enlisting the perspective of a disinterested fellow researcher to review data analysis and coding decisions (Patton, 2002) helped to

bring multiple perspectives to bring understanding to the data and guard against bias in my own internal processing.

Summary

This study was intended to generate knowledge about leaders' influence on working conditions in hopes of improving teacher retention in minority-majority schools. The mixed-methods single case study of a large, suburban minority-majority elementary school aimed to gain data from leavers, stayers, and school and district leaders about the conditions in which teachers work, teachers' perceptions of leadership practices that influence that work, and leaders' perspectives on their ability to influence those conditions of work. Analyzing survey and interview data considering a conceptual framework of nine working condition elements aligned with human motivation theory, findings will help inform leadership practices that can influence environments in which teachers are driven to persist in their work.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

To improve the educational trajectories of the historically minoritized students of color in Corolla County Public Schools, the organization's leaders must—despite the severe national teaching shortage—foster working environments that help to retain quality educators. The purpose of this study was to better understand the nature of teachers' working conditions and better understand the ways in which leaders might favorably influence the conditions of that work through an exploratory case study of one school in Corolla County: Freewill Elementary.

This capstone project employed a mixed-methods design deployed in three phases. Phase One included electronic surveys of teachers (both leavers and stayers). This was followed, in Phase Two, by semi-structured interviews with teachers (both leavers and stayers) and, in Phase Three, by two semi-structured interviews with a school and a district leader. Data from these sources were sought to answer the following research questions:

1. Research Question 1 (RQ1): What is the nature of teachers' working conditions in the subject school, as described by leavers, stayers, and leaders?
2. Research Question 2 (RQ2): What are teachers' perceptions of the influence of leadership practices on working conditions in the subject school?
3. Research Question 3 (RQ3): What are school and district leaders' perceptions of their influence on teacher working conditions in the subject school?

A description of findings that emerged from analysis of these data will be presented in this chapter. Findings are presented in terms of research question and further catalogued and explained in terms of the constructs described in the conceptual framework. Quantitative survey data from Phase One of the study are presented first, followed by qualitative data from semi-structured interviews in Phases Two and Three.

Research Question One (RQ1): What is the Nature of Teachers' Working Conditions in the Subject School, as Described by Leavers, Stayers, and Leaders?

Utilizing the construct of working conditions derived from the literature reviewed in Chapter Two of this study, Research Question One sought to capture a picture of the conditions in which teachers at the study school conducted their daily work. Quantitative data from a survey of leavers and stayers, followed by qualitative data from interviews with leavers, stayers, and school leaders, informed the picture that emerged in response to RQ1.

Phase One Findings: Electronic Survey

In Phase One of this study, stayers and leavers from the study site were asked to share their perceptions about the conditions in which they work(ed) at the study site. The survey data were collected to address research question one: "What is the nature of teachers' working conditions in the subject school, as described by leavers, stayers, and leaders?" Specifically, I sought to identify strong positive or negative perceptions of various elements of teachers' working environment and to compare the responses of stayers and leavers. In this section, I will summarize the participants in the electronic survey and report themes from the survey responses on overall scales as well as on individual survey items.

Survey participants. There were 20 leavers from the study school site over the three-year span targeted by the study (those employed at the school in the school years 2018-2019, 2017-2018, or 2016-2017 who left before 2019-2020, excluding those who left for retirement). Of these 20 leavers, 12 completed the survey, representing a response rate of 60%. Similarly, the school site population included 30 stayers from this time period (those employed in the school year 2018-2019 who remained at the study site in the school year 2019-2020); as 19 of these teachers responded, the response rate for the electronic survey of stayers was 63%. Altogether, 31 of 50 potential participants responded; a response rate of 62%. Participants had the option of selecting "not-applicable" for any statement; therefore, there are not exactly 31 responses for every item in the survey.

A breakdown of the respondents' background information is illustrated in Tables 1, 2 and 3. This information is based upon self-reporting of survey participants. As Tables 1 and 2 illustrate, of the twelve "Leavers" who participated in the survey, six were still in the district but employed at other schools; five were teaching in other school districts; and one was taking a leave of absence from work.

Table 1
Current Place of Employment for Leavers

Employment Status	Leavers
Another school in Corolla County	6 (50%)
Another school, not in Corolla County	5 (42%)
Taking a leave of absence of work	1 (8%)
A career outside of K-12 education	0 (0%)
Total	**12 (100%)**

Table 2
Roles of Teachers Completing Working Conditions Survey

Most Recent Grade Level Taught at Freewill	Leavers	Stayers	All
K-2	7 (58%)	6 (32%)	13 (42%)
3-5	2 (17%)	9 (47%)	11 (35%)
Related Arts	1 (8%)	2 (10.5%)	3 (10%)
Special Education	2 (17%)	2 (10.5%)	4 (13%)
Total	**12 (39%)**	**19 (61%)**	**31 (100%)**

As shown in Table 4, all but two of the leavers had worked at Freewill for at least four years before their departure. Forty-two percent had taught grades K-2 in their final year at Freewill, while 17% had taught grades 3-5, 8% had taught related arts, and 17% had taught special education. All but one respondent identified their ethnicity as White/Caucasian (Table 3).

Similarly, of the 19 “Stayers” who participated in the survey, four had worked at Freewill for more than 10 years prior to the year of the study. Six stayers had worked at Freewill for 4-10 years, seven stayers had worked for 2-3 years, and two had worked at the school for only one year prior to the year of the study. Of all these, 32% were K-2 teachers, 47% taught 3-5, 10.5% were related arts teachers, and 10.5% taught special education. Everyone identified their ethnicity as White/Caucasian.

Table 3
Race/Ethnicity of Teachers Completing Working Conditions Survey

Race/Ethnicity	Leavers	Stayers	All
White/Caucasian	11 (92%)	19 (100%)	30 (97%)
Two or More Races	1 (8%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)
Total	**12 (39%)**	**19 (61%)**	**31 (100%)**

Table 4
Years Spent at Freewill by Teachers Completing Working Conditions Survey

Years Spent Working at Freewill	Leavers	Stayers	All
1	1 (8%)	2 (11%)	3 (10%)
2-3	1 (8%)	7 (37%)	8 (26%)
4-10	9 (75%)	6 (32%)	15 (48%)
10+	1 (8%)	4 (21%)	5 (16%)
Total	**12 (39%)**	**19 (61%)**	**31 (100%)**

Clearly, the total of 31 participants in the electronic survey represent a limited sample size. As such, the descriptive statistics shared below are representative only of those surveyed and are not intended to be generalizable to a broader population.

Data gathered from the survey's 44 statements helped address Research Question One: "What is the nature of teacher working conditions at the subject school?" As discussed in Chapter Three, participants were asked to indicate, on a four-point Likert scale, how strongly teachers perceived having experienced various elements that the literature had shown to be attributes of positive working conditions in minority-majority schools. These elements included: resources; time; collegial relationships; a shared social justice mission; connectedness with families; supports for pro-social student behaviors; professional learning; professional identity and agency; and evaluation, growth and development (see survey instrument in Appendix D). The scale for quantifying participants' responses to statements about their working conditions was composed of average responses on four Likert-type statements, ranging from "strongly disagree," with a numerical value of one, to "strongly agree," represented by a numerical value of four. Figure 4 shows the average ratings of stayers and leavers of the 44 statements representing the nine elements of working conditions. These findings are discussed below, first in terms of overall findings and then in terms of each of the four areas of

human motivation detailed in the conceptual framework for this study: hygiene factors, and elements influencing teachers' needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy.

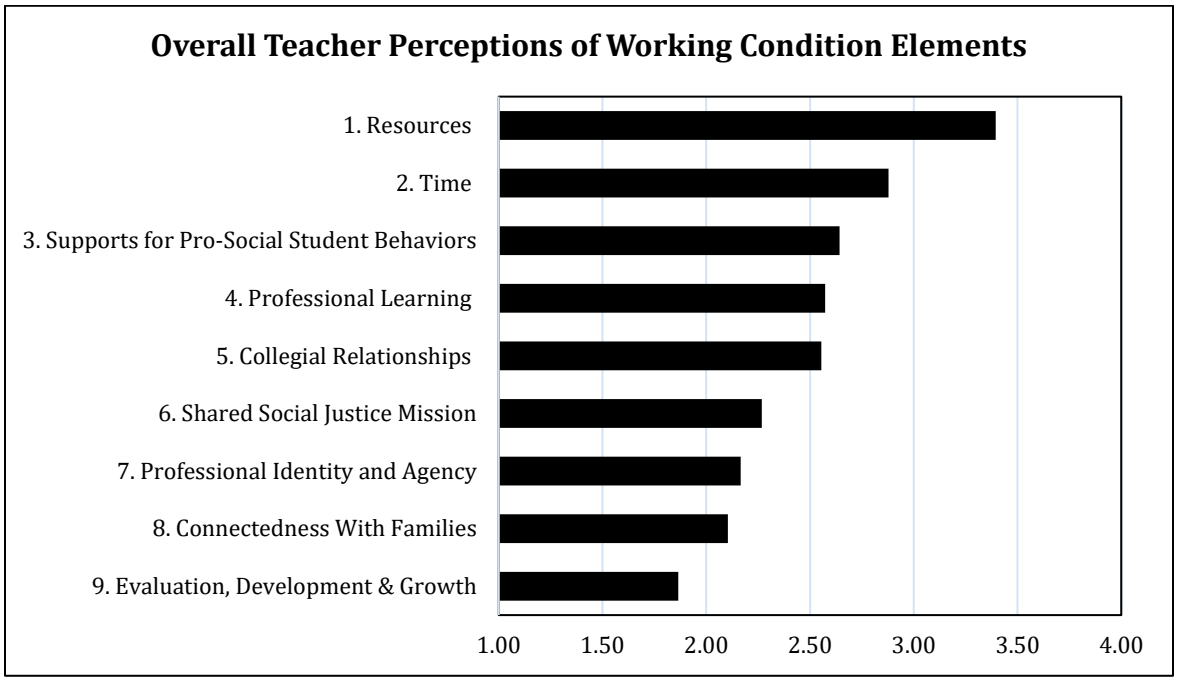


Figure 4. Average Teacher Perceptions of Nine Working Condition Elements.

Summary of overall scale scores. Overall, teachers' perceptions of their working conditions were more positive than negative. Mean scale score responses can be seen in Figure 4. Teachers' perceptions were more positive than negative (50% or more of the total participants indicating agreement or strong agreement) for five of the nine working condition elements: resources (mean scale score of 3.40), time (2.88), supports for pro-social student behaviors (2.64), professional learning (2.57), and collegial relationships (2.56). Teachers indicated more negative than positive perceptions (50% or more of the total participants indicating disagreement or strong disagreement) for four of the nine

elements: shared social justice mission (2.27), professional identity and agency (2.17), connectedness with families (2.11), and evaluation, development and growth (1.87).

Overall, as illustrated by Figure 5, teachers' perceptions of their working condition elements did not vary significantly between stayers and leavers. The area of greatest difference between leavers and stayers was in *connectedness with families*, in which there was a 0.29 difference in the mean scale scores of stayers and leavers, with stayers indicating higher levels of agreement than leavers when it came to statements regarding connectedness with students' families. Stayers also indicated more positive perceptions than leavers did of the school having a shared social justice mission (a 0.11 higher mean scale score for stayers than for leavers), and of their evaluation, development and growth (a 0.05 higher mean scale score for responses of stayers than of leavers). Differences between leavers and stayers were nominal in the areas of professional identity and agency (a 0.01 difference), supports for pro-social student behaviors (a 0.02 difference), and time (a 0.02 difference).

For two of the working condition elements, stayers indicated lower levels of agreement than leavers. Around collegial relationships, stayers' perceptions reflected a mean scale score 0.07 less than the mean indicated by the responses of those who had left, and in resources, stayers indicated a mean scale score 0.27 less than the mean indicated by the responses of those who had left.

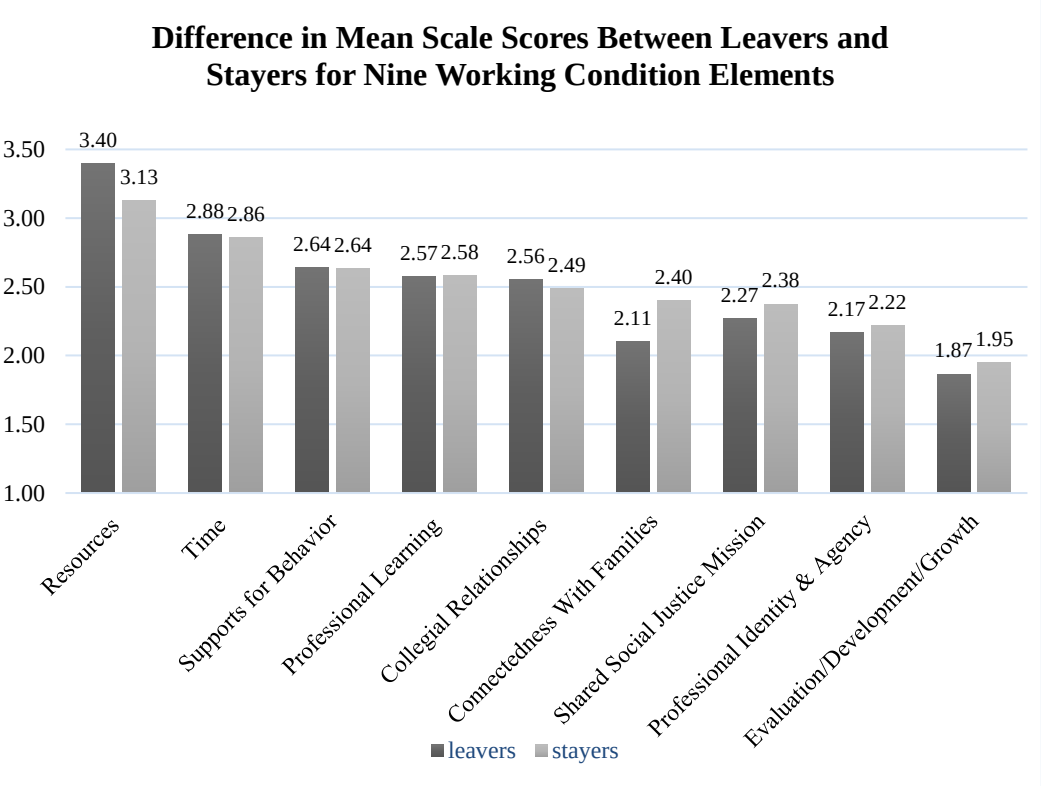


Figure 5. Difference in Mean Scale Scores of Leavers and Stayers' Perception of Nine Working Condition Elements.

Hygiene elements. The first set of survey statements were posed to understand two elements: *time* and *resources.* As discussed in the literature review of the previous chapter, time and resources are two factors of working conditions that were found to have high correlations with teacher mobility decisions. As time and resources constitute baseline satisfiers rather than high-level motivators they were classified as "Hygiene Elements" (Herzberg, 1968).

Under the category of Hygiene Elements, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with four statements related to resources and five statements related to time. A full summary of responses related to hygiene factors can be found in Appendix K. Of the nine working condition constructs surveyed in this study, these two hygiene elements of resources and time were the highest-ranked by teachers. On average,

teachers' responses in this category fell above the median of 2.5, noting agreement or strong agreement with statements about time and resources.

Of the nine items considered under hygiene factors, the most positively perceived were those of resources (office equipment, supplies, and instructional technology). One hundred percent of leavers agreed or strongly agreed that they had access to the resources needed to do their job well. Interestingly, this was only the case for 79% of stayers. The two least positively perceived statements in the category of hygiene elements were those regarding time. Only one teacher, a stayer, strongly agreed that "The non-instructional time provided for teachers in my school is sufficient," and that "I am allowed to focus on educating students with minimal interruptions." Over 50% of leavers and 50% of stayers disagreed or strongly disagreed with these statements.

Elements influencing teacher relatedness. Having analyzed the survey statements pertaining to hygiene factors of resources and time, I next considered high-impact working condition elements that were categorized in their relation to three innate human motivational needs: relatedness, competence and autonomy as described in the literature review of Chapter Three. The next survey section, then—that of elements concerning teachers' need for relatedness—included statements regarding teachers' relationships with colleagues, their connectedness with their students' families, and their inclusion in a shared mission of social justice work in serving historically marginalized students.

As evidenced by the data in Appendix L, teachers' highest ratings in this area were for their sense of relatedness to their colleagues; all leavers and most stayers agreed that their colleagues "cared about me as a person" and "I enjoyed working with my

colleagues." The items in this section with the lowest ratings, on the other hand, were for two "Shared Social Justice Mission" items regarding race: over half of teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed that, "My prescribed curriculum helps all students understand the unique historical and contemporary experiences of different racial and ethnic groups," and "My school leaders or colleagues facilitate open conversations about race."

It is notable that one of the three working condition elements explored under relatedness—connectedness to families—was the second lowest-ranked working condition element of the nine overall. The average scale score for connectedness to families was 2.11, reflecting more disagreement than agreement with statements like, "I was provided with time, resources, opportunities, and encouragement to get to know my students' families," and "I was provided with time and resources to help me connect with the families of my students who might feel uncomfortable or face barriers in coming to school."

Equally notable, however, was how "Connectedness with Families" was the area that showed the greatest difference between stayers and leavers. Leavers had a mean scale score of agreement with these statements that was 0.29 points lower than the scale score of the stayers.

Elements influencing teacher competence. The survey elements concerning teachers' innate motivational need for competence included five statements regarding supporting students in exhibiting pro-social behaviors and six statements regarding teachers' professional learning experiences. After the two hygiene factors of resources and time, it is these two areas—supports for pro-social behaviors and professional

learning—that received the highest scale scores (2.64 and 2.57, respectively) among the working condition elements studied.

These relatively high ratings for pro-social student behaviors was rather surprising, given how much student behavior was described as a challenge in the qualitative interviews. In the survey, however, while three leavers disagreed and two leavers strongly disagreed that "The classroom environment in which I work is safe," most other stayers and leavers agreed that their classroom environments were, indeed, safe. Notably, one of the survey statements with which stayers expressed much higher agreement than leavers was under this element of student behavior. Mean scale scores of stayers (2.58) were much higher than those of leavers (1.83) in agreeing with the statement that "My school places a priority on teaching students social and emotional behaviors and skills."

The highest rated statement in the competence section was with regards to professional learning: eighty-three percent of leavers agreed that "I participated in professional development that was valuable to me." Sixty-eight percent of stayers indicated agreement or strong agreement with this statement as well. Nevertheless, while teachers reported participation in professional development that was valuable to them, the two lowest-ranked items in this section were also related to professional learning. Only 24% of leavers and 31% of stayers reported having opportunities to "share, observe, and discuss one another's teaching;" opportunities that have been shown to be highly impactful forms of professional development (Wei, 2009). Additionally, the most poorly rated statement in this section was regarding new teacher induction; only 26% of teachers reported agreement or strong agreement that "The induction, mentoring, and/or coaching

experiences I received as a new teacher here were helpful to me when I was beginning my work." Agreement with this statement was reported by only one teacher in the leavers group.

Elements influencing teacher autonomy. The survey elements concerning teachers' innate motivational need for autonomy included six statements regarding teachers' professional identity and agency, and five statements regarding teachers' evaluation, growth and development. As displayed in the table in Appendix N, statements in this section received relatively low ratings both in terms of individual statements and as the overall elements they might represent.

The section of evaluation, growth and development received the lowest mean scale score (1.87) out of all the nine areas of working condition elements, and the mean scale score for the section of professional identity and agency (2.17) scored the third-lowest. Of the ten statements with the lowest mean scale score ratings of the survey overall, six were from this section of elements impacting teacher autonomy. The lowest-rated statement in the entire survey, for example, was regarding teachers' evaluation, growth and development: "My one-on-one conversations with my supervisor(s) focus primarily on important feedback that is useful for improving my teaching (rather than focusing primarily on SLO or evaluation scores)."

While strong majorities of teachers agreed that "There are opportunities for teachers to serve as leaders of professional learning in my school," and "The leaders at my school care about my professional learning and growth;" 67% of leavers disagreed or strongly disagreed, "The leaders at Freewill encouraged creativity and risk-taking," and "Teachers at Freewill were recognized as educational experts." These perceptions held

true for stayers as well; 47% of stayers disagreed or strongly disagreed that the school leaders encourage creativity and risk-taking and 74% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were regarded as educational experts.

Summary of Findings from Teacher Working Conditions Survey

In the end, 31 teachers—12 leavers and 19 stayers—participated in a survey of their satisfaction with various working condition elements in the study school. These perceptions of the work in Freewill's minority-majority classrooms came largely from teachers who identified as White (97%). Of the 12 leavers, all but one were still practicing teachers: six within Corolla County and five beyond.

Data gathered from the survey's 44 Likert-scale statements indicated that, overall, teachers' perceptions about the working environment at Freewill were more positive than negative. Teachers expressed the greatest satisfaction with elements related to resources and time; they expressed the least satisfaction with elements related to their evaluation, development and growth. Survey data, overall, did not reveal pronounced differences in perceptions between leavers and stayers. Stayers did indicate greater satisfaction than leavers in the areas of connectedness with families and having a shared social justice mission.

Having reviewed the quantitative data from a survey of teachers' perceptions of various elements of their working environment, the following section will contextualize this data with qualitative accounts from the teachers themselves.

Phase Two Findings: Semi-Structured Interviews

Qualitative depth to better understand these quantitative survey findings was garnered through semi-structured interviews with ten selected teachers. During these

interviews, teachers were asked to describe their experience of working at the subject school and their thoughts about the leadership practices that influenced these experiences. Information from these interviews was triangulated with data from the teacher survey in Phase One to expand upon RQ1: "What is the nature of teachers' working conditions in the subject school, as described by leavers, stayers, and leaders?" The complete interview protocols used for leavers and stayers can be found in Appendix I.

Utilizing an iterative process of coding and memoing, I analyzed teachers' reflections on their experience of working at Freewill Elementary. Themes in teacher experiences emerged along the lines of the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter Three. Following an overview of the interview participants, the discussion of these interview data in the following section explores teachers' reflections in light of nine working condition elements that are categorized in terms of the ways in which they meet teachers' motivational needs.

Participants. A total of 10 teachers—five leavers and five stayers—participated in interviews. Participants included eight females and two males. They had taught or were teaching a wide range of grade levels at Freewill (two first grade, three second grade, one third grade, two fourth grade, and two special educators). All identified as White except for one who identified as African-American.

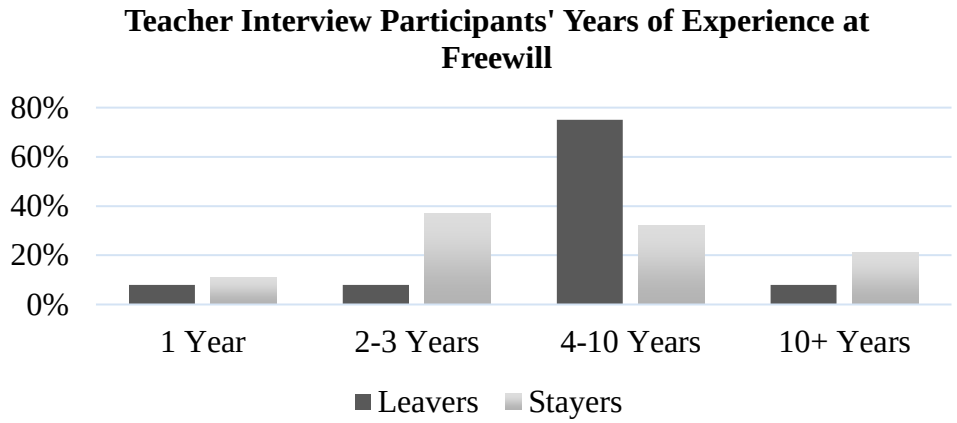


Figure 6. *Teacher Participants' Years of Experience at Freewill.*

Leavers. Of the five leavers interviewed, one remained in Corolla County and was working at a different (majority-White) school in the district. The four who had left the county had resettled in school districts less than two hours away from Corolla County (even though three were originally from more distant states). Three of the leavers began their careers at Freewill as novices, while two came to Freewill with significant years of experience. The leavers' tenure at Freewill ranged from two to nine years; the average tenure of the participating leavers was five years.

Stayers. The participating stayers, too, represented a range of teaching positions and experience levels. Their tenure at the time of the study ranged from 2.5-19.5 years. While only one of the five stayers had possessed any teaching experience before coming to Freewill, the stayers had now been teaching at Freewill for an average of 9.8 years. Two were in their third year at Freewill, one in their eighth year, one in their tenth year and one in their sixteenth. The longer-tenured stayers were native to the region of the study site, while the two more novice teachers had been recruited from out of state.

Table 5 lists pseudonyms and important defining characteristics of the interview participants of the study.

Table 5
Interview Participants

Interview Participant Name (pseudonym)	Leaver or Stayer	Important Characteristic
Robert	Leaver	veteran
Laura	Leaver	veteran
Natalie	Leaver	special educator
Alison	Leaver	special educator
Rachel	Leaver	mid-career teacher
Katherine	Stayer	veteran
Megan	Stayer	veteran
Bethany	Stayer	mid-career teacher
Pete	Stayer	early-career teacher
Jennifer	Stayer	early-career teacher
Brian	School Leader	veteran

Nature of Working Conditions: Hygiene Elements. In describing their days at Freewill Elementary, many teachers' comments pertained to that which Herzberg (1968) would categorize as "hygiene factors," or elements that will not lead to deep wells of intrinsic human motivation but, if not met at baseline levels, will lead to dissatisfaction in the working environment. These factors included time and resources.

Time. The challenges of time for teachers in the study school will likely sound familiar to many teachers in American classrooms. As Robert, one veteran leaver, illustrated:

> Now, my planning time last year was 10:00 a.m… but I've got a lot to do during my planning time! Because, all right, so these three kids all came in and they had some, some kind of event happening in their life in the last 24 hours that I have to deal with. I don't have, you know, any time other than my planning time, so all my planning time is, you know, this is when I've got to make that phone call, this is when I need to talk to so and so. Oh, and you know what? My print shop papers didn't arrive, so I need them to go up to the photocopier.

A stayer's response to an open-ended question on the survey further demonstrated Robert's experience of the many competing priorities for teachers' 42 minutes of contractually obligated daily planning time:

> There is not enough time for instructional prep and other teacher planning responsibilities. We have weekly PLC meetings, team planning, and other distractions that take up our time. A complaint that I hear a lot from different teams is that we never have time to do anything in our classroom because we are always being pulled in 50 directions. Some things cannot be helped but I do feel that I do not get enough planning time during the day to get all of the "little" things done at work. Most has to be taken home and interrupts my family time.

Jennifer, a stayer and team leader, indicated that the school leaders at Freewill had recently employed some creative approaches to carving time for collaboration out of the day, on top of teachers' contractually-obligated minutes:

> An advantage would be we do have PLC meetings weekly. We didn't have them last year. But we did get them back and I think that is always helpful to meet with one of the ILT [Instructional Leadership Team] members, or we met with [the Assistant Principal] one time to talk about SST [Student Support Team] meetings, like as a team. We do have planning but now we, like, get to like talk with ILT [Instructional Leadership Team] about what we should be doing next. So I think that is nice. Like having that time, whereas we didn't have it last year.

While the other stayers did not comment on the addition of time for professional collaboration in their school day, one can imagine that this change would have been much appreciated by leavers like Robert. As he asserted, "That planning period needs to be sacred and not touched. Build in more time so that if I do need some assistance we can have professional conversations and still stay sane." As Freewill's leaders worked in their own small ways to build in the professional collaboration time that is enjoyed by many teachers in higher-performing nations (Wei et al., 2009), they may have been helping to ameliorate the negative impact of time demands on teacher retention as they helped teachers to "stay sane."

Resources. As seen in the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, an influential element of teachers' working conditions is the ease with which they can access critical resources for doing their job. Such access can vary greatly from high- to low-income school districts (EdBuild, 2019). While not what Herzberg would consider to be high-level motivators, the absence of hygiene elements such as resources have been shown to negatively impact teachers' decisions to remain at a school (Johnson et al., 2012; Johnson, 2005; Ladd, 2011; Podolsky et al., 2016).

While access to resources did not figure prominently in stayers' reflections, resources were mentioned by some of the leavers. As Rachel, one leaver, recalled:

> It was hard to get materials. I mean, how many materials do I need to get myself, because they're just not available? I mean, just for a pencil sharpener. Come on. I was going to have to pay for my own pencil sharpener if the PTO was not going to approve to pay for it. And then, for the PTO to get it, I had to wait! I had to wait three or four weeks to get a pencil sharpener.

This sentiment was echoed by Robert, in comparing his access to photocopying at Freewill with that in his new school district. "Do you want to know the thing that I love the most about being in [my new school district]?" he asked. "Nobody is counting how many copies I make."

Technology. A common theme among leavers was the difference in access to technology in their new settings compared to what they experienced at Freewill. As Natalie said, "In [my new district] they use the computer for everything. So, like, everyone has their own laptop. You bring it everywhere." While leavers recalled computers being present at Freewill, the common sentiment was that the computers were used most often for testing and were less available for daily instruction. Alison, a special educator, recalled, "We did go out and do the practice tests in the lab. I do remember that.

It's just like, now, in [my new school], there's opportunities to work more in the classrooms with technology." Robert also recalled bringing in old computers from outside sources, because, "It was absolutely not one-to-one. The laptops at the school… well, we'd hear—you can't use those laptops. They're just for testing."

Robert contrasted this to his new school district, where he explained the difference that this made for the engagement of his students:

> Now, I have more laptops than kids. Having those laptops available every day, for all my kids, really makes group work so much more efficient. Because that's one of the things you can get the kids to buy into now—their devices—because that's how they live their lives. On a device. Knowing that all my kids are going to have access to a laptop every day makes a huge difference.

Stayers at Freewill generally did not express dissatisfaction with access to technology, and recognized the efforts the principal had made in recent years to increase the presence of electronic devices in the classroom. A relatively new stayer, Pete, noted that, "I have seven laptops, seven computers in my room right now, which is a huge blessing."

Human Resources. Beyond thoughts of supplies, photocopies and technology, many of the teachers' interview comments reflected a theme of strained human resources. Leavers and stayers alike commented on the additional pressure that was placed on remaining teachers when others left Freewill behind. This manifested in many forms: from an increased strain on stayers for supporting the novice teachers who subsequently filled the ranks, to fewer quality teachers among whom to share the load of challenging students, to high numbers of novice teachers placing higher demands on scarce resources of instructional resource personnel, to a loss of the school culture overall.

As the special education leaver Natalie described, her workload increased as the turnover of her colleagues left a heavier load on those left:

> I would say for my special ed. team the first three years we were really strong. It started to go a little bit downhill the fourth year just because we had teammates leave midyear where we had to kind of pick up the slack and, like, separate caseloads…which made it super difficult, covering service hours and things like that. Then, we'd have a few teammates that I had to check up on to make sure that they were doing what they were supposed to be doing because they weren't following legality things like service hours and things mentioned on their IEP. That made it kind of difficult.
>
> You were teaching new people and that's why, like my first three years it was like super strong because the special ed. team didn't really change too much; if anything, maybe one person left. But there was always at least like two or three strong people still on the team. And then I remember one year everyone just left and it was just me. So I was training a whole bunch of new teachers and they weren't, like, experienced special ed. teachers. They were literally brand new special ed. teachers… and one of them being someone who didn't even have a special ed. background. So that makes it really difficult when it comes to training and making sure that they're doing what they're supposed to be doing. So, like, you're stressing out about your own caseload, but stressing about like all the other children and on all the other caseloads and making sure they're all accounted for.

The challenge Natalie faced in supporting conditionally-certified teachers who lacked preparation or training in education was mirrored in the challenge of co-teaching with long-term substitutes who also lacked expertise. Reflecting on her co-teaching experience, Natalie recalled, "The long-term sub could not handle the class whatsoever. So anytime I was in there, it wasn't me servicing my kids; it was me kind of managing the class."

The strain of supporting teachers new to the profession was clear from the comments of other leavers as well. As one leaver noted in an open-ended response on her survey, "I often found myself working with new teachers, which I did not mind, but it definitely limited the time I had to plan instruction for my own classroom." Laura, a veteran leaver, lamented, "You do your job and you work hard. It seems like the more

you do, the more is put on you." She recalled receiving students from her teammates' classes for the afternoon because she could "handle" their disruptions and being pulled out of lunch duty to manage her teammates' challenging student behaviors. Contrasting this experience with her happier experience since leaving Freewill, Laura felt the load at her new school was more manageably shared among a team of competent colleagues. "I did have one challenging behavior student moved to my room this year. But, instead of putting 15 in one classroom... it's shared."

This created a vicious cycle in which those left behind got burned out and left, leaving more and more of a burden on those who remained. Alison, a novice leaver, felt the difference in the amount of support that was available to new teachers. At her new school, Alison described how instructional specialists could devote days of time to helping her plan out her instruction, whereas at Freewill, Alison recalls her support personnel being spread very thin. "I just felt like they didn't really know who I was. There's just, there are supports if you go looking for them, but I felt like it was a lot of ground to cover, so it was hard to get to everybody."

Overall, teachers reflecting on their development seemed to value the "training ground" that Freewill had provided. As one leaver, Rachel, quipped, "If you want to learn a lot about managing behavior then Freewill is the school to go to!" Katherine, a veteran stayer, explained this idea of a "training ground" in greater detail:

> People who leave Freewill also say that it is like no other school – the population is so challenging. For a lot of non-tenured teachers I think it's just too hard…Freewill is a great training ground. If you can teach at Freewill you can teach anywhere. They require a lot more of your emotional energy.

Pete agreed; "It's definitely not an easy place to start. But I'm glad that I started here because it definitely is getting me those skills pretty quickly."

Leavers Rachel and Natalie conveyed what a valuable asset these skills were to them now, in their new schools. Both shared experiences of finding themselves more well-equipped to manage student behaviors than were many of their new colleagues.

> It's kind of funny to hear them complain about certain things because like I feel like I gained a lot of experience working at Freewill. Even though it was stressful at times, I would not, I don't think I'd be the teacher I am today and have the knowledge I have today if I didn't work there. Like I have a lot of like tools up my sleeve when it comes to like dealing with behavior and when it comes to data collection that teachers in my new school don't have at all… I have to say it trained me well. I don't regret it by any means. I met so many great people there. I loved all my kids. It was just, it was difficult at times. It definitely was, but it definitely taught me a lot.

Like Natalie, Rachel also felt that the experience with her challenging students at Freewill taught her skills that eluded many of her new colleagues. Skills that "were second-nature now" to Rachel had even earned her recognition from her administrators, who had encouraged her to lead schoolwide professional development in managing challenging behaviors.

While Freewill served as a training ground with thinly stretched resources for new teachers entering the teaching profession, one stayer's open-ended survey response reflected the impact of turnover on the school improvement efforts she was trying to enact as a veteran teacher in the school:

> I do not work as part of a team. Since there has been so much turnover in staff during the past seven years, I feel little connection to the newer staff members. There are very few teachers on staff that have been working at the school over five years. My colleagues that I have had many years of friendship and group projects with have left. The newer staff is not as open to try new things, engage in out-of-the-box teaching, or to support these things.

As this comment suggests, an ongoing loss of social capital seemed to negatively impact improvement efforts of the school overall.

Summary of findings on hygiene factor working condition elements. Teacher turnover at Freewill impacted not only the students of the classes teachers left behind, but the school culture and program overall. A downward cycle of increasing workloads on stayers, an increased pressure on support resources for the new teachers who came behind, and a loss of the school culture at large, reflected a loss of human resources in which any one part was not so great as the collective loss of the whole.

Nature of working conditions: Elements impacting teacher elatedness. As outlined by the theoretical constructs of Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory of human motivation, the way in which the school environment supports or thwarts teachers' needs for relatedness, competence and autonomy will impact the motivation they feel to persist in their work. Three elements of teacher working conditions—collegial relationships, connectedness with families, and a shared social justice mission—were important to impacting teachers' feelings of relatedness. The ways in which these relationships met and did not meet teachers' will to interact, be connected to, and experience caring for others, were highly influential over their experience of the working conditions at Freewill Elementary.

Collegial relationships. There is no underestimating the importance that collegial relationships played in the quality of teachers' experiences at Freewill Elementary. For stayers and leavers alike, the colleagues with whom teachers spent their days were a critical factor in their experience of their working environment at Freewill. To some degree, this was a question of fit—a question of importance to all career mobility decisions. In other instances, however, the collegial relationships experienced by teachers

at Freewill were intricately related to its being a minority-majority school in suburban-rural setting.

The staff was like a family. This "family atmosphere" among the staff—which, we will later see, was cultivated carefully through practices of the school's leaders—was among the most prominent of the themes of interviews with both stayers and leavers. The majority of stayers noted the power of these familial-like relationships in generating feelings of satisfaction with their job, and even more leavers recalled how their relationships with their colleagues were a sustaining force in their time at Freewill.

Leavers' reflections revealed ways in which relationships among the teachers were stronger because of the other hardships of the job. As one leaver commented in an open-ended survey response, "If it were not for the support of colleagues, and the family ties that I built with those colleagues, it would have been hard to get through some of the days." Veteran leaver, Laura, similarly noted, "The staff is wonderful. I think that because of the population you deal with and some of the administrations we had had while I was there, the staff really bonded. They were like a family. They were really supportive of one another." Similarly, Natalie commented, "I have to say, I loved everyone I worked with; I loved all the staff members. I really felt like I was going into a family atmosphere. It's just, it was very difficult to work with the students at times."

Stayers felt Freewill to be a family, as well. Megan, a veteran stayer, commented on the family Freewill had become for her, noting the power of these collegial relationships in improving the morale in the school:

> I do think that the majority of the staff... that is the one thing I love about Freewill is the relationships. I mean, people leave Freewill, but they, we still stay connected. It's not like one of the schools where people move away or leave and you never talk to them again. Like there was, a month ago, a Freewill "reunion"

> where people back from 1990, they all got together. So I do think there's something to be said about just the relationships that the staff form between them themselves that improves the morale.

Katherine echoed this sentiment, saying, “People who have left say that other schools are not as friendly as Freewill. Here, you get to know your teammates—who their spouse is, whether they have children… who they are as people—beyond what standards are we covering this week.” Katherine also noted how important it was to intentionally cultivate these sustaining collegial relationships:

> If you just come to work to do your job, teach the children and stay in your room and go home, that is a miserable day. It makes for a long day. It makes for a long year… We’re sitting in a room together, eating lunch together, and that’s when you get to know the important things. Even something as simple as my kid has a cold and I was up all night last night… I judge myself based on how well I know about your kids and about your spouse’s name. If I don’t know these things I don’t really know you. And with time, these people grow past being your coworkers to becoming your friends.

The power of colleagues who became family was not unique to veteran staff; as novice stayer, Jennifer, commented,

> My first year, and even my second year, I had just, like, amazing people to teach with. So I have learned a lot and I mean, I've made really great friends here. People I could call my family. I'm very grateful for the team that I landed on. They were just very welcoming.

Likewise, Pete, another novice stayer, had also found community in his team at Freewill; a team he would feel bad about leaving “behind” should he pursue employment elsewhere:

> I felt really close with my team ‘cause I could go to people for help and they'd be happy to take as much time as needed to get me through that and, yeah, I'd want to help them out in return. So that's, yeah, I mean, community is definitely a big part of it. I don’t want to leave certain teammates behind.

A lack of trust and collegial connection. On the other hand, for the minority of teachers for whom Freewill did *not* feel like a family, this lack of a relationship with their colleagues was a powerful influence on their working experiencing as well. The one stayer who reflected this experience described her one year on a team that did not get along:

> I think when teachers don't have a, I don't know, a good relationship with their teammates, it just makes for a long day because let's face it, we're there with each other all day, every day, for days and days. And you know, these are people you gotta go on a field trip with; these are the people you got to eat lunch with. And it just makes it, I don't know, icky, yucky uncomfortable when I got to see you every day and you hate my guts, I hate your guts. And so that was the first time. Like I said, I was just like, 'I gotta get outta here.'

Two leavers recalled feeling a lack of connection and trust between them and their teammates. Alison recalled the challenge of spending her days with a co-teacher who did not support her innate need for relatedness:

> So I was on my own kind of island there in special ed. I mean, I had people on my team, but I felt like sometimes, I like didn't necessarily feel like it was like *co* teaching. I felt like I was kind of with people who said, like, *your* kids, you know what I mean; like, the special ed kids…
>
> People couldn't recognize that your priority was the kids and that you're trying to help them and you weren't trying to, I don't know, one-up [your teammates] or something. I don't know. Um, it just felt like a difficult situation.

Another leaver, Rachel, expressed similar feelings of feeling a lack of communal trust; in Rachel's case, when she felt was being criticized by her colleagues for her students' misbehavior. "And then you constantly—at least I did—feel, like, judged by other people because they would look at you like, 'Why are you letting that kid do that?'"

> So I felt like a lot of teachers that were at Freewill just didn't really want to be there. So their overall attitude was quite negative and maybe I would find one person on the team each year that I could get along with and really shared a similar mindset to. And I feel like that is so, so, so important to your success - you have to have people that are like-minded.

When teachers did find those like-minded colleagues—as a great many leavers and stayers did— Freewill felt like a family with strong systems of teachers supporting one another. When these collegial relationships and feelings of being trusted by ones' colleagues were lacking, it was hard for some teachers to feel their best at work each day.

Connectedness with families. This lack of the presence of relational trust in some collegial relationships emerged in some participants' comments regarding relationships with students' families as well. Laura, a veteran leaver, hypothesized that much of this distrust remained in the community because of acts of the principal who had been at Freewill before the time of the study. She noted:

> I mean, I know with the previous administration that I had at Freewill, it was said to me numerous times by parents that they did not feel welcome by that administration. I think that they became very, um, guarded… We need to make the community feel welcome, but unfortunately they didn't. And I think that there was such a breakdown during that administration that it's been hard to come back.

This distrust was further illustrated in Laura's recollections of failed collaborations with parents to address student behavior:

> I would have conferences with parents and the children and the parents would say, 'Well this is your fault and what did you do to upset my child?'… At one point I asked for a video camera in my classroom. Because too many of the parents kept saying that it wasn't their child, that their child didn't interrupt the classroom.

Indeed, many have documented the challenge of generating trust between different racial groups in a society with a history of such racial atrocities and prejudices as that of the United States. This presents serious challenges in schools like Freewill, where students often spend all their years in classrooms taught by teachers who do not look like them. As Bethany, a White stayer, commented:

> I definitely think there's that disconnect and I think that it must be—especially in today's day and age… it must be crazy to be, you know, a school of 95% Black

> kids and see only White teachers. Like, it must limit your idea of what you can be, you know what I mean?
>
> And I, I also think that, you know… there are so many teachers [at Freewill] who just scoff at the idea of there should be more Black teachers. And that is kind of like, that might just be like that kind of that attitude where you just, where you think that stuff doesn't matter… And I think it makes it, it makes it difficult for kids to make connections with certain teachers and for teachers to make connections with kids.

Among the nearly all White teachers who were interviewed for this study, some comments did suggest a failure of White teachers to make these connections with their students. References to "their culture at home" (Natalie) suggested some teachers conceptualized students' homes and families as different from—and even detrimental to—the dominant culture of the school. Natalie noted that the students at Freewill were "not your typical students that you imagine when you go to teach at a school." Such comments suggest the disconnect between the cultural groups with whom White teachers like Natalie had identified and had associated with in their past experience… and the need for enhanced cultural proficiency in order to view the students of color under their care at Freewill as not being "atypical."

Teacher biases in considering the homes and families of their students were reflected in other comments, as well. Three leavers commented on the "change in population" that the school had seen over the past decades, in which the school—like the county overall—had seen its population shift from a rural, minority-White population to a more densely populated suburb comprised of students of color. Laura commented, "The change in population and just the, the lack of support of the parents, even. I feel like a lot of it was, you know learned behavior." Rachel critiqued this common sentiment, saying:

> I just feel like at Freewill there weren't high expectations for the students and it was just kind of like, 'Well, let them be.' Or, like, a lot of the teachers would

> comment like, ‘We're getting the overflow from [nearby metropolitan areas].’ Like, what does that even mean?

One stayer, Pete, also reflected some negative perceptions about the influence of students’ “learned behaviors” from home:

> That's tricky cause I mean so much of that is, you know, if I tell the students who are not behaving well, I mean I'm not trying to stereotype too much, but a lot of that is lack of consequence at home or behavior they're seeing at home.

As discussed in the literature review of Chapter Two, people of color and families living in poverty in the United States face significant injustices that challenge optimal human flourishing, and in an open system of the school organization these can present significant challenges in the schoolhouse as well. The upcoming section about teachers’ experiences with student behaviors at Freewill will provide further context for these feelings of teacher frustration when challenging student behaviors weren’t met with supportive problem-solving from parents at home.

Nevertheless, the deficit thinking suggested by some teachers’ comments could have significantly hindered the development of trusting connections between teachers and their students and families. Particularly among some leavers, comments reflected a missed opportunity for an asset-based approach to building upon students’ cultures. Such a missed opportunity is sadly illustrated by comments like this, from veteran leaver Robert: “Especially the population of people that are in Corolla County, they're very vocal. And so you're always trying to keep track of, you know, keeping the voice levels down.” Such comments leave one to wonder what results might have been different if, perhaps, Robert was always trying to keep track of *amplifying* rather than “keeping the voice levels [of his vocal students] down.”

The comments of Laura, another veteran leaver, go a bit further in this deficit thinking of students' home cultures at Freewill as compared to the "more supportive" families of the parents at her new (majority White) school. Laura reflected: "But at [my new school], when we have events like awards assemblies and game night... the parents are lined up out the door. There is a strong parental showing. And you know, I've always said it starts at home." Laura elaborated further, asserting that the [majority White] teachers of Freewill should get the [majority Black] parents "in to educate them." She shared:

> And somehow we need to be able to get the parents in to educate them on, on the needs of the students. To be able to be successful. Like, how to help their children be successful. That it's not okay for them to want to come to school and want to play all day long. It's not okay for them to interrupt.

Again, definitions of "being successful" can be culturally situated—as can perceptions of children "wanting to play all day" and "interrupting." Failure to connect across these value-laden boundaries created a feeling of disconnect for some of Freewill's teachers—particularly its leavers—and its students and families.

*The power of connections***.** Researchers of the impact of culturally responsive teaching practices might, alternatively, argue that teachers could in fact benefit from learning from students' families ways to best help them be successful. Katherine, the lone African-American teacher participant in the study, spoke extensively about the importance of forming relationships and connecting with ones' students; connections that fostered successful teaching and learning with students of any racial background:

> I think those tough home situations are prevalent in African-American homes; and it's prevalent in other homes, too. So when I'm asked five times a day for a pencil I just have to remind myself, 'Katherine, just give them a pencil. It's not that big a deal.' There are reasons for their foolishness. It's not about Black or White – you

> remember [John Doe, a White student with very challenging behavior problems], right? It's about: 'How do I figure out what they like and form a relationship with them?'
>
> You have to develop a relationship. They will receive the fussing at them from you if they've also had the positive interactions from you. You have to find a way to connect. 'We're going to do math but we're going to do math about football problems. We're going to read but we're going to read about a football player.' You have to figure out a way to make it work. Because there is no way you want to go to work each day seeing 28 bright shining faces you don't like. You'll hate it, and that will lead to this teacher retention problem we're talking about… It's all about building relationships. You want to like what you're doing and who you're doing it with. I always do talk time at dismissal. I talk to them, they talk to each other. I make it my mission to learn about them, even the most shy ones. You need to talk and get to know them today, so when you have to turn around and tell them to get their work done tomorrow, they listen to you. You can't take the behavior personally. No kid woke up today wanting to come make your day hell. I make it my mission to get to know them.

In making it her mission to get to know her students, Katherine fostered feelings of relatedness with students and their families. Other teachers, too, spoke of the sustaining power of forming bonds with students and families. Said one stayer in a short answer response to the anonymous online survey:

> I enjoy working at Freewill because of the staff and the students I work with. I have been working with the same group of students since my first year here. I have been able to see them grow and form bonds with them. This has made my experience at this school more encouraging and positive.

Perhaps novice leaver Alison best articulated the challenge of building trusting teacher-family connections in the diverse community of Freewill Elementary. As Alison said, "Um, I don't always like to connect these two, but I just, I definitely feel like it was more diverse there. So sometimes people weren't seeing eye-to-eye, or they had had different experiences." With these diverse backgrounds and experiences, too often teachers and their students and families had difficulty building the connections that would foster their feelings of relatedness.

Shared social justice mission. In a community where members come from places of having many different experiences, a shared mission of working together in the pursuit of justice can help to enhance teachers' feelings of relatedness and their concurrent motivation to achieve this pursuit. Interview comments more often reflected perceptions of a *lack* of this shared mission rather than a common vision of what all were working to achieve together. As Rachel noted, "It was like people were just going through the motions. I felt like, at Freewill, like people were there just to get their paychecks."

Veteran stayer Bethany conveyed further reflections of how her relationship to the mission of serving the students of color at Freewill had evolved in a way that did not seem to be shared by many of her colleagues, reflecting a feeling that the school had "a culture of low expectations:"

> I think, you know, when I was a younger teacher, it was all about the, it was all about the kid's behavior. But I'm older and wiser and was awoken to my, you know, my privilege of coming from a place where my home life was stable and my parents were on the same page and my parents were at home helping me do everything. And I think that not everybody has awoken to how that can affect a child, you know? So I think that I've come to, I've come to believe that, you know, there's nothing I can do about my students' home life, but there is something I can do about their school life… And I happen to know that there's more I could be doing and there's a hell of a lot more than a lot more of these teachers can be doing. So it's not going to solve every problem, and it's not going to solve all those student behaviors, but it is, it is going to make it so that it's not your whole class. There's no way your whole class is a behavior problem.

Pete, another stayer, also reflected a mission of improving his craft for the betterment of his students; a desire to enhance his expertise so he's not "part of the problem:"

> Um, well part of it is just 'cause I realized that I was part of the problem. You know, I was looking around my classroom and I was not, like, especially my first year, I was like, these routines that I want to have set up aren't really set up well 'cause I didn't do that. So I wanted to make sure that the problem is not me.

Stayers' Bethany and Pete's critical self-reflection equipped them with a sense of mission for their work that Bethany felt "a lot of these teachers" did not share. Leaver Rachel further illustrated how having colleagues who did not share a similar mission and vision was influential in her decision to leave Freewill:

> Like I just felt like the focus really isn't on what's truly best for the kids. They want the test score and they're doing a roundabout way to get to that test score and not everybody has the same vision. And I feel like that's where I was like, 'My vision is not aligning with this.' And I can't continue to battle myself when I can change and I can go somewhere else and learn something… or even I can go somewhere else and end up seeing that it's the same. Like I had been at Freewill for [XX] years. I wanted to see what else was out there – was there anything different out there or did I really truly need to change my career and just get out of teaching altogether.

This feeling of the school's vision for instruction being "they want the test score" will be further discussed in the forthcoming section about teacher autonomy, as this theme featured prominently in teacher reflections. But this lack of a sense of vision for instruction or mission for teachers' work did appear to negatively impact teachers' ability to find shared relatedness around a common cause. Here again, teachers' comments revealed the compounding negative impact of teacher turnover on the experience of those who remained. Wrote one stayer in short answer response on the anonymous survey, "In the past, many teachers stayed at Freewill for many years as we were/are committed to the community. Many of us have taught children of previous students. With the recent staff turnovers, the culture has changed at the school." It seems that when those who were committed to a mission of serving the Freewill community moved on, it was more difficult to sustain that commitment among those who remained behind.

At the same time, both stayers and leavers did express a desire to make a difference; a sense of mission for their work at Freewill Elementary. As one leaver,

Natalie, reflected, “I felt very guilty leaving Freewill and the very needy children that tugged my heartstrings every day.”

Another leaver, Alison, reflected,

> I miss the diversity working with all those students. So I feel like if some of those problems were to be fixed, I would think about coming back. It is sad because like I had some really great kids there and I wished I could have supported them better… You know, we had that trailer park right down the street from the school and the mobile homes, and I would pass it every day. I felt for those families and I feel like I don't see as much of that where I am right now. Students in my new county are almost 100% White. I feel like I was making more of a difference in Corolla County.

This desire to make a difference is no small matter in inspiring teachers’ motivation to persist in their work. For one stayer, Bethany, it made all the difference in her decision to stay at Freewill for nearly a decade. Bethany reflected, “If these ‘tough’ schools could just get some consistency, the school may improve and we might find that it's not only the ‘tough kids’ after all. I guess I’ve stayed because I’ve been trying to provide some of that consistency for Freewill.”

Summary of findings on working condition elements impacting teacher relatedness. Elements influencing teachers’ innate need for relatedness exerted significant influence over the working conditions they experienced at Freewill Elementary. Many reported strong collegial relationships, feeling that Freewill was “like a family.” Those without these strong positive bonds felt collegial relationships to pose a significant challenge in their working environment.

Some teachers reported feelings of disconnect with their students and families, at times revealing racial biases and cultural dissonance. Teachers also seemed to lack a sense of relatedness around a shared social justice mission of serving these families through their work. Those who did make such connections to their colleagues, students,

families, and the mission of the work itself, reported more positive feelings of contentment and motivation in their work environment.

Nature of working conditions: Elements impacting teacher competence. Just as data from teacher interviews revealed complex factors feeding and thwarting their innate need for relatedness, the data also revealed a colorful story of teachers' varied feelings of competence; the drive to control outcomes and experience mastery. Working condition elements of supports for pro-social student behaviors and professional learning were both prominent themes in teacher conversations.

Supports for pro-social student behaviors. There is no denying that student behaviors had a significantly negative influence on the working condition experiences of many Freewill teachers. These themes featured prominently in the comments of stayers and dominated the conversations with many of the leavers.

Leavers recalled many "bad days." Rachel described such days occurring multiple times a week:

> It is hard. It is very hard because you are in there in the classroom and the kids are challenging and it doesn't seem like anyone really knows how to truly help you with the students that you have in your classroom.
>
> A bad day looks like a student coming into your classroom screaming. Or maybe they accidentally dump their breakfast and then, they're running around the school building because they spilled a little of their breakfast and then the rest of their day is a trickledown effect from that… Or maybe at some point during the day the student decides something isn't going his way or her way and all of a sudden desks go flying. This student is hitting you, the student is going after other students. I think that with behavior struggles the students that are listening kind of freeze at first, but then they quickly learn, *'Oh, I have to get out of here*.' So they know how to quickly go to another classroom.
>
> Part of that is standing in front of the door and barricading yourself in a classroom with a student so that that student cannot go after other students. Part of that is running down the hallway after this student because you know that you are the

> only one that will stop that student from doing what they are doing. It's getting hit, kicked, screamed at, spit on.

Laura, likewise, recalled being hit and facing challenging behavior from students at Freewill. “I might have students who cursed profusely... would throw objects at the teachers and other students. I was actually hit one time. By a student. This was in first grade.” Natalie concurred that the academic challenges at Freewill paled in comparison to the behaviors of “defiance” and “aggression” she saw as creating unsafe environments in the classrooms. She said:

> What was challenging was, we had lots of kids who were very defiant. Defiant to doing work; defiant to following directions. Some students would just be aggressive as well. Throwing tantrums within a classroom, making it dangerous, not only for the peers but for even the adults in the room. So making sure that everyone's safe all the time and being able to sit down and actually learn from the teacher without those distracting behaviors because that made it really difficult for some of the classrooms.

While these perceptions of students as “defiant” and “aggressive” warrant further analysis considering the evidence of subconscious biases that teachers have been shown to hold against Black students (Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti, & Shic, 2016), Natalie’s descriptions nevertheless reflect an environment that provided little safety for teaching and learning.

Stayers also felt that student behaviors were an important thing to note about their working environment. Pete said:

> I would definitely mention the behaviors – that would probably be the first thing. Whenever I'm telling some of the stories from just, like, a normal day, teachers from other schools are like, *‘What in the world is happening at your school?’*
>
> It ranges, but there's a lot of students, like… Every day there's some student leaving from some classroom. (Luckily not in mine, anymore.) Or—last year was especially bad—I had a student using their desk as a battering ram or, who liked to throw things every day. I had one student that would just screech randomly throughout the day. Nothing was wrong! He just screeched. A lot.

Jennifer also saw student behavior as a primary factor shaping the conditions of Freewill teachers' work. When asked to describe this challenge, she gave the example of one young student whose disruptive behaviors made it incredibly difficult for the rest of the class to learn:

> So, like, having a friend who's ADHD who's not medicated, just constantly making noises, bouncing around, running around the classroom. And then out of nowhere just bawling, throwing things. He wasn't so much physical with like other kids, but like he would like kick things, kick desks. And, like, having a class with 23 other kids, like it's hard cause like over half my day had to be dealt with him.
>
> I would take like tallies on him as a part of his BIP (Behavior Intervention Plan). So for, let me think… for like [reading], which is around like an hour block, his redirection—like redirection just to like do his work or just sit down… There'd be, like, maybe 20 tallies for redirection. And that's like… you couldn't even get all the like redirection marks. Like, that's just a lot.
>
> And then on top of that, like, throughout the year, other behaviors popped up, which is like another kid who's just like very active making noises; very moody. And then like other, like, I don't know, it's just like attitudes and like, those are things, but, that had to kind of be suppressed to deal with like the main one, the one who's like running around the room, pushing things and screaming and crying.

Behaviors impacted instruction. Many teachers commented that these student behaviors were disruptive to instruction, both for the students themselves and for the peers in their classroom. Pete contended that students "running the classroom"—exhibiting behaviors that were so disruptive that the teacher no longer felt they were leading instruction—was a common phenomenon that contributed to the teacher retention challenge at Freewill. As he said, "It's definitely one of the big issues. My first year I had a student who just ran the classroom and I said, 'Well, what are we doing here?'" As

Rachel elaborated, it was a difficult feeling to be torn between the needs of behaviorally challenging students and the education of everyone else in the class. She recalled:

> And then really my fifth year I was really struggling between helping the kid that had those behavioral needs and needed that extra support. I was struggling with helping him, and balancing the other kids in the classroom. Because it's not fair to them. So I felt myself just getting torn and thinking, 'This isn't fair, this isn't right.'

Leavers reflected on the prevalence of "reprimanding" over "learning" at Freewill, particularly in comparison to their new schools. Natalie compared:

> Ever since I started at my new school, I have not seen children act the way they did at Freewill. I don't see kids being aggressive. So I feel like there's a lot of learning going on instead of a lot of reprimanding.

Alison also was impressed by how much time was available for instruction over emotional and behavioral issues at her new school as compared to Freewill:

> Just being at another school now… Social, emotional, behavioral issues… I felt like that took a lot away from instruction. Which I feel like, you know, how can you learn if you, you know, have poverty at home or you're hungry; if you're, if you're frustrated? I felt like we spent a lot of time dealing with that…There were more kids living in poverty there [at Freewill]. So, I just feel like sometimes that took away from school because they had to deal with that first.

Moreover, this focus on behavior superseding that on academics sometimes extended to the focus of teacher feedback, as well. As Bethany noted, "Like, they'll, as long as they see, you know, kids not being insane, then it's fine. Even though your, your instruction kind of sucks."

Behaviors contributed to burnout. Leavers overwhelmingly reflected on student behaviors as a source of the burnout that led to their decision to leave Freewill. As Alison described the trauma and stress of living in daily fear of a student's daily violent outbursts:

> It's just, I was *on* the entire time, meaning mentally beat down, making it hard to walk in. And I would sit in front of the school in the car at 6:30 in the morning

> and would just cry. I did not want to walk in… You have to sleep with that feeling. You wake up with that feeling.

Rachel also shared feelings of stress over this "constant battle:"

> Like, sitting there, you almost feel judged for having a kid that needs more help and support and no one truly understands why that kid is doing that. Like you find yourself not knowing if you're doing a good enough job or like adequate at what you're doing, but yet you are the one showing up every day in that classroom helping those kids. But it doesn't seem like enough, I guess. Then to be judged by other people or not have the leadership team or other resources within the County be able to help you and guide you. You feel like, well what's the point of this? But then you show up every day because those kids need you. So like, I dunno, I felt like it was a constant battle every day. Like, 'I can't do this. I have to be there. I can't do it. I have to be there.'

Natalie likewise felt the drain of student behaviors that made her "hate going to work:"

> It's really draining. And then I felt like I was just servicing all my other kids the most. So that made me hate going to work because I knew I couldn't go work with the kids who really needed me because they could not understand what was being taught to them… because I had a student who just needed to be in my room all day long, screaming. So that just kind of did me in right there. I was like, I can't, I can't service my kids. And what's the point of coming to work?
>
> And then I think by my fifth year it was getting to me in terms of like dealing with the types of behavior I was dealing with, like with the aggression and the restraining of some of the students. It just was like draining. And then I couldn't see the compromise of driving 45 to 50 minutes to work to deal with kids like this and not feel supported all the time and then doing it again every single day. So it was, it was draining by the fifth year.

A fourth leaver, Laura, reflected on her feelings of burnout at Freewill and the impact this had on her family at home:

> I went into teaching because that's what I love to do. I love teaching, but you really get burnout very quickly. And when I was coming home to my own children who would say how unhappy I was, and that I was short with them all the time. That's when I knew that I had to make a change for my family. It was no longer a healthy environment for me.

Laura contrasted the exhaustion of teaching at Freewill with the joyful feeling of competence she experienced on her first day at her new school:

> When I started I came home and I told [my husband], I'm like, 'I taught today.' He's like, 'Don't you do that every day?' I'm like, 'No, *I taught an entire day and wasn't interrupted once*!' It shouldn't have to feel that hard [as it did at Freewill]. I mean, I was exhausted.

This exhaustion from dealing with challenging student behaviors seemed to correspond with teachers' feelings of incompetence: a lack of mastery in advancing student learning and even in managing a safe and secure learning environment. As one leaver commented in an open-ended response on her survey, "The students bring a wide variety of experiences and some come from trauma. I truly loved the students, but needed more support to appropriately meet their needs." Ongoing feelings of failing to meet student needs appeared to impact teachers' need to feel competent to sustain their continued motivation for their work.

*Behaviors improving***.** Despite these many challenging student behaviors, however, it was noteworthy that nearly all the stayers did *not* feel they were experiencing extreme behaviors this year. Said Megan, a veteran stayer, "For me, especially this year, teaching at Freewill is fabulous. I, I love my class and they are the most important things to me in that building. I enjoy walking into the building this year." Jennifer concurred, relaying that, "I'm very lucky with the kids that I got [this year]. I don't think it will happen again, but I'm very blessed this year!" Pete felt similarly. He shared, "Behavior is usually a bit of a challenge but I, I overall very much like my group this year." Pete further reflected that this positive behavior of his current group might not be completely coincidental:

> I do have to say that is definitely partly or completely due to [teachers'] lack of experience as well. Because I find the longer teachers have been teaching, the less that ['students running the classroom'] seems to be happening. Whether that's because [the teachers] are getting better classrooms, or they have better

> techniques, or probably both; it's hard to say, but it's been happening to me less and less every year. Definitely.

As will be explored in later sections, many of the "better techniques" teachers had for supporting students' pro-social behaviors were the result of intentionally designed professional learning experiences. Such experiences were designed by leaders of Freewill Elementary School to promote teachers' competence in the classroom and fuel the feelings of success that would feed their desire to persist in their work.

Professional learning. As explored in the literature review in Chapter Two, professional learning has a complicated relationship with teacher retention. While some have found positive correlations with teachers' professional learning and their mobility decisions (Ladd, 2011), the rarity of well-designed professional learning for teachers in the United States (Wei et al., 2009) may have something to do with others' findings that professional learning influences teachers' experiences of their working conditions negatively or not at all (Allensworth et al., 2009; Day, 2017).

This complicated relationship of professional learning with teachers' working condition experiences held true at Freewill. Teacher comments regarding professional learning largely centered around the schools' recent efforts to promote restorative practices to help improve student behavior; teachers' experiences with the Instructional Leadership Team; and teachers' experiences of induction when they were entering Freewill and the teaching profession.

Restorative practices. Several stayers commented on recent shifts they had noticed in the school and district's focus for professional learning. In recent years since the enactment of state restorative practices legislation, much of the district's professional learning were felt to center on students' social and emotional health in a way that Megan, a veteran stayer, had never seen before:

> I think students' mental health is being addressed a little bit more, which I think is *very* important to their behavior, and just the overall morale of, like, your classroom environment. We've never been offered anything like that up until recently. I would say in the past two years they have started to acknowledge that it's an issue that we need to address. But prior to that, I don't recall having any classroom management or you know, any sort of professional development.

Novice stayer Pete also felt that this professional learning focus was very beneficial for his practice:

> At my school, we're learning about Zones of Regulation, which I really like and personally helps me deal with students who have challenging behavior. The trauma book we're reading now is also pretty helpful. So I'd say the training that we do does definitely help.

Stayers seemed to appreciate how this whole-school focus of professional learning on restorative practices was helping them to feel more competent in managing the challenging behaviors in their classrooms.

ILT. In every elementary school in Corolla County, the face of much of the school's professional learning is a three-member Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) of a math resource teacher, a reading resource teacher, and a teacher responsible for testing and gifted services. The members of this team have no classrooms of their own and assume myriad administrative, instructional coaching, and professional learning responsibilities. Teacher comments revealed that ILT was a force behind many of their professional learning experiences at Freewill.

Many teachers relayed positive impacts of collaboration with ILT on their practice. Commented one leaver in an open-ended survey response, “I was lucky enough to be placed on a team with a strong team leader and worked closely with ILT members within my first few years of teaching.” Alison echoed this sentiment; “I had good support there [at Freewill]. I had help with manipulatives and interventions and, you know, I learned about lots of types of interventions that I could use. I felt like I was supported a lot.” Jennifer noted how her collaboration with different ILT members would often depend on the needs of the students in her class that year:

> Last year, I had a really high class, so [the gifted education resource teacher] was always supporting me. And this year I have, like, a lower class. So, [the reading specialist], she's constantly helping me. So it just depends on the year.

Veteran stayer, Katherine, noted the valuable role ILT played in situations where professional collaboration and guidance were not being provided by one’s teammates:

> And again, my challenge [when I was moved to fifth grade], was the curriculum. I'm thinking, ‘Those words are too big, those numbers are too big! I don't know how to do all that math!’ I relied on my people... At this point, it was ILT, because my team was new too. New and, well… unwilling.

Jennifer noted how the ILT members were instrumental in facilitating teachers’ collaborative work, as well:

> An advantage would be we do have PLC meetings weekly. We didn't have them last year. But we did get them back and I think that is always helpful to meet with one of the ILT. We get to, like, talk with ILT about what we should be doing next.

While the benefits of ILT in advancing teachers’ professional learning were widely recognized, so too were instances of what Hargreaves and Dawe (1990) termed “contrived collegiality,” or “administratively contrived interactions in which teachers meet and work to implement the curricula and instructional strategies developed by

others" (p. 227). Katherine defined the ILT as facilitating such interactions when she described their role as being a "messenger." She said:

> I've considered taking an ILT position or something. I would like developing the resources for people. However, the downside to that is that your role is to be a messenger. You're there to relay whatever was shared with you at [central office].

Jennifer, likewise, experienced much of ILT's role as passing down information from central office:

> A disadvantage is that the past few meetings, all [ILT members] do is they just give us assessments. So we were told, we were told that we have to finish running records by next Friday and we also have to have DIBELS assessments done on all the kids. And we just learned about DIBELS today… So the advantage is the time that we do have to meet could be beneficial. But a disadvantage is they just give us a lot of assessments.

Another stayer, in the open-ended section of the survey, echoed this idea that ILT is just there to "push agendas" that might not always be in line with the agendas of teachers themselves.

> There is a lot of ILT pushing agendas that may look good on paper but does not work in the classroom. Teachers are told what has to be done and in the way it is to be done. Not enough trusting the teacher. Frustrating!!!!! I would love for everyone to stay out of my classroom for 1 week and JUST LET ME TEACH!!!!

Robert had a lot to say about the complicated nature of professional collaboration. Of mandatory weekly meetings of grade-level teams with ILT, he said:

> It's a forced meeting. You know, you're trying to force us to collaborate. Forced collaboration doesn't work. Last year we had our, one of our planning periods that was taken for an ILT meeting. The day before, we would have to meet as a grade level so that we would be ready for the ILT meeting. A meeting to prepare for the meeting!
>
> But last year, every day, [my two teammates] would be in my room in the morning and we would be talking about instruction. That's, that's collaboration that really works! We would talk about the things that really matter. 'How, how can we reach these particular kids with this? What are you doing? All right, so we have to teach this lesson, whatever the main lesson was, what are you doing with that? How are you going to *really* do this?'

> Last year I would spend a lot of time talking to [the math resource teacher on the ILT team]. Just her and I. Not during the ILT meeting; during my actual planning time, I would go talk to her. Or before or after school. You know? And her and I would sit down and we could really talk about instruction. Have a genuine conversation. Nothing contrived. Not following along some pre prescribed coaching model. But we would actually talk about the kids. Talk about instruction. What are some other things we could do.

> You know, I think administrators really underestimate how much informal collaboration is really happening. Either they underestimate it or they undervalue it. And if collaboration is the goal, the first thing they should think about should be where they place teachers' classrooms. You know, now I'm on one end of the hallway and all my teammates are at the other end. Last year, when all our doors were side-by-side and [my two teammates] were right across the hall from us? You bet a lot of collaboration happened.

Robert's comments reflect the many complexities in shaping communities of practice that effectively promote organizational learning while simultaneously preserving teachers' autonomy.

New teacher induction. A critical component of professional learning in a school with teacher turnover rates like Freewill Elementary's is the induction of new teachers into the profession. Leavers reported various challenging aspects of their induction experience. Natalie recalled beginning her career by being given a demanding caseload and no systematic structures of support:

> Well, when I first started at Freewill, I didn't feel as supported in the special ed. realm because they didn't have, like they had a mentoring program, but the mentor I was assigned wasn't a special educator. She didn't come that often, so I didn't feel like I could really go to her. I could go to my teammates, but it was like, 'Oh, come to us if you need us.' Instead of like, 'Hey, let's meet regularly. Let me check up on you, make sure that you're doing, you're doing well.'

Rachel provided further context for the mentoring program that relied heavily on mentoring by individuals who were no longer practicing teachers:

> You were assigned a mentor but the mentor wasn't really *mentor*ing. It was just like not enough communication. A lot of them were retired or had stopped

> teaching for a while and were there; like, they didn't come into your classroom. And uh, I don't know, it wasn't a very good setup. The Principal offered, like that year the principal had offered like new teacher meetings that we would go to to share like how the school works and stuff. But then after that it was like, sink or swim; like, figure it out.

Alison also noted the challenges of having a teacher mentor who was not in the trenches doing the same work as those whom she was mentoring:

> I really loved my new teacher mentor, but she was a general education teacher. So she tried so hard to help me and give me resources, but I felt like she was all over the place. She was trying to help my co-teacher, too. And so it was hard to get like individualized feedback related to special education.

Alison's reflection highlighted the contrast between the supportive cohort induction experience in her new district with that of Corolla County:

> [In Corolla County] they did have classes on how to write IEPs, but again, it was like just a big group. Like last minute they'd be like, okay, come to this if you want. Or sometimes they'd advertise it in advance, but I just felt like, um, it wasn't part of a cohort. Like, yeah, I didn't really know anybody who was there. Like I was like, 'Yeah, I *think* they went to new teacher orientation with me,' but it wasn't like, 'Oh, like we were in all our trainings together,' you know?… I felt kind of like, just a cog. I don't know if that's a good way to express it, but I just felt like I needed to show up and do my job. Really, no one knew my name there. Um, and so sometimes I felt like in addition to being homesick, sometimes that could be overwhelming, just being a part of like a mass county in a big school. Um, you know, and just kind of flying under the radar. I felt like I had that little classroom with all my kids and I feel like people didn't really check on me a lot.

Certainly, when one feels like "just a cog," professional learning experiences aimed to increase one's competence will be hard-pressed to succeed. Leavers felt that supportive mentoring relationships and authentic communities of practice would have been helpful to their experience of professional learning at Freewill.

Summary of findings on working condition elements impacting teacher competence. Teachers' innate need for competence to fuel their desire to persist in their work was explored through two elements—supports for pro-social student behaviors and

teachers' professional learning—were found in the literature to be significant elements of working conditions that positively impact teacher retention (Allensworth et al., 2011; Boyd et al., 2011; Day et al., 2007; Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Ladd, 2011; Moore-Johnson et al., 2012; Podolsky et al., 2016). Student behavior had a negative impact on the experiences of Freewill's leavers. This seemed to have improved in recent years for Freewill's stayers, and teachers reported positive professional learning experiences with restorative practices to help address these challenging student behaviors. Teachers described a complicated relationship between feeling supported by the school's ILT members and experiencing these personnel as "messengers," and teacher interviews indicated a need for mentorship by practicing teachers and supportive communities of practice in aiding the induction of new teachers.

Nature of working conditions: Elements impacting teacher autonomy. Teacher comments about their working conditions at Freewill also centered often on elements impacting their feelings of autonomy: the desire to be a causal agent in one's life. As Pete reflected in his first comment of his interview, "I think Freewill has a weird level of flexibility and not flexibility depending on what we're talking about." Working condition elements influencing teachers' sense of autonomy included teachers' professional identity and agency—their sense of themselves as professionals with the decision-making powers thereof—and teachers' evaluation, development, and growth.

Professional identity and agency. Ingersoll and Collins (2019) found that teachers in high-poverty schools experience less autonomy and shared decision-making than did their counterparts in low-poverty schools, and Kraft and colleagues (2015) found that assuring student achievement in high-poverty schools required whole-school systems

of "coordinated instructional supports" that may come at the expense of individual teachers' autonomy. While the previous section's element of student behavior arose as a more resonant theme for leavers than stayers, this section's elements related to autonomy were more salient themes among Freewill's stayers. Participants expressed many feelings of limited autonomy in their reflections about Freewill, many of which appeared to be related to accountability pressures measuring students' achievement.

Low academic achievement. Freewill, like many schools serving large populations of minoritized students, faced significant pressures in helping its students achieve at the same levels as their more affluent peers. Freewill's percentage of students passing the state PARCC assessments was 29% in mathematics and 43% in English Language Arts in the year preceding the study (Maryland State Report Card, 2019), and teachers reflected how these gaps in student performance presented challenges in many ways. Laura remarked, "Well, there were years that I had students who couldn't write their name, didn't know the alphabet, didn't know any words coming into first grade." Alison relayed how these gaps were even bigger by the time students reached the intermediate grades. "I felt like at Freewill there were… in one classroom, there could be so many different reading levels. I don't know if you remember, but that second year I felt like the gap was like four; four to five years of reading levels that some students were behind in fifth grade."

Jennifer illustrated that these gaps weren't exclusive to literacy. In describing a recent first-grade math assessment whose administration she had found to be particularly grueling, she described:

> My, kids like… we're finally adding to 10. And on this assessment they were asked to add two-digit numbers with regrouping. The poor kids were just

> drawing! Like, it was 62 plus 12 or something. Like, they sat there and they drew all those circles. And then they tried to count them. And then they miscounted them and then... I just told them to stop eventually.

Additionally, the student behaviors described earlier in these findings presented challenges to providing the instruction that would be needed to accelerate the achievement of students experiencing these gaps.

High accountability pressures. Faced with pressures to demonstrate acceptable levels of performance in the name of accountability for student progress, Freewill—like many minority-majority schools—was very focused on testing. As one stayer's open-ended survey response conveyed, "The testing climate is creating a situation where teachers do not have the ability to be creative and do what's best for their students."

As Megan described, the pressure to perform well on state and district tests permeated many facets of instruction at Freewill. This included utilizing the school's funding for extended learning opportunities to focus on teaching test-taking strategies to "bubble kids" whose mid-range data indicated they held the greatest potential for producing a passing test score that would boost the school's results. "About six weeks before the state tests, they pull groups of bubble kids to teach them testing, test taking practices;" whereas, in other schools, Megan learned: "Apparently other schools use it for primary [grades] and help them learn how to read!" Megan also describes multiple years of being pulled from daily instruction in her classroom to assist with the more pressing need of leading a successful administration of a standardized test:

> For my first ten years I had second grade, and when we did testing and small groups for [the state assessments] I was pulled from my classroom. I had a small group of previous students, so they tried to make it so it was a teacher that they had a relationship with. But I had six students that are normally difficult who I was to help with testing… And then in my third grade life I was asked to help with other teachers, just for management reasons… help them with behavior. So I

> was pulled out of… so not only did I test my own children [for seven days of PARCC testing], I was pulled out for another grade level's seven days of tests, too.

While testing pressures are likely familiar to every public school educator, teacher reflections revealed ways in which testing influenced instruction at Freewill in nearly all aspects of instruction, even in the primary grades who were not included in state testing requirements. As Megan said of second grade: "We are a stepping stone for third grade, which is a testing grade."

In an email following her interview, Natalie indicated how significantly her ability to provide reading intervention for young children was impacted by demands of pulling small groups for testing throughout the year: a loss of 38 out of 180—nearly one quarter—of the year's instructional days:

> Testing definitely impacted my role significantly. I was asked to provide accommodations for two grade levels (and to fill in as needed for additional groups) every year I was there. It was frustrating, but I completely understood the need for this as there were many students who needed a small group setting to reduce distractions to themselves or others, or needed some or all of the test read aloud to them. Staffing to accommodate these needs was limited. Every effort to make these groups as small as possible and comprised of compatible students was made in an effort to ensure a successful outcome. This testing included County Pre-tests and Post-tests in reading, math, music, P.E., and art; MISA, MSA in math and language arts, CoGat, and there probably were more that I can't think of right now! These tests were "high stakes" for everyone involved.
>
> One year I tracked this for my evaluation. There were a total of 38 days that my primary teaching role was impacted and I was unable to serve my students as a direct result of mandated testing (Email communication 1/29/20).

As Natalie and Megan's experiences indicate, testing pressures extended beyond an influence on curriculum or assessment to include teachers being pulled away from providing routine instruction in their classroom. Unlike in Robert's new school, where increased student access to technology meant that any student could experience read-

aloud testing accommodations at any time, at Freewill the drive to maximize the potential for positive testing outcomes consumed a great deal of human resources' instructional time.

Limited teacher autonomy in decision-making. Teacher comments indicated that this tension between the low ability levels of Freewill's students and the pressure to achieve at high levels on standardized tests was often addressed by centralizing decision-making and reducing teacher autonomy. Bethany described how, even for those in the primary grades, testing had permeated the instructional core of the school:

> [One of the greatest challenges is] definitely the testing. I mean, it's a challenge because it's such a, it's such a big thing that it's all anybody thinks about. You know, it's all, it's, that's the goal for me. It's the goal for me, and I'm not even a testing grade. It's, it's boxed us all in so much.

Feeling "boxed in" was a source of much unhappiness for Bethany in her work experience. Another stayer, Megan, perceiving this force from a different angle, suggested that Freewill was a happier place for teachers if they would not be ones to *mind* being "boxed in." Those who would be happy staying at Freewill would be those who did not feel the need to innovate but would, instead, "do what they are told to do." In describing herself as happy at Freewill, Megan explained:

> I am not a complainer; I kind of just go with the flow. So for me, especially this year, teaching at Freewill is fabulous. I'm one of those people that even if I don't agree with it, I still do it. Like I, I do what I'm told to do.

This circumscribed professional agency was reflected in teachers feeling limited control over what they could teach, how they could teach it, and when and how student learning could be assessed.

Many stayers described a curriculum that left them little control over what they could teach: the content or the pacing of instruction. As Jennifer explained of the district

curriculum and pacing guides, the expectation was “just to follow it; to stick to it.” She described her lack of ownership:

> With reading and writing and math, we're expected just to follow it; to stick to it. And it's just our curriculum I just don't think makes a whole lot of sense. Like the scope and sequence, like, especially like with math is, it does not make any sense. And then even with writing, we had one of the reading assessments had like a narrative piece that the kids were supposed to write. But this year we only had about a week to write narratives. And like, they were just, they were surprised as to why the kids did awful on writing narratives. And that's because we spent like three or four weeks on writing how-to, and we're just... We follow it, we're told to follow it.

Bethany described a similar feeling of being unsupported in doing her own professional decision-making. She described being unable to exercise ownership over the selection of her read-alouds and follow-up activities:

> They have bought into this whole thing that this curriculum will raise your test scores on this test. So we need to do it this way. And this is a best practice. Where, you know, I'm a pretty educated person, I have an undergrad degree and now I have a master's degree and I feel like I have no professional decision making and that feels like, like almost like I'm not being supported. Does that make sense?
>
> It used to be that I could, if I had a book, like if I had my own books that taught that standard, I could use that book. Now I can't even do that because I have to have certain pieces of evidence from the curriculum… meaning that I have to keep that exact book because I have to have that exact data… We were doing point of view this week and I had Arthur's Thanksgiving, like, and I, and I thought that would be cute because, one, it's Thanksgiving this week and, two, it's a good example of being able to say what somebody's point of view is and like a different point of view from somebody else. And also being able to track how their point of view changes. And of course I can't do that one because it's not on the walkthrough and the book that I'm supposed to do is.

Laura’s ability to adapt the curriculum to include texts of relevance to her students was limited by the mandate that she produce prescribed artifacts of evidence for data discussions and administrator walkthroughs. A third stayer, Pete, also felt limited in his

curricular decision-making, describing how he was dreading "30 days of work that I don't have any say over:"

> Like, right now, there are certain people that are telling me that I can and can't use certain books that are given to me in the room because of… for weird reasons that can't be explained to me well, or it's just how they want to do it.
>
> I have about 30 [copies of *Percy Jackson*] that are in my room that I'm told I'm not allowed to use. ILT is telling me that I need to do *Shiloh* and they, they're, they're saying that they changed the curriculum for a reason and I need to do *Shiloh*. I don't want to read about a sad that dog that's getting beaten, at the end of the school year.
>
> I mean, I, I had to fight last year. I ended up being allowed to do it, but like why is it a fight to use the books I want to use? For the most part, it's not a big deal, but that is - that one to me is like a killer, just like a month of… about 30 days of work that I don't have any say over.

Katherine felt that, while she was limited in the content of her instruction, the pedagogical execution was left to her discretion. As she explained, "Someone else says what I have to teach but I have control over the how." Few of her colleagues, however, indicated this same feeling of agency over the "how" of their instruction. Bethany recalled feeling stifled in utilizing a workshop approach to teaching reading that she had found to be successful, "because it's not what, it's not what the county says we're supposed to do in order to be successful on the test." Similarly, she described the "certain way" she felt required to teach math:

> I mean for math, you know, I know that my kids are not ready for what I'm… most of my kids are not ready for what they're being asked to do. And I have to do it anyways because the curriculum and my superiors tell me I have to, I have to teach them in a certain way.

Certainly, Bethany felt challenged by demands to follow approaches and pacing that she felt were not best meeting her students' needs, and she felt limited in her professional decision-making to do anything about this. One leaver, Robert, felt this way as well,

particularly with regards to "the mandate of small-group instruction" in which it was required that students be grouped into one of three guided reading groups and that the teacher meet with every group every day.

As Bethany and Robert felt limited control over the "how" of their instruction, Pete felt limited in the "how" of his classroom management procedures:

> Corolla County is like... we're often told how to do things in the classroom. Like, at Freewill, everyone has to do Dojo [a behavior management platform in which students earn and lose points throughout the day]. But then we're told *how* to use Dojo. So just the micromanaging could be a little bit better... because I understand like they don't, they want you to reset Dojo every day at our school because some students are being in the negative and obviously a reward system is not working. If you're negative 100 something's not working. You shouldn't do that with that student. But also, like, I never had a student in the negative anymore. So why can't I do it how I want to do it just because someone else can't? But, yeah, the micromanaging for the whole group is kind of annoying.

Pete described one particularly demeaning encounter in which his instructional decision-making about small-group instruction was challenged directly in front of his students:

> I've been pulled out of a lesson because the person, the ILT that was watching me, didn't like the number of people in my groups. So she pulled me out of the classroom and scolded me for that. In the middle of the lesson. In the middle - yeah. So that was obviously, that's a worst case of not flexibility. Where I just felt like I was establishing discipline, and then suddenly I was not the teacher anymore. I was another student.

In addition to being limited in the "what" and "how" of their instructional decision-making, teachers also relayed feelings of being limited in their decisions regarding when and how to assess students' learning. Megan described to me how, on the day of our interview, "We're just told, like…I was told today that we have another benchmark and we're taking it Wednesday."

Jennifer reflected similar frustrations with expectations to administer assessments that would provide nothing she saw as data of value to informing her instruction. Of a

second-grade assessment she was told to administer in December of first grade, Jennifer described:

> So the assessments that we were given weren't, like… they had nothing to do with what we were doing currently in first grade. They wanted to see like how they would perform on a second grade assessment. So maybe it was used as like a prediction as to what they would do in second grade, but there's this whole long assessment that we had to do. And I mean we were able to do it small group but it was a second grade assessment that the *second* graders had just taken! And they just, it was just, they just wanted to see how [the first graders] would perform on it, probably to see like what they would do and like what we need to do next. But like we entered in the data and we haven't heard like anything about like our next steps for that.

Megan (another stayer) felt a similar frustration with demands to administer assessments that were not valuable to informing her instruction – and over which she had no control. As Megan described, "You assess your kids on benchmarks that aren't, you know, what you taught or how you taught it… just to see if they're ready for a test in eight months." She described the challenge of being forced to administer test-like math assessments rather than measures of the multiple skills she knew students needed to progress to the level of that test. Similarly, on a recent benchmark reading assessment of six multiple-choice questions regarding a passage at a second-grade level, Megan recalled taking a strong stand for her group of six students who were reading at a mid-Kindergarten level. "I'm just supposed to say 'go' and they're supposed to do it [independently]," Megan described the prescribed administration. Instead, she explained the fight to use her "teacher judgment:"

> I had to fight a little because my teacher judgment felt like it was absolutely ridiculous to give my six [students who are reading on a level B] this assessment. They're going to just sit and look at it. I mean, it's going to do *nothing.* We're not going to learn anything from this benchmark. So I said… 'Can I read it to them so we can at least see if they comprehend when it's read to them? Are they able to answer a Part A, Part B question if it's read to them?'

> Um, and I did win. So I was able to read it to them and it was, we were able to learn something from it. Like the fact that I won; not that I 'won,' but that I, I was able to prove my point about the reading benchmark. To the point where our reading resource teacher, she couldn't argue with me. She couldn't…I mean there was no argument. So she kind of had to say, 'Yeah, read it to them.' Because the whole purpose of a benchmark, is to see where they're at and what, you know, what we can learn from this benchmark. You know, what do we need, where do we need to go next? And that's not going to help me do anything…And I don't, even, even know if I should be telling people that she gave me the permission to read it to them. Yeah. That's how usually those kind of benchmarks are kind of held to the same testing standards as, yeah county assessments and things. I mean that- it was just ridiculous.

As teachers lacked control over the protocols for administering county benchmarks, they also lacked control over the content of such assessments to begin with. As Jennifer emphasized:

> Like, teachers should be writing like the assessments, like the pre and post tests. Like teachers should be writing that like - people who are in a first grade classroom consistently like should be writing these things.

Robert explained how the lack of autonomy manifested in others controlling his gradebook, as well:

> I think that our County has become very top heavy with control over everything that we do. I've never had anybody looking at my grade book until like the last five years that I was teaching in Corolla County. And then all of a sudden people, other people, had their hands and eyes in my grade book questioning what the things were that were in my grade book. In [my new school district] I don't, I don't have any, I don't have anybody peeking into my grade book.

Some teachers did express feelings of positive control over their professional agency in decision-making. Multiple stayers reflected on how important it felt to them that the school leader had asked for their input in helping to work towards school improvement, leading professional development for staff, and sharing their expertise with new teachers. In the open-ended survey responses, one stayer remarked:

> I love the people that I work with. I think that the principal trusts us as teachers and allows us to teach without micromanaging. I like how my school tries to be

> involved with families and provides many opportunities for families to be involved as well. I think that students respond well to the positive and upbeat vibes of the school.

While these upbeat vibes were felt by many, four of the five stayer interviews contained multiple references to challenges to autonomy. In the end, Bethany described that with these limitations of teacher autonomy, "The bar is at mediocrity:"

> Maybe, you know, is that being mediocre? Being mediocre is fine because it's easier to handle. It's just easier to handle if you only have to get people to be mediocre as opposed to get people to be good at what they're doing and care about being good at what they're doing.
>
> So kind of to keep everyone accountable, you all have to fit into this box even if you might have been doing things that were beyond the box…I struggle with this a little bit, but it's like why am I having to kind of come down towards the middle? Like people like [a colleague] and I, like we're having to come down towards the middle at the, you know, while for the sake of helping, making, not even helping, making other people do what they're supposed to do. You know what I mean.

As Bethany experienced, higher-performing teachers at Freewill would need to "come down towards the middle" to "fit into this box" of instructional practice over which actors other than the teachers themselves exercised many controls.

Evaluation, development, and growth. Teacher reflections also focused on their feelings regarding their performance evaluation and their opportunities for professional growth at Freewill. As with their reflections about their professional identity and agency, comments about teachers' evaluation and development often reflected feelings of limited autonomy in determining the focus of the direction for their growth. In recent years Corolla County had enacted teacher evaluation policies in which 50% of the evaluation was based on Professional Practice (as measured by the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching) and 50% was based upon student growth (as measured by Student Learning Objectives, or SLOs).

Evaluation over development. Both stayers and leavers revealed feelings that the systems in place for talent management at Freewill Elementary were more about their evaluation than their development and growth. Bethany, for example, described how accountability testing pressures pervaded the focus of her professional development and growth in addition to her instructional decision-making. In response to the question, "Do you feel the leaders in your school are invested in your growth? Like, in supporting your growth as a teacher or a leader?" Bethany responded, "I think, um, as far as the test scores go. I think they're invested in making sure we get the test scores we're supposed to."

> Like, I feel like all of my professional development, all of my, *everything* that I… and all my data meetings… are all about how to raise our test scores and not really about how to be a better teacher myself, a more effective teacher myself…just in terms of helping our kids grow. It's not about how to, like, how to actually improve my own practice.

A lack of autonomy was felt by teachers in the process of setting and reflecting upon the annual SLOs (Student Learning Objectives) that constituted 50% of their performance evaluations. Corolla County's systems of enacting this SLO requirement included structures that served to teacher-proof the process with standardized multiple-choice pre- and post-assessments for each content area. Teachers were provided "rigor charts" that listed a recommended number of points of improvement students should demonstrate between the pre-assessment in September and the post-assessment in February. As Laura described the SLOs; "The goals that are set for us. Not by us, but for us." Megan elaborated:

> The score that is suggested [by central office]. You know, the percentage increase for the SLO scale score points. We are given a range in which the County feels we should improve. And I don't know that I necessarily agree with that… I think by giving a scale and telling us or a range and telling us, you know, we have to

> pick a number in between that range… it totally discredits the, 'I know my kids and I know what they're dealing with and I know what I'm dealing with and I know where we started and you know, if they can make nine points instead of twelve, I think I should be allowed to.' And I think I am allowed to pick my own number, but I would, I will say that it is difficult. Using the percentage increase suggested by the County is highly encouraged. Highly encouraged.

Teacher comments indicated that much of the professional discussion generated through the teacher evaluation process revolved around a goal for which teachers were not permitted to "pick their own number." Corolla County's system appeared to weaken teacher autonomy over their goal-setting for their students' learning, while also focusing conversations with teachers' supervisors on pre- and post-test numbers rather than professional practice.

This lack of ownership in the evaluation process was also felt in the process of compiling portfolios; a component of the Charlotte Danielson teacher evaluation framework that was enacted in such a way with teachers that it was felt to be a lot about the paperwork and the "number" and less about reflecting on practice. Alison reflected on how compiling this portfolio for a grade was frustrating as a new teacher:

> That was frustrating to me because I felt like I was turning in a bunch of papers from the year. Just, being new to teaching… it was overwhelming trying to get everything ready and then getting scored on it as a grade.

Alison contrasted this with her experience of the same evaluation requirement, in the same state, in her new district, where the need to demonstrate one's mastery of the "Professional Responsibilities" domain of the Danielson teacher evaluation framework was met without requiring a portfolio:

> They gather it through other things –when you attend things throughout the year (like conference nights that you have to stay for and things like that)… then for my evaluation I'm sitting down at the end of the year in the room with all my administrators and my special education mentor and being like, okay, 'Here we all see different things that you've gone to.'

Alison noted how other aspects of her evaluation process, like the observations of her teaching practice, felt less supportive and personal at Freewill than at her new school:

> But I also think it's like, the tone, the tone with which it was done ‘cause I was so, I felt like it was very, um, formal at Freewill and it was just like, ‘Okay, this is your review. This is your score. Here you go.’
>
> And I felt like [in my new district] she said, you know, like ‘Don't worry about it.’ And she said, ‘You still did pretty well on your scores,’ but she said, ‘I want to talk about like, what do *you* think you could've done better? Here's where I see really good things. Here's where I see growth or where you could improve. And they were like, how can I help you?’
>
> And there was no… not that anyone was ever punitive, but I did realize how nervous I was last year with the evaluation. So I just wonder if something about the approach at Freewill made me feel that way. I don't think anyone was punitive, but I feel like these [in my new district] were more constructive and um, helpful. You know, none of them were, like, critical… I know [at Freewill] they were struggling to get all the evaluations by the end of the year and then I sat down and I just felt like it was kind of a formality, like, okay. They did put personal comments in the online system but I just felt like, like it was kind of a formality and getting through all of them because there were so many teachers there.

Certainly, the number of formal observations required of an administrator in a school with as many novice teachers as Freewill is no small task. Perhaps it is not surprising that Alison reflected on the frequency of feedback on her instruction: “It was like once a year they come in and observe you and you get graded on that one.”

Bethany shared similar observations of a focus on numbers over practice in enactment of the teacher evaluation process. As she described the conversations with her evaluator following her classroom observations; ‘He'll just read what the, you know, what the category was and talking about and he'll, he'll give me a reason why I didn't like hit that category.” Likewise, in describing periodic one-on-one conversations with her principal at other times throughout the school year, Bethany describes little in the way of

coaching or facilitated reflection. “It's like, ‘Here's what your data is, here's what you're supposed to get, here's some strategies for you to get it’… and then be on your way.”

Opportunities for expanded roles. The high turnover rates at Freewill did create opportunities for new teachers to rise into leadership positions quickly. As Natalie recalled:

> I had great co-teachers and teammates on my special ed. team who helped me like the role of being a special ed. teacher because then I eventually became the special ed. team leader. So that was really nice to have that experience and kind of have that team leader role.

Jennifer, likewise, reflected on how becoming team leader this year had helped her feel that she was really “becoming established in a school.” Though serving in this leadership capacity with teammates who were her senior made her feel awkward at times, she was excited to hold this leadership role only three years into her teaching career.

Teacher comments also described what may be a missed opportunity for expanded roles in the form of providing mentors for new teachers. Katherine described a rift between veteran and novice teachers at Freewill as follows:

> And sometimes I think when new teachers come in, they clique up, for lack of a better word, with other new teachers, which is great. However, they know just as much as you know… for lack of a better word, nothing! No, you don't hang out with people who know nothing!

Robert highlighted the possibilities of formalizing the supportive informal mentoring that already happens in schools by creating expanded roles for practicing teachers to officially serve as new teacher mentors:

> I think it would go a long way for new teachers to get to choose their own mentors. Someone who's actually in the classroom, doing the same work they're doing. Go to them after a few weeks and ask, ‘Who is it who truly is working as your mentor?’ Then reward that person with the pay and professional honor of being a mentor.

Jennifer's experience suggests that formalizing these team-based mentor roles may be a worthwhile endeavor, as it is these teammates who will influence teachers' decisions the most anyways:

> So my first year I think I was very much shaped by being next to [teammate]. Like, she like always fought for me. And she always like kinda guided me… My first year… Like I think the people on my team, they already knew like, 'We're, we're not gonna totally follow what they [the curriculum, ILT] do.' They kind of influenced me in that way I guess.

Such comments indicate that a great deal of teachers' induction to the profession takes place through informal mentoring by teammates; mentoring that might be of higher quality and greater benefit to novice and veteran teachers alike if formalized as an expanded role for practicing teachers.

Summary of findings on working condition elements impacting teacher autonomy. Teachers' innate need for autonomy had a complicated relationship at Freewill. The pressure to secure the school's legitimacy through acceptable performance on state and county standardized test measures exerted significant pressure on all the instructional core of the school. While a few reported feelings that "the principal trusts us as teachers and allows us to teach without micromanaging us," many—particularly stayers—reported instances in which they felt they were not the decision-maker of what to teach, when and how to teach it, or how to assess this learning in their classroom.

Interviews illustrated how multiple components of the teacher evaluation system became less about professional practice and more about scores and numbers: district-created multiple choice pre- and post-tests with accompanying rigor charts dictating goal-setting for SLOs (student learning objectives); discussions of professional responsibilities focusing on portfolio scores; and reflections about professional practice revolving around

categories one did or did not "hit" in observations. These experiences did not seem to optimally promote teacher ownership of their goal-setting and professional growth.

Summary of Findings for Research Question One

This section has outlined the data collected in investigating the first research question of this study: What is the nature of teacher working conditions at the study school? An electronic survey of 31 teachers and interviews with ten teachers (5 stayers and 5 leavers) provided both a quantitative and a qualitative understanding of this question.

Freewill teachers' experiences reflected varying perceptions of the nine elements of working conditions that were found to be influential to teacher retention decisions in the literature. Hygiene factors of time and resources were the elements rated the highest on the survey; interview data revealed how the most influential aspect of resources at Freewill was the ways in which the drain of human resources from the school negatively impacted the school overall. Factors influencing teachers' relatedness were critically important to teachers, with many showing strong connections to their colleagues and experiencing challenges of weaker connections with their students and families or a sense of a shared social justice mission for their work. Factors influencing teacher's competence included significant challenges with student behavior, particularly among leavers. Finally, the pressures of accountability seemed to negatively influence teachers' feelings of autonomy in their work.

Research Question Two (RQ2): What are teachers' perceptions of the influence of leadership practices on working conditions in the subject school?

In addition to informing my understanding of RQ1, "What is the nature of teachers' working conditions in the subject school, as described by leavers, stayers, and leaders?" semi-structured interviews with leavers and stayers also informed my understanding of RQ2—What are teachers' perceptions of the influence of leadership practices on working conditions in the subject school? The following findings are organized around my conceptual framework, which includes the following two of Leithwood and Louis' (2012) four practices by which leaders influence student learning: developing people and redesigning the organization.

Developing People

Teachers perceived school and district leaders as employing practices that could be categorized as developing people. As identified by Leithwood and Louis (2012), developing people includes acts that build the capacity and motivation of staff members to accomplish shared goals. Leadership practices of *developing people* discussed by teachers in the study included the principal's efforts to develop personal relationships; the ways in which leaders' practices of sharing decision-making enhanced teacher satisfaction; complicated efforts of leaders to develop teachers' connection with the mission of the work itself; and the importance of holding high expectations and having hard conversations.

Building relationships. Teacher comments, both leavers' and stayers,' revealed the importance of having a strong relationship with the school leader, right from the very first interaction in the hiring process. Leavers recalled positive relationships with Freewill's school leaders on a personal level. As Natalie remembered, "I really liked how comfortable I felt with the principal when I was interviewing. That's what made me want to choose Freewill." Laura also noted the importance of feeling personally connected to the school administrators. "On a personal level, I loved the administration that was there when I left. I can honestly say... [the principal] even followed my kids in sports. He knew all [my son's] times. He knew how well he was doing." Robert reflected on the power of this principal relationship as well, and the importance of finding a good match:

> I think one of the things you have to do is, know the kind of leader that you want and hopefully get matched to that kind of person. You know, for me, I love [the principal]. I would work for [the principal] anywhere, anytime.

Stayers, likewise, noted positive personal connections with their school leaders. Jennifer recalled her first interaction with the school leader at a district job fair:

> And then I interviewed with [Freewill's principal] and [a teacher leader] and I just felt like that one did go really well. Like, yeah. Everyone else had like a script that they were supposed to use. So every school had like the same questions. [Freewill's principal] had his own questions. And I thought that was really nice.

Megan, another stayer, explained how her school leader would help encourage her when she was feeling discouraged about her students' performance:

> Every meeting even when my kids did not make the required progress for my SLO I went in feeling very defeated, very, 'Oh my gosh, I'm a horrible teacher.' And he totally flipped it and said, but look at what you *did* do. Look at where they were and look at where they are now.

Most teacher comments centered around their relationship with the school leaders. One teacher, a leaver, commented on a perceived lack of relational trust with district leaders. Said veteran leaver, Robert:

> I think that central office piece is the other problem. I mean, that the longer I watched what goes on at central office and how they deal with issues made me want less and less to stay in Corolla County. Any, anytime anything bad happens, central office blames the school staff rather than standing up for school staff. And it kind of rolls downhill, you know? If your, if your scores weren't, weren't good, it was your fault. That whole mentality of blaming, blaming people. Rather than truly supporting people.

Building relationships was an important leadership practice perceived by Freewill's teachers.

Sharing decision-making. Teachers' comments related to leadership practices of developing people also included practices of shared decision-making. One stayer, Megan, relayed how valued and respected she felt by this leadership practice at both a school and district level. When the school principal sought her input and involved her in leading school improvement efforts, for example:

> Things like inviting me to the strategic planning meeting. He asked me to give a presentation to the staff. He's asked me to help with the new teacher orientation. Things like that where he asks for my input to help better the staff make me feel as though he thinks that what I'm doing is right.

At the district level, Megan reflected how valued she felt when included in shared decision-making with leaders there, as well:

> I think if the district leaders would take more teacher input, I think they would get a better reaction. I will say, last year, I was invited to a chat and chew with [the superintendent]. And I went to it and it was her and about 15 of us, we sat in a room with her and she pretty much just said, 'Tell me what you want me to know. Like, what do I need to know? What's going on in elementary school?' And we did talk to her… So I do think that when you do take teachers opinions and recommendations I think good things could happen, but I don't think there's that many opportunities for that.

One leaver, Natalie, positively recalled Freewill's leaders valuing her judgment, reflecting on how school leaders valued the opinions of the special educators when it came to forming class groupings each year. She recalled, "I really think they took into account what we thought was best for the kids." Laura, on the other hand, recounted this shared decision-making as a weakness in her experience at Freewill. She reflected on the importance of this, as her motivation and satisfaction in her new school felt higher because of the school leaders' practices like listening and valuing her opinion:

> I think it's shared responsibility more. I feel like my admin listens to me more, although again, because I work hard. They've asked me to take on extra roles, but in turn when I ask for something or say, 'I don't think this is going to work,' they do listen to my opinion. I feel a little more valued, I'll be honest.
>
> There is such a value in listening. Not just making decisions and putting them in place, but talking to us first. And not even just me; like my teammates and other members in the, in the school. You know, things are discussed with us first.

Listening and valuing teachers' opinion decision-making was a leadership practice of value to some teacher participants.

Difficulty connecting teachers with mission. Data from the semi-structured interviews also indicated that, while teachers often felt the power of personal connection to the school's administrators via the leaders' practices of developing people, leaders sometimes had a difficult time developing people's connection to the mission of working on behalf of changing trajectories for historically minoritized children. Jennifer described a school leader's attempt at this during her initial hiring interview:

> And then like he showed me the yearbook and he asked me, he asked like, 'What is different? Like, what's different from you than like the kids that you see?' And I think he was just really trying to prepare me for like, not, 'It's going to be like a rougher school,' but like, he really wanted me to see that. Like, my students aren't going to look like me.

One leaver, Rachel, felt this lack of connection to a greater mission not just at the school level but in the county as a whole:

> We all just have to work together. But it doesn't seem to be like a community vibe or feeling. I feel like if I felt more valued and supported with truly helping the kids, um, and not blaming the kids for their behavior, but truly figuring out ways that we can help them, ways that we can help the parents; just creating like a sense of community, which I don't feel like exists. And I feel like if that could be created, it would eliminate a lot of the problems that exist at Freewill, that are existing in Corolla County. If they would make a shift to be more proactive instead of reactive, like what can we do to prevent these things from happening instead of just waiting for it to happen and then figuring it out that way.I just felt like that the lack of community and togetherness, like we are here for these kids to better these kids. I felt like that was missing.

In absence of such a greater mission, the mission of the school's work often came to be perceived as achievement on the assessments themselves, as evidenced by the "it's all about the test" culture described as the nature of working conditions in the previous section. Megan contrasted the experience of the mission of the work at Freewill with how it might be experienced under different leadership practices:

> Whereas I think other principals who aren't as testing-driven might be a little more lax, especially with, you know, the primary grades. And more focused on, you know, just getting them to read and you know, building that number sense. So that they might be a better, you know, reader and problem solver but not necessarily a great test taker.

As will be evidenced in the later section, it is not that school or district leaders did not feel deeply about improving outcomes for their students. It was just that, somehow, the messaging and framing of this commitment did not appear to crystalize as a shared mission around which teachers felt driven to galvanize.

High expectations and hard conversations. In developing people to work towards realizing a mission of high student achievement, teachers commonly referred to leadership practices of having high expectations and holding their colleagues

accountable. Indeed, the satisfaction of quality teachers seemed very much impacted by the ability of leaders to uphold equally high standards of quality for their peers. This sentiment was shared by nearly all the stayers, though it surfaced in the interview of only one of the leavers.

Some stayers explained feelings of waning motivation to continue in providing quality instruction when they perceived lower standards being accepted for the performance of their colleagues. As Megan explained part of this frustration:

> Like now that I'm in second grade, if they're not doing guided reading in first grade, then when they get to me in second grade, not just their, you know, overall reading level and reading skills are low, they also don't just don't have even the routine of it. That's a hard routine to get them to do! So it is frustrating when other people in the building aren't doing what they're supposed to be doing. And I kind of looked to our principal to ensure that those things were happening.

Katherine explained, "You know, sometimes [the principal] leaves things optional where they need to be mandatory." Bethany described it as, "No follow through on expectations." She said, "[The principal] will tell us at the beginning of the year, 'These are the expectations,' and then there's no follow through when people aren't following the expectations."

Yet stayers also commented positively on a shift in the principal's practice; increasing efforts to elevate the accountability of their colleagues in recent years. As Bethany described:

> I do feel like there is a shift this year, a small shift. I do feel like he is attempting to make it known that there are expectations, I think that I have heard little instances of him sending emails to people and being like, 'Why are you watching a movie right now?'

Megan explained how this effort to increase accountability for quality instruction throughout the building was, in fact, a practice that was improving the morale of the quality teachers.

> Specifically the past two years, I think administration is making a conscious effort to improve morale. To hold more accountability, in some respects. It's still a work in progress, but it is, I do see improvement and that is helpful to the overall environment of the building…Because before, not only were students getting away with things, other adults in the building were getting away with things that just make the ones that are doing their jobs frustrated.

In the frustration of these stayers appears to speak to the need for leaders to enforce norms of high expectations throughout their school community to help teachers continue to feel that their hard work was warranted. It was interesting, however, how often this frustration was voiced in language around the need for "accountability" rather than other conceptions of development or growth. Even among teachers who felt confined by accountability demands on their own practice, so ingrained was the norm of "accountability" that it was the lens through which they saw the solution to the underperformance of their peers.

Redesigning the Organization

Teacher interviews also highlighted practices employed by leaders of Freewill Elementary that could be characterized as redesigning the organization—creating schoolwide structures that establish positive and productive workplace conditions for staff members (Leithwood and Louis, 2012). Across both leavers and stayers, comments in this category largely focused on leadership practices intended to address the student behaviors that teachers experienced as challenging elements of their working environments in the open system of Freewill Elementary. These practices included the introduction of restorative practices to address student behavior and discipline; and the

need for more structural, systematic practices and resources to fully meet students' social and emotional needs.

No real consequences. Certainly, many teachers commented on feeling that leaders did not administer consequences of sufficient severity to address the student behaviors they experienced as disrupting the learning in their classrooms. Pete described:

> Well, the, they weren't- essentially the only real consequences that I can deliver and make sure happen, are 'You lose recess time.' So after that point, if they say, 'Well I don't care about that,' then if you write a referral, not much happens. And then, well, I can write referrals and nothing happens and then they're just doing whatever they want all day and it gets disruptive and learning, teaching becomes much more difficult. And once one student is doing it, then other students feel like they can act up more as well, because I'm not being *that* bad [as the other student who was written up and received no consequences].

Megan expressed similar feelings of frustration with the administration's handling of student behaviors in years past, but also recognized the difficulty of the task of addressing all the school's behaviors and leaders' improvement in doing so:

> I don't agree with how it's handled sometimes [when one goes to administration for help with student behavior]. And I think part of it is because when you have so many behaviors to handle, you do what you do need to do to survive (as far as administration goes). Like they, they just are trying to give me a break and, you know, *pacify* the situation where it was never really *handled*.
>
> And that is another area where I feel that my administrator has improved. The first year he was there, any behavior issues, even if it was a fight in the building- they were given iPads and told to have a timeout. That was extremely frustrating. Where we have not noticed that [lately]. But he did bring that up and he took it. And he accepted that. Like he acknowledged that that's how he handled things and it was wrong.

Some expressed frustrated feelings that the restorative approaches to discipline mandated by the state's restorative justice school-to-prison pipeline legislation had "tied the hands" of administrators in administering appropriate consequences for disciplinary infractions. As Laura described,

> Sometimes I felt like they were scared of the parents. That they didn't know how to deal with the severity of the discipline problems. And then sometimes; sometimes I felt like their hands were tied as to how much they could do.

Katherine reflected this frustration. “We were going to have a zero tolerance for-whatever -bullying or pushing or physical aggression. And then Jonny and Bobby push each other and then they just have to go play Legos. And talk about it.” Robert, likewise, felt that state policy had created a situation in which administrators “can’t do a whole lot:”

> Well, behavior became a real issue, but that's at the state level. I do understand that. I know a lot of people complain, ‘Well, administration doesn't do anything about these kids.’ I understand that they can't. They can’t do a whole lot.

Impact of restorative practice legislation. While teachers may have felt that the restorative practices legislation meant that administrators “can’t do a whole lot,” other comments suggested that, in fact, the legislation was accomplishing a fair bit. As Robert reflected,

> I know my last year at Freewill I had one difficult child and the administration really helped me out a lot with that one particular child. We had put him on a behavior contract. So if he could get through an hour and a half in the morning, he got so many points and he could go show [the principal] his contract. So he checked in with [the principal] three times a day. If he met his goal at the end of the day, then he got a reward. Other people complained that, ‘Oh he shouldn't be getting rewarded just because he finally behaved himself.’ But at the same time, that's all we have. It would be nice if we had the ability to be stricter with these kids, and make them more accountable and make their parents more accountable, but the bottom line is, we don't.

While one can see how the restorative justice legislation’s restrictions on suspensions would be frustrating to teachers dealing with physical aggression and other extreme behaviors on a routine basis, experiences such as this one conveyed by Robert suggest that the legislation was perhaps realizing some of its intended effects. As past practices of “holding kids and their parents more accountable” contributed to the school to prison

pipeline that the legislation was designed to address, perhaps a policy that encouraged Freewill's leader to invest such time in helping a child to regulate his behaviors might, in fact, have been accomplishing a worthy and important goal.

Many stayers and some leavers did comment on how administrators always responded to their calls for help with behaviors in their classrooms. As Jennifer reflected, "The [student behaviors] that I did have, [the vice-principal] would be very supportive of me and she would come in and help me." Natalie also recalled, "You know, the administrators were always around to come help whenever they were available."

Moreover, stayers noted that while the restorative practices may be trickling down from policy decisions made at higher levels, the way in which such programs were implemented at Freewill were a direct result of the school principal's commitment to this approach. As Megan pointed out:

> I know restorative practices is a countywide thing that they're kind of like pushing. But [our school principal] took it—like, we're the only school where 99% of the staff is trained in restorative practices. Like, we did it in our staff meetings. Like, it wasn't like, an option. You had to do it. Which I'm not, I don't think is a bad thing. It shows that [the school principal] is trying.

Additionally, Pete noted how the use of whole-staff professional development time being used in ways that were beneficial for teachers was a direct result of intentional decisions on behalf of his principal:

> At Freewill, I especially like that [the school principal] is using a lot of the teacher meeting time, like the first Monday of every month or whatever we're supposed to be doing… He uses a lot of that for educational purposes. So we learn about Zones of Regulation or how to deal with student trauma. I love that because when I was student teaching and listening to my other teacher friends talk about their staff meetings, they're just like, 'I just sit on my phone all day and ignore everything that's going on 'cause it's just a bunch of numbers that aren't important to me. Or even if they are important, there's nothing we can do with them.' But I love that [the school principal] uses that time to educate us and make sure that we can teach better. I feel like that's made me a better teacher as well. So I love that.

Need for more resources for therapeutic supports. While school and district leaders' focus on restorative practices was felt to have brought positive improvements to student behavior at Freewill, teacher comments also frequently reflected a feeling that further therapeutic supports were necessary to appropriately address the students' social and emotional needs. As an open-ended survey response from one leaver summarized, "Our focus on responsive classrooms was very helpful. We needed a better plan to deal with very disruptive students."

Resources to help deal with "very disruptive students" were not nonexistent. As Natalie recalled, "We did have people, like, from central office who would come and observe the kids and give us strategies and things to implement." But as Jennifer recalled after a student support team meeting for one of her challenging students, "But then there was no other support from the behavior specialists. Like, you didn't really hear from him. And the psychologist who said she'd be like checking in and getting to know him… and that never happened either."

Rachel recalled how, when additional therapeutic supports were available, they made a big difference:

> My third year, the school counselor and the school psychologist, they were willing and did help with proactive things like doing social stories with the kids or giving them a brain break or teaching them the strategies to calm down and we were all on the same page. And then we'd share that with the specialists and everything like that so that when they would go to their specials, like art or PE or music, everyone was responding to the child in the same way.

Alison contrasted the experience of having sporadic visits from central office behavioral specialists to Freewill with the experience of having embedded support in her new school in the form of a school-based behavior specialist. At her new school, "I just feel like there's less time from the teacher standpoint focused on [discipline]. I did feel like the

behaviors took away from the instruction and I felt like it could be hard for the students and the teachers."

Lack of systematic, structural approach to change. In addition to sharing feelings of needing additional resources to better provide therapeutic supports to better meet students' needs, comments from two stayers and one leaver also reflected a feeling that more organizationally-minded leadership practices could would have better served the system's efforts at improving student behavior. As Bethany summarized, "There's just no follow-through."

Megan commented on how the professional development around restorative practices the previous year had been so positive, but how the lack of a systematic approach to institutionalizing this change in practice had created a situation in which the change looked like it may not last:

> We went through all this restorative practices. We had little cards clipped to our badges. And this year not much has been said. It's almost like you, you learned it and now, you know what I'm saying, like... Once again, the ball has been dropped. If it's something that you use on a regular basis with your students, you'll continue to use it. But if you didn't, you're not really encouraged to.

Additionally, in not taking a systemic view of the problem, Megan pointed out how leaders had not made efforts to build coherence between teachers' professional learning and their evaluation and feedback. "Like, we're saying this whole social emotional learning piece is important, but really your evaluation still has nothing to do with that."

This lack of systems-thinking was reflected in what many teachers noted as taking a reactive rather than a proactive approach. As described by Bethany,

> It's, it's the same for the staff and the kids. The problem with the kids is we kind of bump along until there's an issue and then we're like, 'Oh gosh, how do we solve it? How do we fix this?' And then the same with the staff. We bump along until there's an issue with a staff member who's either having an issue with the kid

> or just not really working as hard as they should. And then we're kind of doing some reactive things to solve it instead of just proactively setting forth the standards at the beginning and following through with it.

One leaver, Alison, contrasted her experience as a novice teacher in Corolla County with that in her new district, where she felt things were much more systematized and institutionalized.

> Yeah, they like have—sometimes it can be a lot to learn—but they have like a system for everything. Like even for scheduling an IEP meeting, like there's like a system and a form with things you check off. And it just leaves the guesswork kind of out of it. So you don't have to go ask someone after they teach you the first time… It was still overwhelming because I felt like there's a lot of systems to learn. But then I felt like it was less of me trying to locate people and be like, 'I need help finding this or that.'

> [All the asking people to explain and re-explain things] carried a lot of stress for me outside of the, um, outside of the teaching. I felt like now, like I know we have like more paperwork, but I feel like… it's a lot, but it's clear. It takes the guesswork out of it. It's very intentional and systematic. So once you get it down, you can do that and it doesn't take away from your instruction. I feel like I have more planning time for instruction.

For ambitious reforms like restorative practices to take root, teachers indicated that more resources and more systematic thinking would be needed to realize a long-lasting change.

Summary of Findings for Research Question Two

This section has outlined the data collected in investigating the second research question of this study: What are teachers' perceptions of the influence of leadership practices on working conditions in the subject school? Ten teacher interviews provided the data that framed an understanding of this question.

Teachers perceived leadership practices of importance along two of the domains outlined in the conceptual framework for this study: developing people and redesigning the organization. Leadership practices of developing people discussed by teachers included the principal's efforts to develop personal relationships; the ways in which

leaders' practices of sharing decision-making enhanced teacher satisfaction; complicated efforts of leaders to develop teachers' connection with the mission of the work itself; and the importance of holding high expectations and having hard conversations. Leadership practices of redesigning the organization centered around efforts to address student behavior and discipline. Teachers felt that more resources of therapeutic supports to address students' social and emotional needs, and more systematic approaches to create institutionalized structural changes, would create important changes in the organization.

Research Question 3 (RQ3): What are school and district leaders' perceptions of their influence on teacher working conditions in the subject school?

An understanding of RQ3 was informed by an in-depth interview with the principal of the study school. The data from this conversation provided context for the leadership practices employed to influence teacher working conditions in the subject school from the perspective of the school's leader, himself. Just as with the analysis of the leadership practices at work in the school as experienced from teachers' perspectives, the practices discussed by the school leaders also emerged along themes of developing people and redesigning the organization.

Participants

The leader interview phase of the study produced a smaller sample size than originally anticipated. A conversation with the principal of the study school and a director of schools at the district level constituted the participants in Phase Three of the study. Despite two attempts at contact, assistant principals of the school (one former, one current), declined to be interviewed, as did two additional district leaders who were contacted via email. Complications of school closures for the COVID-19 pandemic

created more barriers to access of leaders than initially indicated in the research proposal, but the thick description provided by those who did participate provided thoughtful considerations in response to Research Question Three.

The participating leaders had significant years of experience in education, in general, and at the study school. A 60-minute conversation with the principal of the study school constituted the most in-depth interview of the study. The principal, who will be called by the pseudonym Brian throughout this study, was a White male who had decades of experience as an administrator in the district. Brian had been the principal of the study school for the past four years (the years that were the focus of this study). A shorter interview with an executive director of schools followed the principal interview. The director, who will be called by the pseudonym Susan, was a White female who also had decades of experience as a teacher and administrator in the district.

Developing People

Many of the reflections shared by leaders in Phase Three of the study centered around their efforts to help develop the people in their organization. As Freewill's principal Brian stated at the beginning of his interview, "I am most proud about the way some of the children have worked and how some of the younger teachers have grown." He took very personally the teacher retention challenges being experienced at Freewill, and he had applied his many years of experience as a veteran leader in considering how he might ameliorate them. Just as teachers had noted the ways in which Freewill "felt like a family," as well as the challenges of their need for shared accountability among all the members of that family, Brian's reflections revealed much intentionality in leadership practices of building relationships and challenges in upholding high standards for all.

Make it a family. For Brian, in providing leadership for Freewill at the school level, one of the things he felt most passionately about in his leadership practice was the strong bonds he helped facilitate among teachers in his school. From visiting teachers' rooms on their birthdays to sing the "Happy happy birthday song (like at Chevies)," to creating an environment where he and his teachers could have snowball battles at staff

meetings and joke together, Brian noted that he had always prided himself on how he could "pull in a lot of people to continue to be stayers." He relayed how he worked to bring a sense of humor to ordinary situations and funny things that children did throughout the school day, engendering an "esprit de corps" among the staff. As he reflected on the community he tried to nurture among the staff at Freewill, Brian recounted:

> We were one big family unit and that, and so I always thought, it doesn't matter if this school is way far off from [places where new teachers would likely live], that it's way back in the "boonies" or whatever you'd say, and it doesn't have the top test scores or, you know, kids with big homes or whatever… I, I can wield my magic and create this environment where you don't want to leave each other.

This magic was wielded through many everyday efforts of Brian's, including placing "Caught you doing well" cards in teachers' mailboxes and encouraging teachers to give shout-outs to one another for good work over the school's announcements.

Indeed, as many of the teachers had recalled the staff uniting together, at times, because of some of the challenges they faced at Freewill, Brian, too, relayed, "[My approach] is kind of like, 'All right. The kids are difficult. Sure. But this is fun to be together. We're all going to be working together.'" In addition, because of the challenges posed by recruiting teachers to the school's remote location—"I can't take this building and move it into direct [downtown center]"—Brian felt it was imperative to create a sense of community within the school itself.

Support vs. challenge. At the same time, Brian was very reflective on his evolution as a leader over the years, noting how creating such a fun, family-like school community could be "a dual-edged sword." He noted that some teachers benefitted from having a leader with a sense of humor; one that could relate to their experience and help

them feel good about their teaching. On the other hand, Brian noted, “Some people, they don't need that in their principal, they're done with that. They need somebody more, you know, really pushing that instructional margin.”

Like the teachers interviewed, Brian saw an important aspect of the retention of quality teachers at Freewill as being the ways in which leaders addressed those who were underperforming. When quality teachers felt their leaders weren’t holding their colleagues accountable for quality work, Brian reflected, “They become dissatisfied. You can joke all you want; the morale is going to be gone.”

Brian saw this as a challenge in his practice at which he had been working to improve over the years:

> So sometimes I'm a better principal for the middle grade teacher and the lower grade teacher than I am for this rock star because the rock star sees me maybe not addressing some issues ‘cause they're really good. And so they want to, they're holding everybody else up to that same mantle, so to speak. What I need to do is build up those good ones, but I also need to be more demanding and fair to those bad ones. Because eventually those ones you're pumping up are going to say, ‘That's nice, he's pumping me up, but I really want accountability across the board.’

While Brian recognized that many of his teachers wanted more “accountability” for their colleagues, he reflected that he was often more inclined to take an approach more focused on adult development and growth; to help teachers “work through their weakness” and develop over time.

Brian’s reflections on the challenge in enacting leadership practices of simultaneous support and challenge were echoed by those of Susan. A great deal of Susan’s leadership practice involved coaching school leaders. As she described, this involved both supporting school leaders—helping them find information, answering

questions, affirming her support for their decisions, and sometimes challenging school leaders—enforcing district policy, empowering them to handle a decision differently.

Susan found that achieving this balance between support and challenge was aided by her ability to draw on the extensive experience she had as a school principal in diverse settings herself. Importantly, however, she also noted that this work of simultaneously supporting principals and challenging them to grow could be improved by establishing a culture of greater trust throughout the district. Susan reflected,

> But I think part of that is our culture in our district that doesn't necessarily support that. We just haven't really evolved to that point where we're doing things like observational rounds or instructional rounds, or, you know… We've made some, some inroads to, you know, try to observe somebody else. And so they're there in smattering, but we're not a very open culture where people are saying, 'Hey, can you come watch me do this?'

As the following section will further illustrate, efforts to develop people were sometimes complicated by a lack of a supportive culture of growth for leaders throughout the organization.

Redesigning the Organization

Throughout the interview, it became very clear that Brian felt Freewill was at a critical juncture; a turning point at which he as a leader must think about the ways he was redesigning the organization. The challenges Brian identified in these next steps for the organization would very much impact his ability to effectively develop people; a challenge for which Brian felt that school leaders needed more development and support, themselves. Susan mirrored this feeling, noting how much more professional learning she wished district leaders could provide for the system's leaders. In the absence of development and support that would help build these leadership capacities, leaders described drawing heavily upon the use of one familiar organizational routine: holding

teachers accountable for instruction by reflecting upon data. Finally, leaders described practices related to curriculum and resources that could better support leaders' ability to impact working conditions at schools like Freewill Elementary.

Supporting pro-social student behavior: At a turning point. Brian reflected on how the first few years of his tenure at Freewill were very much focused on addressing the student behavior challenges that were the focus of so many teacher interviews. Brian recognized what a challenge students' behaviors were to the working conditions of the teachers; how these challenges were overwhelming for him as a principal, as well. He recalled of his first year, "It was just, just a horrible… It was like the basketball player that wasn't quite ready for, for a team." Leading the staff in teaching students pro-social behaviors was a critical first priority for Brian as a leader because, as he reflected, "You can't have anything else until you get to that."

Brian spoke of how he had worked to promote restorative approaches to student discipline, noting how this child-centered view of discipline might sometimes leave teachers feeling unsupported:

> You could have a principal not do all [the work with restorative practices] that we have been doing, but if a kid gets in trouble: 'Darn it, there's going to be something done about it and that teacher's going to feel supported…' Whereas I, I am providing the supports so that hopefully they don't [repeat that behavior again]. When you put a kid in ISR or whatever, or even suspension, you haven't provided any support for pro-social behavior. So, so when you talk about when they misbehave here in the elementary, we do... We do discipline through prosocial behaviors. So we're looking at not punishing the offense, but we're learning about, you know; a growth model. And that's hard for teachers to see because, A, they want something done about it, which I understand. And, and, B you know, they want something fixed about it. They want the kid fixed. And you're not going to get that through the, through just the punishment thing.

Brian described many leadership practices he had employed to help teachers provide this support for pro-social student behaviors: promoting morning meetings; providing professional development in Restorative Practices and Zones of Regulation; working with teachers in developing and reinforcing "routines, routines, routines," requiring consistent schoolwide use of ClassDojo; having veteran teachers share their approaches with novice teachers; focusing observation feedback on improving classroom management; utilizing his Instructional Leadership Team members to model the management of productive classroom environments; and more.

All in all, this focus on a restorative approach to promoting pro-social student behaviors seemed to be working. Echoing the sentiments conveyed in interviews with Freewill's stayers, Brian noted how this year felt different:

> You know, there were kids leaving, walking out of classrooms, getting very, very mad yelling at their teachers. But save for a very few rare exceptions this year… and they're almost, they're all in the younger grades, so that ability to self-regulate really hasn't been taught anywhere in the house or anything like that… We're not having to really run for anybody eloping [running away from the classroom]. We're certainly not having a lot of physical things going on, or anything like that.

With this improvement in the teaching and learning environment, Brian emphasized, Freewill was at a point where it was critical that it focus upon improving instruction:

> I've had never really made you accountable a lot for your instruction because I was so much dealing with: 'Is that classroom at least functional enough for children to access learning?' And almost every classroom is like that now.

The system's recent restorative practices initiatives were far less of a focus in the interview with Susan, the district leader participant, though she recognized the challenges that could be posed by student behavior. Susan's reflections on redesigning the organization practices focused more on what Brian would identify as a critical next step in improvement efforts at Freewill: support for leaders in instructional improvement.

Now that behaviors were improving, Brian emphasized, there were no excuses for Freewill's instructional underperformance:

> That whole excuse; that one big, huge, social-emotional, 'Freewill is one of the worst behaved places around' is starting to dwindle away. So now it will be, well, 'We're just not good at instruction.' We're behaving better. But our scores still stink.

Brian noted how this research was occurring at a critical "snapshot in time," when the school was finally able to start focusing on instruction.

Need for professional learning for leaders. At the same time Brian conveyed his feeling that Freewill was at a critical juncture on its journey to being the "instructionally savvy" school he'd like for it to become, Brian relayed what he saw as a "very lacking thing that I have in creating a desirable working environment:" deficits in his own instructional expertise. Brian described how he had never been an elementary school teacher himself, nor had he ever held the central office curriculum and instructional specialist roles previously held by some of his principal colleagues. He explained, "We want to really focus on being an instructionally savvy school and we're not. They're not, and I'm not, to be honest with you."

With this lack of instructional expertise in such areas as early childhood development, Brian considered, the evaluations and feedback he was providing might not be leading to teachers' optimal development and growth. "They have a need, but I have that need," he remarked, indicating how his ability to guide other's practice was limited by the extent of his knowledge of that practice himself. Brian described how distributed leadership was helpful in this situation, indicating how lucky he was to be able to "lean so much on my ILT." Nevertheless, at the end of the day, without he as the principal

having that intricate knowledge of best practices in elementary instruction, he could not drive the school's instructional vision.

In strongly congruent ways, both Brian and Susan stressed the need for enhanced systems of professional learning for school leaders to support their growth as instructional leaders in their schools. Susan first described the many systems that were already in place: from pipeline programs of presentations designed to help aspiring leaders "bridge the gap between the textbook—what they've learned in graduate school—and reality" of actual leaders' practices in schools; to bimonthly sessions of book studies and instructional learning experiences for vice-principals; to ongoing support of school principals.

But as both leaders identified, these practices were missing a few key elements. For one, Susan and Brian's interviews both contained a strong desire for a more comprehensive coaching model for supporting leaders. Brian discussed this in terms of paralleling the coaching systems presently in place to support teachers with some to support the system's leaders. As he suggested, perhaps one of the "really strong instructional principals"—someone not far removed from being an active principal with a track record of success—could provide critical coaching support for principals and assistant principals leading the county's schools.

Susan advocated for a coaching system to support school leaders as well, wishing that they had more capacity at the district level to work proactively with teachers instead of so often just "putting out fires." She reflected,

> I would love to expand that model so it's more of a coaching model. So there were regular visits. We could do some goal-setting, um, time for shadowing, time for feedback time for, um, you know, me observing…

Both leaders also alluded to how leaders' professional learning could be enhanced with the formation of trusting, collaborative communities of practice among groups of leaders. In Susan's descriptions of some district leadership development programs as "presentations," and "providing professional learning to them," one can see the lack of a supportive and collaborative community of professional practice perceived by Brian. "There's a lot of good colleagues that I would, that I would like to be able to tap into," Brian explained, but felt that such collaborations were not routinely facilitated. He felt that the county's principals would greatly benefit from forming pairs or small groups in which principals with different strengths could share their practices and support one another's growth.

Leading with strengths: Data-driven instruction. In the absence of strong instructional expertise, Brian drew upon practices he had identified to be his strengths as a leader: most notably, utilizing data. In his efforts to improve instruction at Freewill this year, an important practice he was employing was one-on-one quarterly data meetings with teachers. As Brian described these meetings, he would say things to teachers like:

> Right now we're going to look at: How many kids are moving in running records? How many kids are moving, how many kids are doing their Dreambox [online math learning]? How many kids are achieving mastery in their Dreambox?
>
> And so every quarter I'm meeting, with everybody – everybody – for 15 minutes. And they have a sheet, and it's a profile. And it changes each quarter, what I'm looking for. And I do like we do with pre- and post-test [SLO evaluation meetings]. I do a, 'Here's what your teammates did,' and, 'You know, the school had averaged 79 minutes on DreamBox per kid and your, your team did 67 minutes, and you did 42 minutes per kid on DreamBox…' Simple fidelity checks. But then also reading levels, you know. So, you know, 'It's great you got so many to go up.' I'm going to use their benchmarks in the math one to show how many of them moved, too… [I'm doing this to] hold everybody accountable—even the ones that are doing well—to just make sure that they're aware of that as my priority.

As Susan pointed out, demands on teachers to increase student achievement could certainly be a challenging aspect of their working conditions.

Limited clarity of instructional vision and mission. Brian acknowledged that this practice of data meetings could be contributing to the sentiment in teacher interviews that "it's all about testing." He reflected the following:

> But the other part of this is that, yeah, those are just numbers. So, you know, I did it to kind of raise the level of awareness and accountability, but without [more development of my own instructional knowledge], you know, you're not looking at it as a professional thing. You know, you're evaluating without saying, 'You know, here's what I see [in the classroom]. And here's how it does or doesn't correspond with what I'm seeing as far as this testing profile…' So it is in a bit of a vacuum. And it does leave itself open to, you know, 'He's just looking at the numbers.'

In lieu of a clear vision of the instruction he dreamed that the children in the classrooms of Freewill would receive, Brian drew upon his data analysis expertise to advance Freewill's academic achievement the best way he knew how.

Neither leader interviews centered much attention on an instructional vision, and both also suggested some difficulty in articulating a mission of working towards greater social justice for Freewill's historically marginalized Black and Brown children. Susan noted efforts to assist aspiring leaders in learning from practicing leaders who had demonstrated cultural responsiveness to their school communities. Yet she did not seem to have a great deal of language for describing a shared social justice mission as a force of internal motivation for a school community, noting how it's likely implied, but that, "I bet most teachers in their classrooms in front of their children are not thinking about the social justice… What is the social justice mission that I'm going to accomplish today?" Given the intense demands of her role in navigating complaints from the parent community, Susan also demonstrated a perception of social justice as a demand from the

community placed *upon* the schools, nothing that "The demand for social justice and trying to navigate that is a challenge for teachers, too."

As with some teacher interview comments, Brian reflected that for many of its teachers, Freewill might feel like "an urban-like setting that they didn't grow up or go to college in," yet noted how this could not be an excuse for the school's poor academic performance. Overall, however, Brian's comments reflected a rather colorblind approach towards the ways in which institutionalized racism might be impacting Freewill's students, noting that Freewill was very much "a melting pot," with many multiracial students. Brian was optimistic that such blending of color barriers had "blurred" the division of racial groups in the present world of the 21st century, and was glad that among his students at Freewill," I don't hear racial slurs and kinds of things."

Brian's comments reflected those of some of his teachers that, "We really need to educate our parents and make sure that they're really staying on top of their kids," and did not comment upon the idea of more culturally-responsive approaches to learning from families themselves. He certainly reflected a desire to find ways that that all his students, "regardless of culture, background, or race," could have opportunities to succeed. Yet he seemed to lack the strategies or the language that might help him best articulate this desire in terms of a mission that would galvanize the work of Freewill's teachers.

Autonomy and resources. Like many of his teachers, Brian felt there were ways in which greater autonomy and resources could aid his efforts to improve teachers' working experience at Freewill. Brian did not find the county's curriculum to be particularly supportive in improving his teachers' instruction, noting that, "I'd like to

have more site-based management, more autonomy over curriculum in the school system."

> There's certain things that, you know, we, we probably need in a different way than say [the highest performing elementary school], but we all try to make a cookie cutter with the way we set it up. And you kinda don't, you wouldn't want to do that with your *classroom* where this kid gets the exact same thing as this kid. And this kid comes with challenges, this kid doesn't; this kid's reading above grade level, this kid's not... But yet we kind of create schools like that.

Susan echoed the idea that the curriculum, in general, could be a challenging element of the working experience for teachers, noting that, "I think, sometimes our curriculum is just difficult to understand."

Additionally, Brian felt there was a need for more resources for the county's high-needs schools. Noting how Freewill had the same number of administrators and instructional resource personnel as many other schools in which the needs and numbers of students were far less, Brian reflected on how resources were often distributed throughout the district with more concern for equality than for advancing equity with regards to children's circumstances. As he said, "I feel sometimes like our hands are tied and we have more, more needs and so we should be, be given more resources."

The idea of resources in support of equity did not emerge as a theme for Susan, but she did stress the importance of one resource: time. As she said, "Teachers have competing demands for their time and their energy and their attention." To sustain teachers' energy for persisting in their work, one can see how leadership practices of redesigning the organization to systematically work towards shared goals could be critically important.

Summary of Findings for Research Question Three

This section has outlined the data collected in investigating the third research question of this study: What are school and district leaders' perceptions of their influence on teacher working conditions in the subject school? While the quantity of participants was low in this area, an in-depth interview with the principal of the study school and a director of schools from the district office informed an understanding of this question. The principal felt some of the most important practices in influencing Freewill's working conditions were those he undertook to build morale and help the staff to "feel like a family." Both leaders (as well as many teachers) noted challenges in upholding high expectations for all the members of that family, Brian described relying on his expertise with utilizing data to enact routine conversations with teachers around student performance. Both leaders noted the need for enhanced systems of supportive professional learning for school leaders to equip leaders with more fine-grained visions of quality instruction in their schools and to provide teachers with quality feedback on their practice thereof. Additionally, Brian felt that greater autonomy and resources could help leaders like him achieve more equitable outcomes for children of the district's high-needs schools.

Chapter Summary

Quantitative survey data and qualitative interview data were collected to answer the three research questions posed by this study. Survey data provided insight into the nature of the working conditions experienced by teachers at Freewill Elementary. Specifically, data provided information regarding teachers' perceptions of nine elements of working conditions found to be correlated with teacher mobility decisions in the literature. By capturing data related to perceived satisfaction with working conditions,

comparisons were made between the satisfaction of Freewill's leavers and stayers. Interview data from teachers and leaders not only provided further context for the nature of teachers' working conditions, but also presented opportunities to understand connections between these conditions and the leadership practices of Freewill's school and district leaders.

Upon analyzing all data gathered for this study, five main themes emerged:

1. Migration of Human Resources from Study School to Schools Serving Fewer Minoritized Students

2. The Power of Relatedness: Strong Ties with Colleagues and Principal; Weaker Bonds with Families and Mission

3. Challenges of, and Improvements in, Student Behavior

4. The Encompassing Power of *The Test*: Accountability as Practice

5. Tensions in Developing Competence and Empowering Autonomy—Challenges for Adult Development

In the next chapter, I will discuss each of these themes along with relevant research from the literature on the retention of teachers in minority-majority schools. I will discuss five recommendations for leaders in Corolla County public schools to consider in addressing each theme that is discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND ACTION COMMUNICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore how leaders might favorably influence working condition in minority-majority schools to improve the retention of teachers in those schools. Drawing on the findings discussed in the previous chapter, here I discuss five themes that emerged in analysis of the data from teacher working conditions survey, teacher interviews, and leader interviews. I provide discussion of these findings considering the literature in Chapter Two and the conceptual framework in Chapter Three. From these findings, I offer recommendations about district actions to address the problem of practice: the influence of leadership practice on working conditions and, thereby, teacher retention, in minority-majority schools.

Discussion of Findings

The results of this study appear, at first, to cause some cognitive dissonance. Survey responses of stayers and leavers did not reveal substantial differences; at times, even, leavers had more positive perceptions of working conditions than did those who had stayed. Interview data, likewise, illustrated no clear differences between the experiences of these two groups of teachers. A few elements were discussed in greater detail by one group than the other; for example, stayers noted improvements in student behaviors over those experienced by leavers, while stayers were much more vocal about feelings of limited autonomy than were leavers. Overall, however, trends in differences in working condition experiences between the two groups were not readily apparent. Time,

resources, and connectedness with families did not feature prominently in any interview comments, while nearly equal numbers of stayers and leavers emphasized how much Freewill felt like a family.

These seemingly counterintuitive results may be due to many factors, from the study's small sample size to the abundance of factors beyond working conditions influencing the decision of the leavers to leave. As will be explored in the forthcoming section on relationships, perhaps, too, there is a degree to which the passage of time had brought rose-colored glasses that tinted the recollections of leavers. In the end, however, while not revealing stark differences, the data from stayers, leavers, and leaders together generated a detailed picture of working conditions at Freewill Elementary that emerged around five primary themes.

This discussion will consider the findings reported in Chapter Four considering the teacher retention literature and my conceptual framework. It will highlight the primary themes that emerged from my analysis of quantitative survey and qualitative interview data. This chapter includes a discussion of each theme, the limitations of this study, and recommendations for practice.

Theme One: Migration of Human Resources from Study School to Schools Serving Fewer Minoritized Students

The first theme that emerged from this case study was what Ingersoll and Smith (2003) termed "the revolving door" of teacher turnover. While leader participants did not dwell on this decline in their interviews and the survey did not generate longitudinal data to compare over time, teacher interviews presented a detailed picture of the ways in

which the migration of human capital from the study school to schools serving fewer minoritized students negatively impacted Freewill Elementary.

In general, Freewill's leavers were not leaving the teaching profession altogether. Of the twelve leavers surveyed, all but one remained employed as educators. Of the five leavers interviewed, all but one had moved on to teach at schools serving fewer numbers of minoritized students. They described how their time at Freewill had "trained them well" but how they had moved on to new schools that left them feeling less "emotionally exhausted."

This migration of Freewill's teachers to schools serving fewer students of color negatively impacted, on the one hand, the students who would be taught by a novice teacher in that leaver's classroom in the year to come, starting a whole new cycle of a novice teacher building her expertise on "other people's children" (Delpit, 2006). But furthermore, this migration had an even greater impact on the school culture and program overall. A downward cycle of ever-increasing workloads on stayers, and an increased pressure on support resources for the new teachers who came behind, negatively impacted conditions for the teachers who remained. Moreover, such attrition led to a loss of the school culture at large, reflecting a loss of human resources in which the individual parts were less than the collective loss of the whole.

In considering the stories of the Freewill's leavers, it becomes clear that the stories reflect the trends of too many educators who, upon gaining experience in America's low-income schools of minoritized students, leave and apply that experience elsewhere (Carver-Thomas, 2016; Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Ingersoll et al., 2018; Podolsky et al., 2016; Sutcher et al., 2016); even if remaining in the same school district (Guarina,

Santibanez, Daley, & Brewer, 2004). Sadly, the case study of Freewill Elementary reveals a story with the common narrative of qualified teachers leaving the schools of students who could potentially benefit from their expertise the most.

Theme Two: The Power of Relatedness: Strong Ties with Colleagues and Principal; Weaker Bonds with Families and Mission

A second theme of the data from this capstone centered on the power of relatedness. Positive or negative, the ways in which teachers related to the people around them had a powerful influence on their perceptions of their working environment. Relationships were critical to teachers' satisfaction. Teacher satisfaction at Freewill was enhanced by strong relationships between colleagues and leaders, and diminished by less strong connections with students' families and with a sense of mission for teachers' work.

Some teachers from both the stayer and leaver groups reported the quality of their working experience to be negatively impacted by colleagues who were perceived to not be fulfilling their share of responsibility for instructing Freewill's children, and some leavers also felt a lack of trust and being "judged" by their colleagues. Nevertheless, the sentiment that "Freewill was like a family" featured powerfully in both teacher and leader interview reflections. Indeed, practices aimed at building a family community among the Freewill staff were among those considered most important by the school principal. Perhaps due to these efforts, survey data revealed that all leavers and most stayers agreed that their colleagues "cared about me as a person" and "I enjoyed working with my colleagues."

Interestingly, collegial relationships was one of two categories that was actually rated more positively by leavers than stayers on the survey. Perhaps this indicates a

decline in collegial relationships and the provision of resources in the years following the leavers' departure. Perhaps, however, there is also some truth to the adage that "time heals all wounds," and leavers were more positively reminiscent about the colleagues they left behind than the stayers who were still amid this daily work. Larger-scale research in the literature does indicate that relationships are among the most influential of elements of teacher working condition affecting their retention decisions (Day et al., 2007; Futernick, 2007; Johnson et al., 2012; Pogodzinski et al., 2013).

Teachers reported less powerful connections with Freewill's students and families, at times revealing racial biases and cultural dissonance. Teachers also seemed to lack a sense of relatedness around a shared social justice mission of serving these families through their work, with few leadership practices mentioned that would ameliorate this disconnect. In survey responses, most teachers did not feel that their prescribed curriculum or facilitated conversations with school leaders and colleagues helped them to understand and have open conversations about race.

It was encouraging that "Connectedness with Families" was the area of the survey that showed the greatest difference between stayers and leavers, with more positive perceptions from stayers than leavers. Perhaps some of the state's recent legislation around restorative justice and trauma-informed instruction were beginning to shift connectedness with families in a positive direction. Teachers' perceived disconnect between themselves and their students' families has been found to be a contributing factor in attrition decisions (Allensworth et al., 2009), and the desire to work for social justice has been shown to inspired teachers' motivation to persist in their work (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011; Day et al., 2007; Ronfeldt et al., 2016).

Theme Three: Challenges of, and Improvements in, Student Behavior

A third theme of this study of leadership practices and teacher working conditions revolved around teacher experiences of students' behavior. Student behavior had a significant negative influence on teacher working conditions at Freewill, particularly among leavers. The use of restorative practices appeared to be ameliorating this, but more structural changes and resources were needed to fully address students' social and emotional needs.

While teacher perceptions of student behavior did not emerge as strongly on the survey as they did in teacher interviews, the survey did reflect the interview data in that leadership practices addressing student behaviors were perceived more positively by stayers than by leavers. Notably, one of the survey statements with which stayers expressed much higher agreement than leavers was under the element of student behavior. Mean scale scores of stayers were much higher than those of leavers in agreeing with the statement, "My school places a priority on teaching students social and emotional behaviors and skills."

Data from a school leader interview indicated that providing supports for pro-social student behaviors had been a large focus of the school principal's leadership practices throughout the first three years of his tenure. Teacher interviews, as well, described many leadership practices focused on improving teachers' experiences with this element. In 2018, the state published a report documenting the discriminatory impact of exclusionary discipline practices on students of color. With the passing of state legislation, school systems were required to adopt restorative approaches to positive

school climate and rehabilitative discipline and to examine their discipline data with a scrutinizing eye for disproportionality.

Perhaps these policies were slowly finding their way down to Freewill Elementary. The literature suggests that such practices were worthy of leaders' time. Student behavior in minority-majority schools has proven to be a challenging element of teachers' working conditions and their decisions of whether to remain at a school (Allensworth et al., 2011; Boyd et al., 2011; Day et al., 2007; Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Ladd, 2011; Moore-Johnson et al., 2012; Podolsky et al., 2016).

While stayers reported more positive experiences with student behavior than did leavers, the challenges of student behavior featured prominently in interviews with both sets of teachers. Teachers expressed concern that school's work around restorative practices were not being enacted in systematic and structural ways that would embed these changes in the ongoing practice of the organization. Moreover, teachers expressed a need for more resources for the therapeutic supports that were needed to fully address students' social and emotional needs.

Students in minority-majority schools can bring to the open system of the school environment the effects of centuries of injustice that have disenfranchised them and their families in many ways. These injustices can manifest in behaviors that can present challenges in the classroom environment for classmates, teachers, and the students themselves. These challenges can be compounded by a lack of relational trust and connections between teachers and their students and families. Student behaviors were a critical element of teachers' working experiences at Freewill Elementary and leadership

practices to positively influence these would benefit from being institutionalized and adequately resourced.

Theme Four: The Encompassing Power of *The Test*: Accountability as Practice

The fourth theme that emerged through this study's surveys and interviews was a sentiment that student performance on standardized state and local assessments had come to represent a force larger than the student assessment itself. The teachers' working environment at Freewill Elementary was significantly shaped by normative dimensions of state and local accountability policies. Student achievement on standardized tests served as the focus not just for assessment of student learning, but for the core of instruction of the school itself; defining the school's vision, shaping the school's curriculum, and framing teachers' professional development and evaluation experiences. Pressure to establish the school's legitimacy in the public eye with satisfactory test results seemed to have created an environment in which the standardized assessments came to be construed as the constituting the school's vision, themselves.

A broad body of literature documents the effect of accountability policies on narrowing the curriculum (Berliner, 2011; Milner, 2014) and diminishing engaging instruction (Shannon, Whitney, & Wilson, 2014); effects by which students of color are impacted the most (Milner, 2014). In schools like Freewill where the gaps between students' present performance and the state-determined standard expectations are the greatest, teachers and leaders feel little flexibility to innovate and enrich learning with experiences that may be less likely to translate to the highly consequential standardized test.

Teacher interview data commonly conveyed a feeling that, at Freewill Elementary, “It’s all about testing.” These included not only state-mandated end-of-grade-level tests but also a system of tests created and mandated by the district. Multiple choice pre- and post-tests were administered in every content area in September and February to serve as the measure of the Student Learning Objective (SLO) that constituted 50% of each teachers’ evaluation. These were treated by county educators to be equally high-stakes as the state assessments in terms of the amount of time dedicated to them in instructional preparation and teachers’ time for whole- and small-group test administration.

Teacher interviews illustrated the system’s positivist framing of understanding and evaluating teachers’ performance. Multiple components of the teacher evaluation system became less about professional practice and more about scores and numbers as they were enacted in this system: from pre-determined goal-setting for SLOs, to discussions of professional responsibilities revolving around portfolio scores, to reflections about professional practice revolving around categories one did or did not “hit.”

These qualitative perceptions of accountability as the core of Freewill’s instructional work were reflected in the survey data as well. Of the 44-question survey’s ten statements with the lowest mean scale score ratings, six were from the section regarding teacher autonomy. The section of evaluation, growth and development received the lowest mean scale score (1.87) of all the nine areas of working condition elements and included the lowest-rated statement in the entire survey: “My one-on-one conversations with my supervisor(s) focus primarily on important feedback that is useful

for improving my teaching (rather than focusing primarily on SLO or evaluation scores)." Leader interview data confirmed this focus, as the school principal described his efforts to raise achievement at Freewill using an organizational routine with which he felt the greatest expertise: quarterly one-on-one meetings to discuss student data.

These data suggest that the culture at Freewill reflected what Sachs and Mockler (2012) termed a "measurement culture," in which accountability is assured by a focus on standards, outcomes and results. Measurement cultures are supported by governments rather than by teachers, as they rely on a set of predetermined performance indicators that purportedly represent a form of objective measurement of teaching performance and student outcomes. Scholars have argued that these school cultures arise out of a neo-liberal emphasis on corporate management that has cast teachers as technicians in ways that negatively impacts teacher morale and distorts the broader purposes of public school education (Apple, 2011).

This positivist approach to understanding teacher practice might not be best at leveraging teachers' inner motivations to persist and succeed in their work. When Freewill's leaders' conversations focused on the metrics of measurement itself, rather than on things like classroom practice or student work, they may have been failing to leverage their limited one-on-one time with teachers in ways that would most encourage teachers to stay. Research suggests that teachers might be better retained when leaders value their development over their accountability (Podolsky et al., 2016; Reinhorn et al., 2017).

Theme Five: Tensions in Developing Competence and Empowering Autonomy—Challenges for Adult Development

The final theme that emerged in analysis of the data for this capstone strove to encapsulate the complex tensions between developing competence and promoting autonomy in Freewill's educators. Teachers and leaders at Freewill experienced tensions in their desires for competence and autonomy for themselves and their colleagues in advancing the school's improvement. They often lacked the supportive communities of practice, leadership development, or access to coaching and mentoring that would promote the optimal development of human capacity in the system.

This fifth theme is very much related to the finding discussed previously with regards to Theme Four. Like in many underperforming schools (Diamond & Spillane, 2004; Milner, 2014), educators at Freewill were under significant pressure to demonstrate satisfactory performance on standardized student assessments. In the quest to assure Freewill's legitimacy by demonstrating increased student achievement on state and local assessment measures, school and district leaders and teachers enacted school improvement efforts that limited teachers' autonomy.

In addition to testing pressures, tensions between competence and autonomy at Freewill were complicated by its very nature as a high-turnover school. With large numbers of their staff comprised of novice teachers, Freewill's leaders often could not rely on their teachers having the competence that arises with professional experience. Yet while supporting their teachers with the clearly delineated direction so many require when new to the profession, those who had amassed some expertise felt their autonomy to be limited. A prominent theme of teacher interviews were experiences of feeling

limited professional decision-making about what to teach, when and how to teach it, and when and how to assess their students' learning.

Survey data corroborated this finding. The questions in the survey section of "professional identity and agency" scored the third-lowest of the nine working condition elements surveyed. Out of the participants, 74% of stayers and 67% of leavers disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were regarded as educational experts, and the majority disagreed with the statement, "The leaders at Freewill encouraged creativity and risk-taking."

This theme of limited autonomy illustrates the influences of accountability pressures and the compounding impacts of high turnover rates, but it also suggests a lack of consideration of best practices in adult development. Participants' comments and survey data revealed a lack of utilizing adult developmental (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2018), and motivational theories (Ryan & Deci, 2000) to most fully support teachers' motivation to bring their whole selves to their work. Interestingly, the prevalence of "accountability" as a force for school improvement was so ingrained in the school that even as teachers complained about constrained autonomy as a negative experience for themselves, they described the performance of their underperforming colleagues because of a "lack of accountability" rather than viewing this in terms of a need for development or growth. Only one quarter of teachers reported agreement or strong agreement that "The induction, mentoring, and/or coaching experiences I received as a new teacher here were helpful to me when I was beginning my work."

Additionally, the data suggest an absence of structures of supportive communities of practice along various career ladder trajectories that would support professional

learning and leadership development in educators at a variety of stages. Teacher interviews indicated that informal mentors of grade-level teammates exerted a powerful force over the instruction provided by new teachers but that this mentoring work was not recognized in a formalized role.

Most telling, perhaps, was the leader interview data on this matter. In their interviews, both school and district leaders asserted the need for supportive professional communities and ongoing coaching for leaders. The Learning Policy Institute's summary of research on key building blocks of effective principal preparation and professional development programs (Sutcher, Podolsky, & Espinoza, 2017) asserted that programs that were successful in supporting leaders who impacted student learning were structured as cohorts (learning carried out in collaboration amongst a small group of peers), and supported principals' development through on-the-job coaching by strong and supportive leaders.

The literature indicates that teachers in low-income schools often share in less decision-making than do those in schools with higher-income populations (Ingersoll & Collins, 2017), but that leadership practices that enhance teachers' professional identity and agency can elevate their investment in their work (Henkin & Holliman, 2009; Glazer, 2018; Renzulli et al., 2011). For leaders to most effectively employ such practices, it stands to reason, they would benefit from an investment in professional development of their own.

Summary of Themes

An analysis of teacher and leader interviews and surveys with teacher stayers and leavers resulted in five themes described in the previous section:

1. The migration of human capital from the study school to schools serving fewer minoritized students negatively impacted Freewill Elementary.
2. Relationships were critical to teacher satisfaction. Teacher satisfaction at Freewill was enhanced by strong relationships between colleagues and leaders, and diminished by less strong connections with students' families and a sense of mission for teachers' work.
3. Student behavior had a significant negative influence on teacher working conditions at Freewill, particularly among leavers. The use of restorative practices appeared to be ameliorating this, but more structural changes and resources are needed to fully address students' social and emotional needs.
4. The teachers' working environment at Freewill Elementary was significantly shaped by normative dimensions of state and local accountability policies. Student achievement on standardized tests served as the focus not just for assessment of student learning, but for the core of instruction at the school itself: defining the school's vision, shaping the school's curriculum, and framing teachers' evaluation and professional learning experiences.
5. Teachers and leaders at Freewill experienced tensions in their desires for competence and autonomy for themselves and their colleagues in advancing the school's improvement. They often lacked the supportive communities of practice, leadership development, or access to coaching and mentoring that would promote the optimal development of human capacity in the system.

These themes are used to inform the recommendations for practice in the following section which are outlined in Appendix N.

Limitations

As noted previously, there were several limitations to this study. Most importantly, this case study of a single minority-majority school is limited by its small sample size and its convenience sampling of a single site. Findings from this research, while representing rich understandings gleaned from teachers' experiences at Freewill, cannot be generalized to minority-majority schools in the United States or to other schools in Corolla County more broadly. Particularly given the sample size of only one school and one district leader for addressing Research Question Three, it remains to be seen whether perceptions of leaders of Freewill would align with those across the district as a whole.

Utilizing Freewill Elementary as the study site also presented a limitation in terms of the age level of the school and the working condition experiences that were particular to schools of that age level. For example, anecdotal experience has highlighted elements that appear to negatively impact teachers' working experience at the secondary level that did not emerge as important themes from this elementary sample. That elementary teachers in this study did not express great concern over factors like insufficient access to technology and a shortage of substitute teachers (requiring classroom teachers to serve as substitutes during their planning time), should not negate the fact that these could be very real factors impacting the experiences of secondary teachers in the district.

Recommendations

The recommendations that follow have been developed to improve teachers' experiences of working conditions in Corolla County's minority-majority schools. These five actions are meant to suggest steps that school and district leaders could take that could positively impact the motivation teachers feel to persist in their work. The literature contains a breadth of research on leadership practices that can positively impact teacher working conditions in minority-majority schools. The recommendations provided here aim to put the literature in conversation with the findings from this case study of a school in Corolla County, in the hopes that a consideration of the research base in context will yield realistic, actionable means of improving teacher retention in this suburban district's minority-majority schools.

Recommendation 1: Incentivize the Attraction of Talent to High-Needs Schools

The greatest asset for changing outcomes for the children of a school system is the talent of the teachers and leaders in its schools. Research on hundreds of schools and

districts that have doubled student performance over a four- to six-year period reveals that leaders understood one action that was critical to their improvement: focusing on the strategic management of human capital (Odden, 2009). Or, in the words of one leaver from this study, “They really need to focus on schools with such high needs to really grab and keep those good high quality teachers that are truly going to be there and make the difference” (Rachel).

In fact, the incentive programs that already exist to attract teachers to minority-majority schools in Corolla County do appear to be having an impact. One stayer described in detail the primary drivers of her decision to stay at Freewill for the foreseeable future: student loan forgiveness from the federal government and tuition reimbursement from the district. Building upon these existing programs with human capital management systems more explicitly tied to retention in high-needs schools could help direct the county’s talent where it is needed the most.

Unfortunately, many common human resource practices (such as seniority-based transfer provisions) work to channel more experienced teachers *out* of high-needs schools (Neild, Useem, Travers, & Lesnick, 2003). For examples of public school systems that have successfully utilized strategic talent management systems to turn around schools for minoritized students, Corolla County might consider the Benwood Initiative in Hamilton County (Tennessee) (Chenoweth, 2007) or the Charlotte-Mecklenberg’s Strategic Staffing Initiative (Blakeney Clark, 2016). In the Charlotte-Mecklenberg model, for example, highly effective principals with proven track records were selected to lead the district’s lowest performing schools. These principals could select a team of highly effective teachers, literacy coaches and assistant principals, as “Over and over again, our

rock-star teachers told us the leader of the school would be the determining factor in a decision to transfer to a struggling school" (Blakeney Clark, 2016, p. 128). Principals received a 10% pay supplement over their base salaries and teachers also received bonuses throughout their five-year commitment to the school.

This recommendation was posed directly by the principal of Freewill in his interview. He reflected the following:

> This might sound like a utopian world. But what if you have a principal who feels they're really good and says, 'You know what? I really need that challenge of a [high-needs] school. I really need that $10,000 a year more and I'm going to turn this lower performing school around. Teachers might follow the kind of principal who wanted that role. It's possible. It could be a magnetic thing that we would do.

Such a "utopian" vision has proven to be possible in other districts throughout the country. A more strategic human capital management system could incentivize the migration of talented teachers and leaders towards, rather than away from, Corolla County's minority-majority schools.

Recommendation 2: Prioritize the Cultivation of Trust Throughout the System

In seeing the power of relatedness that emerged as the second theme of this study's findings, a second recommendation for addressing Corolla County's teacher retention problem of practice revolves around the cultivation of trust throughout the system. As Bryk and Schneider (2002) describe it, relational trust is built through day-to-day social exchanges in an educational community and it reduces the vulnerability that members feel when asked to take on new tasks. Schools with strong levels of trust have been shown to achieve important improvement goals. Critical attributes for building trust include respect, personal regard for others, competence, and integrity.

The cultivation of such relational trust would be particularly important to relationships between Freewill's teachers and parents, as centuries of institutionalized racism have created societal conditions in which trust between those of differing ethnic backgrounds has been repeatedly fractured. Efforts to build such trust could be enhanced by culturally responsive pedagogy (Hammond, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2009) and culturally responsive school leadership practices (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). Culturally responsive pedagogy begins with engaging teachers in self-analysis of their own background, culture, and potential biases while also working to better understand the cultures of their students and provide instruction that capitalizes on students' strengths while connecting to their experiences.

This pedagogical approach necessitates that teachers change their instructional delivery in response to the cultures of their students. This would differ from current practices such as what one leaver, Laura, relayed: "I'm not, I'm not any different person now that I'm in a different school. I talk to the kids the same way. I teach the same way. But it's just the response you get." Learning different ways to teach based on the children before them may be helpful to teachers seeking to get a different response from their students.

Supporting teachers in accommodating such pedagogical shifts and in forming trusting partnerships with students' families would necessitate leadership by culturally responsive school and district leaders. Through a synthesis of the research and literature around Culturally Responsive School Leadership, Khalifa et al. (2016) determined four primary behaviors such leaders need, including the ability to (a) critically self-reflect on leadership behaviors; (b) develop culturally responsive teachers; (c) promote culturally

responsive/inclusive school environments; and (d) engage students, parents, and staff in positive community relations.

With leaders and teachers better equipped to employ culturally responsive pedagogical practices, they would be better able to generate connections, feelings of safety, and trust among diverse members of the school community. In summarizing the neuroscience behind the impact of culturally responsive pedagogy on students' brains, Hammond (2014) wrote the following:

> We are hardwired to connect with others. Our nervous system is designed to guide us toward avoiding threats, approaching rewards and things that will make us feel good, and attaching to others for safety and companionship. Our challenge as culturally responsive teachers is knowing how to create an environment that the brain perceives as safe and nurturing so it can relax, let go of any stress, and turn its attention to learning. (p. 50)

The ability to cross cultural barriers to forge connections with others in the school community would help to generate the trust that would feed teachers' innate desire to be held in affirming relationships with those around them.

Recommendation 3: Employ Practices of Improvement Science to Target High-Leverage Change Drivers: Student Behavior

Scholars of organizational theory advocate that leaders' application of frameworks for understanding organizational behavior can be valuable tools for leaders seeking to impact change (Brazer, Bauer, & Johnson, 2019). Tenets of organizational theory include the interplay between structures—of rules, policies, procedures, and routines—and the humans who interact within and upon these structures. Brazer, Bauer, and Johnson (2019) argued that the use of frameworks from organizational theory can help create more sustained and institutionalized changes for the children schools serve.

Data from teacher and leader interviews suggested that leadership practices to improve working conditions at Freewill Elementary could be enhanced by the use of organizational theory. Teachers reported how the lack of structures and systems made their jobs more difficult at times, and they expressed concern that the absence of structural changes could create situations in which efforts such as the recent work around restorative practices would fail to take permanent root.

Bryk and colleagues (2015) provided guidance in how leaders can apply practices of improvement science to impact lasting change in educational institutions. They assert that a fundamental principle of such an approach involves fully "seeing the system" that is producing the current results. As they wrote, "Adopting a systems perspective makes visible many of the hidden complexities actually operating in a system that might be important targets for change" (p. 14).

If the interviews from this case study are any indication, "seeing the system" impacting teacher working conditions at Freewill Elementary must involve more closely studying teachers' experience with students' behaviors in the classroom. Root cause analyses of the teacher retention problem of practice at schools like Freewill might reveal supports for pro-social student behaviors to be a high-leverage driver of change upon which leaders might want to act.

In considering ways to utilize organizational theory and improvement science to impact high-leverage changes on root causes of teacher dissatisfaction such as student behavior in minority-majority classrooms, leaders will want to consider the existing body of research. The literature contains a great deal of knowledge about student behavior that can inform the drivers of change leaders in Corolla County might choose to enact.

Research abounds on potential practices and programs to positively impact student behavior, and leaders will need to judiciously decide what systems to enact, how to enact changes with coherence, and how to evaluate their impact.

District and school leaders might consider various practices that have been shown to positively impact student behavior; for example: the use of Culturally Responsive Teaching pedagogies (discussed in the previous section) that better connect teachers and students; curriculum and instruction shifts that enhance students' engagement in their learning (Hammond, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2009); enhanced therapeutic supports to meet students' social and emotional needs and provide trauma-informed instruction (Yoshikawa et al., 2012); restorative justice practices of maintaining healthy communities (Wachtel, 2016); and comprehensive programs of social and emotional learning (SEL). Leaders might draw upon resources like CASEL's (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2019) Program Guide that shares best-practice guidelines for district and school teams on how to select and implement SEL programs. This guide offers ratings of evidence-based programs that help children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (https://casel.org/guide/). Drawing upon the wealth of resources to support the problem of practice of student behavior, leaders' application of improvement science practices—like conducting causal system analysis and conducting rapid small tests of change—can enable leaders to positively impact this challenge in a systematic and long-lasting way.

In addressing this pressing problem of student behavior, of course, educators must remember that children exhibiting "challenging behaviors" may, in fact, be challenging

the very systems of oppression that are disenfranchising them in society. As Shalaby (2017) reminds us in her research with first- and second-graders relayed in *Troublemakers: Lessons in freedom from young children at school,* "Can we wonder, together, how the problem we are seeing in our classroom might be related to a problem we see in the world" (p. 178)? When we can see the behaviors of "Troublemakers" in their larger context as agitation against systematic injustice itself, possibilities abound for helping students to both successfully navigate within the system and exercise their powers to help change it.

Recommendation 4: Develop Transformative Visions of Instruction and Supportive Instructional Guidance Infrastructure to Achieve Vision

Critical theorists argue that many education systems function to reproduce rather than reduce inequalities in society (Anyon, 1981; Freire, 1970). For leaders to disrupt the reproduction of inequalities by schools like Freewill, they must, first, develop a vision of instruction that transcends current inequitable systems and, second, develop and enact coherent systems of instructional guidance infrastructure that work in service of this vision.

A key element in schools that are significantly improving student performance is an explicit instructional vision; a finely articulated understanding of effective instructional practice (Mehta & Fine, 2015; Odden, 2009). As Mehta and Fine describe, in such schools, "Administrative leaders, teachers, and students share a highly developed picture of what they think good instruction looks like, and this picture serves as an anchor for much of what happens at these schools" (p. 501). It is this crystal-clarity of vision in

picturing classroom instruction that will inform the subsequent leadership actions to bring vision to reality.

As poet Lucille Clifton wrote, “We cannot create what we can’t imagine.” Leaders in Corolla County must engage their communities in the messy process of imagining and articulating explicit visions of the instructional practice they hope to see in classrooms. To begin this visioning process, leaders might engage their communities around fundamental direction-setting questions. *What is education for and what does this look like (*Mehta & Fine, 2015)? *What skills and dispositions are needed of 21st century graduates to succeed in a world where change is constant and learning never stops* (Portrait of a Graduate, 2019)? Such defined aspirations frame the purpose of teachers’ work in the deeply rooted commitment many have for the affective aspects of teaching and learning, recognizing an investment in the broader purposes of public school education that have been distorted by the demand for delivery of performance emphasized in the accountability era (Sachs & Mockler, 2012).

Upon defining a vision of transformative instruction, leaders wishing to ignite teachers’ motivation to realize it must enact coherent systems of instructional guidance infrastructure that work in service of this vision. Researchers have argued that ambitious reform policies such as the Common Core Standards have failed, in part, due to a weak educational infrastructure tying policy to practice in the United States (Cohen, 2011). There are many structures and tools—highways—by which leaders shape the instruction experienced by students in classrooms. Hopkins and Spillane (2015) outline five components of instructional guidance infrastructure (IGI) to include (1) instructional frameworks, (2) instructional materials, (3) student assessment, (4) instructional

oversight, and (5) teacher professional learning. When leaders enact supportive IGI elements in coherent ways, improved student outcomes can be achieved (Mehta & Fine, 2015; Hopkins & Spillane, 2015; Peurach & Neumerski, 2015).

Leaders in Corolla County could capitalize on teachers' motivation to realize transformative instructional visions by creating and enacting IGI elements that support this vision. Systems of instructional oversight and professional learning, for example, could shape teachers' development in ways that parallel the ways in which leaders hope students' development will be shaped. School instructional oversight practices might draw less upon accountability-focused data comparisons of one class to another's test scores, and more upon tools like protocols for observing and collaboratively reflecting on in-class practice of high-leverage pedagogical techniques. County teacher evaluation practices might draw less upon systems of high-stakes, resource-intensive standardized multiple choice pre- and post-tests, and more upon tools of teachers setting their own goals for their professional practice and designing their own performance assessments of students' progress.

Policies and tools such as these would move beyond espousing a vision of life-affirming instruction, to creating a system in which school leaders had the tools and resources to help make such a vision a reality.

Recommendation 5: Build a Comprehensive System of Adult Development

A final recommendation for acting upon the findings of this study to improve working conditions and teacher retention in Corolla County is the building of a comprehensive system of adult development. This recommendation entails moving beyond the notion that a single leader's efforts to enforce more "accountability" among

teachers will lead to sustained improvements in performance, and instead considers creating a holistic system that would help to develop the system's adults, with all their various talents and motivations, to their fullest capacities. Grounded in an understanding of human motivation theories such as those that informed the conceptual framework for this study (Herzberg, 1968; Ryan & Deci, 2000), an understanding of adult developmental theories (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2018), and best practices in teacher and leader professional development (Professional Learning Association, 2012; Sutcher et al., 2017), a comprehensive system of adult development would help nurture the resilient communities of practice that would support teachers' ongoing commitment to their work.

In developing people to be the resilient, ever-improving, culturally responsive teachers and leaders minority-majority schools require them to be, the division must build growth-oriented professional cultures at all levels of the organization. This would range from induction, to ongoing improvement of practice, to leadership. Throughout these career stages, such a system should be mindful of employing adult developmental theory to provide holding environments of appropriate support and challenge (Drago-Severson, & Blum-DeStefano, 2018) for the adults in its care. Such a stance towards adult learners requires a focus on their development, goals and growth distinctly different from the evaluation systems currently being practiced for the sake of accountability. Development of healthy communities of practice throughout the organization could better distribute leadership throughout multiple routines, systems, and people in the organization, rather than relying on a single principal's ability to "hold everyone accountable" as the key to improvement in the system (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001).

The first stage of consideration for this system of adult development would be new teacher induction. Data from this study indicated that teachers did not feel consistently supported by communities of practice and collegial mentors. Corolla County's induction program should include tenets that researchers have found to best promote retention of new teachers: common planning time with teachers in the same subject, regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers, participation in a supportive cohort of other new teachers, and the assignment of a teacher mentor working in the same subject area and/or grade level (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

In integrating these best practices, Corolla County's induction program could provide opportunities to support the development of novice and veteran teachers alike. Teacher interviews indicated that new teachers' guidance and support often came through informal advice from team leaders and grade-level colleagues, and leader interviews indicated a desire for "rock star teachers" to have a greater influence. By formalizing the roles of those providing this support, mentoring of new teachers could provide opportunities for expert teachers to take on the "expanded roles" that have been shown to promote their retention (Ladd, 2011; Olsen & Anderson, 2007) while also providing new teachers with shoulder-to-shoulder support.

In addition to an induction program of simultaneous support for new teachers and career progression for veteran teachers, a comprehensive approach to adult development in Corolla County would also consider best practices in supporting all practicing teachers in their ongoing development and growth. Such practices should include nurturing supportive communities of practice, providing access to instructional coaching, and engaging teachers with the content and curriculum materials they are with which they

will teach (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018; Lynch, 2019; Wei et al., 2009). As Hargreaves and O'Connor define successful collaborative professionalism:

> It is organized in an evidence-informed, but not data-driven, way through rigorous planning, deep and sometimes demanding dialogue, candid but constructive feedback, and continuous collaborative inquiry. The joint work of collaborative professionalism is embedded in the culture and life of the school, where educators actively care for and have solidarity with each other as fellow professionals as they pursue their challenging work together.

One can imagine how leadership of such collaborative professionalism will require a highly developed skill set of both coaching and team facilitation skills.

Finally, to this end, a comprehensive adult development system must support the ongoing development of the county's leaders. The Learning Policy Institute's summary of research on key building blocks of effective principal preparation and professional development programs (Sutcher et al., 2017) asserted that programs that are most successful in supporting leaders who impact student learning are often structured as cohorts (learning is carried out in collaboration amongst a small group of peers), and they support principals' development through on-the-job coaching. The study's leader participants, themselves, indicated how beneficial such practices would be in helping them to promote instructional improvement in their schools.

In the end, the greatest asset for children in Corolla County will be the learning of the organization's adults. The ways in which teachers and leaders experience relatedness, competence, and autonomy in their own development will guide the way in which they support the development of these motivational needs in their students.

Summary of Recommendations

The recommendations presented in this chapter are based on the findings of the study and the existing literature. They will be relayed to Corolla County practitioners

through the action communication products outlined below. These recommendations provide a number of ways in which leaders can improve teacher working conditions: strategically incentivizing talent towards high-needs schools; building trust throughout the system with the use of culturally responsive pedagogies and leadership practices; utilizing improvement science practices to impact change on high-leverage factors like student behavior; developing a transformative vision of instruction and instructional guidance infrastructure aligned to achieve it; and developing a comprehensive program of adult development that supports the ongoing growth of both teachers and leaders. With these practices, leaders can meet teachers' motivational needs by enhancing their competence while also recognizing their professional autonomy. And through it all, these recommendations strive to promote the positive relatedness that motivates teachers to, as Sammons et al. write (2007), "maintain upward trajectories of commitment" (p. 688) throughout their careers.

ACTION COMMUNICATIONS

This section will present the action communication products that address the recommendations presented in this study. The action communication products consist of briefing memos and accompanying slide decks outlining the recommendations for school and district leaders that have resulted from my research. Both the briefing memo and the slide decks will outline the problem of practice and research questions which guided this study.

Action Communication Product One: Memo to Division Leadership Team

Intended Audience. The briefing memo will be shared with members of the division leadership team. These members include the district superintendent, the deputy superintendent, two executive directors of schools, the executive director of human resources, as well as the principal of the school that served as the site of research for this case study.

Purpose. The briefing memo describes the study design and research findings and summarizes the findings and recommendations for Corolla County Public Schools. It is meant to serve as a supplement to the slide deck that will be described in the next section.

Format. The briefing memo will be shared electronically. The memo will invite district leaders' further conversation about the study's findings and offer my services in reflecting on the outlined recommendations.

MEMORANDUM

To: CCPS Leadership Team

From: Carolyn Wooster, Ed.D, University of Virginia

Date: November 30, 2020

Subject: Leadership Practices Influencing Working Conditions and Teacher Retention, based on research conducted November 2019-June 2020

Dear Leaders of Corolla County Public Schools,

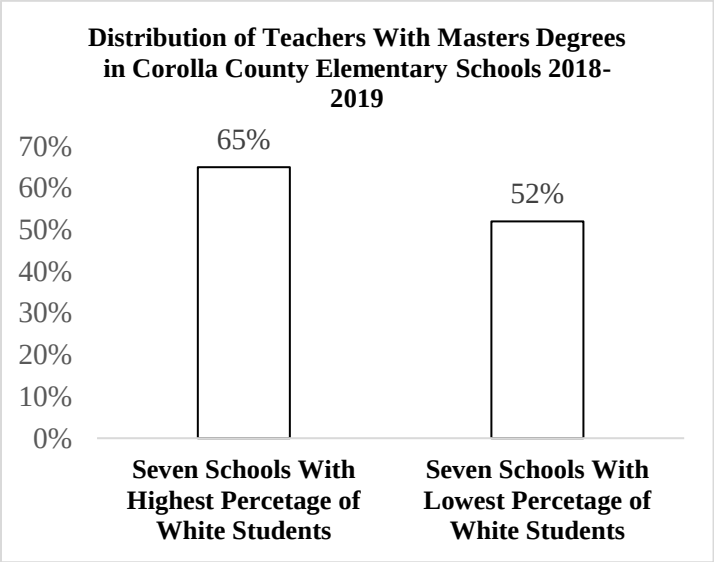
From the summer of 2015 to the spring of 2020 I had the great pleasure of serving as a reading resource teacher in Corolla County Public Schools. Over the course of these five years I had the opportunity to work with dozens of talented, dedicated, highly qualified teachers and leaders creating incredible learning environments for children in the county's elementary and middle school classrooms.

I also, throughout those five years, became intimately acquainted with a persistent, troublesome problem: in several other classrooms, children were not met with professionally qualified teachers. At 10.9%, Corolla County's teacher attrition rate exceeded the state average of 6.7% as the second highest in the state of Maryland, falling only behind Baltimore City (Maryland Longitudinal Data System Dashboard, 2018). And as high teacher attrition rates have been shown to be the single greatest factor driving our national teaching shortage (Sutcher et al., 2016), this has meant that Corolla County students are met, on average, by teachers with ever less experience, preparation, and certification (Garcia & Weiss, 2019).

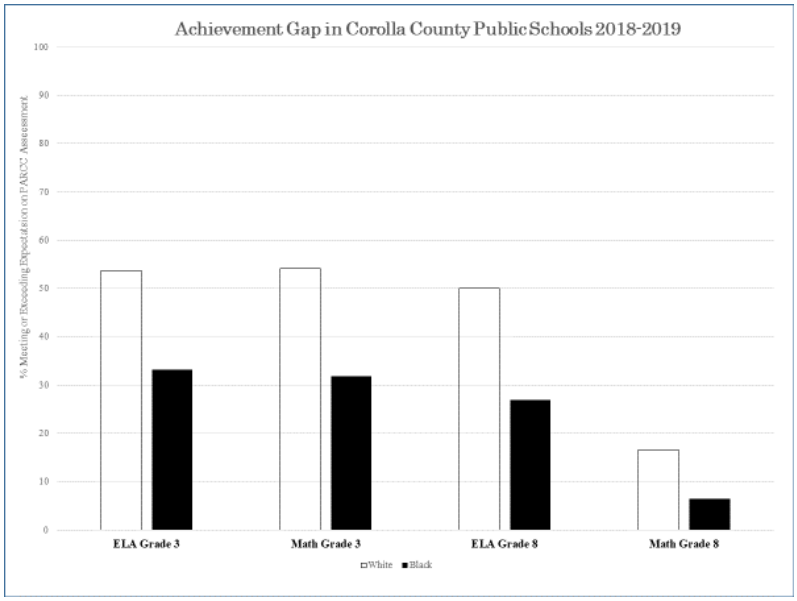
As a mother of Corolla County students, this makes me worry.

As you well know, and as a wealth of research has confirmed, the quality of a child's teacher is the single largest school-based factor in the realization of a child's academic success (Aaronson, Barrow, & Sander, 2007; Nye, Konstantopoulous, & Hedges, 2004). What might it mean for a child's development when they have a long-term substitute for first grade, a novice college recruit for second grade, and a non-certified conditional teacher for third?

Not surprisingly, Corolla County's attrition rate is not unique among schools serving mostly students of color. Nearly half of all teacher turnover takes place in just one-fourth of the nation's schools, with high-poverty, high-minority schools losing the greatest number of teachers (Ingersoll et al., 2018). One can, sadly, see this trend mirrored even within Corolla County itself. As shown in the graph below, in our seven elementary schools with the highest percentage of White students 65% of teachers hold masters degrees, while only 52% of teachers have this qualification in our seven elementary schools where the percentage of White students is the lowest.



I would often wonder, if we flipped the distribution of experienced teachers to schools serving great proportions of our children of color, what that might mean for the persistent academic achievement gap that too often colors student achievement in our schools?



I often wonder how you, our system leaders, might best be supported in this mission.

Because, while a large body of research certainly documents the correlation between a school's racial demographics and the attrition of its teachers, the literature also reveals an important distinction: When statistical models account for working conditions

as a factor in their analyses, the correlation between teacher attrition and the racial demographics of their students is found to be minimal, if not entirely unsubstantial (Allensworth et al., 2009; Boyd et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2012; Johnson & Simon, 2015; Ladd, 2011; Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005; Marinell & Coca, 2013; Podolsky et al., 2016). As leaders in the field articulate, "Teachers who leave high-poverty, high-minority schools reject the dysfunctional contexts in which they work, rather than the students they teach" (Johnson et al., 2012, p. 4).

As a student with the University of Virginia's administration and supervision doctoral program, I was afforded the unique opportunity to investigate these wonderings through my capstone research. Through a mixed methods investigation of "leavers," "stayers," and leaders, I conducted an in-depth case study of one of our high-minority, high-attrition elementary schools. Through surveys and interviews, I explored how leadership practices could best interact to meet teachers' intrinsic motivational needs (Herzberg, 1968; Ryan & Deci, 2000) and drive their desire to persist in their work.

A construct of nine elements of working conditions framed the focus of study on the conditions of teachers' work. Survey data provided descriptive statistics about stayers' and leavers' experience of working conditions in the school, and interviews with ten of these teachers brought these experiences to life in greater detail. Interviews with school and district leaders provided insight into how they experienced their agency and limitations when working to influence working conditions in their setting.

Analysis of these data revealed the following findings:

1. The migration of human capital from the study school to schools serving fewer minoritized students negatively impacted the study school. Teacher turnover at the study school impacted not only the students of the classes teachers left behind, but the school culture and program of the school overall. A downward cycle of increasing workloads on stayers, an increased pressure on support resources for the new teachers who came behind, and a loss of the school culture at large, reflected a loss of human resources in which any one part was not so great as the collective loss of the whole.

2. Relationships were critical to teacher satisfaction. Teacher satisfaction at Freewill was enhanced by strong relationships between colleagues and leaders, and diminished by weaker connections with students' families and a sense of mission for teachers' work.

3. Student behavior had a substantial negative influence on teacher working conditions at Freewill, particularly among leavers. Stayers did report less negative experiences of student behaviors in recent years, and more present support with professional learning to address this need, perhaps resulting from the district's recent implementation of restorative practices. Nevertheless, both leavers, stayers, and leaders expressed the need for more structural changes to institutionalize these practices, and the need for more resources to fully address students' social and emotional needs.

4. The teachers' working environment at Freewill Elementary was significantly shaped by normative dimensions of state and local accountability policies. Student achievement on standardized tests served as the focus not just for assessment of student learning, but for the core of instruction at the school itself: defining the school's vision, shaping the school's curriculum, and framing teachers' evaluation and professional learning experiences.

5. Teachers and leaders at Freewill experienced tensions in desires for competence and autonomy in advancing the school's improvement. A prominent theme of teacher interviews were experiences of feeling limited professional decision-making about what to teach, when and how to teach it, and when and how to assess their students' learning. This theme of limited autonomy not only illustrated the influences of accountability pressures as described in the previous finding, but it also suggests a need for greater understanding and implementation of best practices in adult development as a whole. Teachers and leaders at Freewill often lacked the supportive communities of practice, leadership development, or access to coaching and mentoring that would promote the optimal development of human capacity in the system.

Recommendations

While this was a small-scale study derived from a non-randomized sample whose results are not generalizable to a broader population, its findings nevertheless invite consideration of what recommendations might help to positively influence the teacher attrition challenge at schools like Freewill in Corolla County. I would welcome an opportunity to consider together what steps could be enacted in response to the following questions:

1. **How might we incentivize the attraction of talent to our county's highest-needs schools?** Examples exist of hundreds of schools and districts that have reversed teacher migration trends and improved student performance by making teacher talent in high-needs schools a priority. How might we most strategically manage our system's human capital to direct talent where it is needed the most?

2. **How could we best engender the cultivation of trust throughout our system?** Many systems facing challenges like our own have found means of enacting culturally responsive pedagogies and school leadership practices to help teachers form trusting relationships with their students and families. What training and supports might we provide that would foster connections to feed the innate need for relatedness among the educators, students and parents in our schools?

3. **What might it look like to enact system-wide change on a high-leverage driver of teacher attrition such as student behavior?** Corolla County's work of enacting restorative practices was shown to have promising implications for the experiences of stayers at Freewill Elementary. How might we build upon this success in ways what could institutionalize such practices? What practices and programs of trauma-informed supports, culturally responsive and engaging teaching, and social-and

emotional-learning have been found to improve student behavior in other schools serving mostly students of color, and how might we enact these in coherent ways to improve student wellbeing here?

4. **What is our vision of the instruction we hope to see students experiencing in their classrooms? What do we hope students will learn during their time in Corolla County Public Schools? What is the mission of a school system serving mostly students who have faced centuries of racial discrimination and inequality?** As we aspire to disrupt the reproduction of historical inequities by schools like Freewill, we must first develop a clear vision of what instruction could look like in its classrooms. Second, we might consider what components of instructional guidance infrastructure (instructional materials, student assessments, instructional oversight, teacher professional learning) would tie this transformative vision to teachers' everyday practice.

5. **What could adults in our system experience if we built upon our existing structures to enact a more comprehensive system of adult development?** Many in the study at Freewill seemed to uphold a notion that improved performance in the school depended on a single leader's ability to enforce "accountability" among teachers. The body of research suggests that we, instead, consider creating a holistic system of best practices in teacher and leader professional learning that would help to *develop* the system's adults, with all their various talents and motivations, to their fullest capacities.

In an increasingly diverse county in an increasingly diverse country, there is enormous potential to be realized by Corolla County Public Schools successfully educating all children, from all their diverse backgrounds, to their greatest abilities. I look forward to our continued dialogue regarding how we might leverage the findings of this study to do so. Please feel free to contact me at any time at carolyn.wooster@gmail.com or 555-555-5555.

With great respect,
Carolyn Wooster

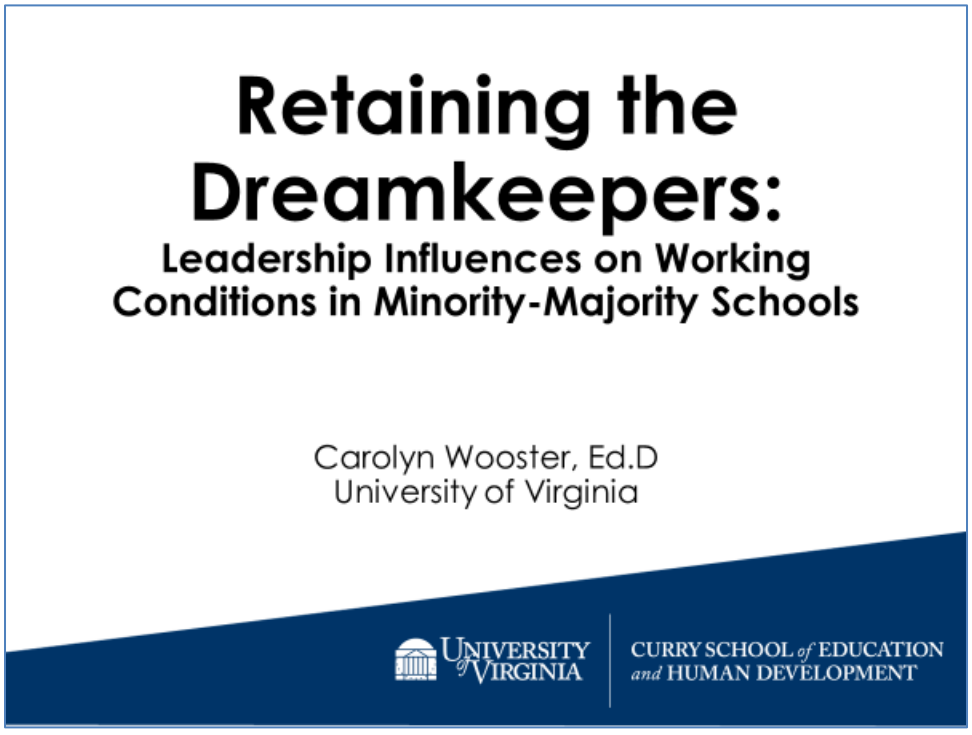
Carolyn Wooster

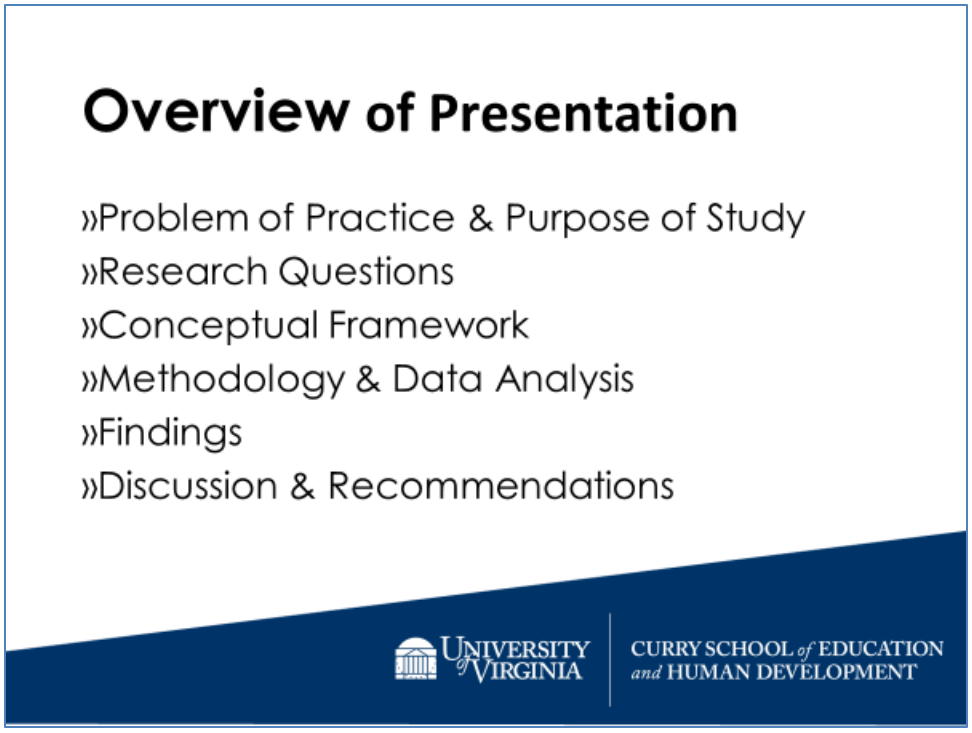
Action Communication Product Two: Slide Deck

Intended Audience. The slide deck will be shared with the previously mentioned members of the district leadership team in the hopes it will be shared and invite reflection among various stakeholder groups.

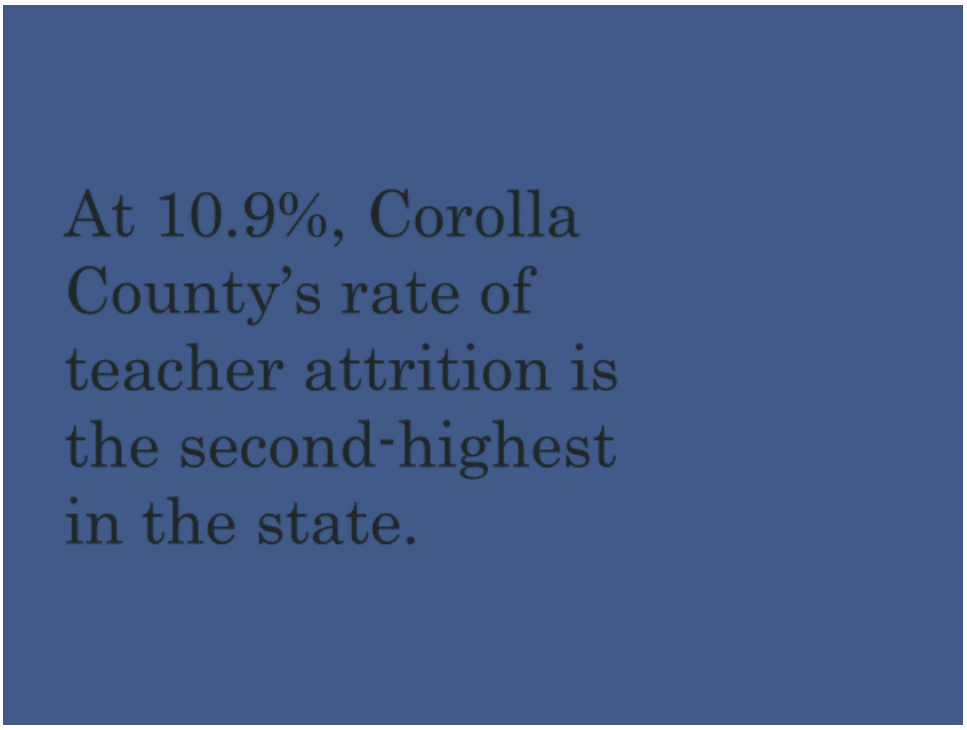
Purpose. The slide deck will provide visuals related to the study design and research questions of my capstone research. It will summarize the findings and recommendations for district leaders to consider in positively influencing teacher working conditions in the system's schools.

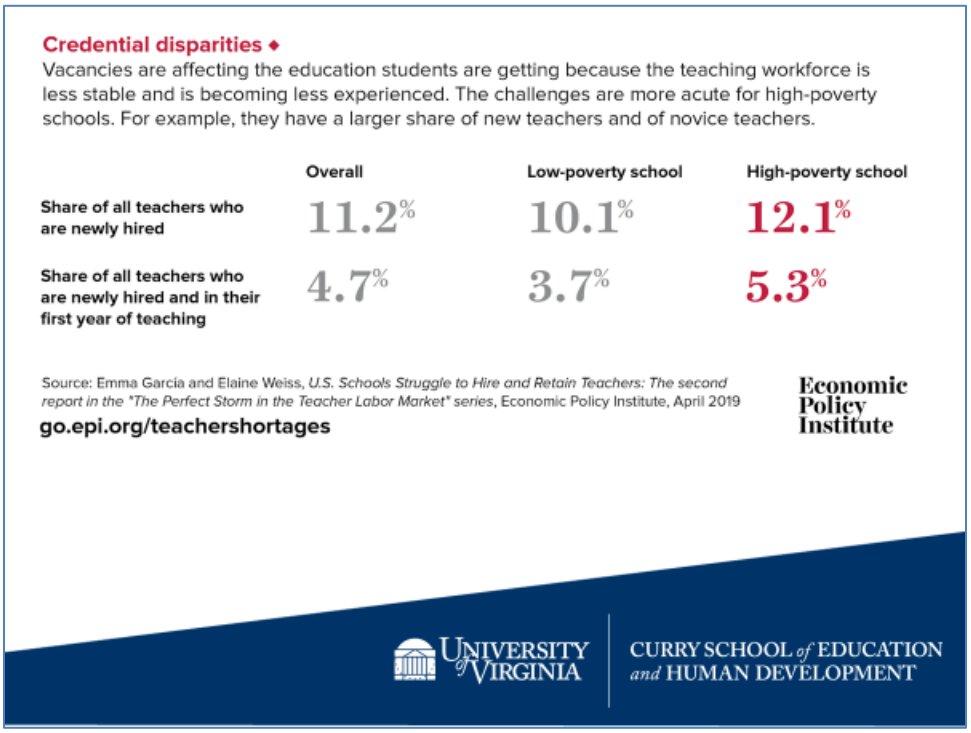
Format. An electronic copy of the presentation will be shared via email along with the previously outlined memo.

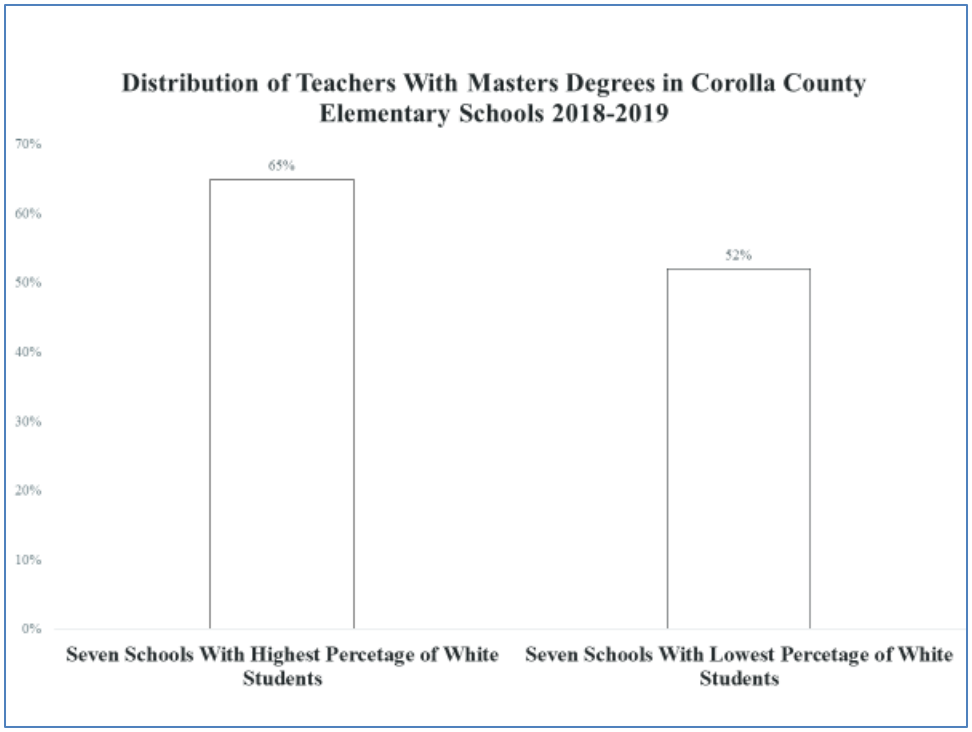


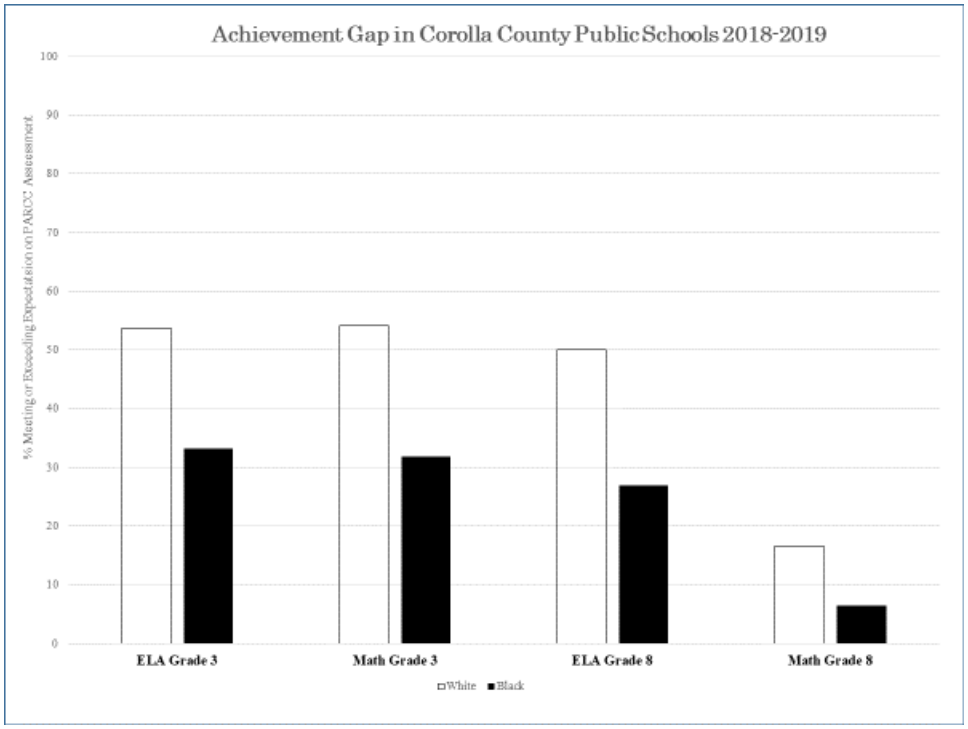

Overview of Presentation
»Problem of Practice & Purpose of Study
»Research Questions
»Conceptual Framework
»Methodology & Data Analysis
»Findings
»Discussion & Recommendations
UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA
CURRY SCHOOL of EDUCATION and HUMAN DEVELOPMENT


Problem of Practice
UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA
CURRY SCHOOL of EDUCATION and HUMAN DEVELOPMENT


At 10.9%, Corolla County's rate of teacher attrition is the second-highest in the state.


Credential disparities
Vacancies are affecting the education students are getting because the teaching workforce is less stable and is becoming less experienced. The challenges are more acute for high-poverty schools. For example, they have a larger share of new teachers and of novice teachers.
Overall
Low-poverty school
High-poverty school
Share of all teachers who are newly hired
11.2%
10.1%
12.1%
Share of all teachers who are newly hired and in their first year of teaching
4.7%
3.7%
5.3%
Source: Emma Garcia and Elaine Weiss, U.S. Schools Struggle to Hire and Retain Teachers: The second report in the "The Perfect Storm in the Teacher Labor Market" series, Economic Policy Institute, April 2019
go.epi.org/teachershortages
Economic Policy Institute
University of Virginia
Curry School of Education and Human Development


Distribution of Teachers With Masters Degrees in Corolla County Elementary Schools 2018-2019
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
65%
52%
Seven Schools With Highest Percetage of White Students
Seven Schools With Lowest Percetage of White Students


Achievement Gap in Corolla County Public Schools 2018-2019
% Meeting or Exceeding Expectation on PARCC Assessment
100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
ELA Grade 3
Math Grade 3
ELA Grade 8
Math Grade 8
White
Black

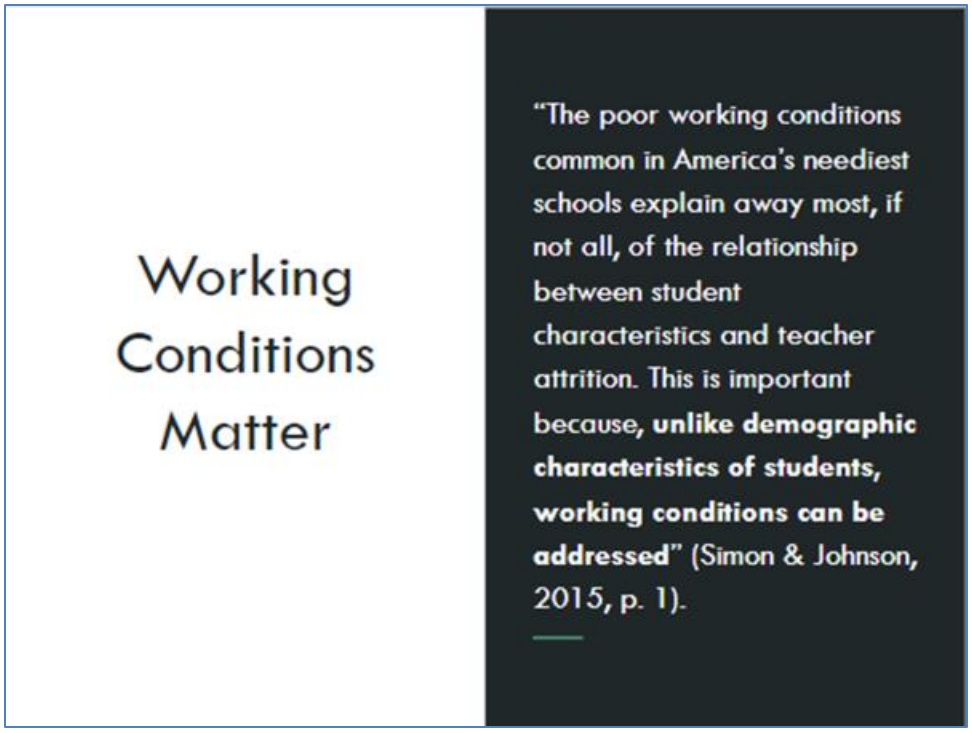
Problem of Practice

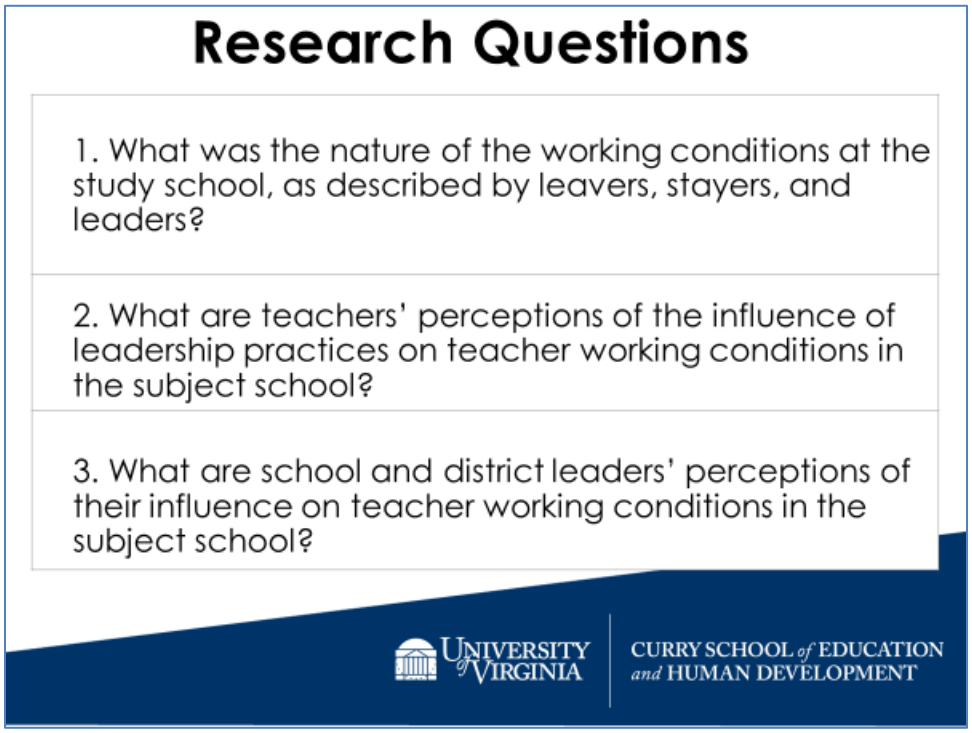
Corolla County Public Schools, like minority-majority school systems across the county, are struggling to retain qualified teachers to educate their children. High teacher attrition rates in schools serving traditionally marginalized student populations have led to a workforce of teachers with lesser experience, preparation, and certification. This turnover of teachers leads to weaker academic outcomes for students of color.

How can leaders retain teachers who can improve outcomes for students in minority-majority schools?

"Freewill Elementary"

An Information-Rich Case Study


Working Conditions Matter
"The poor working conditions common in America's neediest schools explain away most, if not all, of the relationship between student characteristics and teacher attrition. This is important because, unlike demographic characteristics of students, working conditions can be addressed" (Simon & Johnson, 2015, p. 1).


Research Questions
1. What was the nature of the working conditions at the study school, as described by leavers, stayers, and leaders?
2. What are teachers' perceptions of the influence of leadership practices on teacher working conditions in the subject school?
3. What are school and district leaders' perceptions of their influence on teacher working conditions in the subject school?
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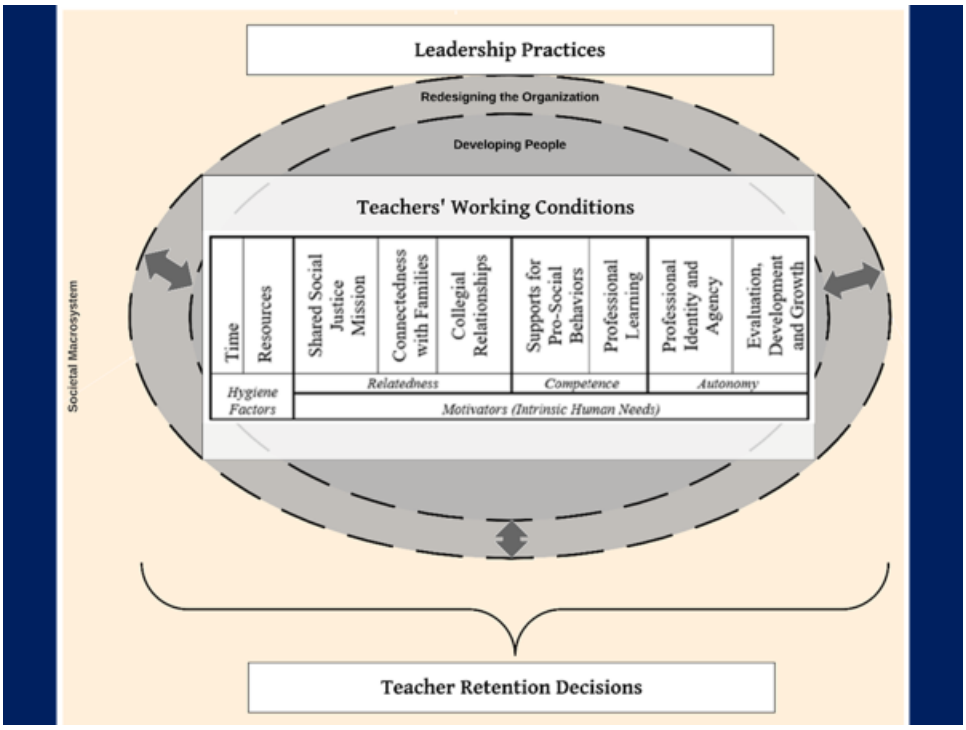
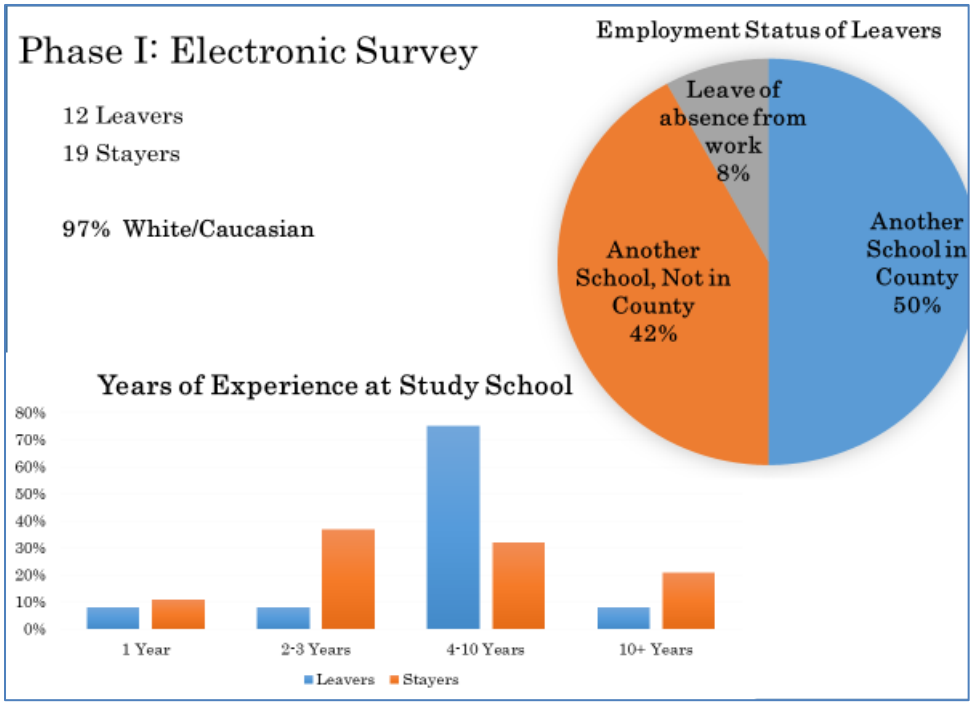
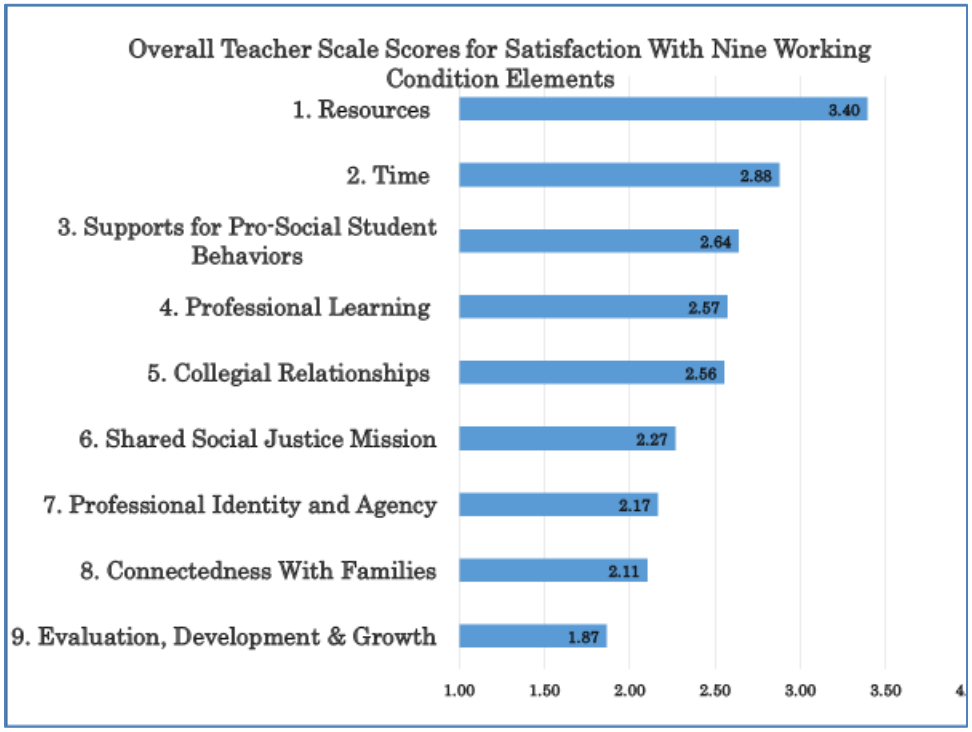


	Participants
Phase 1 – Survey **RQ1** **RQ2**	Surveyed Population of Leavers and Stayers from past three years (Fall 2016-Spring 2019), excluding retirees · 12 Leavers · 19 Stayers 62% Overall Response Rate
Phase 2 – Teacher Interviews **RQ1** **RQ2**	Heterogeneous Sample of Leavers and Stayers from past three years · 5 Leavers · 5 Stayers
Phase 3 – Leader Interviews **RQ3**	Convenience Sample of School Leaders · 1 district leader 1 Principal


Phase I: Electronic Survey
12 Leavers
19 Stayers
97% White/Caucasian
Employment Status of Leavers
Leave of absence from work 8%
Another School in County 50%
Another School, Not in County 42%
Years of Experience at Study School
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
1 Year
2-3 Years
4-10 Years
10+ Years
Leavers
Stayers


Overall Teacher Scale Scores for Satisfaction With Nine Working Condition Elements
1. Resources
3.40
2. Time
2.88
3. Supports for Pro-Social Student Behaviors
2.64
4. Professional Learning
2.57
5. Collegial Relationships
2.56
6. Shared Social Justice Mission
2.27
7. Professional Identity and Agency
2.17
8. Connectedness With Families
2.11
9. Evaluation, Development & Growth
1.87
1.00
1.50
2.00
2.50
3.00
3.50


Resonant Themes
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1. The migration of human capital from to schools serving fewer minoritized students negatively impacted Freewill Elementary.
"People who leave Freewill say that it is like no other school – the population is so challenging. For a lot of non-tenured teachers I think it's just too hard…Freewill is a great training ground. If you can teach at Freewill you can teach anywhere. They require a lot more of your emotional energy."
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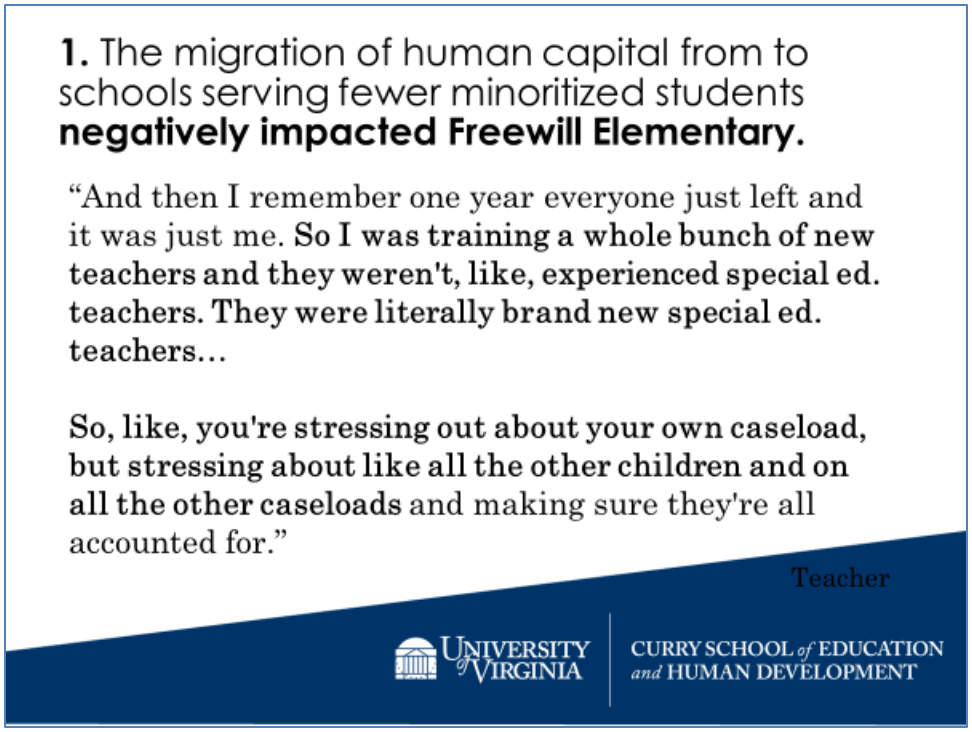
1. The migration of human capital from to schools serving fewer minoritized students negatively impacted Freewill Elementary.
"And then I remember one year everyone just left and it was just me. So I was training a whole bunch of new teachers and they weren't, like, experienced special ed. teachers. They were literally brand new special ed. teachers…
So, like, you're stressing out about your own caseload, but stressing about like all the other children and on all the other caseloads and making sure they're all accounted for."
Teacher
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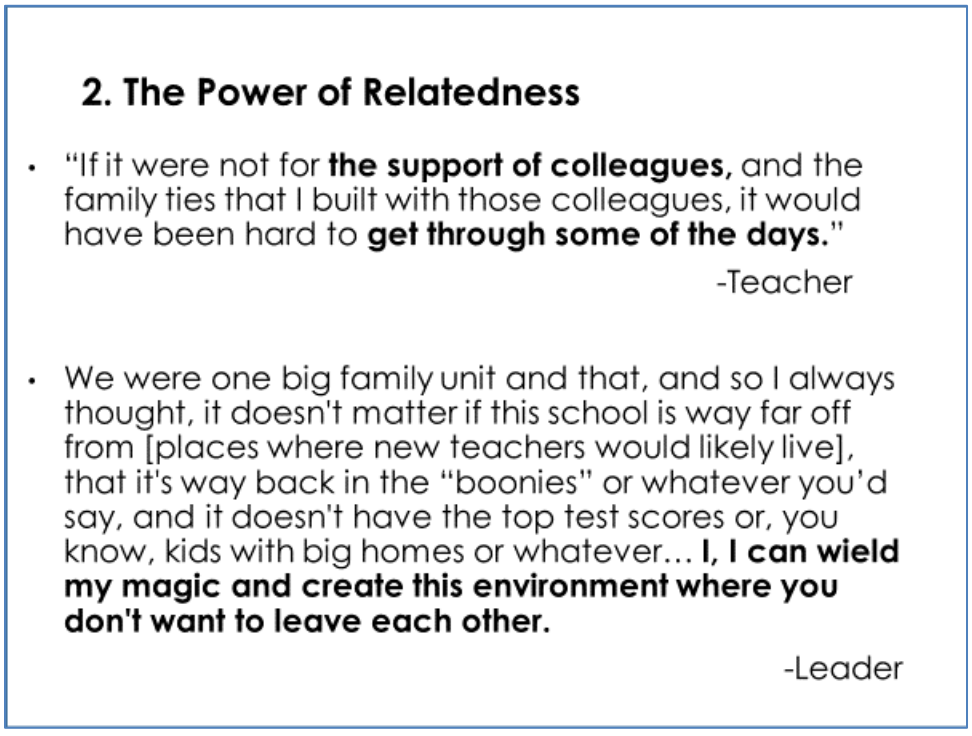
2. The Power of Relatedness
• "If it were not for the support of colleagues, and the family ties that I built with those colleagues, it would have been hard to get through some of the days."
-Teacher
• We were one big family unit and that, and so I always thought, it doesn't matter if this school is way far off from [places where new teachers would likely live], that it's way back in the "boonies" or whatever you'd say, and it doesn't have the top test scores or, you know, kids with big homes or whatever… I, I can wield my magic and create this environment where you don't want to leave each other.
-Leader

2. The Power of Relatedness

"I mean, I know with the previous administration that I had at Freewill, it was said to me numerous times by parents that they did not feel welcome by that administration. **I think that they became very, um, guarded. We need to make the community feel welcome, but unfortunately they didn't.** And I think that there was such a breakdown during that administration that it's been hard to come back." -Teacher

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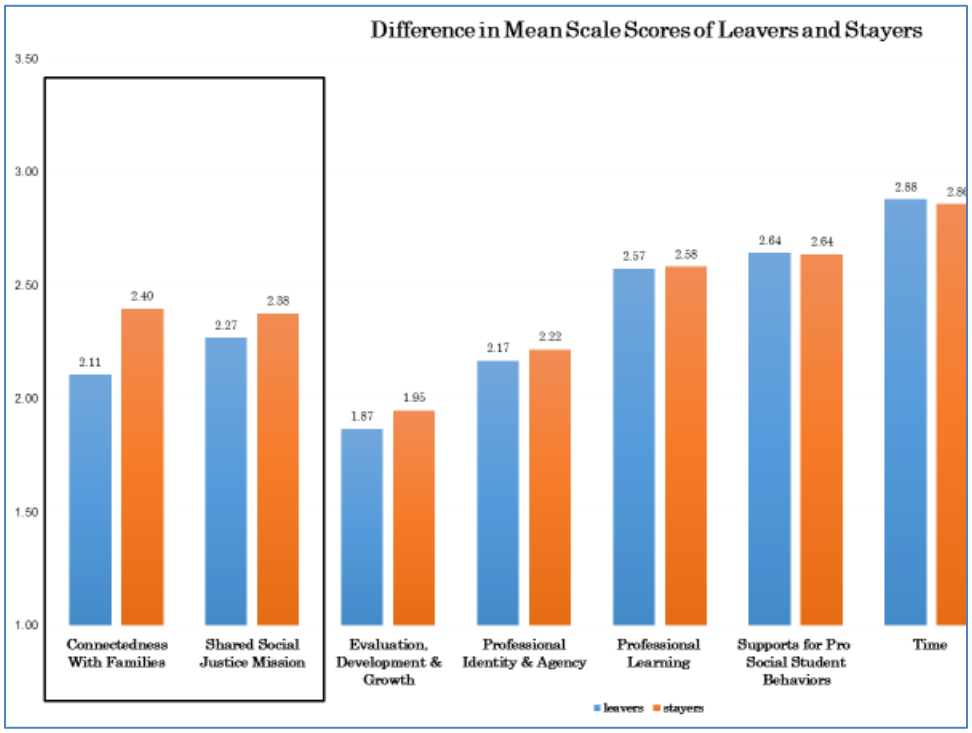

3. Challenges of – and Improvements in – Student Behavior

"Maybe at some point during the day the student decides something isn't going his way or her way and all of a sudden desks go flying. This student is hitting you, the student is going after other students. I think that with behavior struggles **the students that are listening** kind of freeze at first, but then they quickly learn, *'Oh, I have to get out of here*.' So they **know how to quickly go to another classroom.**

Part of that is standing in front of the door and barricading yourself in a classroom with a student so that that student cannot go after other students. **It's getting hit, kicked, screamed at, spit on.**

I felt like it was a constant battle every day. Like, 'I can't do this. I have to be there. I can't do it. I have to be there.'"

-A leaver recalling "bad days"

3. Student Behavior

- "At my school, we're learning about Zones of Regulation, which I really like and **personally helps me deal with students who have challenging behavior.** The trauma book we're reading now is also pretty helpful. **So I'd say the training that we do does definitely help."**

  -Teacher

- That whole excuse; **that one big, huge, social-emotional, 'Freewill is one of the worst behaved places around' is starting to dwindle away**.

  -Leader

4. The Encompassing Power of *The Test*: Accountability as Practice

- [One of the greatest challenges is] definitely the testing. I mean, it's a challenge because it's such a, **it's such a big thing that it's all anybody thinks about.** You know, it's all, it's, that's the goal for me. It's the goal for me, and I'm not even a testing grade. **It's, it's boxed us all in so much.**

  -Teacher

- "One year I tracked this for my evaluation. **There were a total of 38 days that my primary teaching role was impacted and I was unable to serve my students as a direct result of mandated testing**."

  -Teacher

4. Accountability as Practice

Teachers		
"I've been pulled out of a lesson because the person, the [instructional coach] that was watching me, didn't like the number of people in my groups. **So she pulled me out of the classroom and scolded me for that. In the middle of the lesson.**"	"And of course I can't do that [read-aloud] because **it's not on the walkthrough** and the book that I'm supposed to do is." **"We follow it, we're told to follow it."**	"That one to me is like a killer, just like a month of... about 30 days of **work that I don't have any say over**."
Leader		
And so every quarter **I'm meeting, with everybody – everybody – for 15 minutes**. And they have a sheet, and it's a profile. And it changes each quarter, what I'm looking for. And I do like we do with pre- and post-test [SLO evaluation meetings]. I do a, 'Here's what your teammates did,' and 'You know, the school had averaged 79 minutes on DreamBox per kid and your, your team did 67 minutes, and you did 42 minutes per kid on DreamBox…' Simple fidelity checks. But then also reading levels, you know. So, you know, 'It's great you got so many to go up.' I'm going to use their benchmarks in the math one to show how many of them moved, too… **[I'm doing this to] hold everybody accountable—even the ones that are doing well—to just make sure that they're aware of that as my priority.**		

5. Tensions in Developing Competence and Empowering Autonomy—Challenges for Adult Development

"There's a lot of good colleagues that I would, that I would like to be able to tap into."

-Freewill Leader

"I would love to expand that model so it's more of a coaching model. So there were regular visits. We could do some goal-setting, um, time for shadowing, time for feedback time for, um, you know, me observing…"

-Corolla District Leader

5. Tensions in Developing Competence and Empowering Autonomy—Challenges for Adult Development

"I felt kind of like, just a cog. I don't know if that's a good way to express it, but I just felt like I needed to show up and do my job. Really, no one knew my name there."

-Teacher

Recommendations for Practice

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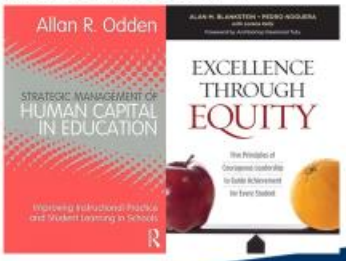
1) Incentivize the attraction of talent to high-needs schools.

A plan for strategic management of human capital could help direct the district's talent where it is needed the most.



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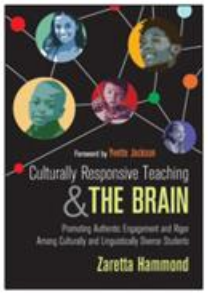
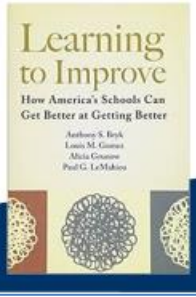
2) Prioritize the cultivation of trust throughout the system.

Employ culturally responsive pedagogies and school leadership practices to support trusting relationships between teachers and their students and families that would feed their innate need for relatedness.



3) Employ practices of improvement science to target high-leverage change drivers such as student behavior.

Draw upon resources to support social- and emotional-learning, culturally responsive teaching, and trauma-informed supports to impact this high-leverage change driver in lasting ways.



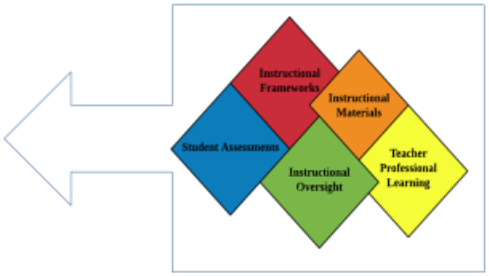
4) Develop a transformative vision of instruction and supportive instructional guidance infrastructure to achieve it.

PORTRAIT OF A GRADUATE

A FIRST STEP IN TRANSFORMING YOUR SCHOOL SYSTEM

Getting Started Guide for Superintendents

PortraitofaGraduate.org



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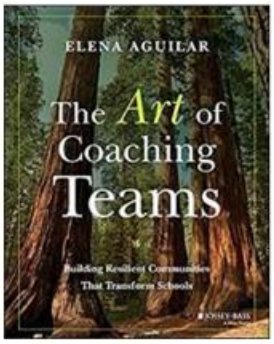
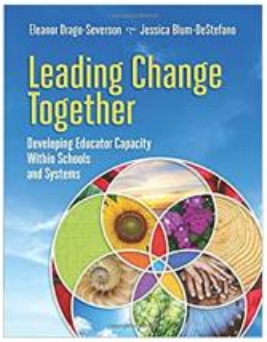
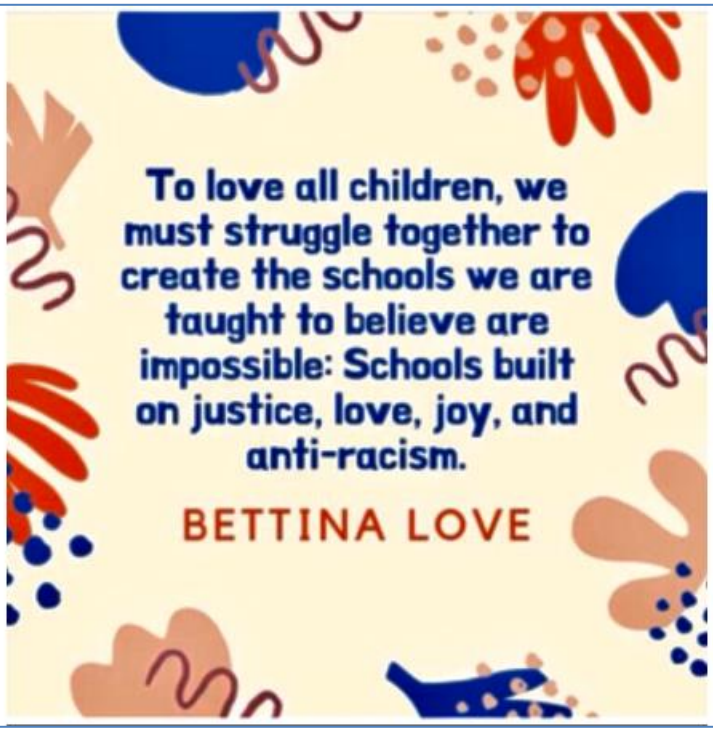
5) Build a comprehensive system of adult development.

Move beyond "accountability" to consider a holistic program to develop the system's adults, with all their various talents and motivations, to their fullest capacities.





Corolla County Leaver	Dr. Bettina Love
I miss the diversity working with all those students. So I feel like if some of those problems were to be fixed, I would think about coming back. It is sad because like I had some really great kids there and I wished I could have supported them better… You know, we had that trailer park right down the street from the school and the mobile homes, and I would pass it every day. I felt for those families and I feel like I don't see as much of that where I am right now. Students in my new county are almost 100% White. **I feel like I was making more of a difference in Corolla County.**	I argue that **you must fight with the creativity, imagination, urgency, boldness, ingenuity, and rebellious spirit of abolitionists** to advocate for an education system where all Black and Brown children are thriving. I call this abolitionist teaching…



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APPENDIX A: A FRAMEWORK FOR DEFINING ELEMENTS OF WORKING CONDITIONS

	Defined Elements of Working Conditions for This Study	Podolsky et al., 2016	Johnson, Kraft & Papay, 2012	Ladd, 2011
1	**Resources**	Resources for teaching and learning	Resources: the extent to which teachers have access to sufficient instructional materials, instructional technology, and support personnel in the school Facilities: the extent to which teachers work in a safe, clean, and well-maintained school environment that enables them to be productive	Facilities and Resources: sufficiency of teacher access to appropriate instructional materials, technology, office supplies, and professional space, and to the cleanliness and safety of school environments.
2	**Time**		Time: the extent to which teachers have sufficient time to meet their instructional and noninstructional responsibilities in the school	Time Factor (emerged in analysis of elementary and middle school only): time available to meet need of students or collaborate with colleagues, and the extent to which teachers are protected from administrative duties.
3	**Collegial Relationships**		Colleagues: the extent to which teachers have productive working relationships with their colleagues and work together to solve problems in the school	
4	**Shared Social Justice Mission**		School Culture: the extent to which the school environment is characterized by mutual trust, respect, openness, and commitment to student achievement	
5	**Supports for Pro-Social Student Behaviors**	School leadership and administrative support	Principal: the extent to which school leaders create an orderly and safe instructional environment	Leadership, especially with respect to teachers' efforts to maintain discipline in the classroom.
6	**Connectedness with Families**		Community Support: the extent to which families and the broader community support teachers and students in the school	
7	**Professional Learning**	Professional Collaboration		Professional Development: the sufficiency of funds, resources, and time for teachers to take advantage of professional development opportunities.

8	**Professional Identity and Agency**	Shared Decision-Making	Governance: the extent to which teachers are involved in decision-making about matters of school governance; Professional Expertise: the extent to which teachers are recognized as educational experts and are given the flexibility to make professional decisions about instruction	Leadership: trusting teachers and involving them in decision making and problem solving. Expanded Roles: empowerment of teachers in terms of expanded responsibilities like selecting instructional materials, setting grading and assessment practices, hiring new teachers, and school improvement planning.
9	**Evaluation, Growth and Development**	Accountability Systems	Principal: the extent to which school leaders provide feedback on instruction	Teacher Evaluation: consistency, usefulness, and appropriateness of teacher evaluations.

APPENDIX B: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

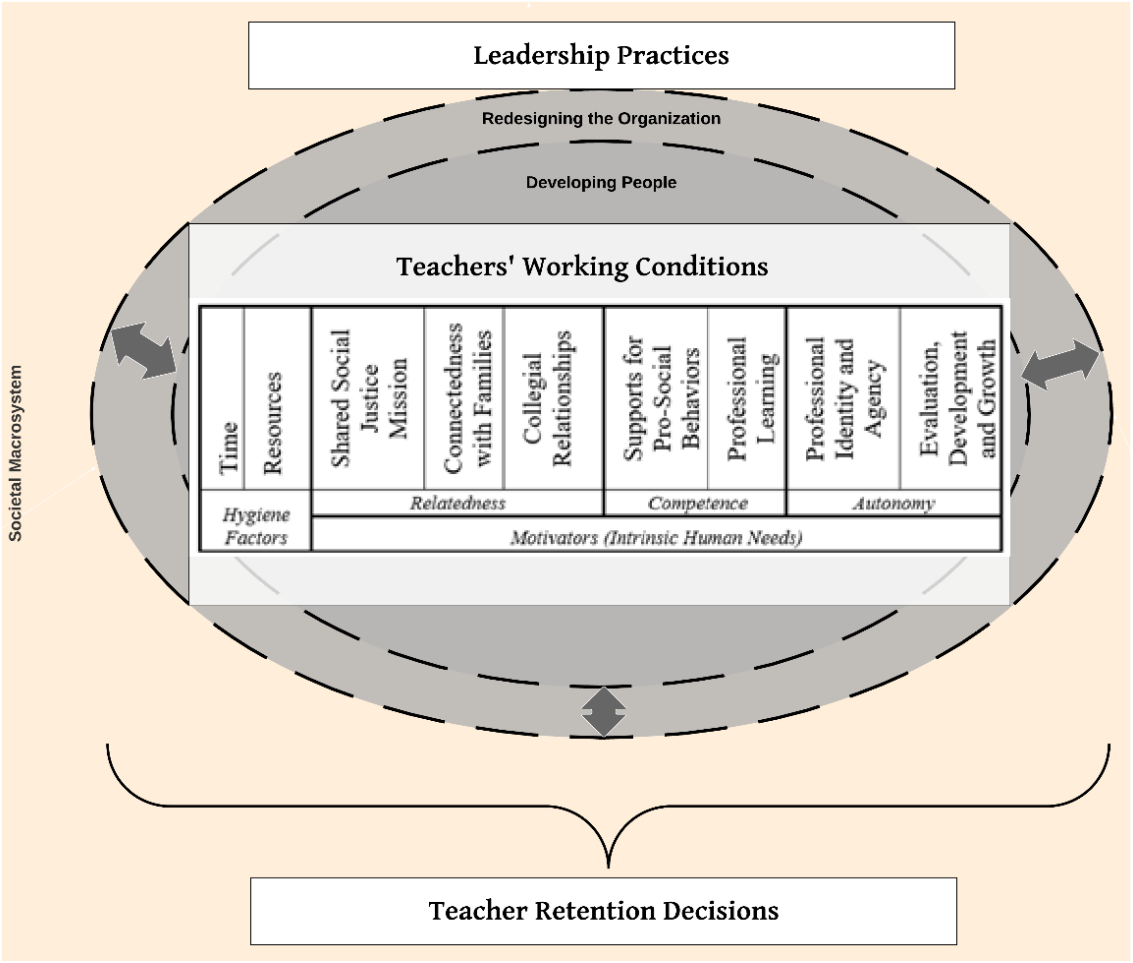

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Leadership Practice's Influences on Teacher Retention Decisions, Mediated by Working Conditions.

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT FOR ONLINE SURVEY

INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT

Please read this carefully before you decide to participate in this online survey.

As part of this study, I am conducting a confidential online survey about the conditions in which you work as a teacher. It is hoped that the information gained from this study will help build understanding about teacher working conditions in an effort to improve teacher retention.

The survey is completely voluntary, and you may skip any questions you choose. The survey is expected to take between 10 and 15 minutes. There are no anticipated risks, and there are no direct benefits to you for your participation.

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you choose to withdraw from the study, close your browser window. If you have any questions about the purposes of this study or if you would like to withdraw after your materials have been submitted, please contact Carolyn Wooster-Carolyn.wooster@gmail.com, 703-867-7685- or faculty advisor, Dr. Sandra Mitchell, at spm7b@virginia.edu. If you have any questions about your rights in this study, contact
Tonya R. Moon, Ph.D.,
Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Social and Behavioral Sciences One Morton Dr. Suite 500 University of Virginia, P.O. Box 800392 Charlottesville, VA 22908-0392
Telephone: (434) 924-5999
Email: irbsbshelp@virginia.edu
Website: www.virginia.edu/vpr/irb
IRB-SBS #2015-0494

I look forward to your perspectives and hope they will provide our school division with a better understanding of teacher retention. I value your insights and hope you will participate.

By clicking the button below, you acknowledge that your participation in the study is voluntary, you are18 years of age, and that you are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation in the study at any time and for any reason.

Please note that this survey is best displayed on a laptop or desktop computer. Some features may be less compatible for use on a mobile device.

Agree Disagree

You may print out a copy of this page for your records.

APPENDIX D: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

(Stayers)

Thank you so much for taking this brief survey to tell me a bit about the conditions in which you work as a teacher. The information gained from this study will help build understanding about teacher working conditions in an effort to improve teacher retention.

Background Information

1. Where are you working this year?
    a. **Study school** (Branch 1 – survey below)
    b. At another school in Corolla County (Branch 2 – past tense survey)
    c. At another school, not in Corolla County
    d. Taking a leave of absence from paid work
    e. A career outside of K-12 education
    f. Undecided
    g. Other: _____

2. What grade level did you teach last year?
    a. K-2
    b. 3-5
    c. Related Arts
    d. Other: _____

3. How many years have you worked at Freewill?
    a. 1
    b. 2-3
    c. 4-10
    d. More than 10

4. How many years of teaching experience did you have prior to joining Freewill?
    a. 0
    b. 1-3
    c. 4-10
    d. More than 10

5. How would you classify your race or ethnicity?
    a. Hispanic or Latino
    b. Black/African American
    c. White/Caucasian
    d. Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
    e. American Indian/Alaskan
    f. Asian
    g. Two or More Races
    h. Other
    i. I prefer not to answer

6. During what years did you work at Freewill Elementary? (Please select all that apply.)
    a. 2016-2017
    b. 2017-2018
    c. 2018-2019

Please consider your responses to the following statements based upon the most recent full school year during which you were employed at Freewill.

Resources	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**(Not applicable)**
1. I have access to the instructional technology (including computers, devices, printers, and software) I need to do my job well.					
2. I have access to the office equipment and supplies (including copy machines, pens, paper, etc.) I need to do my job well.					
3. I have access to the instructional materials (including curriculum, resources, etc.) I need to do my job well.					
4. The physical environment of this school and its classrooms support teaching and learning.					
Time	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**(Not applicable)**
5. I am protected from duties that interfere with my essential role of educating students.					
6. I am allowed to focus on educating students with minimal interruptions.					
7. Efforts are made to minimize the amount of routine paperwork teachers in my school are required to do.					
8. The non-instructional time provided for teachers in my school is sufficient.					
9. I have time to collaborate with colleagues.					
(What additional information or clarification would you like to offer about the impact of time or resources on your ability to do your job well?)					

Supports for Prosocial Student Behaviors	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**(Not applicable)**
10. The classroom environment in which I work is safe.					
11. I receive training and resources that help me effectively support students' social and emotional learning.					
12. Teachers and administrators in my school work together to create solutions to behavioral and discipline challenges in our school.					
13. My school places a priority on teaching students social and emotional behaviors and skills.					
14. My students who have difficulty displaying appropriate social and emotional skills have access to adults in our school who can help them achieve these skills.					
Professional Learning					
15. I have ongoing opportunities to plan for instruction with teachers who teach similar content as I do.					
16. My colleagues and I have opportunities to share, observe, and discuss one another's teaching.					
17. I participate in professional development that is valuable to me.					
18. The professional development experiences that I am offered are focused on making me better at instructing the students in my					

classroom.					
19. I engage in ongoing conversations with colleagues or coaches in my school in which I reflect on my teaching.					
20. The induction, mentoring, and/or coaching experiences I received as a new teacher here are helpful to me when I was beginning my work.					

Collegial Relationships	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**(Not applicable)**
21. I enjoy working with my colleagues.					
22. I work with people who care about me as a person.					
23. My colleagues encourage creativity and risk-taking.					
24. Conversations with colleagues in my school help me feel excited about teaching and learning.					
Social Justice Mission					
25. The colleagues with whom I work are committed to changing academic outcomes for students of color who have historically been marginalized in public schools.					
26. Through words and actions, leaders at my school promote a mission of assuring high levels of success for every student.					
27. My school provides me with professional development that helps me develop strategies to effectively teach students from different racial and ethnic groups.					
28. My school leaders or colleagues facilitate open conversations about race.					
29. My prescribed curriculum provides culturally relevant resources for students.					
30. My prescribed curriculum helps all students understand the unique historical and contemporary experiences of different racial and ethnic groups.					
Connectedness with Families					
31. I am provided with time, resources, opportunities, and encouragement to form relationships and get to know my students' interests and backgrounds outside of school.					
32. I am provided with time, resources, opportunities, and encouragement to get to know my students' families.					
33. My students' families and I work as partners in assuring our students' success.					
34. I am provided with time and resources to help me connect with the families of my students who might feel uncomfortable or face barriers in coming to school.					
(What additional information or clarification would you like to offer about your feelings of connectedness or distance from your colleagues, your students, and/or their cultural backgrounds?):					

Professionalism and Professional Identity	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**(Not applicable)**
35. Teachers in my school are recognized as educational experts.					
36. I have autonomy to make decisions about the instructional delivery (i.e. my pacing, my use of curriculum materials, my instructional strategies) that is best for my students.					
37. I have choice in selecting the professional learning that best meets my needs.					
38. My colleagues and I are involved in making decisions important to the instruction and well-being of students in our school.					
39. My colleagues and I are involved in the selection and hiring of new teachers.					
40. My colleagues and I are involved in planning for instructional improvement in our school.					
Evaluation, Growth and Development	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**(Not applicable)**
41. There are opportunities for teachers to serve as leaders of professional learning in my school.					
42. My school leaders have helped build my ability to lead improvement efforts in my school.					
43. The leaders at my school care about my professional learning and growth.					
44. The leaders at my school encourage creativity and risk-taking.					
45. My one-on-one conversations with my supervisor(s) focus primarily on important feedback that is useful for improving my teaching (rather than focusing primarily on SLO or evaluation scores).					
(What additional information or clarification would you like to offer about the opportunities to influence decision-making or the ways in which your professional growth is or is not supported?):					

Overall, on a scale of 1-5, how satisfied are you with the working environment in your school?

1	2	3	4	5
Highly dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Neutral	Somewhat satisfied	Highly Satisfied

What else would you like people to know about the experience of teaching at Freewill?

APPENDIX E: ELECTRONIC CORRESPONDENCE TO SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

E-mail to Stayers

Hello!
My name is Carolyn Wooster, and many of you know me as the previous reading teacher here at Freewill. Some of you are also aware that I am a graduate student at the University of Virginia, and for my culminating project Mr. Miller has been kind enough to allow me to conduct my research here at Freewill with you!

I am interested in the topic of teacher retention, an issue with which our county has been struggling for the past few years, and I am particularly curious about how the conditions in which teachers do their daily work impacts the motivation they might feel towards their job. I am looking to investigate this through a survey with you—those who have stayed at Freewill—as well as teachers from the past three years who have left. These is followed by interviews later this fall with some of you who might be interested.

I anticipate the survey will require less than 20 minutes to complete and I would greatly appreciate your input. There is no compensation for responding nor is there any known risk. Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. All of the responses in the survey is recorded anonymously. If you agree to participate, you may choose not to answer any given questions, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time. You will indicate your informed consent by clicking on the appropriate box at the start of the electronic survey.

Please feel free to contact me at any time if you have any questions: cwooster@ccboe.com or 703-867-7685.

The survey is open until October 18. I know this is a crazy time of year and am so appreciative of your taking the time to consider participating. If you so choose, please click on the survey link below!

https://virginiaeducation.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_9NoZUKCS2vWZqUl

Many thanks!
Carolyn

E-mail to Leavers (Individual)

Dear _____,

Hi there! I hope that your school year is off to a great start!

As you may know, in addition to my work as a reading teacher here in Corolla County (at Mountain Middle School these days!), I am also a graduate student at the University of Virginia. For my culminating research project I am looking at the impact of working conditions on teacher retention, and I have been lucky enough to have been approved to do this work with current and former teachers of Freewill. This brings me, today, here to you!

Corolla County has been struggling with teacher retention for a number of years now, and I am particularly curious about how the conditions in which teachers do their daily work impacts the motivation they might feel towards their job. I am looking to investigate this through surveys with those who have stayed at Freewill as well as teachers from the past three years who have left. These is followed by phone interviews later this fall with those who might be interested.

I anticipate the survey will require less than 20 minutes to complete and I would greatly appreciate your input. There is no compensation for responding nor is there any known risk. Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. All of the responses in the survey is recorded anonymously. If you agree to participate, you may choose not to answer any given questions, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time. You will indicate your informed consent by clicking on the appropriate box at the start of the electronic survey.

Please feel free to contact me at any time if you have any questions: cwooster@ccboe.com or 703-867-7685.

The survey is open until October 18. I know this is a crazy time of year and am so appreciative of your taking the time to consider participating. If you so choose, please click on the survey link below!

https://virginiaeducation.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_9NoZUKCS2vWZqUl

Many thanks!
Carolyn

APPENDIX F: ELECTRONIC CORRESPONDENCE TO INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Email to Teachers

Dear __,

Hi! I hope that your school year is off to a great start.

As you know, I am conducting research on working conditions and teacher retention for my doctoral program with the University of Virginia. You may have already participated in Phase 1 of my research study which involved a short survey.

In this second phase of my study, I is conducting phone interviews with teachers from Freewill—some with teachers who have stayed, and some with teachers who have left—to get a more complete picture of the conditions in which you do your daily work. Anything shared in the interview is kept completely confidential and reported anonymously, with pseudonyms used for names and any identifying information removed. Your participation is completely voluntary.

I would greatly appreciate if you would be willing to talk with me. I anticipate our conversation would take 30-45 minutes of your time. I know this is a busy time of year, and I want to work around your schedule. Please indicate through the link below any times that would be convenient for you.

Your only other action item is to sign the attached informed consent form. You may pony it to me, or scan and email back.

Please let me know if you have any additional questions (703-867-7685)! Thank you for considering this request and I look forward to connecting with you soon.

Best,
Carolyn

Email to School Leaders

Dear __,

Hi there! I hope that your school year is off to a great start!

As you may know, in addition to my work as a reading teacher here in Corolla County, I am also a graduate student at the University of Virginia. For my culminating research project I am looking at the impact of working conditions on teacher retention, and I have been lucky enough to have been approved to do this work with current and former teachers of Freewill. This brings me, today, here to you!

Corolla County has been struggling with teacher retention for a number of years now, and I am particularly curious about how the conditions in which teachers do their daily work impacts the motivation they might feel towards their job. Mr. Miller has been kind enough to allow me to investigate this through surveys and interviews with those who have stayed at Freewill as well as teachers from the past three years who have left.

I am looking to augment this information I hear from teachers with the perspectives of you; Freewill's school leaders. Anything shared in the interview is kept completely confidential and reported anonymously, with pseudonyms used for names and any identifying information removed. Your participation is completely voluntary.

I would greatly appreciate if you would be willing to talk with me. I anticipate our conversation would take 30-45 minutes of your time. I know you are very busy people, and I want to work around your schedule. Please let me know if there might be any times between 12:30-6:30 p.m. during the weeks of November 4 or November 11 that might be convenient for you.

Your only other action item is to sign the attached informed consent form. You may pony it to me, or scan and email back.

Please let me know if you have any additional questions (703-867-7685)! Thank you for considering this request and I look forward to connecting with you soon.

Best,
Carolyn

Email to District Leaders

Dear __,

Greetings! My name is Carolyn Wooster, and I am a reading resource teacher at Mountain Middle School. In addition to my work here in the county, I have spent the past three years pursuing my doctorate in education leadership at the University of Virginia. I am conducting my culminating capstone research study on teacher retention, and I am wondering if you might be able to find a few minutes to participate in my study.

As you well know, Corolla County has been hit hard by the national teaching shortage. In my research—an exploratory mixed methods case study of one of our elementary schools—I have been investigating how the conditions in which teachers do their daily work impacts the motivation they might feel towards their job. I have been lucky enough to hear from teachers who have stayed, teachers who have left, and school leaders at the building, to receive multiple different perspectives on this issue.

I would love to augment this teacher and school leader information with the thoughts and perspectives of you; our educational leaders at the district level. Anything shared in the interview would, of course, be kept completely confidential and reported anonymously, with pseudonyms used for names and any identifying information removed.

I would greatly appreciate if you would be willing to talk with me. I anticipate our conversation would take no more than 30 minutes of your time. I am sure you have many other pressing demands on your time; please let me know any half-hour block of time that would be convenient for you.

Please let me know if you have any additional questions (703-867-7685)! Thank you for considering this request and I look forward to connecting with you soon.

Best,
Carolyn Wooster

APPENDIX G: INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT FOR INTERVIEWS

Please read this form carefully before agreeing to participate in the study.

Purpose of the research study: The purpose of the study is to better understand teachers' working conditions in minority-majority schools. The knowledge gained from this study will help inform leadership practices that can improve working conditions and, thereby, teacher retention, in schools serving historically disadvantaged children.

What you will do in the study: In this study, you are interviewed about the day-to-day teacher working conditions in your school and district. Your experiences and recommendations is used to help understand the leadership practices that could positively impact those working conditions and improve teacher retention outcomes. You can skip any question that makes you uncomfortable and stop the interview at any time.

- **Time required:** The study will require about 45 minutes of your time.
- **Risks:** There are no anticipated risks in this study.
- **Benefits:** There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research study. Your participation will, however, help increase understanding and awareness of the conditions of teachers' work.
- **Confidentiality:** The information you tell me is confidential. Pseudonyms is used in the research paper.
- I would like to record this interview so that I can use it for reference while proceeding with this study. I will not record this interview without your permission. If you do grant permission for this conversation to be recorded, you have the right to revoke recording permission and/or end the interview at any time.
- This project is to be completed by May 31, 2020. All interview recordings will be stored in a secure workspace until (1 year) after that date. The files will be destroyed after that date.
- **Voluntary participation:** Your participation in the study is completely voluntary.
- **Right to withdraw from the study:** You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

- **How to withdraw from the study:** If you want to withdraw from the study, tell the interviewing to stop the interview at any time. There is no penalty for withdrawing.

- **Payment:** You will receive no payment for participating in the study.

If you have questions about the study, contact:
Carolyn Wooster
Reading Resource Specialist, Mattawoman Middle School
Carolyn.wooster@gmail.com
703-867-7685

Dr. Sandra Mitchell
Department of Administration and Supervision
Curry School of Education
University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 22903.
Telephone: 703-303-7660
spm7b@virginia.edu

To obtain more information about the study, ask questions about the research procedures, express concerns about your participation, or report illness, injury or other problems, please contact:
Tonya R. Moon, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Social and Behavioral Sciences
One Morton Dr. Suite 500
University of Virginia, P.O. Box 800392
Charlottesville, VA 22908-0392
Telephone: (434) 924-5999
Email: irbsbshelp@virginia.edu
Website: www.virginia.edu/vpr/irb/sbs
Website for Research Participants: http://www.virginia.edu/vpr/participants/

Agreement:

I agree to participate in the research study described above.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

APPENDIX H: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Interview Protocol: Stayers

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the second phase of my study! I anticipate this interview will take about 45 minutes. All of our discussion is kept confidential and you may skip any question you do not feel comfortable answering.

1. Tell me a bit about your background as an educator and how you came to teach at Freewill.
    a. How long have you been teaching?
    b. Anywhere before Freewill?

2. I'm curious to get a better picture of what it is like to work at Freewill, from your perspective. Tell me a little bit about what you teach at Freewill and what that experience is like for you.
    a. Can you give me an example?
    b. Tell me a little bit more about that.
    c. What was that like for you?
    d. Why does that feel important to you?

3. If a teacher from another school were to ask you, "What's it like to teach at Freewill?" How might you respond? What are the advantages and disadvantages of being a teacher here?
    a. Can you give me an example?
    b. Tell me a little bit more about that.
    c. What was that like for you?
    d. Why does that feel important to you?

4. Tell me about the good or bad parts of a typical day.
    a. Can you give me an example?
    b. Tell me a little bit more about that.
    c. What was that like for you?
    d. How typical might it be to experience a day like this?

5. What would you say are some of the things that are going well in your work?
    a. What, if anything, do you imagine that leaders of your school or district might be doing that could be contributing to making these things successful?

6. What would you say are some of the greatest challenges to doing your job well?
    a. What, if anything, do you imagine that leaders of your school or district could do to try to alleviate these challenges?

7. Have you ever thought about leaving Freewill? Why do you think you feel that way? Do you think other teachers want to leave? Why do you stay?

8. Before we conclude, is there anything else you'd like for me to know? Do you have any other thoughts about the ways in which school or district leaders might improve teachers' experiences of working at Freewill or other schools like it?

Prompts if Needed:

- Resources. Talk to me a bit about your access, or lack of access, to resources (e.g. technology, supplies, supports for students, etc.).
- Time. Talk to me a bit about the use of your time as a teacher at Freewill.
- Behavior. Talk to me a bit about the ways in which the school works to support students in exhibiting positive behaviors.
    - *In what ways are student behaviors and your schools' approaches to supporting them a challenge or a benefit in your work? Do you feel your school provides an orderly environment for teaching and learning? Tell me about this.*
- Professional Learning. Talk to me a bit about the professional learning opportunities available to you.
    - Were your induction, mentoring and/or coaching experiences helpful when you were beginning your work here?
- Relationships with Families. Talk to me a bit about what ways – if any – in which you have been supported in forming relationships with your students and their families.
- Mission. Why do you work at Freewill? Would you teach elsewhere if you could?
- Collegial relationships. Talk to me about your relationships with your colleagues. What practices do you feel are most important for leaders working to create a school in which teachers work with supportive, passionate, innovative colleagues?
- Respect as a Professional. Talk to me a bit about the degree of autonomy you experience in your professional decision-making. Do you feel you have control over the instructional delivery in your classroom (choice of pacing, curriculum materials, instructional strategies)? Why or why not? Do you feel you have a voice in making important decisions in your school?
- Evaluation. Talk to me about your experiences with your performance evaluation. How do your supervisors approach your evaluation process? What is the focus of your conversations with your supervisors? Are these helpful to your growth as a teacher?

Interview Protocol: Leavers

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the second phase of my study! I anticipate this interview will take about 45 minutes. All of our discussion is kept confidential and you may skip any question you do not feel comfortable answering.

9. Tell me a bit about your background as an educator and your role at Freewill.
    a. *How long have you been teaching?*
    b. *Where now?*
    c. *Role?*

10. I'm curious to get a better picture of what it was like to work at Freewill, from your perspective. Tell me a little bit about what you taught at Freewill and what that experience was like for you.
    a. *How long at Freewill?*
    b. *Grade levels?*
    c. *Can you give me an example?*
    d. *Tell me a little bit more about that.*
    e. *What was that like for you?*
    f. *Why does that feel important to you?*

11. If a teacher from another school were to ask you, "What is it like to teach at Freewill?" How might you respond? What are the advantages and disadvantages of being a teacher there?
    a. *Can you give me an example?*
    b. *Tell me a little bit more about that.*
    c. *What was that like for you?*
    d. *Why does that feel important to you?*

12. Tell me about the good or bad parts of a typical day at Freewill.
    a. *Can you give me an example?*
    b. *Tell me a little bit more about that.*
    c. *What was that like for you?*
    d. *How typical might it be to experience a day like this?*

13. What would you say are some of the things that are good about working at Freewill?
    a. What, if anything, do you imagine that leaders of the school or district might have been doing that could have contributed to making these things successful?

14. What would you say are some of the greatest challenges to doing your job well at Freewill/in Corolla County?
    a. What, if anything, do you imagine that leaders of your school or district could have done to try and alleviate these challenges?

15. What, if anything, might have influenced your decision to stay at Freewill (or in Corolla County)?

Prompts if Needed:

- Resources. Talk to me a bit about your access, or lack of access, to resources when you were at Freewill (e.g. technology, supplies, supports for students, etc.).
- Time. Talk to me a bit about the use of your time as a teacher at Freewill.
- Behavior. Talk to me a bit about the ways in which teachers, leaders and parents at Freewill worked to support students in exhibiting positive behaviors.
    - *In what ways were student behaviors and your schools' approaches to supporting them a challenge or a benefit in your work? Did you feel your school provided an orderly environment for teaching and learning? Tell me about this.*
- Professional Learning. Talk to me a bit about the professional learning opportunities available to you.
    - Were your induction, mentoring and/or coaching experiences helpful when you were beginning your work at Freewill?
- Relationships with Families. Talk to me a bit about what ways – if any – in which you were supported in forming relationships with your students and their families at Freewill.
- Mission. How do you think the staff perceived of the purpose of their work at Freewill? Do you feel this sentiment was shared? How or how not?
- Collegial relationships. Talk to me about your relationships with your colleagues at Freewill. What practices do you feel are most important for leaders working to create a school in which teachers work with supportive, passionate, innovative colleagues?
- Respect as a Professional. Talk to me a bit about the degree of autonomy you experienced in your professional decision-making. Did you feel you had control over the instructional delivery in your classroom (choice of pacing, curriculum materials, instructional strategies)? Why or why not? Did you feel you had a voice in making important decisions in your school?
- Evaluation. Talk to me about your experiences with your performance evaluation at Freewill/in Corolla County. How did your supervisors approach your evaluation process? What was the focus of your conversations with your supervisors? Were these helpful to your growth as a teacher?

Before we conclude, is there anything else you'd like for me to know? Do you have any other thoughts about the ways in which school or district leaders might improve teachers' experiences of working at Freewill or other schools like it?

Interview Protocol: Leaders (School)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study which will look more deeply at the impact of working conditions on teacher retention in your school. The interview will take about 30-45 minutes. You may skip any question you do not feel comfortable answering.

16. Tell me a bit about your background as an educator and your role as a leader at Freewill.
    a. How long have you worked in education?
    b. What career experiences before Freewill do you feel were most important in preparing you for your role here?
    c. How many years have you been here in this role?

17. Tell me a bit about what the working conditions are like for your teachers at Freewill. If another principal would ask you, "What's it like to teach at Freewill?" How might you respond? What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of being a teacher here?

18. What do you consider to be important aspects of teacher working conditions in your school?
    a. In what ways do you try to influence these?
    b. What are some of the challenges you face in positively influencing these?

19. In my survey I asked teachers about these nine aspects of teacher working conditions. Among those who (stayed/left/both), X, Y, and Z came across as areas in which teachers had the greatest satisfaction.
    a. Why do you think this might be the case?
        i. Tell me a little about X from your perspective.
        ii. What things have you tried doing that you think might be influencing X?
    b. What are some of the challenges you see with regards to X?
        i. What elements of X seem within or beyond your control?
    c. What resources/development/support do you feel might help you better influence X?

20. Among those who (stayed/left/both), A, B, C came across as areas in which teachers had the greatest dissatisfaction.
    a. Why do you think this might be the case?

i. Tell me a little about X from your perspective.
ii. What things have you tried doing that you think might be influencing X?

b. What are some of the challenges you see with regards to X?
    i. What elements of X seem within or beyond your control?
c. What resources/development/support do you feel might help you better influence X?

21. How big of a role, if any, do you feel working conditions play in the retention of teachers at Freewill?

22. What recommendations might you make to district leaders who wanted to positively influence working conditions at Freewill or schools like it?

Interview Protocol: Leaders (District)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study which will look more deeply at the impact of working conditions on teacher retention in our division. The interview will take about 30-45 minutes. You may skip any question you do not feel comfortable answering.

23. Tell me a bit about your background as an educator and your role as a leader in Corolla County Public Schools.
    a. How long have you worked in education?
    b. What do you see as the most important aspects of your current role?
    c. How many years have you been here in this role?

24. Tell me a bit about what you know of the working conditions for teachers in the county's minority-majority schools.

25. What do you consider to be important aspects of teacher working conditions in your schools?
    a. In what ways do you try to influence these?
    b. What are some of the challenges you face in positively influencing these?

26. In my survey I asked teachers about these nine aspects of teacher working conditions. While these results are from a small sample of only one school, I am curious to hear your perspective.
    Among those who (stayed/left/both), X, Y, and Z came across as areas in which teachers had the greatest satisfaction.
    a. Why do you think this might be the case?
        i. Tell me a little about X from your perspective.

        ii. What things have you have tried doing that you think might be influencing X?
    b. What are some of the challenges you see with regards to X?
        i. What elements of X seem within or beyond the school system's control?
    c. What resources/development/support do you feel might help your school leaders to better influence X?

27. Among those who (stayed/left/both), A, B, C came across as areas in which teachers had the greatest dissatisfaction.
    a. Why do you think this might be the case?
        i. Tell me a little about X from your perspective.
        ii. What things have you have tried doing that you think might be influencing X?
    b. What are some of the challenges you see with regards to X?
        i. What elements of X seem within or beyond the school system's control?
    c. What resources/development/support do you feel might help your school leaders to better influence X?

28. How big of a role, if any, do you feel working conditions play in the retention of teachers in the county?
    a. Do you see any variation in this related to the different demographics of the student populations in the school?

29. What recommendations might you make to school leaders who wanted to positively influence working conditions in the division's minority-majority schools?

APPENDIX I: CODE LIST FOR ANALYSIS OF SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS AND OPEN-ENDED SURVEY RESPONSES

Code	Definition	Code	Definition
Time	The element of time as a challenge (insufficient time, demands on time too challenging, intrusion of bureaucratic requirements on time) and/or as a positive factor (sufficient amounts of time, benefits of allocations of time, efforts to improve demands on time).		
Resources	The element of resources as a challenge (lack of supplies, insufficient supports for students, lack of technology, poor facilities) and/or as a positive factor (sufficient supplies, technology, positive learning environment; student support; efforts to improve resource availability).		
Shared Social Justice Mission	The element of a shared social justice mission as a challenge (racist views of students or community, lack of commitment of colleagues to changing trajectories for minoritized student population.) and/or as a positive factor (deeper purpose to work, giving back, serving greater good, rewarding, working together to create change).		
Connectedness with Families	The element of connectedness with families as a challenge (lack of family support or involvement, lack of parental support at home, feelings of difference/distance between school and students' families) and/or as a positive factor (leaders facilitating opportunities for teachers to connect with students' families, teacher receiving training or resources for connecting with families, teacher reporting positive feelings after connecting with families).		
Collegial Relationships	The element of collegial relationships as a challenge (ineffective colleagues; unsupportive colleagues; colleagues stifling innovation; negative colleagues; unsatisfactory hiring, firing, or teaming practices) and/or as a positive factor (supportive colleagues; effective colleagues; colleagues working together as change-agents; helpful hiring, firing, or teaming practices).		
Supports for Pro-Social Behaviors	The element of supports for pro-social behaviors as a challenge (student behaviors interfering with instruction; lack of disciplinary measures resulting in behavior improvement; unsafe learning environment; lack of mental health resources; lack of social/emotional learning training and resources for teachers) and/or as a positive factor (social/emotional learning training and resources for teachers; positive impact of SEL programs; positive influences on student behavior; ability to access mental health resources; effectiveness of disciplinary measures;		

	improved safety of learning environment).
Professional Learning	The element of professional learning as a challenge (uncoordinated offerings; not impactful on individual's practice in the classroom; professional learning unrelated to content of instruction) and/or as a positive factor (opportunities to collaborate with colleagues around classroom practice; professional learning experiences valuable; professional learning experiences inspiring; rooted in content).
Professional Identity and Agency	The element of professional identity and agency as a challenge (lack of input in decision-making around hiring, instructional improvement, curriculum or instruction; lack of respect for teachers' decision-making as instructional expert) and/or as a positive factor (involvement in decision-making around hiring, instructional improvement, curriculum or instruction; choice in professional development; choice in instructional delivery).
Evaluation, Development and Growth	The element of evaluation, development and growth as a challenge (lack of growth opportunities; lack of support for creativity and risk-taking; evaluators focused on SLO or evaluation scores rather than individuals' growth) and/or as a positive factor (experiences with evaluator leading to development and growth; growth opportunities).
Societal Macrosystem	External forces, home factors, language, poverty, being a challenge, and/or diversity in students' home cultures, experience working with this population, supports from external environment, being a positive.
Leadership Practices	Lack of effective leadership practices presenting a challenge, and/or effective leadership practices in place.
Redesigning the Organization Approaches	Absence or presence of structures, systems, organizational supports in place.
Developing People Approaches	Challenges and/or skill in human resources skills and relationships.

APPENDIX J: SURVEY MEAN SCALE SCORES FOR HYGIENE ELEMENTS

	Mean (Leavers)	*Mean (Stayers)*	*Mean (All Teachers)*
Resources			
Resources - 1. I have access to the instructional technology (including computers, devices, printers, and software) I need to do my job well.	3.25	2.84	3.00
Resources - 2. I have access to the office equipment and supplies (including copy machines, pens, paper, etc.) I need to do my job well.	3.25	3.12	3.16
Resources - 3. I have access to the instructional materials (including curriculum, resources, etc.) I need to do my job well.	2.83	2.89	2.87
Resources - 4. The physical environment of this school and its classrooms support teaching and learning.	3.00	2.78	2.87
Resources Total	3.13	3.01	3.14
Time			
Time - 5. I am protected from duties that interfere with my essential role of educating students.	2.58	2.63	2.61
Time - 6. I am allowed to focus on educating students with minimal interruptions.	2.17	2.26	2.39
Time - 7. Efforts are made to minimize the amount of routine paperwork teachers in my school are required to do.	2.80	2.44	2.48
Time - 8. The non-instructional time provided for teachers in my school is sufficient	2.42	2.16	2.33
Time - 9. I have time to collaborate with colleagues.	2.55	2.63	2.6
Time Total	2.53	2.64	2.60
n	12	19	

Note. Each rating reflects average responses to Likert-type questions making up that scale with ratings as follows: 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly Agree.

APPENDIX K: SURVEY RESPONSES RELATED TO ELEMENTS THAT SUPPORT TEACHER RELATEDNESS

Collegial Relationships	*Mean (Leavers)*	*Mean (Stayers)*	*Mean (All Teachers)*
I enjoy working with my colleagues.	3.5	3.28	3.37
I work with people who care about me as a person.	3.58	3.28	3.47
My colleagues encourage creativity and risk-taking.	2.54	2.68	2.83
Conversations with colleagues in my school help me feel excited about teaching and learning.	2.9	2.78	2.9
Collegial Relationships Total	2.25	2.04	2.13
Social Justice Mission			
The colleagues with whom I work are committed to changing academic outcomes for students of color who have historically been marginalized in public schools.	2.67	2.88	2.79
Through words and actions, leaders at my school promote a mission of assuring high levels of success for every student.	2.67	2.72	2.7
My school provides me with professional development that helps me develop strategies to effectively teach students from different racial and ethnic groups.	2	2.22	2.14
My school leaders or colleagues facilitate open conversations about race.	2	2.06	2.03
My prescribed curriculum provides culturally relevant resources for students.	2.27	2.38	2.33
My prescribed curriculum helps all students understand the unique historical and contemporary experiences of different racial and ethnic groups.	2.25	2	2.11
Social Justice Mission Total	2.92	2.77	2.83
Connectedness with Families			
I am provided with time, resources, opportunities, and encouragement to form relationships and get to know about the interests and backgrounds my students have outside of school.	2.5	2.61	2.57
I am provided with time, resources, opportunities, and encouragement to get to know my students' families.	2.5	2.5	2.5
My students' families and I work as partners in assuring our students' success.	2.83	2.95	2.9
I am provided with time and resources to help me connect with the families of my students who might feel uncomfortable or face barriers in coming to school.	2	2.42	2.27
Connectedness With Families Total	2.24	2.35	2.3
n	12	19	

APPENDIX L: SURVEY MEAN SCALE SCORES FOR ELEMENTS THAT SUPPORT TEACHER COMPETENCE

Supports for Prosocial Student Behaviors	*Mean (Leavers)*	*Mean (Stayers)*	*Mean (All Teachers)*
The classroom environment in which I work is safe.	2.42	2.1	2.84
I receive training and resources that help me effectively support students' social and emotional learning.	2.25	2.42	2.35
Teachers and administrators in my school work together to create solutions to behavioral and discipline challenges in our school.	2.33	2.42	2.39
My school places a priority on teaching students social and emotional behaviors and skills.	1.83	2.58	2.29
My students who have difficulty displaying appropriate social and emotional skills have access to adults in our school who can help them achieve these skills.	2.17	2.61	2.35
Behaviors Total	2.10	2.34	2.31
Professional Learning			
I have ongoing opportunities to plan for instruction with teachers who teach similar content as I do.	2.81	2.06	2.69
My colleagues and I have opportunities to share, observe, and discuss one another's teaching.	2.17	2.33	2.27
I participate in professional development that is valuable to me.	2.83	2.89	2.87
The professional development experiences that I am offered are focused on making me better at instructing the students in my classroom.	2.58	2.61	2.6
I engage in ongoing conversations with colleagues or coaches in my school in which I reflect on my teaching.	2.75	2.78	2.77
The induction, mentoring, and/or coaching experiences I received as a new teacher here were helpful to me when I was beginning my work.	1.75	2.2	2.04
Professional Learning Total	2.39	2.50	2.45
n	12	19	

APPENDIX M: SURVEY MEAN SCALE SCORES FOR ELEMENTS THAT SUPPORT TEACHER AUTONOMY

Professionalism Identity and Agency	*Mean (Leavers)*	*Mean (Stayers)*	*Mean (All Teachers)*
Teachers in my school are recognized as educational experts.	2.25	2.16	2.13
I have autonomy to make decisions about the instructional delivery (i.e. my pacing, my use of curriculum materials, my instructional strategies) that is best for my students.	2.33	2.11	2.19
I have choice in selecting the professional learning that best meets my needs.	2.42	2.26	2.32
My colleagues and I are involved in making decisions important to the instruction and well-being of students in our school.	2.25	2.26	2.26
My colleagues and I are involved in the selection and hiring of new teachers.	2	1.53	1.74
My colleagues and I are involved in planning for instructional improvement in our school.	2.5	2.11	2.27
Professionalism Total	2.21	2.36	2.39
Evaluation, Growth and Development	**Stayers**	**Leavers**	**All**
There are opportunities for teachers to serve as leaders of professional learning in my school.	2.83	2.74	2.77
My school leaders have helped build my ability to lead improvement efforts in my school.	2.42	2.39	2.4
The leaders at my school care about my professional learning and growth.	2.25	2.84	2.61
The leaders at my school encourage creativity and risk-taking.	1.67	2.44	2.13
My one-on-one conversations with my supervisor(s) focus primarily on important feedback that is useful for improving my teaching (rather than focusing primarily on SLO or evaluation scores).	1.33	1.95	1.71
Evaluation, Growth and Development Total	2.50	2.42	2.48
n	12	19	

APPENDIX N: MAJOR THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Major Themes	***Recommendations for Practice***
The migration of human capital from the study school to schools serving fewer minoritized students negatively impacted Freewill Elementary.	Incentivize the attraction of talent to high-needs schools. A plan for strategic management of human capital could help direct the district's talent where it is needed the most.
Relationships were critical to teacher satisfaction. Teacher satisfaction at Freewill was enhanced by strong relationships between colleagues and leaders, and diminished by less strong connections with students' families and a sense of mission for teachers' work.	Prioritize the cultivation of trust throughout the system. Through increased use of culturally responsive pedagogies and school leadership practices, teachers could better form trusting relationships with their students and families that would feed their innate need for relatedness.
Student behavior had a significant negative influence on teacher working conditions at Freewill, particularly among leavers. The use of restorative practices appeared to be ameliorating this, but more structural changes and resources are needed to fully address students' social and emotional needs.	Employ practices of improvement science to target high-leverage change drivers such as student behavior. The tools of organizational theory offered by improvement science provide a means of impacting change on root cause problems of practice in teachers' working conditions in meaningful and lasting ways. Resources abound for practices and programs of trauma-informed supports, culturally responsive and engaging teaching, and social-and emotional-learning that could be enacted in coherent ways to positively impact teachers' experience.
The teachers' working environment at Freewill Elementary was significantly shaped by normative dimensions of state and local accountability policies. Student achievement on standardized tests served as the focus not just for assessment of student learning, but for the core of instruction at the school itself: defining the school's vision, shaping the school's curriculum, and framing teachers' evaluation and professional learning experiences.	Develop transformative visions of instruction and supportive instructional guidance infrastructure to achieve the vision. For leaders to disrupt the reproduction of inequities by schools like Freewill, they must first develop a clear vision of what instruction could look like in its classrooms. Second, they must enact coherent instructional guidance infrastructure (including instructional frameworks, instructional materials, student assessments, instructional oversight, and teacher professional learning) that ties this transformative vision to teachers' everyday practice.
Teachers and leaders at Freewill experienced tensions in their desires for competence and autonomy for themselves and their colleagues in advancing the school's improvement. They often lacked the supportive communities of practice, leadership development, or access to coaching and mentoring that would promote the optimal development of human capacity in the system.	Build a comprehensive system of adult development. This recommendation entails moving beyond the notion that a single leader's efforts to enforce more "accountability" among teachers will lead to sustained improvements in performance, and instead considers creating a holistic system that would help to *develop* the system's adults, with all their various talents and motivations, to their fullest capacities.