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Contributing Factors to Special Education Teacher Burnout and Retention

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DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to my daughters. For cheering me on as I finished my doctorate and completed my research. I am lucky to be their mom. You can do anything you set your mind to. I love you more!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

LIST OF TABLES

Page

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ABSTRACT

Teacher burnout is an increasing concern as Minnesota state data indicates more teachers leaving the profession in the first five years of their career and fewer individuals emerging from teacher preparation programs. The area of special education continues to be an area of need as the state continues to report special education licenses as areas of deficit to meet the need across the state. The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a correlation between burnout and attrition in special education teachers and to analyze the factors contributing to these issues. A voluntary questionnaire was emailed to K-12 special education teachers employed in four public-school districts in southeastern Minnesota. The questionnaire contains the Maslach Burnout Inventory for Educators (Maslach et al., 1986) in addition to questions regarding job satisfaction and other related factors in relation to future retention. Correlations were run and determined a significant correlation between burnout domains and attrition. Additional exploration was completed on related factors contributing to attrition and burnout domains (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment). Determining the impact of contributing factors gives educational leaders specific areas to address in order to decrease burnout and increase retention of special education teachers employed in their districts.

Keywords: special education burnout, teacher burnout, special education teacher retention, teacher retention, burnout in special education, special education attrition, special education teacher emotional exhaustion

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This is a pivotal time in the field of education. The issue of inadequate teacher staffing and teacher shortage is a growing concern in the education community as districts struggle to retain teachers and in turn struggle to find qualified candidates to fill vacancies. This is particularly a high area of concern within the field of special education. In Minnesota alone, in 2019 the Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (2021) reported the existence of 113,986 fully licensed teachers. Of those licensed teachers, only 56,628 were actively using their license in preschool to grade 12 teaching positions. Additionally, of the 375 districts who completed the 2021 biennial survey on teacher supply and demand in Minnesota, 263 (70%) reported a teacher shortage as significant or very significant and 314 of the 375 reported the availability of teachers and teacher applicants to be somewhat and significantly fewer compared to five years ago. In special education specifically, Academic and Behavior Specialist licenses, Emotional Behavioral Disorder Licenses, and Autism Spectrum Disorder Licenses are within the top five areas of need. In Minnesota, these specialized license areas are also ranked the highest among teachers who hold out-of-field permissions and special permission licenses (Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board, 2021). It is important for the education system to research the reasons for teacher vacancies and shortages in order to provide continued educational programming for students.

Throughout recent years, there has been an increased concern around teacher burnout and retention in the field of education. With staffing challenges, fewer teachers emerging from teacher preparation programs, an increase in non-traditional licensing, and teachers reporting frustrations, increased stress, and increased levels of exhaustion, it is imperative that burnout and retention are studied and addressed in order to support current teacher staffing in the field and

provide preventative supports to new teachers who may be vulnerable to attrition and burnout (Ponnock, 2018).

Brief Literature Review

Burnout has been defined by Maslach and Jackson (1981) as the level of experienced emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced self-efficacy an individual experience in relation to the working conditions of helping and high empathy professions, such as teaching. Experienced burnout levels in educators has been a topic researched by many individuals in the past, however the topic of burnout and retention of special education teachers is a less common topic of study in recent years. According to recent research, more and more special education teachers are experiencing burnout-related numerous factors in their current roles and some are considering leaving their positions, and in some cases leaving teaching all together (Robinson et al., 2019; Bettini et al., 2020; Kumedzro, 2018; Grant, 2017).

Special education teachers are highly vulnerable to burnout as they teach multiple specialized subject areas to students with disabilities. This includes independent life skills, self-sufficiency within society, and academic content in addition to behavioral management, providing academic accommodations, and additional paperwork and collaboration requirements (Kumedzro, 2018; Gilmour & Wehby, 2020). It is important to consider special education teacher job satisfaction as it impacts burnout. Ensuring high job satisfaction, decreases burnout and increases retention. Increased retention minimizes the negative impact of staffing inconsistencies in the field of special education (Gilmour & Wehby, 2020). Current research indicates a variety of factors that impact the job satisfaction, retention, and burnout levels of special education teachers; these factors include relationships with colleagues, administrative leadership styles, collegial and administrative support, school climate, and workload (Ansley et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2019; Capri & Guler, 2018; Langher et al., 2017).

Increasing job satisfaction of special education teachers has been found to lower the probability of burnout and increased teacher dedication to their current jobs. This ultimately leads to increased levels of retention. Kumedzro (2018) completed a study in Ghana, on retention of special education teachers and the relationship to job satisfaction. When surveyed the participants responded as follows; 77% reported the workload of teaching in a special education school was overwhelming, 64% considered leaving their positions due to poor working conditions, and 54% considered leaving their positions due to poor administrative leadership styles in their school.

Factors that have been found to lead to decreased job satisfaction, increased burnout and ultimately attrition of special education teachers vary from school to school. Establishing a wider scope of consistent data throughout multiple districts would help to solidify consistent factors leading to these areas of concern. Concrete knowledge of these contributing factors would assist each district and the corresponding building leaders, policy makers, and licensing institutions in making specific organizational changes, implementing interventions for special education teachers, and providing appropriate supports to reduce attrition of special education teachers.

Statement of the Problem

Hiring adequately licensed special education teachers has been a significant challenge facing many districts in the state of Minnesota. This problem appears to be a continual and growing challenge as each year passes. As a principal of a federal setting IV special education building that serves two public school districts in Minnesota, the researcher has engaged in this crisis each of the past five years that the program has been in existence. Special education teachers are becoming more challenging for districts to recruit, most significantly in programs serving primarily high needs populations of students with emotional behavioral and autism spectrum disorders. Licensing practices have changed to allow individuals to teach outside of

their trained field and in some cases without teaching experience. This includes a licensing of teachers outside their field of expertise. College preparation programs have been developed to encourage individuals to go back to school to obtain appropriate teacher licensure, while concurrently teaching in a classroom within that specialty. These interventions were put in place to recruit individuals to the teaching career and to assist districts in filling vacant positions in their schools, particularly in the area of special education. Even with these interventions, fewer individuals are completing licensure programs and going into teaching.

In special education, teacher burnout rates are high and retention is a challenge districts are facing. This causes the need for more districts to hire teachers without proper special education licensure creating a concern with provision of efficient and appropriate programming for high needs students with disabilities. Districts opt for creative and non-traditional licensing programs for special education licenses, which may impact the effectiveness of service delivery for students with special needs. This also has the potential to negatively impact retention of these teachers in current positions. Recent research indicates that one third of teachers leave the field of education in their first five years of teaching. Determining why these teachers are leaving their positions is imperative in order to increase appropriately licensed special education teacher staffing (Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board, 2021).

The problem of special education teacher burnout and concerns regarding retention impact a number of stakeholders within the educational system. Most importantly, students are negatively impacted due to inconsistent teacher staffing, open positions, unlicensed or inappropriately licensed teachers working in programs, and inconsistent instruction. These staffing inconsistencies can impact special education student progress on individual education plan goals, access to appropriate special education services, in addition to student access to free

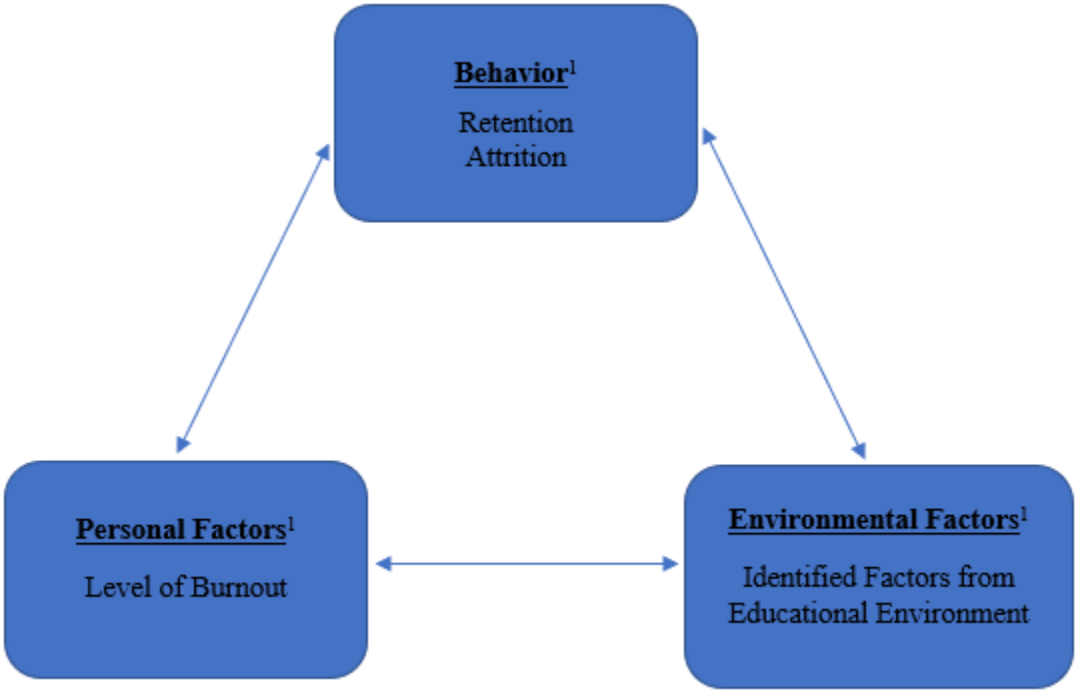
appropriate public education (FAPE). This leads to gaps in learning and diminished academic progress of students enrolled within special education programs (Gilmour & Wehby, 2020). Diminished student progress negatively impacts districts in regard to the state assessment reporting expectations and districts are held accountable for lack of student success. Lack of student success creates future impacts on the workforce when students are not provided appropriate educational programming and FAPE. In addition to programming concerns for students, there is a concern regarding the expense of hiring and retraining new teachers who fill these vacancies (Garcia & Weiss, 2019a; Moore et al., 2018).

Theoretical Framework

In this study, burnout and retention of special education teacher was analyzed from the perspective of Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory combined with the burnout theory developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981). This study intertwines these two theories using the triadic reciprocal causation model that represents Bandura's theory. Social cognitive theory explains the interconnectedness of personal factors, environmental factors, and an individual's behavior (Edu-Valsania et al., 2022; Consiglio et al., 2013; Bergman et al., 2019; Bandura, 2001; Nickerson, 2023), see Figure 1. As it relates to burnout theory and retention in special education teachers, the personal factors of Bandura's theory encompass the individual's experienced levels of burnout as defined by Maslach and Jackson. Environmental factors are related to the contributing factors leading to increased burnout levels and the individual's behavior is representative of their determination to remain in their current position, retention. Positive and negative reinforcement of a given behavior can be a result of environmental factors (Nickerson, 2023). This study gathered information on related factors impacting special education teachers and current levels of experienced burnout. These variables were then analyzed in comparison to the special education teachers' intention of retention.

Figure 1

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and Maslach's Burnout Theory Model



Note: [1]Denotes Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to gather information from special education teachers regarding their levels of burnout and analyze contributing factors related to retention and attrition. It is important to consider what factors are contributing to special education teacher burnout and what is influencing teachers to leave their positions and the teaching profession. The purpose of this analysis was to gain a deeper perspective of special education teachers' experiences in the work environment, demographic variables, job satisfaction and the impact of these factors on teachers' potential burnout and willingness to remain in the profession. With this analysis, further study would be beneficial to determine effective interventions to reduce the

effects of special education teacher burnout in the future and increase special education teacher retention.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

In an effort to explore special education teacher burnout and retention, four research questions guide this inquiry.

RQ1: Is there a correlation between levels of burnout and retention in special education teachers serving in southeastern Minnesota?

H01: There is no correlation between levels of burnout and retention in special education teachers in southeastern Minnesota.

Ha1: There is a correlation between levels of burnout and retention in special education teachers in southeastern Minnesota.

RQ2: What factors contribute to burnout among special education teachers serving in southeastern Minnesota?

RQ3: What factors are related to special education teacher longevity?

Definition of Variables

Variable: Retention reported by special education teachers

Constitutive Definition: The definition of retention used in this study was taken from Billingsley (2004). Special education teacher retention is defined as special education teachers who stay in their teaching position from one year to the next (Billingsley, 2004).

Operational Definition: The questions in this questionnaire that identify retention are represented in the following questions in Appendix A; Questions used to measure special education teacher retention are as follows: Questions 18 through 22.

Variable: Level of burnout reported by special education teachers

Constitutive Definition: The definition of burnout used in this study was taken from Jackson (1981). Helping professions, such as teaching, can cause symptoms leading to burnout. These symptoms include emotional exhaustion, depersonalization/cynicism, and personal accomplishment. These three symptoms are the key components of burnout as it relates to teachers (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Akin, 2019; Maslach, 1982; Robinson et al., 2019).

Operational Definition: The Maslach Burnout Inventory for Educators (Maslach et al., 1986) was utilized to measure special education teacher burnout and retention in this research study. See Appendix A; Question 13, sub questions 1-22.

Variable: Factors reported by special education teachers

Constitutive Definition: Various factors analyzed by researchers that have contributed to general education teacher burnout in other studies. These factors include building and district leadership, workload and salary, along with parent and student interactions.

Operational Definition: The questions within the questionnaire that identify potential factors related to burnout are represented in the following questions from the questionnaire in Appendix A; Questions 1 through 12, 14 through 17, and 23 through 30.

Significance

Research on the topic of special education teacher burnout as it relates to teacher retention is highly impactful in order to solve the problem that many schools across the nation face. Special education teacher burnout levels increase with increased pressures and demands as it relates to their current positions. The analysis of this research could lead to appropriate interventions that school leaders can implement in their respective districts that are unique to their educational settings in order to prevent or reduce the impacts of burnout in special education teachers and in turn increasing retention.

Teacher attrition causes significant impacts, both educationally and financially for districts as studies indicate there is a negative impact on student achievement. “Retaining special education teachers is essential to ensure that students have equitable access to experienced special education teachers” (Bettini et al., 2019, p. 310). Retention is a significant concern as the current educational system in the United States is experiencing a teacher shortage “particularly in high-needs schools” (Ansley et al., 2019, p. 3). Schools with lower socioeconomic populations and higher levels of special education needs display significantly higher rates of turnout in their teaching staff. Research has indicated that highly intense working environments and low job satisfaction are predictors of high turnover rates for teachers, however research also indicates that though a job may be intense with high levels of challenging behaviors, teachers and staff will remain in their positions if the job satisfaction rates are high (Ansley et al., 2019). Ansley et al. (2019) suggests that in order for districts to maintain teachers, the district must provide a supportive environment and foster high levels of job satisfaction.

Due to the reduction in special education licensed teachers in the field, as indicated in the 2021 Biennial Report, the state of Minnesota and universities have developed multiple pathways to licensure in special education. With the development of these alternative routes to licensure, Bruno et al. (2018) suggest, “a closer inspection of accreditation” (Bruno et al., 2018, p. 310) of both traditional and alternative teacher preparation programs in order to establish priorities and effective programming for preparing special educators for the classroom. This includes increasing practicums and diverse experiences throughout the duration of special education teacher preparation programs in order to foster resiliency in the field (Beck et al., 2020; Sciuchetti & Yssel, 2019).

Research Ethics

The researcher submitted to the Institutional Review Board at Minnesota State University Moorhead and received approval on May 5, 2023. Letters of approval were provided by the participating district special education departments as well. Informed consent from participants was obtained from participants at the start of the survey. Additionally, notification that all data collected was confidential and the right of withdrawal from the study at any time, was provided in the beginning disclosure of the survey.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

The limitations of this study were the perceptions of the participants and their honest responses. Due to the proximity and relationships with the districts involved with this study, there may be knowledge of who the researcher is. Though the responses to this survey were anonymous and voluntary, the knowledge of the researcher may have persuaded or dissuaded a participants' participation and/or responses to the survey.

Delimitations

Due to the expansive number of special education teachers in the nation, the state requirements related to special education vary a great degree from state to state. Due to this fact, the participants were limited to the state of Minnesota, in particular south-central Minnesota. District participation was voluntary, as was the participation from special education teachers within these districts. Data collected reflected special education teachers employed by these districts for the 2023-2024 school year.

Conclusion

Special education teacher retention has been at a critical stage in recent years. Hiring and maintaining teachers that provide intensive and individualized programming for students with

disabilities in schools is essential for the students' academic success. Much research has been completed on burnout in teachers, however, there has been less of a focus on special education teachers specifically. This study analyzed these factors leading to burnout in special education teacher and the impact of burnout on special education teacher attrition.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The issue of teacher applicant shortage is a growing concern in the education community as districts struggle to retain teachers and in turn struggle to find qualified candidates to fill vacancies. Teacher attrition coupled with the decrease in the number of individuals completing teacher preparation programs, creates a significant concern for districts to meet the needs of their student populations. This is particularly a high area of concern within special education specifically with approximately 9% of special educators leaving the field of teaching after their first year (Grant, 2017). Licensing practices have changed to allow individuals to teach outside of their trained field and in some cases without teacher experience, leaving teachers who are not highly qualified or appropriately licensed teaching. These individuals are charged with developing individual education plans, developing goals and implementing strategies, and providing direct special education services to students with a large variety of disabilities in programs serving students age birth through the age of 21 (Gokturk et al., 2021; Grant, 2017; Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board, 2021; Robinson et al., 2019).

In a five-year span between 2011 and 2015, data indicate an increase in teacher vacancies from 67.2% to 78.8% (Garcia & Weiss, 2019b; U.S Department of Education, 2012). Districts also report an increase in difficulty to fill positions in that same timeframe from 19.7% to 36.2% (Garcia & Weiss, 2019b; U.S Department of Education, 2012). “Teacher attrition is higher than nursing attrition, and teachers have far higher attrition than traditionally highly respected profession, such as law, engineering, and architecture” (Ingersoll et al., 2021, p. 25). When comparing attrition data between multiple occupations, teachers ranked fifth, below secretaries, daycare providers, paralegals, and correctional officers (Ingersoll et al., 2019; Ingersoll et al., 2021; U.S Department of Education, 2012).

It is important to consider why teachers are leaving positions and why now a third of new teachers leave the profession by the fifth year of teaching (Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board, 2021a). Teacher attrition causes financial loss to educational investments due to the increased dollars spent of rehiring, retraining, and mentoring replacement teachers (Gokturk et al., 2020). In addition to the significant cost of teacher attrition, annually over $2.2 billion across the United States, teacher attrition negatively impacts student progress in the educational setting and limits access to high quality instructors (Moore et al., 2018).

Districts with higher levels of teachers leaving positions are most often those with higher poverty levels and those in urban, culturally diverse areas. High poverty areas have an increased number of vacancies which leaves the job market favorable for fully licensed teachers to select jobs in more affluent communities over high poverty districts. These districts often are able to offer higher salaries and more teacher support making vacancies more desirable to highly qualified teachers. This also leads to attrition from high poverty districts to higher income districts as vacancies come available creating higher levels of teacher turnover in low-income schools (Garcia & Weiss, 2019a).

Ingersoll et al. (2021) collected and analyzed data from the United States Department of Education's Schools and Staffing Surveys as well as the National Teacher and Principal Survey. The most recent report compiles data from these national surveys in the "Seven Trends: The Transformation of the Teaching Force" from 2021. This report states, of teachers leaving their positions, 11.9% are first year teachers, 23% are second year, 30.6% are third year, 39.1% are fourth year, and 44.6% are fifth year teachers. National data revealed in the first five years of teaching, over 44% of beginning teachers leave education. In addition, teachers who left their jobs after their first year of teaching reported the following reasons for their departure; 32.1%

indicated a forced transfer or termination, 39.7% moved for personal reasons, 31.7% left to another profession, and 44.4% moved positions due to dissatisfaction in their current role. This demonstrates that beginning teachers are highly vulnerable to turnover and attrition (Ingersoll et al., 2018; Ingersoll et al., 2021; U.S. Department of Education, 2012, 2021). The first five years of teaching are critical in the development and support of teachers. This is evident as researchers have indicated that up to 30-50% of new teachers leave the profession within this timeframe (Ponnock et al., 2018; Ingersoll et al., 2021; Garcia & Weiss, 2019b; Moore et al., 2018) and special education teachers are 2.5% more likely to leave the profession than their general education counterparts (Moore et al., 2018). After this critical five-year period, teachers begin to develop more confidence in their abilities and develop strategies to cope and manage challenges faced in the educational setting. Self-efficacy and job satisfaction reportedly still may decline without effective supports in place, leading to burnout and attrition (Ponnock et al., 2018; Moore et al., 2018; Lane et al., 2019). This is due to multiple factors that impact job satisfaction and decrease self-efficacy leading to burnout in these early years of their careers (Kumedzro, 2018).

Throughout the research completed on teacher retention, many factors have arisen that contribute to teachers considering or ultimately leaving the teaching profession. Frequent factors reported for teachers leaving the profession include building culture (Lane et al., 2019; Ponnock et al., 2018), lack of meaningful staff development (Lane et al., 2019), lack of mentorship opportunities, minimal support from student families, and low levels of support from administration (Ponnock et al., 2018; Ingersoll et al., 2021; Goturk et al., 2021).

Providing new teachers mentorship programs in their first five years of teaching allows for collaboration with experienced educators in addition to opportunities to get feedback and develop self-efficacy within their own classrooms. Developing a strong onboarding process for

new teachers also sets the stage for integration of the new teacher into the culture of the district, building and district collaboration, and supports establishing connectedness in the workplace (Moore et al., 2018; Ponnock et al., 2018). Educational leadership is an important aspect of teacher retention (Kumedzro, 2016). Creating a culture of connectedness and support positively impacts teacher job satisfaction, decreases teacher stress, and increases commitment which positively impacts teacher retention. Teachers who experience isolation, minimal support, poor leadership, overwhelming workloads, and inconsistent collaboration opportunities leave the profession at higher rates (Moore et al., 2018; Gokturk, et al., 2021; Bettini et al., 2020).

In addition to mentorship programs, improved school building culture and increased administrative support, providing opportunities and guidance on how to ensure proper selfcare was found to have a positive impact on resiliency in new educators and individuals training to become teachers (Lane et al., 2019; Miller & Flint-Stipp, 2019; Goturk et al., 2021; Bettini et al., 2020). Providing new teachers with positive role models of burnout management and application of coping skills, in addition to providing an example of managing an effective balance between work life and home life can also positively impact resiliency and decrease future burnout (Miller & Flint-Stipp, 2019; Goturk et al., 2021).

In a study completed by Lane et al. (2019), teacher experience was analyzed and perceptions on various factors that may impact teacher retention were reported. General education teachers who worked in the district for five years or more were interviewed, and the data revealed several common themes. These included; lack of empowerment, feelings that teacher input was not valued, and teachers feeling stressed and burned out to the point they were frequently missing work, and many were looking for different teaching positions. Each participant shared feelings of disempowerment and felt as though they were not valued. They

perceived that their thoughts and experiences were devalued, and this caused a negative impact of morale, and as a result many were looking for new job opportunities (Lane et al., 2019).

Contributing to the increased concern of districts filling vacant teaching positions, is the reduction of new teachers emerging from teacher preparation programs. From 2008-2018 there is a significant 37.8% reduction of individuals attending teacher preparation programs. A decrease of 15.4% of individuals obtained a bachelors in education and reduction of 27.4% finished a teacher licensure program (Garcia & Weiss, 2019b) With fewer individuals entering teacher certification programs, alternative licensure programs can be an avenue for recruitment into the field of education. This pathway attracts non-traditional students to enroll in teacher programs, thus increasing teacher candidates and a more diverse candidate pool (Woods, 2016).

Special Education Teacher Retention

"Approximately 13% of special education teachers leave the workforce every year" (Garwood et al., 2018, p. 31). This negatively impacts the educational progress of students with special needs. Special education teachers who leave at increased rates are those working with students with emotional behavioral diagnoses when compared to other special education teachers (Sciuchetti & Yssel, 2019). Schools who serve high numbers of students with special needs have teachers leaving positions 50% more than other schools (Ansley et al., 2019). In a study exploring motives relating to the attrition and retention of two first year special education teachers, researchers found common themes that led to the attrition of these two educators after their first year; special education paperwork, job stress, and leadership support (Grant, 2017). Feelings of isolation, lack of support, ineffective collaboration, and increased workload are all frequent contributing factors to special education teacher burnout and attrition (Grant, 2017).

Other factors contributing to special education teacher retention include building leadership, which research shows is the most impactful aspect of teacher retention. Leadership

that is consistent, supportive when managing student behaviors, and allows teachers to be a part of decision making throughout the building increases job satisfaction and decreases the likelihood of special education teacher attrition (Ansley et al., 2019; Gokturk et al., 2021; Kumedzro, 2018). Additionally, positive building culture plays a role in job satisfaction and attrition. Special education teachers who report having positive relationships with others in the workplace, increases satisfaction and reduces attrition (Ansley et al., 2019; Gokturk et al., 2021).

There are some contradictory findings on the impact of salary on retention and attrition. Most research indicates that it is not a primary motivator when individuals consider leaving their special education teaching positions. Poor working conditions negatively impact a special education teacher's desire to remain in their position and are more likely to resign (Kumedzro, 2010).

While more studies have used a deficits-based approach to the study of teacher attrition, Gokturk et al. (2021) focused on reasons special education teachers remain in their positions. This study found four key components to why special education teachers stay in their positions and two components explaining why they leave. One reason special education teachers decided to remain in their positions despite high levels of adversity, included having more freedom within the special education classroom to design creative instruction to meet a variety of needs. Additionally, Gokturk et al. (2021) found that special education teachers had a genuine passion for working with individuals with special needs. Special education teachers in this study reported empathy and compassion for their students and reported high levels of satisfaction from working with children with disabilities. In addition to passion felt for the job, special education teachers also reported high feelings of persistence and resiliency when teaching students with disabilities new skills. The teachers in this study reported positive support from their administrative teams,

which was reported as a reason to remain in their current positions (Gokturk et al., 2021). Similar to other research on special education teacher attrition, the individuals who chose to leave their positions reported dissatisfaction with their positions (Goturk et al., 2021; Ansley et al., 2019; Kumedzro, 2018) and discouragement by the slow progress students with disabilities were making within their classrooms (Gokturk et al., 2021). This in addition to feelings of lack of support and minimal recognition, lead these special education teachers to leave their current positions (Gokturk et al., 2021; Grant, 2017).

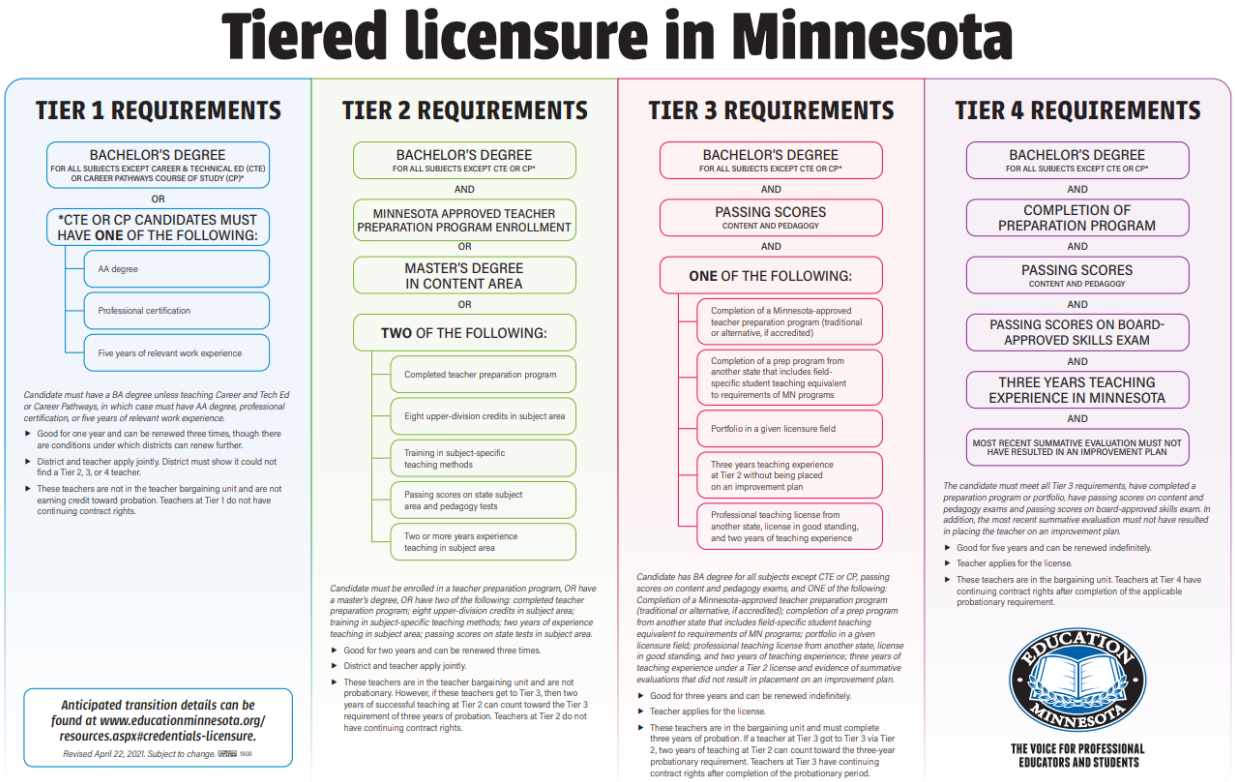
Minnesota Teacher Retention

College programs and special teacher licensing requirements have been developed to encourage individuals to go back to school with the purpose of obtaining appropriate teacher licensure, while concurrently teaching in a classroom within that specialty. These interventions are put in place to recruit individuals to the teaching career and to assist districts with filling vacant positions in their schools, particularly in the area of special education. The 2021 Biennial Report on *Supply and Demand of Teachers in Minnesota* indicated that special education is currently one of the license areas where the highest number of special permissions licenses are held. Special permissions licenses may be obtained by individuals holding a Bachelor's Degree, but it may not be in special education. These licenses may also be given to individuals who do have a teaching license but are not certified in a particular area required for a specific teaching position, for example special education specific licenses (e.g., emotional behavioral disorders, autism spectrum disorders, developmental cognitive delay). This in addition to the declining number of students graduating from teacher preparation programs and the number of teachers leaving the profession creates staffing concerns when it comes to hiring and retaining special education teachers (Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board, 2021a).

Specifically, in the state of Minnesota an individual can be approved for an out-of-field permission license, which allows an individual who holds a Tier 2, Tier 3, or Tier 4 license to teach in an area that is outside of their current teaching license. See Figure 1. An out-of-field permission license may only be used for a total of 5 years in an individual's teaching career. A 1-year Tier 1 license may be issued in the state of Minnesota if a teacher candidate has a 4-year degree and a job offer from a public-school district and may only be renewed 3 times. Tier 2 licenses also may be issued to allow for increased hiring flexibility. A Tier 2 license can be issued with individuals who have a 4-year degree and a job offer from a public-school district. This license is a 2-year license that can be renewed 3 times. Teacher candidates who qualify for a Tier 2 license are generally enrolled in a teacher preparation program that has been approved by the Minnesota Department of Education (Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board, 2021a). These licensing options allow for some flexibility in placing teaching candidates when positions are vacant or difficult to fill with qualified candidates.

Figure 2

Minnesota Tiered Teacher Licensing Requirements 2021



(Education Minnesota, 2021)

In the state of Minnesota, the Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board collected data in the Biennial Report from 20-21 reveals several statistics around teacher retention and recruitment. When surveying 375 of the public-school districts in Minnesota, 296 of them reported having teaching positions that were difficult to fill in the 19-20 school year. Of the 375 districts, 101 of them report having open positions due to lack of qualified candidates in the 19-20 school year. The survey also included data on the reasoning teachers left positions in the 2019-2020 school year. In total, 2,330 teachers indicated leaving a position in the 19-20 school year and 26.09% of these indicated leaving due to personal reasons which were not specified in the data collected, while 17.38% left for unspecified reasons to the researchers.

Additionally, 31.07% of the teachers surveyed left their positions due to moving to a position in another district. Data were collected regarding the retention rate of teachers in the first 5 years of teaching and it indicated 11% of teachers left the field after the first year of teaching, increasing to 22.5% leaving the profession after the third year of teaching. By the fifth year, nearly 33% of teachers had left the profession. This report also found a significant reduction in first year teachers emerging from teacher preparation programs from 3,107 first year teachers in 2015 to 1,964 first year teachers in 2019, over a 30% reduction in first year teachers entering the field (Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board, 2021a). This coupled with the attrition of nearly a third of teachers within the first five years of teaching, could have catastrophic repercussions on district's current and future abilities to fill vacant positions to meet the needs of students in the state of Minnesota.

History of Burnout

The history of burnout has been studied extensively by many researchers. One of the first to explore this topic was psychologist Herbert Freudenberger. According to Freudenberger (1980), burnout occurs because individuals "pushed themselves too hard for too long" (p. 12) beyond their limitations in a workplace setting. In relation to burnout in special education teachers, this definition could be applied to those teachers experiencing burnout due to increased workloads due to paperwork, increased numbers of students on their caseloads, and increased responsibilities within their positions (Grant, 2017; Sciuchetti & Yssel, 2019; Ansley et al., 2019). Symptoms of this burnout are manifested as excessive fatigue, detachment and cynicism. These are often paired with some additional concerns of irritability, feelings of unappreciation, and depression. This occurs most often in helping professions where individuals want to help others and make a positive impact on society (Freudenberger, 1980). These professions include social work, teaching, and counseling, as noted by Freudenberger (1980), where there is a great

deal of passion for helping others. Helping professions tend to observe a great deal of trauma, adversity, and lack of progress as well, which can notably contribute to the development of burnout. Freudenberger (1980) states that burnout is “a state of fatigue or frustration brought about by devotion to a cause, way of life, or relationship that failed to produce the expected reward” (p. 13).

Mehmet Ali Akin (2019) furthered the definition of burnout, originally formulated by Freudenberger (1980), as workplace stress. Akin found burnout led to the inability to meet workplace demands due to high workloads and emotional exhaustion. Additionally, burnout led to feelings of failure and exhaustion leaving a lasting impact on the individual’s physical and emotional wellbeing (Akin, 2019). Researchers Capri and Guler (2018) also used Freudenberger’s definition to further define burnout as “physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion accompanied by underachievement, depersonalization, and apathy at work” (p. 124). Just as other researchers have indicated, workplace burnout most often occurs in high-empathy helping professions like teaching.

Maslach and Jackson (1981) continued to define burnout as it relates to individuals in “human service” careers (p. 99) and helping professions who encounter high levels of continuous interactions with others. Burnout sets in when there are intense levels of interaction with clients, coupled with continuous exposure to adverse and stressful situations between provider and client. Emotional exhaustion is a key indicator of burnout. Cynicism and “dehumanized perception of others” (p. 99) follow as the practitioner develops intense feelings of exhaustion and inability to meet the needs of others. The increased negative perception by the practitioner often leads to self-reflected feelings of inadequacy in their job performance and reduced personal accomplishment. In this definition of burnout, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and

personal accomplishment are the key components of burnout as it relates to teachers (Robinson et al., 2019; Maslach, 1982). Burnout occurs more frequently in careers where there is a dissonance between human values and economic values. There appears to be a conflict between the increase of work to be done with less time to complete it in. When individuals are feeling overwhelmed with a workload and less time to complete required tasks, burnout is more likely to occur. Individuals who do not feel recognized for their work and do not feel valued, have an increased likelihood of experiencing burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Maslach and Leiter, 1988).

As burnout progresses, first emotional exhaustion becomes as the result of individuals intensive emotional involvement of themselves (Maslach, 1982) followed by a decrease of energy, emotional resources, and fatigue (Akin, 2019; Maslach, 1982; Maslach and Leiter, 1988). Emotional exhaustion refers to feelings of exceeding one's limit physically and emotionally. An individual never seems to get enough rest. They have little to no energy and feel as though they cannot solve another task given to them. Typically, this is the first symptom exhibited in an individual when there is increased job stress (Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Maslach and Leiter, 1988). This progresses until an individual may feel as though they can no longer invest emotionally to the individual or situation. This is not the result of the individual no longer caring, but of feeling fully depleted of anything left to give. When this occurs, the individual will disengage and remove themselves from the situation or source of stress, including the client (Maslach, 1982; Maslach and Leiter, 1988).

Detachment prompts the development of depersonalization. This, according to Maslach (1982), occurs as the practitioner views others, including the client, in a highly negative manner and assumes negative intent by another individual (Maslach, 1982). Though this term exists in

the field of psychology, Maslach gave it a different connotation. The individual appears emotionless and unfeeling towards coworkers and clients, presenting an uncaring attitude of work-related tasks and individuals in the workplace. This is interpreted to be a coping mechanism for the increased job stress and exhaustion in order to protect one's self from feelings of failure (Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Maslach and Leiter, 1988). This negativity can lead to service providers neglecting care or not being vigilant in their care for clients due to the feelings of helplessness and continued demands within the work environment (Maslach, 1982).

Ultimately, depersonalization persists until the individual develops an excessive negative perception of one's self. In helping professions, the feelings of depersonalization towards a client can induce feelings of failure, reduced productivity, increased feelings of depression, shame, and ineffectiveness in a practitioner. This also includes lack of confidence in one's abilities, feelings of being unqualified to complete assigned tasks, and extending feelings that others perceive them as a failure. This is defined as reduced personal accomplishment (Akin, 2019; Maslach, 1982; Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Maslach and Leiter, 1988).

Current Teacher Burnout

More recently, research has been done on burnout and the confirmation of multiple models of burnout. Moving beyond the three-dimensional burnout model established and defined by Maslach and Jackson (1981) four other models are explored by Maslach and Leiter (2016) as confirmed by empirical research studies. The first model is focused on job stress. Burnout begins with a stage of experienced job stress and an imbalance of job expectation and the individual's ability to meet these expectations. This leads to feelings of exhaustion and tension within the individual. Finally, this model culminates with the individual experiencing an emotional response including pessimism, detachment and behavioral changes.

The second burnout model, the Job Demands-Resources model, suggests that burnout occurs when there is an imbalance in the workload and the resources provided to meet job expectations. Similarly, the third burnout model, Conservation of Resources model, also takes into consideration the imbalance of workload in comparison to available resources, but factors in the individual's perception that resources are going to be removed or depleted. Finally, the fourth alternative burnout model explored by Maslach and Leiter (2016) was the Areas of Worklife model. This model also centers around imbalance, but focuses in six categories: "workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values" (Maslach & Leiter, 2016, p. 106). In this model, the larger the imbalance in these areas, the more likely burnout is to occur.

It is important to consider what can be done to prevent burnout in the workplace as special education positions are becoming increasingly more difficult to fill. Workload contributes to burnout by creating an overall imbalance of an individual to meet job expectations (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Teachers have reported that increased work demands have led to continued high levels of emotional exhaustion and this has negatively impacted their ability to utilize effective coping skills within their jobs (O'Toole, 2018). When there is high demand with little to no chance for an individual to recuperate and have a work-life balance, this increase of job stress will contribute to burnout. If this is experienced repeatedly in a work environment, burnout will occur (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

Teachers also report that the inability to reach some students and meet their needs, impacts their feelings of effectiveness and have an overall impact on their wellbeing outside of the school. They report feeling discouraged, ineffective, dispirited, and one participant reported "I do not want to do this job anymore" (Akin, 2019, p. 58). Teachers must meet the needs of all students in the classroom, differentiate instruction to meet the needs of the students with varying

needs in the classroom, and balance a positive culture and positive relationships with students and their families. With reported high workload from teachers, maintaining this workload balanced, by definition, can lead to burnout (Ziaian-Ghafari & Berg, 2019; O'Toole, 2018; Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Slaoviita & Pakarinen, 2021). Some individuals may not have another possible career option or replacement position. Depending on salary and experience, there are risks of reduction in pay and worries about contributing to outstanding student loans. Teachers with a lot of experience and with high levels of burnout may decide to remain in the career due to being close to retirement. There may be feelings of being forced to remain in a position when experiencing high levels of burnout and that could prove to have highly negative consequences (Hughes, 2001).

Many variables have been studied in research, using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach et al., 1986) on the effects of burnout in the field of education. Teachers' grade level was found to contribute to differing levels of experienced burnout (Baran et al., 2010; Kokkinos, 2006). In this line of research, elementary teachers have been found to experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion than preschool and special education teachers. Preschool teachers have higher levels of reported depersonalization while special education teachers have higher levels of perceived personal accomplishment (Baran et al., 2010). Lastly, elementary teachers experienced higher levels of emotional exhaustion, whereas their high school teacher counterparts reported increased levels of negative feelings about students and lower levels of personal accomplishment (Kokkinos, 2006).

Years of experience has also been found to play a role in experienced burnout. Teachers that had between one to five years of teaching experience, experienced higher levels of burnout when compared to instructors with more years of experience (Demirel & Cephe, 2015; Byrne,

1993; Capri & Guler, 2018). Teachers with over 20 years and those with less than five years of experience reported lower levels of job satisfaction as well (Balanescu, 2019; Brittle, 2020; Sciuchetti & Yssel, 2019). New teachers have less job commitment and "young teachers reported themselves as low motivated for the teaching career" (Balanescu, 2019, p. 125) and they anticipate leaving the profession after a few years of teaching.

Creating a supportive work environment with an acceptable workload can lead to higher levels of productivity and less experienced burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Akin, 2019; O'Toole, 2018; Slaoviita & Pakarinen, 2021). Additionally, creating work environments where individuals have investment and buy-in into the work they are doing in addition to employee recognition establishes higher levels of engagement and can decrease levels of burnout. Work environments that have a positive social culture, low levels of conflict between employees, and high levels of support and trust are also found to have less burnout. Other potential interventions to prevent burnout include developing effective ways to manage stress, increasing breaks, lessening workload, increased sleep, establishing a support network, engaging in stress reducing activities, encouraging individuals to have a healthy lifestyle and proper nutrition, and attending counseling with a trained professional (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

Additionally, burnout can have significant negative effects on a workplace. With increased feelings of job stress and dissatisfaction, negative outcomes can impact the organization as a whole. This could be in the form of lower quality of job performance, increased absenteeism, and high levels of turnover. These issues impact the organization by causing increased negative feelings about work, higher levels of conflict, fatigue, lack of self-efficacy, increased workload on others, and creating a negative work culture. This can perpetuate a culture

of burnout within the organization and can lead to higher rates of turnover (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Ziaian-Ghafari & Berg, 2019).

Research also suggests that experiencing high levels of burnout can negatively impact one's physical and mental health. Burnout can increase feelings of depression in individuals (Szigeti et al., 2016). Prolonged experiences to high levels of stress can significantly impact the wellbeing of individuals, including teachers. Stress can lead to anxiety and other mental health concerns, high blood pressure, sleep issues, chronic fatigue, stomach issues, increased drug use, and other physical health concerns (Garwood et al., 2018; Robinson et al., 2019). "Chronic and extreme stress from occupational demands can negatively affect mental health for individuals" (Ziaian-Ghafari & Berg, 2019, p. 33). Due to the significant health concerns that teachers can experience due to the increased exposure to stress, it is imperative that interventions be put in place to ensure positive and healthy well-being, decrease in burnout symptoms, and in turn overall increase in teacher retention (Ziaian-Ghafari & Berg, 2019). "A shortage of teachers harms students, teachers, and the public education system as a whole. Lack of sufficient, qualified teachers and staff instability threaten students' ability to learn and reduce teachers' effectiveness, and high teacher turnover consumes economic resources" (Garcia & Weiss, 2019a, para. 2).

Special Education Teacher Burnout

"Special education teachers are required to balance several roles, and this requires high demands in mental and physical energy" (Robinson et al., 2019, p. 295). According to the Minnesota Teacher Supply and Demand Report (2021), three of the five highest licensure areas of individuals teaching with a special permissions license (out-of-field permission, tier 1 or tier 2) within the state of Minnesota are in the area of special education. Specifically, these special education license areas are Academic and Behavioral Specialist, Emotional Behavioral

Disorders, and Autism Spectrum Disorders within the state of Minnesota (Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board, 2021a; Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board, 2021b). Table 1 indicates a shortage within the field of special education and with these numbers it is important to retain the special education teachers currently in these positions.

Table 1

Minnesota Teacher Licensure Percent Tier 1, Tier 2, and Out of Field Permissions 2021

Licensure	Tier 1	Tier 2	Overall % of OFP
Academic Behavioral Specialist	13.45%	12.70%	10.24%
Autism Spectrum Disorders	4.31%	4.15%	5.12%
Emotional Behavioral Disorders	6.67%	5.88%	6.99%

(Minnesota Professional Licensing Board, 2021b)

"Special education teachers have one of the most challenging and stressful jobs in public education" (Garwood et al., 2018, p. 30). Developing an understanding of special education teacher burnout is essential in establishing interventions to prevent burnout and teacher attrition. Without intervention, research shows that experienced burnout symptoms of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and decreased personal accomplishment in special education teachers does not decrease overtime. Burnout symptoms remain consistent and special education teachers five years later are just as likely to experience continued burnout over time without proper prevention and interventions put in place (Soini et al., 2019). Increased support from colleagues and administration has been shown to be an effective intervention by reducing overall burnout and specifically increasing feelings of personal effectiveness in special education teachers. Practicing mindfulness has shown to decrease feelings of stress, improve relationships with students, and

increase ability to use coping strategies in difficult times reducing burnout (Sharp Donahoo et al., 2018). Special education teachers who successfully implement coping skills (Nuri et al., 2017), self-care strategies, and set boundaries for balancing work life and home life have also been found to reduce burnout (Greenwood et al., 2018). Research also suggests that in order to avoid burnout in special education teachers, educational leaders should refrain from increasing workload on the special education teachers within the organization (Thakur, 2018).

Research on the three dimensions of burnout; emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal achievement, indicate many factors cause increased burnout levels in special education teachers. High levels of workload in special education teachers result in an emotional exhaustion and depersonalization increase as workload increases and as a result personal accomplishment decreases (Nuri et al., 2017; Thakur, 2018). Working with students with disabilities can be more challenging due to the high levels of individualized needs each student presents (Brittle, 2020; Shaukat et al., 2019). Teachers working in self-contained special education settings have shown to experience higher levels of job dissatisfaction and increased levels emotional exhaustion. Higher levels of depersonalization result from serving increased numbers of students in the category of emotional behavioral disorders (Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002). Special educators also have high levels of paperwork that can contribute to increased and unmanageable workloads. In addition to teaching content, special education teachers are responsible for due process paperwork, writing evaluations, individual education plans, evaluating student progress, managing high level challenging behaviors, coaching general education teachers on implementation of appropriate accommodations for students, and managing paraprofessionals. All these tasks increase the workload of special education teachers contributing to high workloads. Maintaining manageable workloads increases self-efficacy.

Increased self-efficacy has shown to reduce symptoms of burnout, including emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, in addition to reducing stress and increasing job satisfaction (Garwood et al., 2018; Shaukat et al., 2019).

There was significant negative correlation between job satisfaction and burnout in research on burnout in special education teachers (Robinson et al., 2019; Capri & Guler, 2018). Teachers who experience low job satisfaction experience high levels of burnout, this could be countered by ensuring teachers feels supported in their teaching environment (Robinson et al., 2019; Capri & Guler, 2018). Researchers have indicated similar outcomes when comparing special education teachers' job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and years of experience. Special education teachers with fewer than five years of experience report lower job satisfaction and lower self-efficacy than teachers with more years of experience (Shaukat et al., 2019; Yavuz et al., 2018; Capri & Guler, 2018). In closing, what is clear is that special education teachers report their job satisfaction rates as low (Shourbagi & Bakkar, 2015; Wangari & Orodho, 2014, as cited in Yavuz et al., 2018).

Support from colleagues is a significant factor to counter teacher burnout (Capri & Guler, 2018). Low levels of support, especially from general education counterparts have been found to be a significant factor to increased burnout in special education teachers (Greenwood et al., 2018). Additionally, appreciation shown by supervisors and increased administrative support decreases burnout (Yavuz et al., 2018; Capri & Guler, 2018) and decreased administrative support increases burnout rates in special education teachers (Langher et al., 2017). It is rather clear that support within the educational setting positively impacts special education teachers' sense of wellbeing.

A very important issue relates to the deficient number of qualified special education teachers in the classroom and how this directly impacts student academic achievement and progress in the classroom (Brittle, 2020; Gokturk et al., 2021; Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2012). Licenses issued through alternative licensing programs and special licenses issued have increased to 30.2% of Minnesota teaching licenses. These individuals are charged with teaching children while attending teacher licensure programs. This issue begs the question as to whether appropriate services are being provided for students. This question deserves even more consideration when services are being provided to students with specialized needs outlined through special education (e.g., behavioral interventions, academic modification, individualized programming). There is an increase in teacher vacancies, especially in difficult to hire positions including behavioral strategist, autism spectrum disorder, emotional behavioral disorder, and blind and visually impaired licenses. These areas are noted as high demand by the 2021 Biennial Report on *Supply and Demand of Teachers in Minnesota.* Decreasing special education teacher retention and increased vacancies in special education could lead to the inability to provide appropriate services to special needs students, impacting their access to free appropriate public education (FAPE). It is the right of students with disabilities to have full access to FAPE in the educational system.

Increasingly, as it relates to burnout, Maslach (1982) stated that increased levels of depersonalization, a symptom of burnout, can lead caregivers to such a negative state that an individual may not take a client's needs as seriously, may not give required accommodations, and may lead to decreased effectiveness in services (Maslach, 1982). This would negatively impact the provision of FAPE due to the lack of interventions for students with special needs.

Increased levels of burnout in teachers impacts the school's ability to meet instructional goals as well (Sokmen & Kilic, 2019, p. 709).

Theoretical Framework

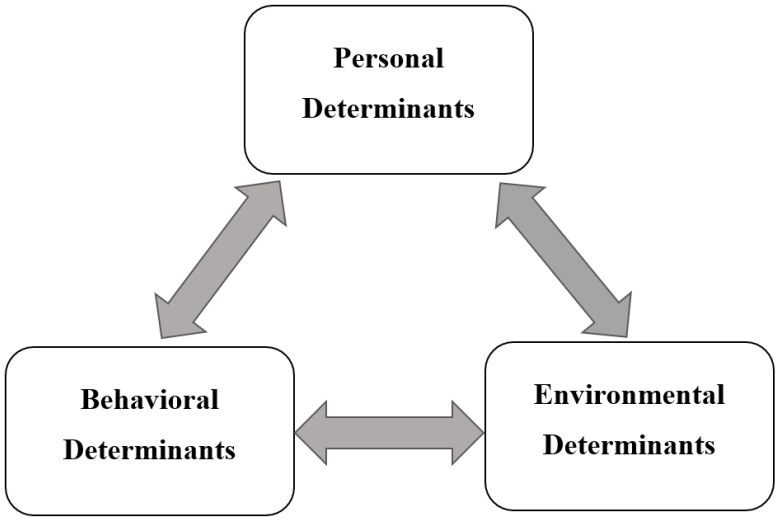
This study was based on the combination of burnout theory defined by Maslach and Jackson (1981) and Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory as a basic structure to define experienced burnout in the workplace. This theory further defines self-efficacy, emotional exhaustion, and depersonalization in addition to establishing a framework for the progression of burnout and various contributing factors within the workplace. This study intertwined these two theories using the triadic reciprocal causation model that represents Bandura's theory.

Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theory defines the interrelation between personal factors, environmental factors and an individual's behavior (Edu-Valsania et al., 2022; Consiglio et al., 2013; Bergman et al., 2019; Bandura, 2001; Bandura, 2002; Nickerson, 2023). This theory suggests that there is a reciprocal relationship between an individual's behavior, environmental factors, and personal factors (Edu-Valsania et al., 2022; Nickerson, 2023; Bolkan et al., 2021), see Figure 3. The social cognitive theory allows for more autonomy and control of the individual on behavioral outcomes. As such, this theory goes against the traditional behaviorism as historically presented behavioral psychologist (Nickerson, 2023). Traditional behaviorist theory presents a linear construct of behavior while social cognitive theory explains that behavior is a function of outside environmental influence, intrinsic influence, or external reinforcement (Bandura, 1999). Social Cognitive Theory provides a reciprocal triadic causation between the environment, the individual, and the behavior.

Figure 3

Reciprocal Determinism in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory



(Deryakulu et al., 2016)

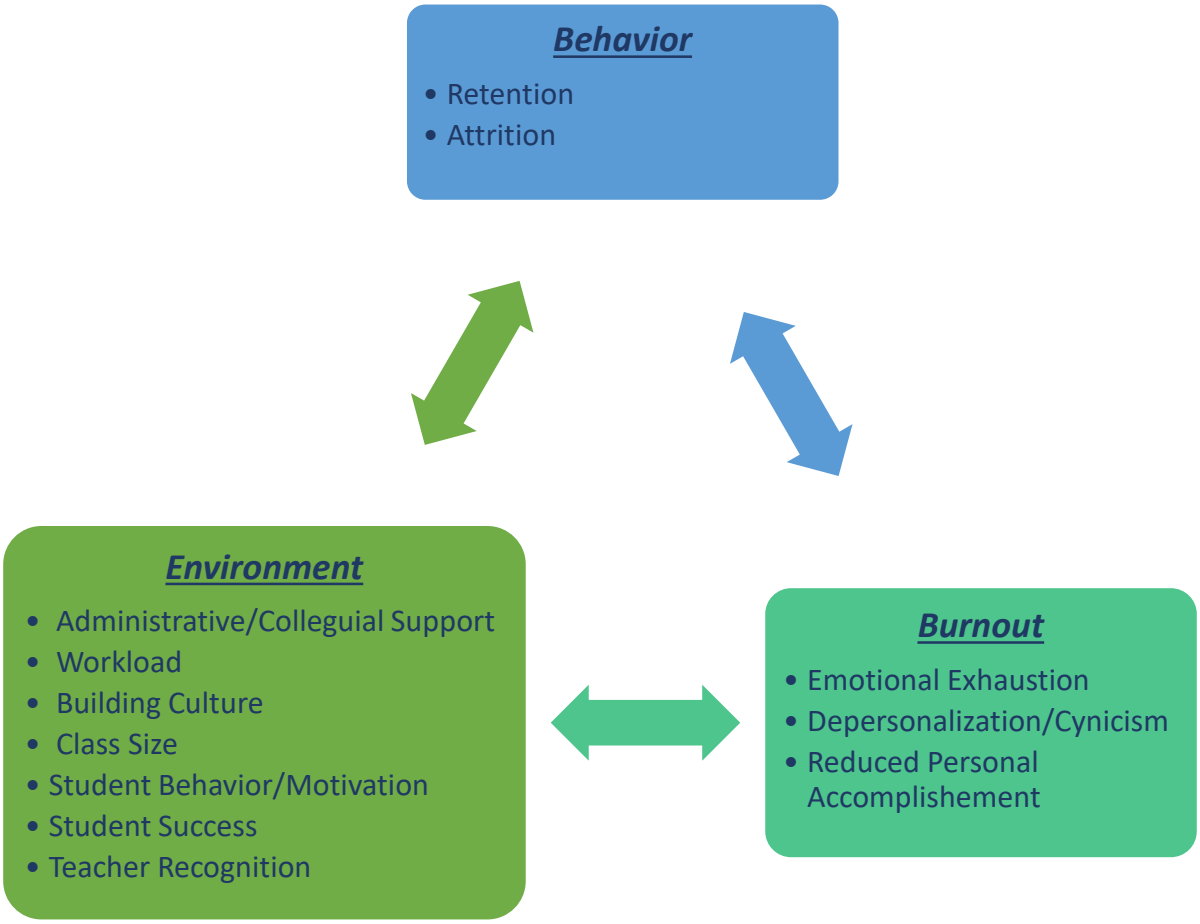
Bandura (2001) utilized this theory to explain the connection between the personal determinants and environmental factors as they relate to an individual's behavior. He found that self-efficacy is directly related to thought patterns that directly impact success and performance and beliefs of one's self. Self-efficacy, additionally, played a role in decision making in the work setting by influencing choice of specific tasks, how much effort to put into a task, and persistence. Self-efficacy also influenced the environment and activities an individual chooses to engage in. According to the application of social cognitive theory in a study completed by Consiglio et al. (2013), personal factors, such as self-efficacy also impact the individual's behavior and perception of incidents in the workplace.

When specifically applied to burnout in teachers, the application of social cognitive theory and the impacts on teacher burnout have been studied by Pines (2002). This researcher found the primary factors contributing to teacher burnout were student behavior, lack of student motivation, and perceived lack of support when managing student behavior problems in the

classroom. In addition, increased class sizes and high workloads played a role in burnout. According to the intertwined theories of Maslach and Jackson's (1981) theory of burnout and Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory, environmental factors such as increased workload contributes to teacher burnout as they want to meet the expectations set for them, (see Figure 4). When expectations and workload increase, teachers are met with feelings of defeat. Teachers experience an increase in feelings of being ineffective and feelings of failure when they are unable to meet the high levels of workload presented to them leading to emotional exhaustion (Nuri et al., 2017; Thakur, 2018; Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002; Garwood et al., 2018; Shaukat et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2019). Increased emotional exhaustion coupled with lack of administrative and collegial support, lack of recognition and collaboration leads to depersonalization or cynicism (Yavuz et al., 2018; Capri & Guler, 2018; Greenwood et al., 2018; Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002; Robinson et al., 2019). When environmental factors such as high levels of student behavior and increased class sizes occur, this leads teachers feeling ineffective in the classroom as they are unable to focus on the entire class due to behavioral issues. Decreased student motivation impacts personal factors, such as teacher burnout and increased stress, due to the teacher feeling ineffective at keeping students engaged in learning, which in turn leads to reduced self-efficacy (Nuri et al., 2017; Thakur, 2018; Garwood et al., 2018; Shaukat et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2019). This makes the teacher feel ineffective as they feel as though there is not enough time to meet the needs of all students (Pines, 2002; Consiglio et al., 2013; Bandura, 2001; Edu-Valsania et al., 2022; Koutroubas et al., 2022).

Figure 4

Maslach and Jackson Theory of Burnout and Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory



Research Questions

In an effort to explore the relationship between special education teacher burnout and retention and in addition to the contributing factors leading to burnout, the following are the research questions that were explored in this study:

RQ1: Is there a correlation between levels of burnout and retention in special education teachers serving in southeastern Minnesota?

H01: There is no correlation between levels of burnout and retention in special education teachers in southeastern Minnesota.

Ha1: There is a correlation between levels of burnout and retention in special education teachers in southeastern Minnesota.

RQ2: What factors contribute to burnout among special education teachers serving in southeastern Minnesota?

RQ3: What factors are related to special education teacher longevity?

Conclusion

There is great deal of research on the impact burnout has on teachers in the teaching, but fewer specifically focused on the field of special education. The purpose of this analysis was to gain a deeper perspective of special education teacher experiences in the work environment and the impact of these experiences on teachers' mental health related to burnout and willingness to remain in the profession. With this analysis, further study could be formulated to determine effective interventions to reduce the effects of special education teacher burnout in the future, including consideration of further development in teacher preparation programs and other interventions.

CHAPTER 3

Method

Introduction

Determining the factors related to special education teacher burnout, in addition to factors related to retention and attrition of special education teachers is vital in the current climate within education. Nearly 30% of teachers in general leave their jobs within the first five years of teaching. With the decline of new teachers remaining in the field of education and the reduced number of teachers emerging from teacher preparation programs, it is critical to analyze teacher attrition and retention (Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board, 2021). Hiring teachers to fill vacant special education teaching positions has been noted as a significant area of concern as districts across the United States report difficulties filling these positions (Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board, 2021; Robinson et al., 2019; U.S. State Department of Education & Office of Postsecondary Education, 2017). In order to provide the specialized educational services for students with special needs, hiring and retaining highly qualified and experienced teachers is key to the successes of these learners. This study aims to determine the factors leading to burnout and attrition specifically in the field of special education.

Research Questions

This study explored special education teacher burnout and the potential correlation with retention. Additionally, the related factors to special education teacher burnout and the factors related to retention and attrition of special education teachers currently in the field were explored. The research questions for this study are as follows:

RQ1: What is the correlation between levels of burnout and retention in special education teachers serving in southeastern Minnesota?

H01: There is no correlation between levels of burnout and retention in special education teachers in southeastern Minnesota.

Ha1: There is a correlation between levels of burnout and retention in special education teachers in southeastern Minnesota.

RQ2: What factors contribute to burnout among special education teachers serving in southeastern Minnesota?

RQ3: What factors are related to special education teacher longevity?

Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative correlational research methodology and explored the correlations between special education teacher burnout levels and identified key factors, in addition to burnout levels as they correlate to special education teacher retention and attrition (Fraenkel et al., 2019). The "purpose of correlational research is to clarify our understanding of important phenomena by identifying relationships among variables" (Fraenkel et al., 2019, p. 326).

A post-positivist paradigm was applied to this study in order to analyze potential contributing factors to the reality of burnout experienced by special education teachers and the contributing factors that could lead to retention or attrition of special education teachers. This paradigm allows researchers to explore multiple experienced realities from individuals. Within this paradigm, researchers account for "multiple perspectives from participants rather than a singular reality" (Ceswell & Poth, 2018, p. 23). Factors experienced by each individual lend themselves to possible burnout and subsequently attrition. The reality is experienced differently by each individual; however, the fundamentals of these factors are potentially experienced by many special education teachers (Fraenkel et al., 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The ontological perspective of this researcher was the "direct and quantifiable evidence" (Suarez-Sousa &

Bradbury, 2022, p. 72) of the reality of burnout experienced by special education teachers leads to a higher likelihood of attrition. The notion that the reality of burnout is being experienced can be translated into quantifiable evidence that allowed the researcher to determine it is really occurring. The post-positivist perspective incorporates the inquiry of multiple experienced factors that may lead to special education teacher burnout and attrition. The empirical epistemology of burnout requires that the special education teachers' experience be measured; thus, the reality of burnout can be measured through valid tools, such as the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and the knowledge generated by this study can be objectively communicated.

Table 2

Interpretive Framework for Current Study

Paradigm	**Ontology**	**Epistemology**	**Theoretical Perspective**	**Methodology**	**Method**
	Reality	*Knowledge*	*Approach*	*Procedures*	*Tool*
Positivism	Realism	Reality can be measured	Post-Positivism	Correlational Research	Questionnaire

(Suarez-Sousa & Bradbury, 2022)

Threats to Internal Validity

The correlational research design is vulnerable to specific threats that jeopardize its internal validity. Subject characteristics, data collector bias and instrument decay are all potential threats to internal validity (Fraenkel et al., 2019; Suarez-Sousa & Bradbury, 2022). Instrument decay is a possibility in correlational studies if the instrument is overused, repetitive, or requires a significant amount of participant effort (Briggs et al., 2012; Fraenkel et al., 2019). In order to address this threat, the instrument was designed in Qualtrics, which allowed respondents to access it from their laptops or cellphones, adding a versatility element that supports the respondents' navigation and efficiency in completing the instrument. The questionnaire was

short in duration and the questions are multiple choice, rating scales, and short response (Fraenkel et al., 2019). Data collector bias is a potential threat to internal validity in correlational research. This researcher had investment in the topic of special education teacher burnout and concerns with retention due to her current role as a principal of a Federal Setting IV Special Education School. The potential bias in this study was countered by the use of the Qualtrics database for the anonymous administration of the instrument and collection of the data. No identifying data was collected from participants and the researcher had no contact with participants directly. Additionally, when the data analysis was complete, all results were reviewed by a research peer to check for validity. This prevented data from being skewed by the researcher (Fraenkel et al., 2019).

Additionally, potential threats to the internal validity of this study include the mortality of participants. There was the potential that once participants begin analyzing their job satisfaction and burnout levels, they may have discontinued completion of the questionnaire. In efforts to reduce the threat of mortality, the questionnaire was developed to remain consistent in response format, so participants were able to respond with ease (Fraenkel et al., 2019). The questionnaire was also short in length, taking about 10 minutes to complete and was broken into smaller sections in efforts to encourage full completion of all questions by participants. The questionnaire was also distributed to all special education teachers, pre-kindergarten through 12th grade, in all four districts in order to ensure enough participants to meet the requirements of an effective correlational study.

Also, the responses may vary greatly between participants due to the settings teachers were working in (e.g., federal setting I language arts intervention, federal setting IV self-contained behavior program, kindergarten resource setting, high school setting III behavior

intervention). Responses could also vary due to potential personal and professional connection with the researcher as the researcher was a practicing special education leader in southeastern Minnesota. In effort to reduce this threat, the questionnaire was sent out by the special education directors for each district and not the researcher to reduce potential response bias (Fraenkel et al., 2019).

Table 3

Controlling for Threat to Internal Validity in Correlational Research

Threat	Method for Controlling Internal Threat
Subject Characteristics	All K-12 special education teachers in all four participating districts were distributed the questionnaire.
Mortality	Participants' data who quit mid-questionnaire were removed from the study.
Location	The questionnaire is electronic, so participants can complete in their chosen setting.
Instrumentation	The questionnaire is created for this study and was given once.
Testing	The questionnaire is only available for a singular completion by participants.

(Fraenkel et al., 2019)

Threats to External Validity

Threats to external validity in this correlational study include the representativeness of the sample of participants in southeastern Minnesota. The characteristics of the sample varied from the special education teachers' organization, grade level, certification, and years of experience. This threat to generalizability of this study was mitigated through distributing the questionnaire to four different school districts and collecting data from all special education teachers currently teaching pre-kindergarten through 12th grade within each of these districts (Fraenkel et al., 2019; Suarez Sousa & Bradbury, 2022).

Setting

This study takes place in four public school districts in southeastern Minnesota. The representative community population and economic demographics of each district in comparison to the state data are represented below in Table 4. Community C appears to be declining in population; however, Communities A and B are both reporting population growth, over the course of the past year, while Community D appears consistent. The median household income in Communities A and D far exceeds the median incomes of both Community B and C, which are very similar. Additionally, the percentage of adults with high school diplomas and a college education are higher in Communities A and D. Communities B and C are similar, as are Communities A and D, in their reports of adults holding a high school diploma and receiving a college education. The cost of living was higher in Community A when compared to the similar cost of living in Communities B, C, and D. The race and ethnicity breakdown of each community is represented in Table 5. Community A has the highest percent of individuals identifying as Black or African American (6.6%) while Community D has the highest percentage of individuals identifying as White (90.0%). Community B has the highest percentage of residents identifying as Asian (5.4%), 2 or more races (5.2%), and Hispanic or Latino (12.3%) than Communities A, C, and D.

Table 4

State and Participating District Community 2022 Economic Data

	State	Community A	Community B	Community C	Community D
Population	5.7 million	67,693	40,140	30,718	37,398
Population Change between 2020-2022	7,332	595	106	-183	-2
Unemployment Rate	2.7%	2.6%	2.5%	2.7%	2.8%

	State	Community A	Community B	Community C	Community D
Median Household Income	$77,706	$71,384	$60,386	$59,862	$73,468
Annual Cost of Living (Family of 3)	$60,540	$53,535	$47,102	$46,439	$45,979
Adults with a High School Diploma	92.8%	92.3%	87.3%	87.4%	91.5%
College Educated	68.0%	61.8%	55.3%	52.3%	60.4%

(Minnesota Employment and Economic Development, 2022)

Table 5

State and Participating District Community 2022 Ethnicity Data

	State	Community A	Community B	Community C	Community D
White	80.7%	84.0%	81.7%	87.7%	90.0%
Black or African American	6.6%	6.2%	3.6%	1.1%	3.3%
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.9%	0.5%	0.2%	0.5%	0.1%
Asian or Other Pacific Islanders	5.0%	2.4%	5.4%	3.0%	0.5%
Some other Race	2.1%	3.2%	3.9%	2.9%	2.1%
Two or more Races	4.6%	3.8%	5.2%	4.8%	3.9%
Hispanic or Latino Origin	5.6%	8.5%	12.3%	10.4%	8.1%

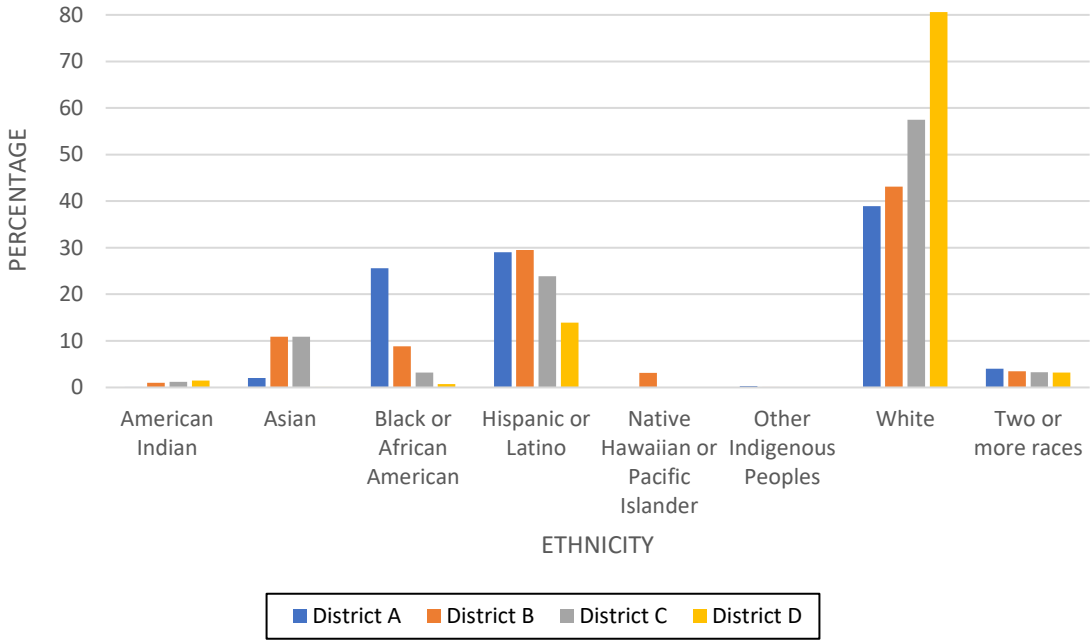
(Minnesota Employment and Economic Development, 2022)

When analyzing the student demographic data from the Minnesota Department of Education (2023), several differences were noted. District enrollment as it relates to race and ethnicity was found to have several differences between the four districts, see Figure 5 and Table 6.

Other demographic data noted included English Learners, students who receive special education services, students who qualify for free and reduced lunches, and students reported to be homeless, see Table 7. District A and B reported similar enrollment of students who were categorized as English Learners, 25.0% and 21.9% respectively, whereas District C reported 11.1% of the student population to English Learners. All four districts report similar enrollment of students in special education programming ranging between 19.2% and 18.4%.

Figure 5

Participating District Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity in 2023



(Minnesota Report Card, 2023)

Table 6

State and Participating District Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity in 2023

	State	District A	District B	District C	District D
American Indian	3.2%	0.1%	1.0%	1.2%	1.5%
Asian	7.0%	2.0%	10.9%	10.9%	0.1%
Black or African American	11.7%	25.6%	8.8%	3.2%	0.7%

	State	District A	District B	District C	District D
Hispanic or Latino	10.6%	29.0%	29.5%	23.9%	13.9%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.0%	3.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Other Indigenous Peoples	0.1%	0.3%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%
White	62.3%	38.9%	43.1%	57.5%	80.6%
Two or more races	5.0%	4.0%	3.5%	3.3%	3.2%

(Minnesota Report Card, 2023)

Table 7

Enrollment Demographics of Participating Districts in 2023

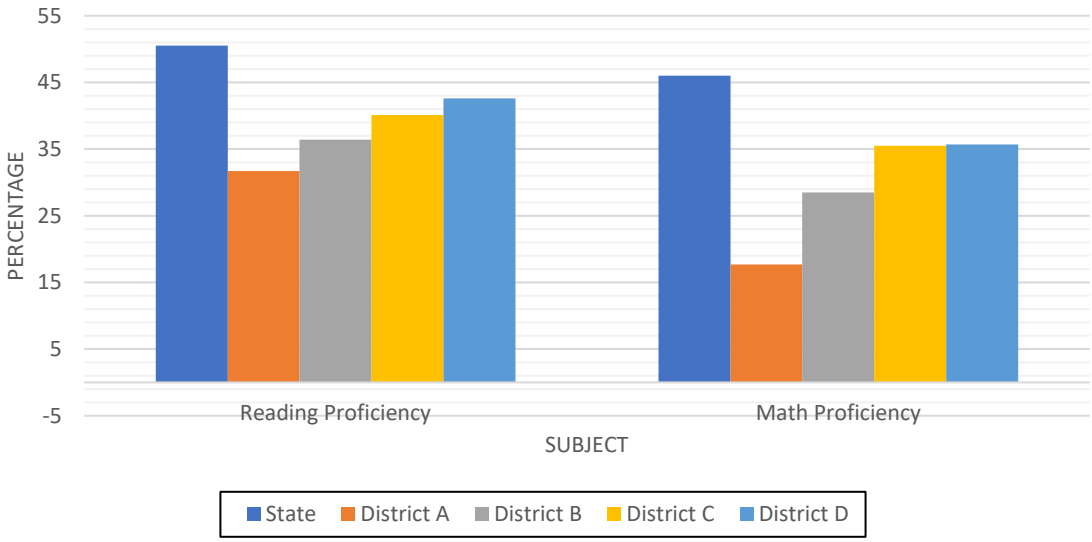
	District A	District B	District C	District D
English Learner	25.0%	21.9%	11.1%	3.6%
Special Education	18.8%	19.2%	18.4%	14.8%
Free and Reduced Lunch	73.2%	67.1%	62.3%	39.8%
Homeless	1.1%	0.2%	1.1%	0.1%

(Minnesota Department of Education, 2023)

When compared to the state average, there were many differences noted in the reading and math proficiency of students between all four districts, see Figure 6. All four districts have been performing well below the state average in both reading and math. Notably, District D (42.6%) was performing above Districts A (31.7%), B (36.4%), and C (40.1) in the area of reading. Districts C and D are performing similarly in the area of math between 35.5% and 35.7% respectively with District A performing the lowest at 17.7% proficiency.

Figure 6

State and Participating District Reading and Math Proficiency in 2023



(Minnesota Department of Education, 2023)

Participants

All special education teachers working in four districts in southeastern Minnesota, currently teaching in the PK-12 settings, were emailed the Qualtrics Survey. In 2023, District A employed 260 teachers for the 2022-2023 school year. This averages to be a 14:1 student to teacher ratio. District B employed 368 teachers in 2023 and held a 15:1 student to teacher ratio. District C employed 242 teachers in 2023 with a 15:1 student to teacher ratio and the smallest district, District D, employed 58 teachers with a 16:1 student to teacher ratio (Minnesota Department of Education, 2023). As noted in Table 8, the average years of experience for teachers in three districts were between 10 and 12. The largest number of new teachers were reported in District B with 95.87 FTE (27.2%) having 1-5 years of experience, however District C has the highest percentage of new teachers at 35.8% of the total FTE in the district. The average teacher salary for District A was reported as $65,592, District B is $65,205, District C was $62,255 and District D was $52,656 in 2021-2022. The state average teacher salary in 2021-

2022 was reported at $67,600 (Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board, 2022). Demographic data specifically on special education teachers in these four districts were not publicly available, nor accessible at the time of this study.

Table 8

Participating District Teacher FTE Demographics 21-22

	District A FTE	District B FTE	District C FTE	District D FTE
Male	76.08	92.31	45.61	10.06
Female	192.83	260.14	170.49	44.87
Average experience	12 years	12 years	12 years	10
1-5	66.89	95.87	76.68	18.3
6-10	47.17	69.11	42.05	17.78
11-15	52.34	59.78	23	6.97
16-20	43.76	50.37	32.48	8.85
21-25	30.51	41.66	21.3	0.73
26-30	15.36	24.87	13.09	0.71
31+	12.35	5.94	3.83	1.59

(Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board, 2022)

Table 9

Participating District Teacher FTE Racial Demographics 21-22

	District A FTE	District B FTE	District C FTE	District D FTE
American Indian	0	0	0	0
Asian	0.72	1.0	2.35	0
Hispanic	1.99	5.95	1.67	1.17
Black	1	0	0.09	0
White	264.36	344.49	211.99	53.22

(Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board, 2022)

Sampling Procedures

The sampling procedure used in this study was convenience sampling. The researcher's target group of participants are special education teachers currently working in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade located in southeastern Minnesota. This population was conveniently accessible to the researcher due to being located in southeastern Minnesota. There were four districts participating in this study and the questionnaire were sent to all pre-kindergarten

through 12th grade special education teachers in each district. The researcher's goal was to have at least 15 participants from each district respond to the questionnaire to draw conclusions that can be generalized (Fraenkel et al., 2019; Briggs et al., 2012).

Instrumentation

A questionnaire has been designed (see Appendix A) within the Qualtrics electronic platform that includes the Maslach Burnout Inventory for Educators and were distributed through email to PK-12 special education teachers within four specific public-school districts in southeastern Minnesota. This questionnaire includes the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (Maslach et al., 1986) in addition to questions developed by the researcher regarding contributing factors to teacher burnout and retention in teachers. These include job satisfaction, teacher preparation programs, and contributing job factors that may contribute to burnout and attrition. Additionally, the questionnaire gathered both professional and personal demographic data. These questions include gender, age, race/ethnicity, marital status, years of experience in special education, years of experience in education, and level of post-secondary education including special education licensure.

The Maslach Burnout Inventory portion of the questionnaire poses statements broken into three subscales; emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. The participants are asked to measure the degree at which the given statements are true based on a Likert scale response (Maslach et al., 1997). The reliability of this tool was assessed within the subscales of emotional exhaustion at a coefficient of .82, depersonalization at .60, and personal accomplishment at .80. Validity was evaluated through three correlations of the inventory outcomes correlated to specific job characteristics and participant behaviors. The third correlation was found between the inventory subscales and specific hypotheses regarding attrition, interpersonal relationships, and stress (Maslach et al., 1997).

The questionnaire contains 72 questions, including multiple choice, ranking, Likert scale, and short answer questions. See Table 10.

Table 10

Special Education Teacher Burnout and Retention Questionnaire Questions

Question Topic	Number of Questions	Type of Questions	Research Question
Personal Demographic	11	Multiple choice (Nominal) Slider (Nominal)	RQ2: Independent Variable RQ3: Independent Variable
Burnout Scale	22	Likert Scale (Ordinal)	RQ1: Independent Variable RQ2: Dependent Variable
Job Satisfaction	21	Likert Scale (Ordinal) Short Answer Ranking (Ordinal) Multiple choice (Nominal)	RQ2: Independent Variable RQ3: Independent Variable
Retention	5	Short Answer Multiple Choice (Nominal) Slider (Nominal)	RQ1: Dependent Variable RQ3: Dependent Variable
Professional Demographic	13	Multiple Choice (Nominal) Short Answer Likert Scale (Ordinal)	RQ2: Independent Variable RQ3: Independent Variable

Data Collection

The questionnaire was developed, with the inclusion of the Maslach Burnout Inventory, specifically for this research study. Each of the four special education directors from each district participating in this study were emailed the questionnaire out to the pre-kindergarten through 12th grade special education teachers currently working within each of the four corresponding districts. This questionnaire was sent out in October of 2023, just after most districts finished the first quarter of the school year. This timeframe allowed special education teachers to finish the first part of the school year with their assigned caseloads and schedules and hopefully settle into

the school year. The researcher wanted to get at least 15 respondents from each district in order to collect sufficient data for a district comparison of burnout, retention, and relating factors. The questionnaire remained open for four weeks (28 days) to allow for all possible responses. The directors emailed reminders at seven days and at 14 days to the special education teachers in each corresponding district. Data was collected virtually through Qualtrics. The researcher did not collect participant names, emails, or any other identifying personal information from participants.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed through Statistical Packet for the Social Sciences Software (SPSS). There the researcher ran descriptive and inferential data analyses. Throughout this study, the names of the districts was coded as District A, B, and C to keep respondent data confidential. All data was stored in the SPSS and was disposed of at the close of this study. The analysis of the hypothesis was completed using a comparison of means, medians and modes, or measures of central tendency, of the overall burnout composite, retention, and related factors and demographic data. Additionally, an analysis of the correlation between the dependent and independent variables were executed using the Pearson Product Moment correlation test to determine the strength of association, if one exists (Fraenkel et al., 2019). An analysis was also completed by disaggregating the data by demographic variables to determine changes in burnout and retention.

Several short response questions were asked within the questionnaire. These responses were analyzed with the intent to code for themes of specific contributing factors related to burnout and retention.

Table 11

Research Questions and Alignment

Research Question	Research Design	Variables	Instrument	Sources and Expected Sample Size	Technique	Data Analysis
Primary RQ						
RQ1: Is there a correlation between levels of burnout and retention in special education teachers in southeastern Minnesota?	Correlational	Dependent Variable: Retention Independent Variable: Burnout Score	Qualtrics Questionnaire	K-12 Special Education Teachers	Questionnaire	Correlation: Pearson Product Moment
Secondary RQs						
RQ2: What factors contribute to burnout among special education teachers in southeastern Minnesota?	Correlational	Dependent Variable: Burnout Score Independent Variable: Demographic Factors	Qualtrics Questionnaire	K-12 Special Education Teachers	Questionnaire	Descriptive Statistics Theme-Memoing
RQ3: What factors are related to special education teacher longevity?	Correlational	Dependent Variable: Retention Independent Variable: Demographic Factors	Qualtrics Questionnaire	K-12 Special Education Teachers	Questionnaire	Descriptive Statistics Theme-Memoing

Procedures

The start of this research began with acquiring permission to gather data from special education teachers from each of the four districts participating in this study (see Appendix C). Then the researcher proceeded with submitting and getting approval from the Internal Review Board (IRB) at Minnesota State University Moorhead (see Appendix B). A questionnaire was developed in Qualtrics that includes demographic data, information relating to potential burnout factors, retention, and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (see Appendix A). The questions on related factors within the questionnaire were developed directly from past literature.

Directors of special services departments from each district emailed the questionnaire to their current pre-kindergarten through 12th grade special education teachers in early November of 2023. The email contained information on the study purpose, procedure, request for participation, and assurance of anonymity. Informed consent was provided within the questionnaire. In addition, a statement was included in the questionnaire informing participants that participation was not mandatory, and that they may withdraw participation at any time. The questionnaire remained open for four weeks, with two reminder emails sent to participants after the questionnaire had been available for seven and 14 days. Once the data were collected, they were analyzed with the support of SPSS system and correlations between variables were evaluated.

Ethical Considerations

Due to the format of the questionnaire and data collection method, the potential risk of negative impacts to participants in this study was low. The researcher has obtained written permissions from all four districts (see Appendix C) to engage the special education teachers employed by these districts in the study. The researcher has obtained IRB approval (see Appendix B) from Minnesota State University Moorhead Institutional Review Board. The

questionnaire includes a section on informed consent to the participants outlining their rights to refuse to participate and their ability to withdraw participation at any time. The questionnaire also refrains from gathering any personal identifying information and no names or emails are attached to the data collected by the researcher. Participants are asked what specific school district the teacher was employed; however, this information was coded in all reports with the use of pseudonyms as to not identify the specific districts in the study.

All data were stored in a secure database on a password protected laptop only accessible by the researcher. At the close of the study, all data was deleted.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study was a quantitative study, utilizing correlational methodology. An electronic questionnaire was distributed via email to participants by the corresponding director of special services from four districts in southeastern Minnesota. The special education teacher participants from this study are at low risk to adverse impacts of participation due to the nature of this study. The data gathered was utilized to contribute to future research into the contributing factors leading to special education teacher burnout and challenges with retention in southeastern Minnesota. Data were collected, and correlations were analyzed to determine possible connections between burnout and retention in addition to potential contributing factors.

CHAPTER 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to explore special education teacher burnout and retention, in addition to the potential mediating and moderating roles played by other variables presented as contributing factors with relation to burnout and retention. This study focuses on the southeastern region of Minnesota. The researcher's intent was to attempt to provide insight into the potential connection between the subcategories of burnout (i.e., emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment) and retention/attrition of special education teachers. Additionally, the researcher gathered demographic information, professional profile information, and information on participants' perceptions on various factors (e.g., principal support, district administration support, feeling valued by colleagues). With the increased understanding of the current burnout levels and how burnout impacts retention in special education teachers, there can be more effective efforts made to improve the work environment for special education teachers. Exploration of the potential factors that impact burnout and retention gives a better understanding of the overall experience of special educators. It also sheds light into how to address burnout and high levels of attrition in special education teachers. Improving the work environment will ultimately increase retention of these teachers and hopefully increase the number of teachers entering the field of special education.

Research Questions

This study focused on education teachers in southeastern Minnesota and to assess the levels of burnout and retention in their current roles. Additionally, the potential contributing factors to retention and burnout were explored. The research questions for this study were:

RQ1: Is there a correlation between levels of burnout and retention in special education teachers serving in southeastern Minnesota?

H01: There is no correlation between levels of burnout and retention in special education teachers in southeastern Minnesota.

Ha1: There is a correlation between levels of burnout and retention in special education teachers in southeastern Minnesota.

RQ2: What factors contribute to burnout among special education teachers serving in southeastern Minnesota?

RQ3: What factors are related to special education teacher longevity?

Participants

Inquiries for participation in this study were sent to district special education directors in the southeastern region of Minnesota. In total, four directors responded with interest in participating in deploying this questionnaire to the special education staff employed in each district. The questionnaire was launched to the potential participants and remained active for four weeks. Reminder emails were sent to potential participants after the first week, second week, and third week of deployment to notify participants of the questionnaire closing date. The total response rate for this questionnaire was 56%, though not all responses were complete. District A had a response rate of 54%, District B had a rate of 68%, District C had 33% response rate, and District D had an 89% response rate. It must be noted that District D had significantly fewer special education teachers on staff when compared to the other remaining districts who participated in this questionnaire. Special education student population of District B was the highest at 19.2% of student enrollment, while District D was the lowest at 14.8% of the student population. The difference in students qualifying for free and reduced lunch were significant as well, with District A having 73.2% of the district qualifying for assistance while District D had only 39.8% of the student population qualifying for assistance. The teaching demographics of these districts also varied, though all four were in the same region of Minnesota. These districts'

teachers had similar average years of experience between 10-12 years. District B employed the most teachers in their first five years of teaching, while District C had the highest percentage of new teachers when compared to the entire district's full-time employment. The district with the highest average teacher salary in 21-22 was District A at $65,592, while District D was the lowest at approximately $13,000 less than District A. Also, all districts in this study had teaching staff that were largely White with between 1.0% and 2.2% of all teaching staff as non-White.

Personal Demographic Information

Participants were asked a variety of questions regarding their personal demographics in order to gain a more complete representation of the participants in the sample and to explore potential connections between personal demographics and the main variables in this study (i.e., retention, burnout). The information in Table 12 presents the personal demographic information of respondents in this study.

The sample was comprised primarily of women (80%). Participants were mostly married (72.12%), White (93.9%) teachers in their 41-50 (36.5%) and 31-40 age ranges (27.8%).

Table 12

Participants' Personal Demographic Characteristics

Variable		Frequency	Percentage
Gender			
	Woman	92	80.0%
	Man	21	18.26%
	Prefer not to say	1	0.87%
	Missing Data	1	0.87%
Marital Status			
	Married	83	72.17%
	Divorced	8	6.96%
	Single	22	19.13%
	Other	1	0.87%
	Prefer not to say	1	0.87%
Ethnicity			
	White	108	93.9%

Variable		Frequency	Percentage
	Asian	1	0.9%
	Two or more races	1	0.9%
	Other	2	1.7%
	Prefer not to say	3	2.6%
Age			
	20-30	13	11.3
	31-40	32	27.8
	41-50	42	36.5
	51-60	22	19.1
	61-70	6	5.2

Note: In addition to those ethnicities mentioned in this table, participants were also given African American or Black, American Indian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and Other Indigenous Peoples as options. There were no responses in these areas.

Professional Demographic Information

Professional demographic information was also gathered and is visually represented in Table 12. The most common highest level of education attained by participants was a Master's (68.7%). Overall years of experience teaching was coded to better analyze teachers newer to the profession during their first five years of teaching as well as teachers with more experience in special education. Most of the participants had 6-15 years of experience in special education (43.86%) and the same amount of experience with their overall teaching experience (39.1%). Teachers newer to special education (0-5 years) represented 23.68% of the sample and participants new to the teaching profession represented 14.8%. Most of the teachers were teaching in a federal setting II (40%) and federal setting III (31.3%). Participants were also asked about their active special education licenses in Minnesota. Specifically, high needs licenses were analyzed (i.e., Academic Behavioral Specialist, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Emotional Behavioral Disorder) as indicated by the Minnesota Professional Licensing Board (2021b). About 59% held at least one of the licenses in these high needs areas in the state of Minnesota.

Participants were also asked to indicate the district where they were currently employed. The highest representation in this participant sample was from District B (52.2%), while the lowest was from District D (7.8%). It must be noted that each district employed a varying number of special education teachers and had differing numbers of students enrolled in their schools. Almost two thirds of the sample indicated their district had mentor programs (69.57%) while 24.35% indicated a lack of such programs.

Table 13

Participants' Professional Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Educational Degree		
Bachelor's Degree	25	21.7%
Master's Degree	79	68.7%
Specialist Degree	11	9.6%
Years of Experience Teaching		
0-5	17	14.8%
6-15	45	39.1%
16-25	35	30.4%
26+	17	14.8%
Years of Experience in Special Education		
0-5	27	23.5%
6-15	50	43.5%
16-25	27	23.5%
26+	10	8.7%
Years in Current Role		
0-5	55	47.8%
6-15	46	40.0%
16-25	9	7.8%
26+	4	3.5%
Federal Setting		
Setting I	25	21.7%
Setting II	46	40.0%
Setting III	36	31.3%
Setting IV	7	6.1%
District		
District A	27	23.5%
District B	60	52.2%
District C	19	16.5%
District D	9	7.8%

Variable		Frequency	Percentage
District Mentor Program			
	Yes	80	69.6%
	No	28	24.3%
High Needs License (EBD, ABS, ASD)			
	Yes	68	59.1%
	No	47	40.9%

The average experience in education was also explored with the participant sample having an average of 15.41 years of experience teaching overall and 12.8 years of experience teaching in special education. Additionally, the average years participants specified being in their current role was 7.78 years as represented in Table 14.

Table 14

Participants' Years of Experience Teaching Mean Scores

	n	Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum
Experience teaching	114	15.41	14.0	0 years	38 years
Experience teaching in special education	114	12.8	11.0	0 years	45 years
Years in current role	114	7.78	6.0	0 years	45 years

Independent Variable: Burnout Data Summary

The questionnaire utilized in this study contained a section which included the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educator Survey. This inventory was utilized with the permission of Mind Garden Inc., which holds the exclusive rights to the reproduction of this survey. The researcher obtained permission and paid a fee for the right to utilize the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educator Survey in this study. The inventory breaks the psychological construct of burnout into three subcategories which include emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 1986). Participants were asked to respond to various questions on a Likert scale. The inventory rates the frequency at which the participants experience the given scenarios presented in the inventory, 0 (never) to 6 (everyday). The higher the number, the

more frequent the participant experienced symptoms of the burnout subcategory. In this sample, participants experienced emotional exhaustion with a mean of 3.33 (*SD*=1.2). Participants experienced symptoms of depersonalization with a mean of 1.39 (*SD*=0.98). Feelings of personal accomplishment were experienced with a mean of 4.70 (*SD*=0.81). These data are represented in Table 15.

Table 15

Participants' Mean Scores by Burnout Domains

	n	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
Emotional Exhaustion	114	3.33	3.33	1.20
Depersonalization	115	1.39	1.20	0.98
Personal Accomplishment	115	4.70	4.88	0.81

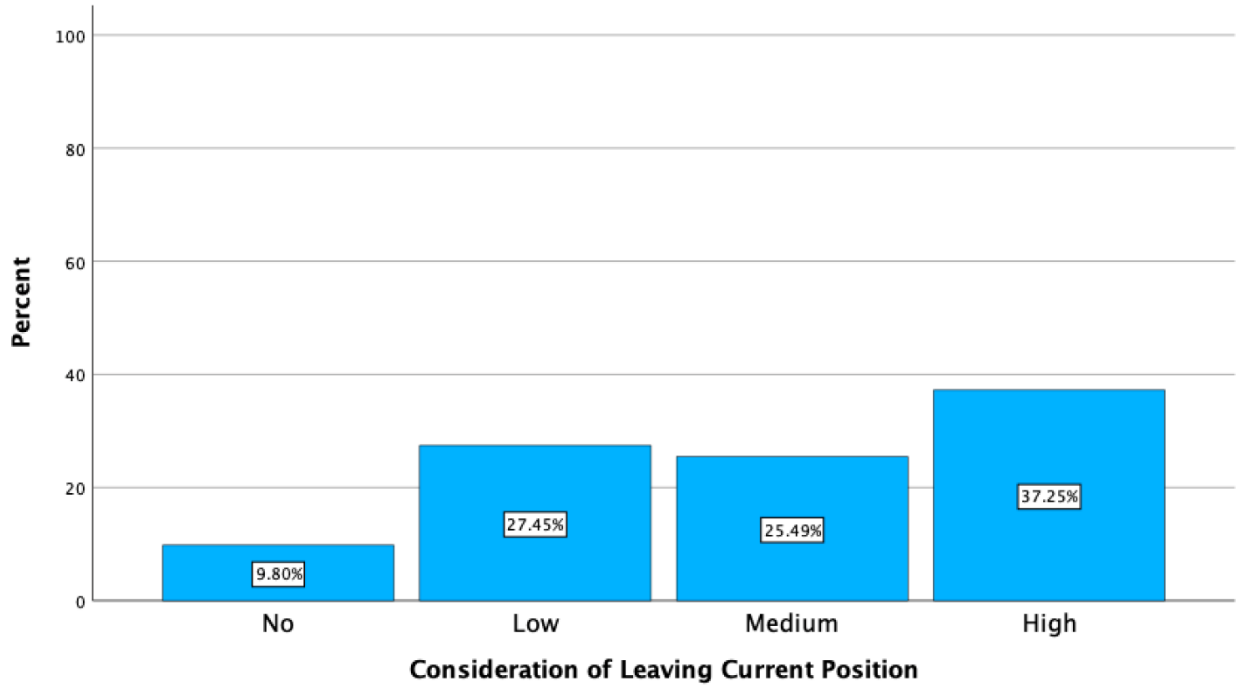
Note: Scoring 0-6- 0=Never, 1=A few times a year, 2=Once a month, 3=A few times a month, 4=Once a week, 5=A few times a week, 6=Every day

Dependent Variable: Retention Data Summary

Retention estimations from participants in this sample were explored with four questions. In the first question, participants were asked to rank their level of consideration of leaving their current position in the past six months. Figure 7 displays 37.25% of participants had a high level of consideration regarding leaving their current positions, 25.49% had medium consideration, 27.45% had low consideration, while 9.8% had no level of consideration of leaving their current positions.

Figure 7

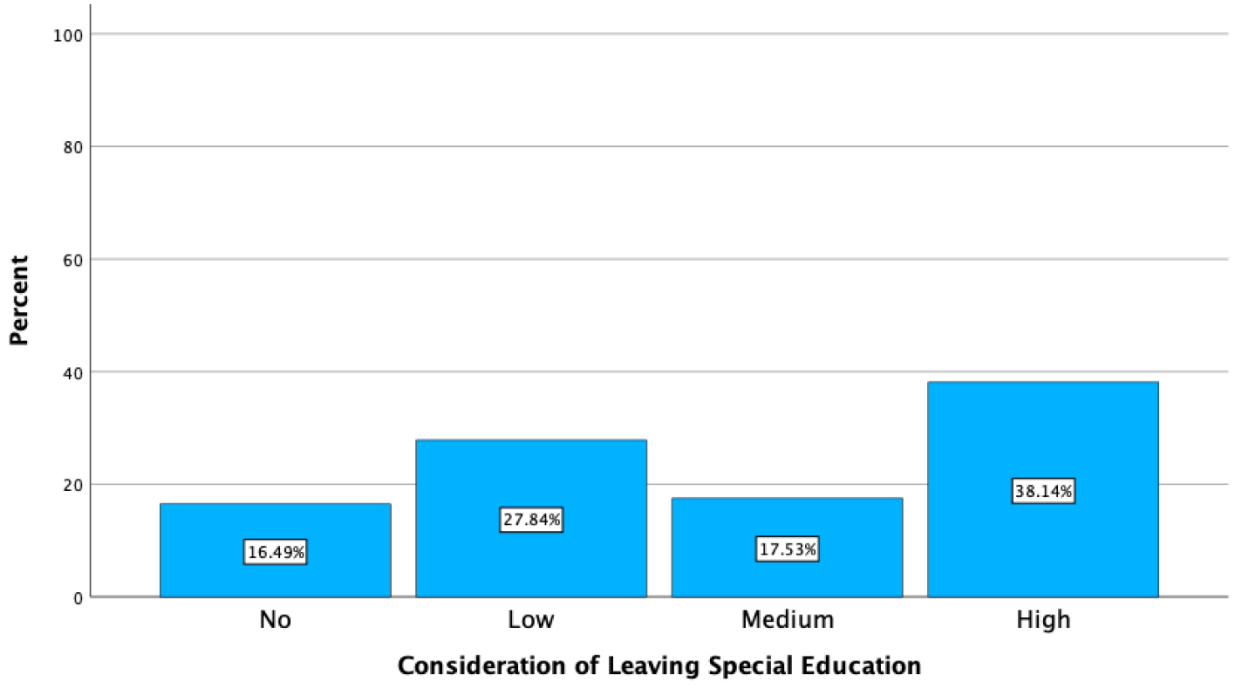
Consideration of Leaving Current Position



Second, participants were also asked about their level of consideration in the past six months of leaving the field of special education. Figure 8 displays the participants' responses. Participants indicated 38.14% had high consideration of leaving special education, 17.53% had medium consideration, 27.84% had low consideration, and 16.49% had no consideration of leaving special education.

Figure 8

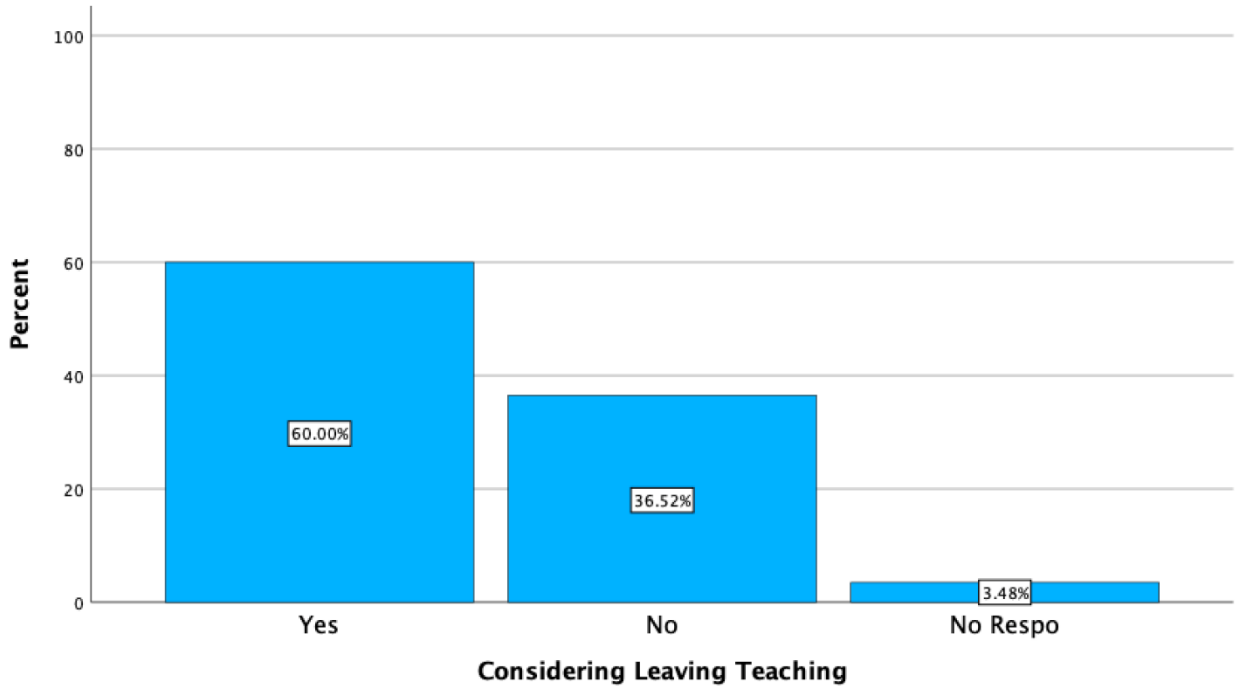
Consideration of Leaving Special Education



Third, when asked if in the past 6 months, participants had considered leaving the teaching profession, 60% responded that they had, while 36.52% indicated they had not considered it. Figure 9 represents these data.

Figure 9

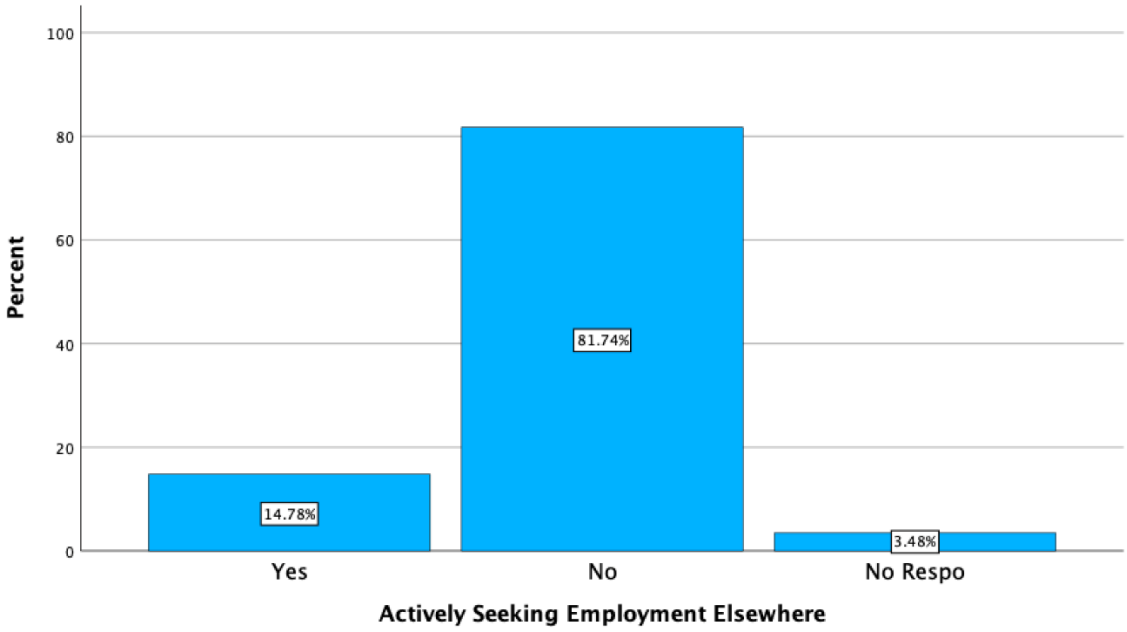
Participants' Considering Leaving Teaching



Lastly, participants were asked if they were actively seeking employment elsewhere. Figure 10 shows that 14.78% of respondents indicated they were actively looking for new positions, while 81.74% were not.

Figure 10

Participants' Actively Seeking Employment Elsewhere



The overall retention means are represented in Table 16. In this participant sample, the mean score for the level of consideration given to leaving their current position was 5.04 (*SD*=3.12). The mean score of this sample for the level of consideration given to leaving the field of special education was 4.06 (*SD*=3.27).

Table 16

Participants' Mean Scores by Consideration of Leaving

	n	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
Leaving Current Position	115	5.04	5.09	3.12
Leaving Special Education	115	4.60	4.64	3.27

Note: Consideration Scale- 0 (no consideration) to 10 (high consideration)

Additional Related Factors Data Summary

Potential contributing factors were asked in order to explore potential connections to burnout and/or retention. Questions included the following topics: job satisfaction, salary,

workload, due process paperwork, student behavior, parent involvement, principal support, district administration support, feeling valued by colleagues, feeling valued by students, feeling valued by students' families, and the districts providing relevant staff development. Participants were asked about their current levels of job satisfaction. Most participants (67.9%) indicated they were either satisfied or very satisfied with their current position. Conversely, 21.7% of participants responded with unsatisfied or very unsatisfied. These data are represented in Table 17.

Table 17

Participants' Job Satisfaction

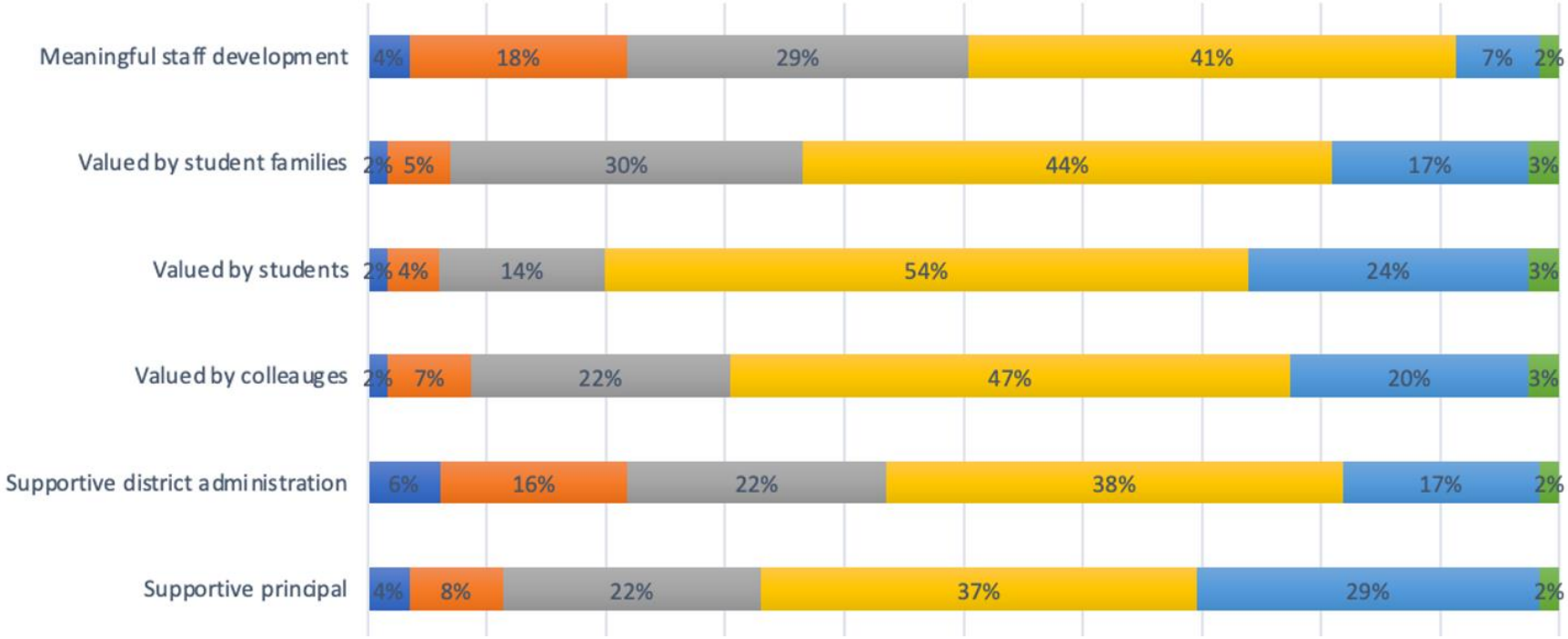
	Frequency	Percentage
No Response	12	10.4%
Very Unsatisfied	5	4.3%
Unsatisfied	20	17.4%
Satisfied	64	55.7%
Very Satisfied	14	12.2%

Note: n= 115

The participants in this study were also asked about their beliefs on multiple factors within their current positions. Figure 11 shows the participants' beliefs regarding supports in their current positions. Overall, over half of participants responded positively that they had administrative supports and felt valued in their positions. Most participants believed they had a supportive principal with 66% reporting they agreed or strongly agreed, while only 12% reported they disagreed or strongly disagreed. Similarly, participants agreed that they had supportive district administration (55%) and also overall feel valued by their colleagues (67%). The same was true regarding feeling valued by students (78%) and their students' families (61%).

Figure 11

Teachers' Perceptions of Supports in Current Position



Research Question 1: Is there a correlation between levels of burnout and retention in special education teachers serving in southeastern Minnesota?

Retention was explored by breaking this experience down into four areas; 1) consideration of leaving current position, 2) consideration of leaving the field of special education, 3) considering leaving teaching in the past 6 months, and 4) actively seeking employment elsewhere. When exploring the intersection of burnout and retention, the participants' consideration of their current position was factored in. Participants who indicated no consideration to leaving their current position had the lowest average emotional exhaustion (*M*=1.97, *SD*=1.13) and depersonalization (*M*=0.58, *SD*=0.58), and the highest personal accomplishment (*M*=5.13, *SD*=0.70). Participants indicating high consideration of leaving their current position indicated the highest emotional exhaustion (*M*=4.03, *SD*=1.19) and depersonalization (*M*=1.61, *SD*=1.13), and the lowest personal accomplishment (*M*=4.30, *SD*=0.89) as represented in Table 18.

Table 18

Burnout Domains' Scores by Consideration of Leaving Current Position

Consideration of Leaving	*n*	EE Mean	EE Med	EE SD	Dep Mean	Dep Med	Dep SD	Per Acc Mean	Per Acc Med	Per Acc SD
None	10	1.97	1.94	1.13	0.58	0.50	0.58	5.13	5.38	0.70
Low	28	2.80	2.94	0.79	1.29	1.20	0.82	4.76	5.00	0.77
Moderate	26	3.71	3.78	0.87	1.53	1.30	0.81	4.91	4.88	0.64
High	38	4.03	4.22	1.19	1.61	1.60	1.13	4.30	4.31	0.89

Note: EE-Emotional Exhaustion, Dep-Depersonalization, Per Acc-Personal Accomplishment. Scoring 0-6- 0=Never, 1=A few times a year, 2=Once a month, 3=A few times a month, 4=Once a week, 5=A few times a week, 6=Every day. Med=Median

When analyzing the participants' consideration of leaving special education and burnout subcategories, a similar pattern was represented. Those who indicated high consideration of

leaving special education reported the highest emotional exhaustion (*M*=4.03, *SD*=1.09) and depersonalization (*M*=1.61, *SD*=1.06), and the lowest personal accomplishment (*M*=4.30, *SD*=0.86). Additionally, participants indicating no consideration of leaving special education reported on average the lowest emotional exhaustion (*M*=1.97, *SD*=1.24) and depersonalization (*M*=0.58, *SD*=0.71), and the highest personal accomplishment (*M*=5.13, *SD*=0.65). These data are represented in Table 19.

Table 19

Burnout Domains' Scores by Consideration of Leaving Special Education

Consideration of Leaving	*n*	EE Mean	EE Med	EE SD	Dep Mean	Dep Med	Dep SD	Per Acc Mean	Per Acc Med	Per Acc SD
None	16	1.97	2.00	1.24	0.58	0,60	0.71	5.13	5.38	0.65
Low	27	2.80	3.22	0.88	1.29	1.60	0.74	4.76	4.88	0.65
Moderate	17	3.71	3.67	0.84	1.53	1.20	0.90	4.91	4.75	0.75
High	37	4.03	4.22	1.09	1.61	1.60	1.06	4.30	4.50	0.86

Note: EE-Emotional Exhaustion, Dep-Depersonalization, Per Acc-Personal Accomplishment. Scoring 0-6- 0=Never, 1=A few times a year, 2=Once a month, 3=A few times a month, 4=Once a week, 5=A few times a week, 6=Every day.

When analyzing if participants had considered leaving the field of teaching in the past 6 months a comparison was completed against the burnout subcategories, the results are represented in Table 20. Participants who indicated they had not considered leaving teaching reported emotional exhaustion lower (*M*=2.44, *SD*=1.05) than those indicating they had considered leaving teaching (*M*=3.89, *SD*=0.96). Depersonalization scores of those who indicated they had not considered leaving teaching was somewhat lower (*M*=1.07, *SD*=0.91) than those who had considered leaving special education (*M*=1.62, *SD*=0.98). Personal accomplishment was slightly higher for those participants that had not considered leaving teaching (*M*=4.94, *SD*=0.76) than those who had (*M*=4.25, *SD*=0.82).

Table 20

Burnout Domains' Scores by Consideration of Teaching

	n	EE Mean	EE Med	EE SD	Dep Mean	Dep Med	Dep SD	Per Acc Mean	Per Acc Med	Per Acc SD
No response	4	2.92	3.11	0.55	0.80	0.50	0.81	5.06	5.06	0.22
No	42	2.44	2.22	1.05	1.07	0.90	0.91	4.96	5.06	0.76
Yes	69	3.89	3.89	0.96	1.62	1.60	0.98	4.52	4.75	0.82

Note: EE-Emotional Exhaustion, Dep-Depersonalization, Per Acc-Personal Accomplishment. Scoring 0-6- 0=Never, 1=A few times a year, 2=Once a month, 3=A few times a month, 4=Once a week, 5=A few times a week, 6=Every day.

Finally, participants were also asked if they were currently seeking employment elsewhere. Burnout subcategories of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment were explored in intersection with the current intent to find a different position. Those participants who stated they were seeking new positions, reported higher emotional exhaustions (M=4.05, SD=0.75) and depersonalization (M=1.82, SD=1.10), and lower personal accomplishment (M=4.44, SD=0.81). Participants who indicated they were not actively seeking new positions reported lower emotional exhaustion (M=3.22, SD=1.24) and depersonalization (M=1.34, SD=0.95), and slightly higher personal accomplishment (M=4.73, SD=0.82). These data are represented in Table 21.

Table 21

Burnout Domains' Scores by Actively Seeking Employment Elsewhere

	n	EE Mean	EE Med	EE SD	Dep Mean	Dep Med	Dep SD	Per Acc Mean	Per Acc Med	Per Acc SD
No response	4	2.92	3.11	0.55	0.80	0.50	0.82	5.06	5.06	0.22
No	94	3.22	3.11	1.24	1.34	1.20	0.95	4.73	4.88	0.82
Yes	17	4.05	4.22	0.75	1.82	1.60	1.10	4.44	4.63	0.81

Note: EE-Emotional Exhaustion, Dep-Depersonalization, Per Acc-Personal Accomplishment. Scoring 0-6- 0=Never, 1=A few times a year, 2=Once a month, 3=A few times a month, 4=Once a week, 5=A few times a week, 6=Every day. Med=Median

Hypothesis Testing:

H01: There is no correlation between levels of burnout and retention in special education teachers in southeastern Minnesota.

Ha1: There is a correlation between levels of burnout and retention in special education teachers in southeastern Minnesota.

Before exploring the correlation between burnout and retention, the data were analyzed to determine if all four statistical assumptions to use Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation were met. These assumptions are as follows:

1. The variables need to be represented in interval or ratio representation.
2. No outliers in the data must be present.
3. The variables' comparison must be linear.
4. The data must have a normal distribution.

To run the correlation between burnout variables (i.e., emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) and retention (i.e., leaving their current

position and leaving special education) the researcher explored the four assumptions as listed above. The data met assumption one as all variables were ratio in measure.

Assumption two was not met due to two variables containing outlier data points. Depersonalization and personal accomplishment both had outliers (see Figure 12 AND Figure 13 respectively), while emotional exhaustion, intent to leave their current position, and intent to leave special education all presented with no outlier data. These outliers were not removed due to the participant sample size. The researcher kept these data points in order to gain a complete analysis of the experience of the participants in this sample as the overall data would be impacted with the removal of any given participant. The researcher chose to keep all data present and analyze the current reality of the sample. Because the data does not meet all the necessary parametric assumptions to use Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, nonparametric correlations were run using Spearman's Rho for burnout and retention variables.

Figure 12

Depersonalization Scores - Outliers

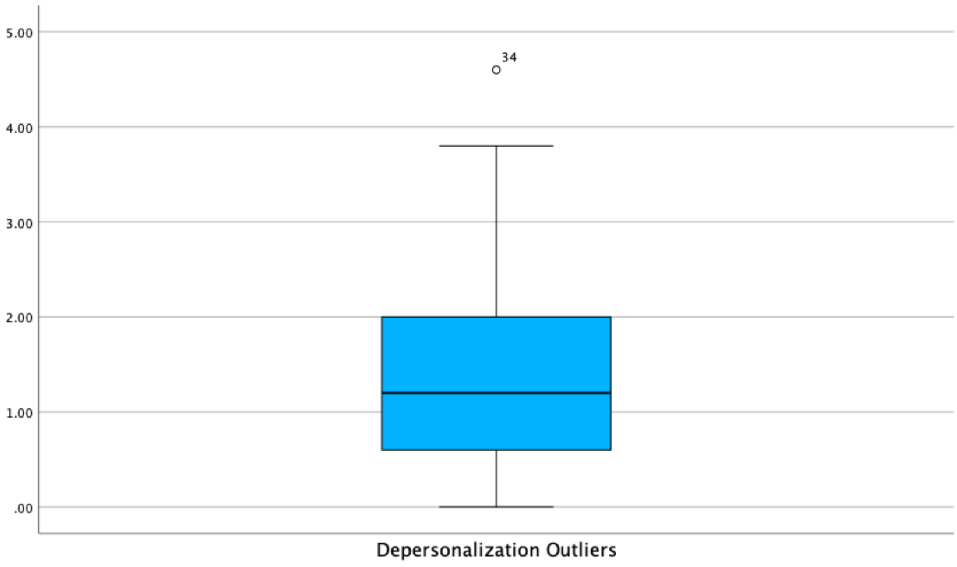
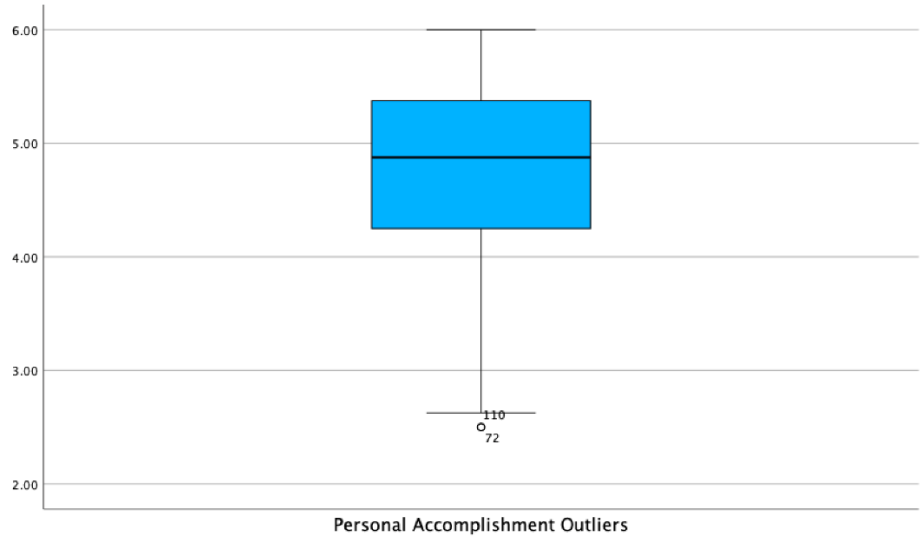


Figure 13

Personal Accomplishment Scores - Outliers



This correlation analysis (see Table 22) shows a significant positive correlation ($r_s(113)=.500$, $p<.001$) between emotional exhaustion and participants' consideration of leaving their current positions. This correlation is considered large as cited by Cohen (1988). See Figure 14. Additionally, emotional exhaustion and participants' consideration of leaving special education were analyzed and results show a large positive correlation ($r_s(113)=.514$, $p<.001$). The data also present a small positive correlation between depersonalization and participants' consideration of leaving their current position ($r_s(113)=.287$, $p=.002$). Also, there was a moderate positive correlation between depersonalization and participants' consideration of leaving special education ($r_s(113)=.350$, $p<.001$). Personal accomplishment also presented a small negative correlation with participants' consideration of leaving their current position ($r_s(113)=-.282$, $p=.002$) and a moderate negative correlation with participants' consideration of leaving special education ($r_s(113)=-.351$, $p<.001$).

Table 22

Spearman's Rho Nonparametric Correlation Between Burnout and Retention Statistical Significance

			EE	Dep	Per Acc
Spearman's rho	Leaving current position	Correlation Coefficient	.500**	.287**	-.282**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.002	.002
		n	115	115	115
	Leaving Special Education	Correlation Coefficient	.514**	.350**	-.351**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001
		n	115	115	115

Note: EE-Emotional Exhaustion, Dep-Depersonalization, Per Acc-Personal Accomplishment

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 14

Cohen Variation of Significance for Correlation Coefficients

ES	d	$r_p \times 1.253 = r_b$	r	
Small	.20	.100	.125	.10
Medium	.50	.243	.304	.30
Large	.80	.371	.465	.50

Note: (Cohen, 1988)

Summary of Research Question 1

The data analyzed in this study have discovered statistically significant correlations between all burnout domains (i.e., emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) and the retention domains of consideration of leaving their current position and consideration of leaving special education. The null hypothesis was rejected due to the multiple correlations found between the burnout domains and the retention variables. Emotional

exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment all were found to have correlations ranging from large to small with participants' consideration of leaving their current positions. Additionally, all three burnout domains were found to have correlations ranging from large to small with participants' consideration of leaving the field of special education.

Research Question 2: What factors contribute to burnout among special education teachers serving in southeastern Minnesota?

Personal Demographics

Comparison data were analyzed between burnout and the multiple related factors (i.e., gender, age. job satisfaction, federal setting) presented in this questionnaire. First, the personal characteristics of participants were explored with relation to burnout subcategories. The sample was composed mostly of women (see Table 23) who reported the lowest average emotional exhaustion (*M*=3.28, *SD*=1.19) and depersonalization (*M*=1.34, *SD*=1.03) scores and the highest average personal accomplishment score (*M*=4.88, *SD*=0.78). In Table 23 it can be noticed that the gender differences were less than 0.5 for both emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, however the difference was more than 1.0 for personal accomplishment.

Table 23

Burnout Domain Scores by Gender

	n	EE Mean	EE Med	EE SD	Dep Mean	Dep Med	Dep SD	Per Acc Mean	Per Acc Med	Per Acc SD
Man	21	3.47	3.44	1.26	1.59	1.60	0.79	4.55	4.75	0.96
Woman	92	3.28	3.15	1.19	1.34	1.20	1.03	4.75	4.88	0.78
Prefer not to say	1	4.67	4.67		1.60	1.60		4.13	4.13	

Note: EE-Emotional Exhaustion, Dep-Depersonalization, Per Acc-Personal Accomplishment. Scoring 0-6- 0=Never, 1=A few times a year, 2=Once a month, 3=A few times a month, 4=Once a week, 5=A few times a week, 6=Every day. Med=Median

Participants' age was also analyzed with respect to burnout (see Table 24). The age group of 61-70 displayed the highest emotional exhaustion (*M*=3.78, *SD*=1.28) and depersonalization (*M*=1.63, *SD*=1.50) mean scores, with the lowest personal accomplishment score (*M*=4.52, *SD*=1.07) of all age groups. The lowest emotional exhaustion and depersonalization mean values were reported by the 51-60 age group, with 2.96 (*SD*=1.13) and 1.05 (*SD*=0.70) mean scores respectively but the highest personal accomplishment mean score (*M*=4.83, *SD*=0.80) of all age groups. The youngest teachers in the sample were in the 20-30 age group and reported the second to lowest emotional exhaustion (*M*=3.05, *SD*=1.55) and second highest depersonalization (*M*=1.60, *SD*=1.10) mean scores.

Table 24

Burnout Domain Scores by Age Groups

	n	EE Mean	EE Med	EE SD	Dep Mean	Dep Med	Dep SD	Per Acc Mean	Per Acc Med	Per Acc SD
20-30	13	3.05	3.19	1.55	1.60	2.00	1.10	4.68	4.75	0.71
31-40	32	3.55	3.44	0.87	1.48	1.50	1.11	4.66	4.88	0.74
41-50	42	3.37	3.67	1.31	1.40	1.40	1.00	4.69	4.81	0.88
51-60	22	2.96	2.89	1.13	1.05	1.00	0.70	4.83	4.88	0.80
61-70	6	3.78	3.83	1.28	1.63	1.50	0.75	4.52	4.75	1.07

Note: EE-Emotional Exhaustion, Dep-Depersonalization, Per Acc-Personal Accomplishment. Scoring 0-6- 0=Never, 1=A few times a year, 2=Once a month, 3=A few times a month, 4=Once a week, 5=A few times a week, 6=Every day. Med=Median

Professional Demographics

In the investigation of related factors, professional characteristics were also explored. When comparing emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment to participants' current job satisfaction results varied and did not appear to follow a pattern. Participants who indicated to be very satisfied with their current job reported the lowest

emotional exhaustion (*M*=2.72, *SD*=1.09) a few times a month and the highest personal accomplishment (*M*=4.94, *SD*=0.86) a few times a week. Additionally, participants who indicated being very unsatisfied with their current job reported highest depersonalization (*M*=2.12, *SD*=1.38) and the lowest personal accomplishment (*M*=3.80, *SD*=1.49) as represented in Table 25. Overall, however, those who indicated feeling unsatisfied in their current positions reported higher emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and lower personal accomplishment than those reporting being satisfied in their current role.

Table 25

Burnout Domains by Job Satisfaction

	n	EE Mean	EE Med	EE SD	Dep Mean	Dep Med	Dep SD	Per Acc Mean	Per Acc Med	Per Acc SD
No response	12	3.30	3.33	1.00	1.45	1.60	0.97	4.92	5.19	0.66
Very Unsatisfied	5	3.24	4.56	2.55	2.12	2.40	1.38	3.80	3.25	1.49
Unsatisfied	20	4.52	4.50	0.79	1.67	1.50	1.26	4.31	4.06	0.70
Satisfied	64	3.10	3.00	1.00	1.23	1.20	0.84	4.79	4.88	0.73
Very Satisfied	14	2.72	2.67	1.09	1.41	1.20	0.96	4.94	5.13	0.86

Note: EE-Emotional Exhaustion, Dep-Depersonalization, Per Acc-Personal Accomplishment. Scoring 0-6- 0=Never, 1=A few times a year, 2=Once a month, 3=A few times a month, 4=Once a week, 5=A few times a week, 6=Every day. Med=Median

Burnout sub-categories and the participants' federal setting were also analyzed (Table 26). Participants were asked what federal special education setting was represented by more than 50% of their current caseload. The highest emotional exhaustion mean scores were reported by participants who primarily work in federal setting III (*M*=3.57, *SD*=1.15), while participants working in federal setting IV programs represented the lowest emotional exhaustion mean scores (*M*=2.67, *SD*=1.13). Participants working in primarily federal setting II had the highest

depersonalization mean scores (*M*=1.53, *SD*=1.00) and those working in federal setting IV programs reported the lowest depersonalization mean score (*M*=0.83, *SD*=0.89). Personal accomplishment mean scores were highest in participants who worked in federal setting IV programs (*M*=5.16, *SD*=0.30) and lowest for participants working in federal setting I (*M*=4.57, *SD*=0.80). This is important to note as federal setting IV programs typically have higher intensity and severity of student behaviors due to the nature of the student population within these setting IV programs. Though they work in high intensity environments, setting IV teachers have the lowest emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and the highest personal accomplishment mean scores of all subgroups.

Table 26

Burnout Domains by Federal Setting

	n	EE Mean	EE Med	EE SD	Dep Mean	Dep Med	Dep SD	Per Acc Mean	Per Acc Med	Per Acc SD
Federal Setting I	25	3.10	3.11	1.24	1.24	1.20	0.94	4.57	4.75	0.80
Federal Setting II	46	3.34	3.26	1.21	1.53	1.50	1.00	4.65	4.81	0.85
Federal Setting III	36	3.57	3.50	1.15	1.42	1.30	1.01	4.74	5.00	0.83
Federal Setting IV	7	2.67	2.33	1.13	0.83	0.60	0.89	5.16	5.00	0.30

Note: EE-Emotional Exhaustion, Dep-Depersonalization, Per Acc-Personal Accomplishment. Scoring 0-6- 0=Never, 1=A few times a year, 2=Once a month, 3=A few times a month, 4=Once a week, 5=A few times a week, 6=Every day. Med=Median

When exploring the variable of years of teaching experience, teachers with 0-5 years of experience had the lowest emotional exhaustion (*M*=2.92, *SD*=1.41) and depersonalization (*M*=1.27, *SD*=1.12) mean scores. Participants with the highest experience (26+ years) reported the highest personal accomplishment (*M*=4.89, *SD*=0.60) mean score. Emotional exhaustion was

highest in the 6-15 years of experience (*M*=3.59, *SD*=1.06), along with depersonalization (*M*=1.53, *SD*=1.06). Personal accomplishment was lowest in this group as well (*M*=4.64, *SD*=0.72) as displayed in Table 27.

Table 27

Burnout Domains by Years of Experience Teaching

	n	EE Mean	EE Med	EE SD	Dep Mean	Dep Med	Dep SD	Per Acc Mean	Per Acc Med	Per Acc SD
0-5	17	2.92	3.19	1.41	1.27	1.00	1.12	4.71	5.00	0.85
6-15	45	3.59	3.55	1.06	1.53	1.60	1.06	4.64	4.75	0.72
16-25	35	3.26	3.11	1.31	1.27	0.60	0.97	4.69	4.88	1.00
26+	17	3.26	3.00	1.03	1.34	0.80	0.64	4.89	4.88	0.60

Note: EE-Emotional Exhaustion, Dep-Depersonalization, Per Acc-Personal Accomplishment. Scoring 0-6- 0=Never, 1=A few times a year, 2=Once a month, 3=A few times a month, 4=Once a week, 5=A few times a week, 6=Every day. Med=Median

Participant feelings in their current role in the following areas were investigated; building principal support, district administration support, being valued by colleagues, being valued by students, being valued by students' families, and being provided meaningful staff development. These areas were analyzed with emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and feelings of personal accomplishment. These data are represented in Table 28. Participants who stated they strongly disagree that there is building principal support reported the highest emotional exhaustion and the highest depersonalization mean scores. Emotional exhaustion was also highest when participants strongly disagreed that there is adequate district administration support and lowest emotional exhaustion for those that strongly agree. Depersonalization follows a similar pattern with the highest mean when participants strongly disagreed that their district administration was supportive. Depersonalization was the lowest when participants strongly agreed that district administration was supportive. Additionally, patterns in responses regarding

depersonalization were noted in participants feeling valued by students and their families. Responses of strongly disagree had the highest level of depersonalization responses of strongly agree showed the lowest level of depersonalization.

Table 28

Burnout Domains by Participant Beliefs in Current Position

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
			Emotional Exhaustion		
Principal Support	5.08 (0.46)	3.77 (1.20)	3.68 (1.08)	3.03 (1.10)	3.15 (1.25)
District Admin Support	4.35 (1.31)	3.56 (0.89)	3.67 (1.12)	3.15 (1.10)	2.75 (1.45)
Valued by Colleagues	1.78 (1.41)	4.14 (1.24)	3.40 (1.13)	3.25 (1.18)	3.29 (1.24)
Valued by Students	4.00 (0.79)	4.62 (1.54)	3.66 (0.91)	3.23 (1.14)	3.03 (1.28)
Valued by Students' Families	4.00 (0.79)	4.53 (0.58)	3.77 (1.17)	3.04 (1.09)	2.99 (1.34)
Provided Meaningful Staff Development	3.50 (0.66)	3.82 (1.16)	3.47 (1.08)	3.07 (1.18)	3.03 (1.80)
			Depersonalization		
Principal Support	2.05 (1.23)	1.64 (1.21)	1.46 (1.02)	1.20 (0.96)	1.42 (0.91)
District Admin Support	1.97 (1.36)	1.41 (1.03)	1.34 (0.99)	1.43 (1.01)	1.15 (0.71)
Valued by Colleagues	0.07 (0.14)	1.45 (1.05)	1.47 (0.81)	1.34 (1.00)	1.52 (1.14)
Valued by Students	2.10 (1.56)	2.52 (0.52)	1.60 (0.96)	1.31 (0.93)	1.08 (0.82)
Valued by Students' Families	2.10 (1.56)	2.03 (1.36)	1.54 (1.07)	1.40 (0.91)	0.87 (0.69)
Provided Meaningful Staff Development	1.15 (0.82)	2.01 (1.10)	1.13 (0.83)	1.39 (0.97)	0.97 (0.91)
			Personal Accomplishment		
Principal Support	4.56 (0.66)	4.61 (0.79)	4.68 (0.94)	4.55 (0.80)	4.91 (0.71)
District Admin Support	4.79 (0.72)	4.72 (0.69)	4.46 (0.93)	4.66 (0.78)	5.01 (0.87)
Valued by Colleagues	5.56 (0.27)	4.50 (1.03)	4.76 (0.73)	4.58 (1.40)	4.82 (0.77)
Valued by Students	3.81 (0.80)	3.73 (0.78)	4.38 (0.83)	4.65 (0.77)	5.25 (0.53)
Valued by Students' Families	3.81 (0.80)	3.71 (0.81)	4.47 (0.83)	4.77 (0.74)	5.24 (0.56)
Provided Meaningful Staff Development	5.13 (0.53)	4.30 (0.82)	4.77 (0.79)	4.76 (0.78)	4.77 (1.09)

Note: SD-Standard Deviation in parenthesis, Scale-0=Never to 6=Every day

Further correlation analysis of burnout and related factors was completed to explore potential relationships between burnout domains and the participants' personal and professional demographic variables. These analyses were completed to assist in future exploration of these variables in future studies. When exploring the correlational assumptions for burnout and related factors, these data did not meet the first assumption as the burnout data was represented in ratio format, however the data of related factors was a numeric representation of ordinal responses. Future research would explore these factors in ratio form. Because these data did not meet the assumptions for parametric analysis, nonparametric correlations were explored.

In the method of data collection, these questions were formulated with a Likert scale using a Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree response format. These responses were converted to a scale of one through five in order to explore potential correlations. This exploration revealed a preliminary low negative correlation between emotional exhaustion and principal support ($r_s(111)=-.243$, $p=.010$), district administration support ($r_s(111)=-.297$, $p=.001$), being valued by students ($r_s(110)=-.209$, $p=.027$), and a moderate negative correlation of being valued by students' families ($r_s(110)=-.336$, $p<.001$). Depersonalization data showed a preliminary small negative correlation with being valued by students ($r_s(111)=-.272$, $p=.004$) and being valued by students' families ($r_s(110)=-.242$, $p=.010$). With the increased feelings of value by students and their families and with increased administrative support, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization decrease. Finally, personal accomplishment demonstrated a preliminary moderate positive correlation with being valued by students ($r_s(110)=.479$, $p<.001$) and being valued by students' families ($r_s(110)=.432$, $p<.001$). As feelings of being valued by students and their families increase, personal accomplishment increases. These data are represented in Table 29.

Table 29

Nonparametric Correlation Between Burnout and Related Factors Statistical Significance

			EE	Dep	Per Acc
Spearman's rho	Principal Support	Correlation Coefficient	-.243**	-.057	.116
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.010	.550	.221
		n	113	113	113
	District Admin Support	Correlation Coefficient	-.297**	-.071	.126
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.454	.185
		n	113	113	113
	Valued by Colleagues	Correlation Coefficient	-.031	.006	.009
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.749	.951	.924
		n	112	112	112
	Valued by Students	Correlation Coefficient	-.209*	-.272**	.479**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.027	.004	<.001
		n	112	112	112
	Valued by Student Families	Correlation Coefficient	-.336**	-.242*	.432**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.010	<.001
		n	112	112	112
	Relevant Staff Development	Correlation Coefficient	-.192*	-.142	.126
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.042	.134	.183
		n	113	113	113

Note: EE-Emotional Exhaustion, Dep-Depersonalization, Per Acc-Personal Accomplishment

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

A nonparametric correlation was also run between burnout subcategories and years of experience. The nonparametric analysis was completed as the burnout data presented with

outliers in depersonalization and personal accomplishment and did not meet assumption two. There were no correlations noted upon this analysis as displayed in Table 30.

Table 30

Nonparametric Correlation Between Years of Experience and Burnout Statistical Significance

			EE	Dep	Per Acc
Spearman's rho	Years of Experience Teaching	Correlation Coefficient	-.024	.019	.057
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.802	.840	.545
		n	114	114	114
	Years of Experience in Special Education	Correlation Coefficient	.075	.075	-.063
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.430	.431	.507
		n	114	114	114
	Years in Current Position	Correlation Coefficient	.136	.087	-.056
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.150	.357	.556
		n	114	114	114

Note: EE-Emotional Exhaustion, Dep-Depersonalization, Per Acc-Personal Accomplishment

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlations between participant age and burnout domains were explored. No correlations were found between these variables (see Table 31).

Table 31

Nonparametric Correlation Between Participant Age and Burnout Statistical Significance

			EE	Dep	Per Acc
Spearman's rho	Years of Experience Teaching	Correlation Coefficient	-.085	-.095	.078
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.368	.314	.407
		n	115	115	115

Note: EE-Emotional Exhaustion, Dep-Depersonalization, Per Acc-Personal Accomplishment

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Similarly, when correlations between federal setting and burnout domains were explored, no statistically significant correlations were found.

Table 32

Nonparametric Correlation Between Federal Setting and Burnout Statistical Significance

			EE	Dep	Per Acc
Spearman's rho	Federal Setting	Correlation Coefficient	.065	-.028	.157
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.493	.763	.094
		n	115	115	115

Note: EE-Emotional Exhaustion, Dep-Depersonalization, Per Acc-Personal Accomplishment

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Finally, the correlation between participant job satisfaction and burnout domains was explored (see Table 33). Job satisfaction responses were ranked by participants from very unsatisfied to very satisfied. For the purpose of running correlation comparison, these responses were recoded from one (very unsatisfied) to four (very satisfied). A statistically significant negative moderate correlation ($r_s(99)=-.468$, $p<.001$) was found between job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion. Similarly, a statistically significant moderate correlation ($r_s(99)=.325$, $p<.001$) was present between job satisfaction and personal accomplishment. These data indicate that as job satisfaction increases, both emotional exhaustion and depersonalization decrease, while personal accomplishment increases.

Table 33

Nonparametric Correlation Between Job Satisfaction and Burnout Statistical Significance

			EE	Dep	Per Acc
Spearman's rho	Job Satisfaction	Correlation Coefficient	-.468**	-.134	.325**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.180	<.001
		n	101	101	101

Note: EE-Emotional Exhaustion, Dep-Depersonalization, Per Acc-Personal Accomplishment

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Summary of Research Questions 2

The exploration of burnout domains and the potential relationship to personal and professional demographics found statistically significant preliminary correlations between the emotional exhaustion burnout domain and the following related factors; principal support, district administration support, feeling valued by students, feeling valued by students' families, and being provided relevant and meaningful staff development opportunities. The depersonalization and personal accomplishment burnout domains presented statistically significant preliminary correlations with feeling valued by students and their families.

Notably, participants working in federal setting IV programs reported the lowest emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and the highest personal accomplishment mean scores of all subgroups presented in this section. This is impactful due to the nature of federal setting IV programs and the intensive special education services provided in these settings.

Research Question 3: What factors are related to special education teacher longevity?

Comparison data were explored between retention and multiple related personal and professional factors (i.e. gender, age, years of experience, job satisfaction). When explored with the consideration level of retention, though the number of women in this sample far outweighed

the men, men reported far more consideration in leaving their current positions and also leaving special education. See Table 34.

Table 34

Consideration of Attrition by Gender

	n	Leave Current Position - Mean	Leave Current Position - Med	Leave Current Position - SD	Leave Special Education - Mean	Leave Special Education - Med	Leave Special Education - SD
Man	21	6.10	6.00	2.86	6.74	8.00	2.86
Woman	92	4.78	5.00	3.17	4.10	4.64	3.20
Prefer Not to Say	1	7.00	7.00		7.00	7.00	

Note: Consideration Scale= 0 (no consideration) to 10 (high consideration)

When exploring retention consideration by age group (see Table 35), the highest consideration of leaving their current positions and leaving special education were represented in the 61-70 age group. The lowest consideration of leaving their current position was the 51-60 age group and the age group presenting the lowest consideration to leaving special education was the 20-30 age group.

Table 35

Consideration of Attrition by Age Group

	n	Leave Current Position - Mean	Leave Current Position - Med	Leave Current Position - SD	Leave Special Education - Mean	Leave Special Education - Med	Leave Special Education - SD
20-30	13	5.10	5.09	2.72	4.20	4.64	2.79
31-40	32	4.85	5.00	2.93	4.56	4.64	2.87
41-50	42	5.17	5.00	3.41	4.52	4.64	3.70
51-60	22	4.57	5.09	2.98	4.55	4.64	3.16
61-70	6	6.67	7.00	3.72	6.50	7.00	3.99

Note: Consideration Scale= 0 (no consideration) to 10 (high consideration)

Professional characteristics were also explored with regards to retention. Those participants who reported feeling unsatisfied had the lowest consideration of leaving their current

positions and the field of special education (see Table 36). Participants who reported feeling satisfied with their current positions reported the lowest consideration of leaving their current jobs. Those who reported feeling very satisfied with their current positions reported the lowest consideration of leaving special education.

Table 36

Consideration of Attrition by Job Satisfaction

	n	Leave Current Position - Mean	Leave Current Position - Med	Leave Current Position - SD	Leave Special Education - Mean	Leave Special Education - Med	Leave Special Education - SD
Very Unsatisfied	5	5.41	5.09	4.56	5.86	4.64	4.23
Unsatisfied	20	7.35	8.00	2.92	6.15	7.00	3.41
Satisfied	64	4.29	4.50	2.72	4.20	4.64	3.16
Very Satisfied	14	4.37	5.00	3.63	3.45	2.50	3.18

Note: Consideration Scale= 0 (no consideration) to 10 (high consideration)

When exploring the years of experience with level of consideration of attrition (see Table 37), the 6-15 years of experience and 16-25 years of experience groupings presented nearly the same level of consideration given to leaving their current positions. These were the highest reported in this subcategory. Additionally, participants with 6-15 years of experience reported the highest level of consideration given to leaving the field of special education.

Table 37

Consideration of Attrition by Years of Teaching Experience

	n	Leave Current Position - Mean	Leave Current Position - Med	Leave Current Position - SD	Leave Special Education - Mean	Leave Special Education - Med	Leave Special Education - SD
0-5	17	4.27	5.09	2.65	3.32	4.64	2.68
6-15	45	5.36	5.09	3.04	5.16	5.00	3.15
16-25	35	5.35	5.00	3.68	4.74	4.64	3.79
26+	17	4.25	4.00	2.54	4.41	4.64	2.71

Note: Consideration Scale= 0 (no consideration) to 10 (high consideration)

Participants were asked what federal setting makes up the majority of their caseload. The federal settings reported, and the level of consideration given to leaving their current positions and leaving special education were explored. The lowest consideration given to leaving both their current position and special education were lowest in the individuals working in federal setting IV programs. The highest level of consideration given to leaving both their current position and special education were in the individuals working in primarily federal setting III programs (see Table 38).

Table 38

Consideration of Attrition by Federal Setting

	n	Leave Current Position - Mean	Leave Current Position - Med	Leave Current Position - SD	Leave Special Education - Mean	Leave Special Education - Med	Leave Special Education - SD
Federal Setting I	25	4.30	5.00	2.58	4.01	4.64	3.03
Federal Setting II	46	5.20	5.09	3.07	4.70	4.82	3.27
Federal Setting III	36	5.51	5.09	3.14	5.23	4.64	3.22
Federal Setting IV	7	3.43	1.00	4.39	2.29	1.00	3.59

Note: Consideration Scale= 0 (no consideration) to 10 (high consideration)

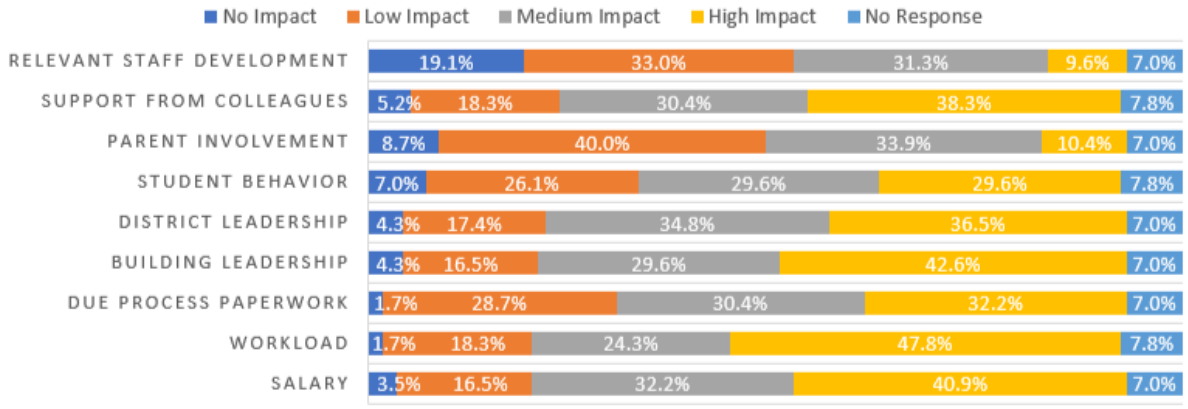
Participants were asked to rate the level of impact of given factors on their decision to remain in their current positions. These related factors included 1. salary, 2. workload, 3. due process paperwork, 4. building level leadership, 5. district level leadership, 6. student behavior, 7. parental involvement, 8. support from colleagues, and 9. the district providing relevant staff development opportunities. Participants indicated workload as the highest impact on their determination of remaining in their current position at 47.8% of respondents rating this factor as high impact. The factor with the lowest impact on retention was the district providing relevant staff development with 19.1% of participants rating this at no impact. The sample rating as most having the most impact are as follows:

1. Workload – 47.8%
2. Building Leadership – 42.6%
3. Salary – 40.9%
4. Support from Colleagues – 38.3%
5. District Leadership – 36.5%
6. Due Process Paperwork – 32.2%
7. Student Behavior – 29.6%
8. Parent Involvement – 10.4%
9. Staff Development – 9.6%

These data are represented in Figure 15.

Figure 15

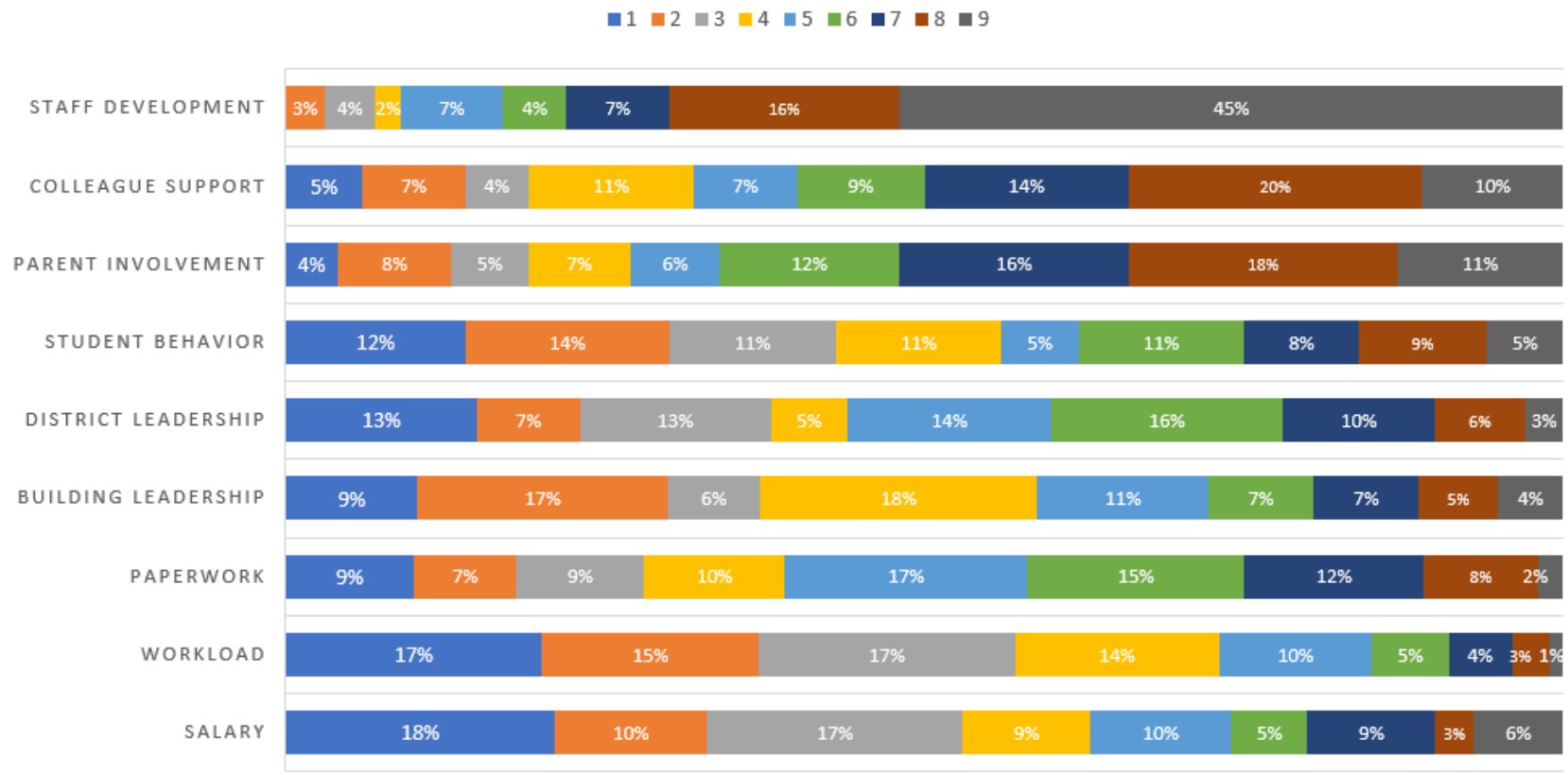
Participants' Rating of Factors' Influence on Retention



Study participants were also asked to rank these given factors from 1, the most impactful, to 9, the least impactful, on their retention in their current position. For reporting purposes, the rankings were broken into three categories; high (ranking 1-3), medium (ranking 4-5), and low (ranking 6-9). As represented in Figure 16, the top three factors having the most impact ranking them one through three on amount of impact were workload (49%), salary (45%), and student behavior (37%). The factors that had the least impact ranking them seven through nine were staff development (68%), parent involvement (45%), and colleague support (44%).

Figure 16

Participants' Ranking of Factor's Impact on Retention



Additional, preliminary correlation was explored between retention responses of the participant sample and related factors (see Table 39) to further explore the relationship between retention and the personal and professional demographic variables. This exploration was a preliminary analysis of potential factors that may be contributing to special education teacher retention. The questionnaire asked these questions based on a Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree Scale. To explore these correlations, this data was changed to a scale of one through five. The exploration of these data represent a preliminary small negative correlations between principal support ($r_s(111)=-.190$, $p=.004$) and district administrative support ($r_s(111)=-.293$, $p=.002$), and the teachers' consideration of leaving their current positions. There was also a preliminary moderate negative correlation between the consideration of leaving their current positions and feeling valued by students ($r_s(110)=-.384$, $p=.001$) and feeling valued by students' families ($r_s(110)=-.332$, $p=.001$). Additionally, teachers' consideration of leaving special education was found to have a small negative correlation with district administrative support ($r_s(111)=-0.263$, $p=.516$), and feeling valued by students' families ($r_s(110)=-0.280$, $p=.003$). A moderate negative preliminary correlation was found between leaving special education and feeling valued by students ($r_s(110)=-0.358$, p=.001). With the increase of the presence of administrative support and increased feelings of being valued by students and their families, the potential risk of attrition decreases.

Table 39

Nonparametric Correlation Between Retention and Related Factors Statistical Significance

			Leaving Current Position	Leaving Special Education
Spearman's rho	Principal Support	Correlation Coefficient	-.190*	-.061
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.044	.516
		n	113	113

			Leaving Current Position	Leaving Special Education
	District Admin Support	Correlation Coefficient	-.293**	-.263**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.005
		n	113	113
	Valued by Colleagues	Correlation Coefficient	-.172	.013
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.069	.891
		n	112	112
	Valued by Students	Correlation Coefficient	-.384**	-.358**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001
		n	112	112
	Valued by Student Families	Correlation Coefficient	-.332**	-.280**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.003
		n	112	112
	Relevant Staff Development	Correlation Coefficient	-.166	-.118
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.080	.231
		n	113	113

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

A nonparametric analysis was explored between years of experience and retention. These data did not meet assumption two as years of experience in special education and years in their current role presented with outliers. No statistically significant correlations were found in this comparison. These data are represented in Table 40.

Table 40

Nonparametric Correlation Between Years of Experience and Retention Statistical Significance

			Leaving Current Position	Leaving Special Education
Spearman's rho	Years of Experience Teaching	Correlation Coefficient	-.059	.085
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.531	.366
		n	114	114
		Correlation Coefficient	-.028	.192

			Leaving Current Position	Leaving Special Education
	Years of Experience in Special Education	Sig. (2-tailed)	.764	.041
		n	114	114
	Years in Current Position	Correlation Coefficient	.029	.237
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.757	.011
		n	114	114

Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

There were no correlations found between age and the consideration level of participants leaving their current positions and special education (see Table 41).

Table 41

Nonparametric Correlation Between Participant Age and Retention Statistical Significance

			Leaving Current Position	Leaving Special Education
Spearman's rho	Age	Correlation Coefficient	.011	.052
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.904	.579
		n	115	115

Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Similarly, there were no correlations found between federal setting and retention consideration (see Table 42).

Table 42

Nonparametric Correlation Between Federal Setting and Retention Statistical Significance

			Leaving Current Position	Leaving Special Education
Spearman's rho	Federal Setting	Correlation Coefficient	.063	.020
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.503	.832
		n	114	114

Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The final correlation was explored between job satisfaction and the retention domains of leaving their current position and leaving the field of special education (see Table 43). A

moderate statistically significant negative correlation was found between job satisfaction and consideration of leaving their current position ($r_s(90)=-.308$, $p=.003$). There was also a statistically significant small negative correlation found between job satisfaction and consideration of leaving special education ($r_s(86)=-.259$, $p=.015$). As job satisfaction increases, consideration of leaving their current position and the consideration of leaving special education decreases.

Table 43

Nonparametric Correlation Between Job Satisfaction and Retention Statistical Significance

			Leaving Current Position	Leaving Special Education
Spearman's rho	Job Satisfaction	Correlation Coefficient	-.308**	-.259*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.015
		n	92	88

Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Summary of Research Question 3

Exploration of retention domains and potential relationship with personal and professional demographics revealed statistically significant preliminary correlations between the consideration of leaving their current position and the following related factors; principal support, district administration support, feeling valued by students, and feeling valued by students' families. The exploration of preliminary correlations revealed the level of consideration of participants leaving special education had statistically significant preliminary correlations with district administrative support, feeling valued by students, and feeling valued by student families.

Notably, participants indicated the highest factors impacting desire to remain in their current positions as workload, salary, and student behavior. Additionally, participants working in

federal setting IV programs reported the lowest consideration of leaving their current roles and leaving the field of special education. This is important to note due to the level of student behaviors and intensive supports required in federal setting IV special education programs. The subgroup with the highest consideration of leaving their current positions and the field of special education was the 61-70 age group. This age group could have been impacted by the typical age of retirement for teachers being age 65. The response of level of consideration, could have been interpreted by participants as consideration to retire.

Qualitative Data Summary: Narrative Responses

Participants in this study were asked a series of open-ended questions to better understand the issues and factors that impact their desire to remain in their current positions. These narratives could lead to more significant research on potential interventions to positively impact retention and reduce attrition in special education teachers. The two questions were analyzed by looking for common themes in responses and then tallied so data could be analyzed for potential common experiences among themes. The two questions in this analysis were as follows: What issues impact your desire to stay in your current teaching role? and What is your district doing now that is positively impacting your satisfaction in your current role?

The most common response when asked what issues are impacting their desire to remain in their current role were support (25), paperwork or workload (23), salary (15), student behavior (11), staffing (7), and district priorities (4). Support was reported from multiple areas from respondents including principal support, district support, superintendent support, and special education leadership support. Respondents stated, “admin not always being around”, “not being heard”, and “being supported by building and district administration would go a long way.” Workload was also an area of concern noted by respondents. Concerns included the amount of

paperwork, the "demand for the job", the time it takes to complete required paperwork, and the increasing demands for this job in special education. Salary was the third highest common theme. One respondent stated the "workload continues to increase but the salary doesn't".

Table 44

Response Themes: What issues impact your desire to stay in your current teaching role?

Theme	Number of Responses	Some Participant Responses
Support	25	*Adequate support from administrators both in and out of the classroom.* *Being supported by building and district administration would go a long way.* *Admin not always being around.* *Poor leadership in the special education department.* *Lack of care from district SPED administrators.* *Not being heard and just blown off as if there are others out there begging for my job.*
Workload	23	*The amount of paperwork required.* *Workload.* *The amount of work versus salary, stress, emotional support.* *Demand for the job we are asked to do.* *So much paperwork.* *Not enough time in the day to do my job well.* *I am finding that I bring most of my due process work home with me which takes away from my family time.* *The amount of work added to our plate every year is increasing drastically.*

Theme	Number of Responses	Some Participant Responses
		Finding loopholes to the maximum number of students at this level.
Salary	15	*Pay.*
		My salary and a 403b which is matched by the district.
		Workload continues to increase but salary doesn't.
Student Behavior	11	*Student behavior has the biggest impact on my desire to stay in my current position and lack of support when dealing with student behaviors from administration.*
		Negative student behaviors continue to increase while discipline is decreasing.
		Behaviors are difficult.
Staffing	7	*The shortage of staff.*
		Difficulty finding good paraprofessionals.
		When a teacher leaves, we are expected to pick up the slack and get students added to our caseload.
District Priorities	4	*The direction the district is going.*
		District decisions that impact students being successful.
		In my building administration was not family oriented and understanding that we have lives outside of teaching.

Participants were also asked, "what is your district doing now that is positively impacting your satisfaction in your current position?" as displayed in Table 33. Through analysis of the responses, nine themes emerged from the data. In order of most responses, the themes were support (42), manageable workload (16), nothing (13), staffing (6), mentor programs (4), and providing materials and curriculum (4). Support was mentioned by the majority of participants

and the type of support was spread between district level, building level, special education department, and colleague support.

Table 45

Response Themes: What is your district doing now that is positively impacting your satisfaction in your current position?

Theme	Number of Responses	Some Participant Responses
Support (District/ Principal/ Sped Leadership/ Colleague	39	*Open to listening to ideas to help support teachers.* *Positive supervisor support.* *I feel supported by our sped director.* *Supporting my needs as a new teacher.* *They are making sure I am supported.* *I believe I have a lot of support.* *Demonstrating a willingness to listen to my ideas and concerns.* *Having a newer principal that is trying to implement positive changes and correct behavioral issues that were ignored in the past.* *Having my back.* *My building principal is very supportive.*
Manageable Workload	16	*Keeping caseloads at a manageable level.* *Giving teachers more time for prep in my level.* *This year I have a smaller caseload.* *Some evaluation workload has been absorbed by staff in positions created for that purpose.* *Adding a due process clerk.*

Theme	Number of Responses	Some Participant Responses
		I don't believe I am overworked.
Nothing	13	*Nothing. They are consistently and relentlessly adding non-meaningful tasks throughout each day and week.* *They are completely out of touch with the current situation.* *Not much.* *Nothing.*
Staffing	6	*Actively looking for para support.* *Appropriate staffing.* *They support us in day to day activities with staffing.* *District leadership is adding staff when possible.*
Mentor Program	4	*A new mentor programs.* *Mentoring between groups.* *Teacher mentor for new teachers.*
Materials/Curriculum	4	*We have the ability to get the supplies we need for students.* *Providing curriculum that works for my students.* *Providing access to curriculum used in the classrooms.*

Conclusion

The findings from this study address the research question analyzing the potential connections between special education teacher burnout and retention. Moderate correlations were found between emotional exhaustion and the retention variables of consideration of leaving their current positions and leaving special education. A moderate correlation was also found between depersonalization and leaving special education and a low correlation was found

between depersonalization and leaving their current position. The analyses did not show a correlation between burnout subcategories and years of experience, however there were low correlations found between consideration of leaving special education and years of experience in special education and years working in their current role.

Preliminary analysis of potential contributing factors presented potential relationships between burnout subcategories and principal support, district administrative support, feeling valued by students, feeling valued by students' families, feeling valued by colleagues, and being provided relevant staff development opportunities. Additionally, potential relationships were found between consideration of leaving and the related factors of principal support, district administrative support, feeling valued by students, feeling valued by students' families, feeling valued by colleagues, and being provided relevant staff development opportunities. Additional exploration of these variables will need to be completed to determine the strength of correlation between burnout subcategories, retention, and the given related factors. Further interpretation and connections with the data presented will be made in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The focus of this study was to analyze the potential correlations between the subcategories of burnout and retention in special education teachers who are currently serving in southeastern Minnesota. Due to the researcher's current professional role as a principal of a federal setting IV special education program, the implications of this study had been experienced and observed directly by this researcher. The federal IV setting provides specialized behavioral and mental health programming for students with varying disabilities, cognitive levels of functioning, and academic abilities. Special education teacher staffing and retention have proven to be difficult in recent years within this program and the district and the implications to students have been significant. This hiring difficulty has also been observed in districts throughout the state of Minnesota as hiring of Tier 3 and 4 teachers has been most difficult in the areas of Academic and Behavioral Strategist, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and Emotional Behavioral Disorders (PELSB, 2023). Hiring teachers with Tier 1 and 2 licenses allows districts to fill teacher vacancies with an individual who is either not yet appropriately licensed or who is currently enrolled in a teacher preparation program pursuing appropriate licensure. While in 2023 the state of Minnesota, there were a total of 192,250 Tier 3 and 4 licensed teachers, only 108,444 of them were working in districts. This means that 44% of viably licensed teachers were not using their teaching license in a Minnesota public school district (PELSB, 2023). Though these data are reflective of all teaching licenses in the state of Minnesota, the top three areas of highest need continue to be represented in special education.

Throughout the United States, when compared to general education teachers, special education teachers are leaving the profession at an escalated rate (Council for Exceptional Children, 2020; Gilmour & Wehby, 2019). Empirical research has found multiple factors that

impact special education teacher retention and attrition. These factors include special education teacher salary (Peyton et al., ND; Kumedzro, 2018), workload (Grant, 2017; Gilmour & Wehby, 2019; Kumedzro, 2018; Bettini et al., 2020), administrative support (Grant, 2017; Gokturk et al., 2019; Bettini et al., 2020), relationship with colleagues (Grant, 2017; Gokturk et al., 2019; Bettini et al., 2020), years of experience (Gilmour & Wehby, 2019; Kumedzro, 2018), and ineffective or nonexistent mentorship programs (Grant, 2017).

Additionally, in this researcher's experience working directly with special education teachers who hold licenses in Academic and Behavioral Specialist, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and Emotional Behavioral Disorder, the frequent rhetoric shared with special education administration in this researcher's experience has been that special education teachers feel over worked, don't have enough time to get required paperwork completed, are undervalued by district administration, and emotionally exhausted. Teaching in special education is a high empathy field, requiring special education teachers to expend emotional energy, in addition to the physical and mental energy required in this profession (Nichols & Sisnowsky, 2002; Ziaian-Ghafari & Berg, 2019). Often special education teachers are required to work directly with students who have experienced a great deal of trauma, students who have severe mental health needs, or complex medical diagnosis. These situations can lead to a greater risk of emotional exhaustion, leading to burnout if the special education teacher has not been provided appropriate supports to cope with these emotional situations (Ziaian-Ghafari & Berg, 2019).

Special education teachers, also, have many additional responsibilities as required by the positions they hold. Frequent collaboration with general education counterparts, building administration, district level special education leadership, additional service providers, and students' guardians are required to ensure student success in the educational setting (Nichols &

Sosnowsky, 2002; Yavuz; 2018; Thakur, 2018; Langher et al., 2017; Shaukat et al., 2019; Hernandez, 2013; Shepherd et al., 2016; Accardo et al., 2020). This requires support from colleagues and a trusted relationship with students' families. Special education students require specific and individualized modifications and supports in order to access the general education curriculum that are developed and provided by the special education teacher. Taking care of these responsibilities can require a variety of added supports within the general education classroom or may require supplemental, direct instruction provided by the special education teacher. The overall role of the special education teacher is to formally evaluate the student with special needs under the provision of due process as required by state and federal statute. It is in this legal context that, once evaluated, the special education teacher is required to orchestrate an individualized plan for the student to effectively access Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2017) while meeting the individualized needs of the student and ensuring appropriate access to the state educational standards. In addition to the development and implementation of these plans, the special education teacher must continuously progress monitor the effectiveness of the plans and interventions put in place, as well as the progress of the student. These tasks require extensive due process paperwork and documentation to be completed by the special education teacher in a structured timeline. Special education teachers must maintain their gradebook, attend building meetings and staff development, and carry out all required tasks that their general education counterparts are responsible for, in addition to all specialized requirements outlined above. Over and above the development, implementation, and monitoring of these plans requires additional documentation, frequent collaboration, and time above the general lesson preparation periods provided to teachers daily. The myriad of responsibilities has been associated to higher levels of stress

among special education teachers (Nichols & Sisnowsky, 2002; Ziaian-Ghafari & Berg, 2019; Robinson et al., 2019; Bettini et al., 2020; Kumedzro, 2018; Grant, 2017) and variations in the responsibilities assigned to them could lead to added stress and increased levels of burnout.

Past research completed on burnout among educators has been primarily focused on professionals along the continuum of the PK-12 teaching sector. While understanding the burnout experience of teachers is highly important and has been addressed in the scientific literature (e.g., Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002; Park & Shin, 2020; DeStasio et al., 2017; Gilmour et al., 2022; Capri & Guler, 2018), specific research on the experience of burnout in special education was far less common. The research on special education teacher burnout that used the Maslach Burnout Inventory, recurrently reported that special education teachers overall feel moderate degrees of emotional exhaustion, low depersonalization, and high feelings of personal accomplishment (Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002; Gilmour et al., 2022; Langher et al., 2017; Garwood et al., 2018). Research exploring burnout in combination with personal and environmental factors reported multiple relationships such as the increase of job satisfaction, decreases overall burnout in special education teachers (DeStasio et al., 2017; Ansley et al., 2019; Capri & Guler, 2018; Robinson et al., 2019; Park & Shin, 2020). Additionally establishing a manageable workload (Thakur, 2018; Ansley et al., 2019), increased collegial and administrative support (Ansley et al., 2019; Langher et al., 2017; Park & Shin, 2020; DeStasio et al., 2017; Capri & Guler, 2018; Robinson et al., 2019; Garwood et al., 2018) and positive student/teacher relationships (DeStasio et al., 2017; Garwood et al., 2018) decrease overall burnout in special education teachers. Reducing burnout increases the likelihood that special education teachers will remain in their current positions, reducing attrition levels in the field of

special education. Reducing attrition positively impacts districts' ability to maintain a full special education staff, in order to appropriately meet the needs of all students with special needs.

In efforts to gain a better understanding of the dimensions of burnout and its impact on special education teachers and explore the impact that burnout plays in special education teacher attrition, this study was developed. Overall, this researcher explored these areas in order to seek areas of potential intervention that could be developed to improve the special education teacher job experience and satisfaction, in hopes to reduce burnout and increase retention in the future.

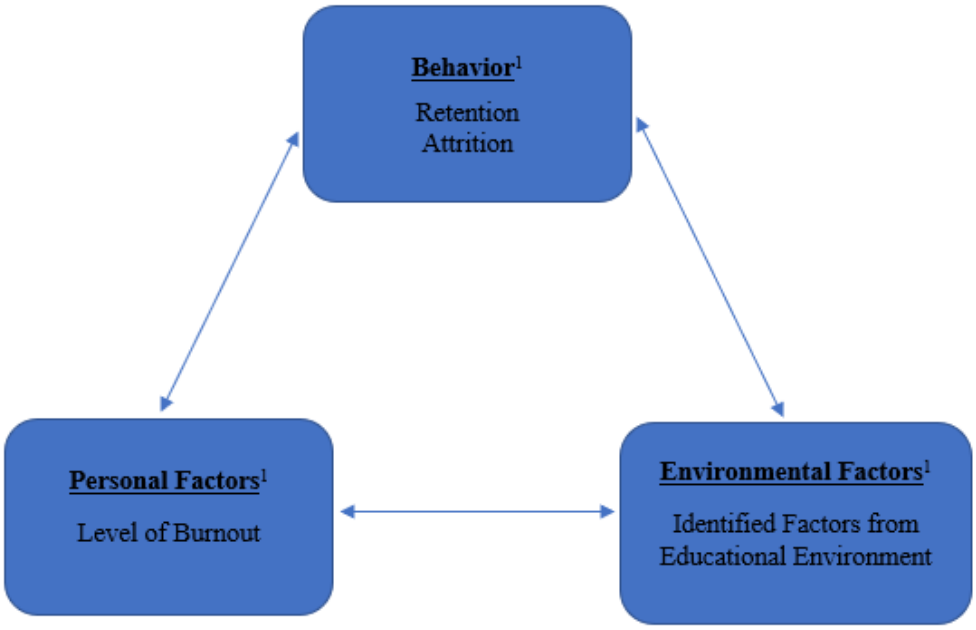
Summary of Study Methodology and Research Questions

This correlational study focused on one central research question; Is there a correlation between levels of burnout and retention in special education teachers serving in southeastern Minnesota? This research question was analyzed between the three subcategories of burnout which include emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Additionally, retention was examined from two criteria; 1) leaving the current position and 2) leaving the field of special education altogether. Two secondary research questions focused separately on specific personal and professional factors and their potential relationship to the burnout subcategories and the two aforementioned retention criteria.

The theoretical framework of this study was centered around Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory combined with Maslach and Jackson's (1981) theory of burnout and retention/attrition. This combination of theories was represented in Chapter 2 in Figure 1, which is reproduced below. Social cognitive theory encompasses the interconnectedness between human behavior, personal factors, and environmental factors. Within this theoretical system, personal burnout is treated as a personal factor interacting with a myriad of environmental factors (e.g., administrative support, job satisfaction) and mutually impacting retention and attrition (i.e., outcome behavior).

Figure 1

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and Maslach's Burnout Theory Model



Note: [1]Denotes Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory

A questionnaire was developed in Qualtrics with 30 questions, including the Maslach Burnout Inventory for Educators (1981, see Appendix A). The questionnaire included Likert scales, rating responses, multiple choice, and open-ended response questions. This questionnaire was emailed to all special education teachers serving in four different districts in southeastern Minnesota and remained active for five weeks. There were 155 responses total. Specific participants were removed if the questionnaire was missing responses in the burnout inventory or if there was a large degree of information missing (more than 20% of data). In all, 115 participant questionnaires were utilized consistently throughout this study.

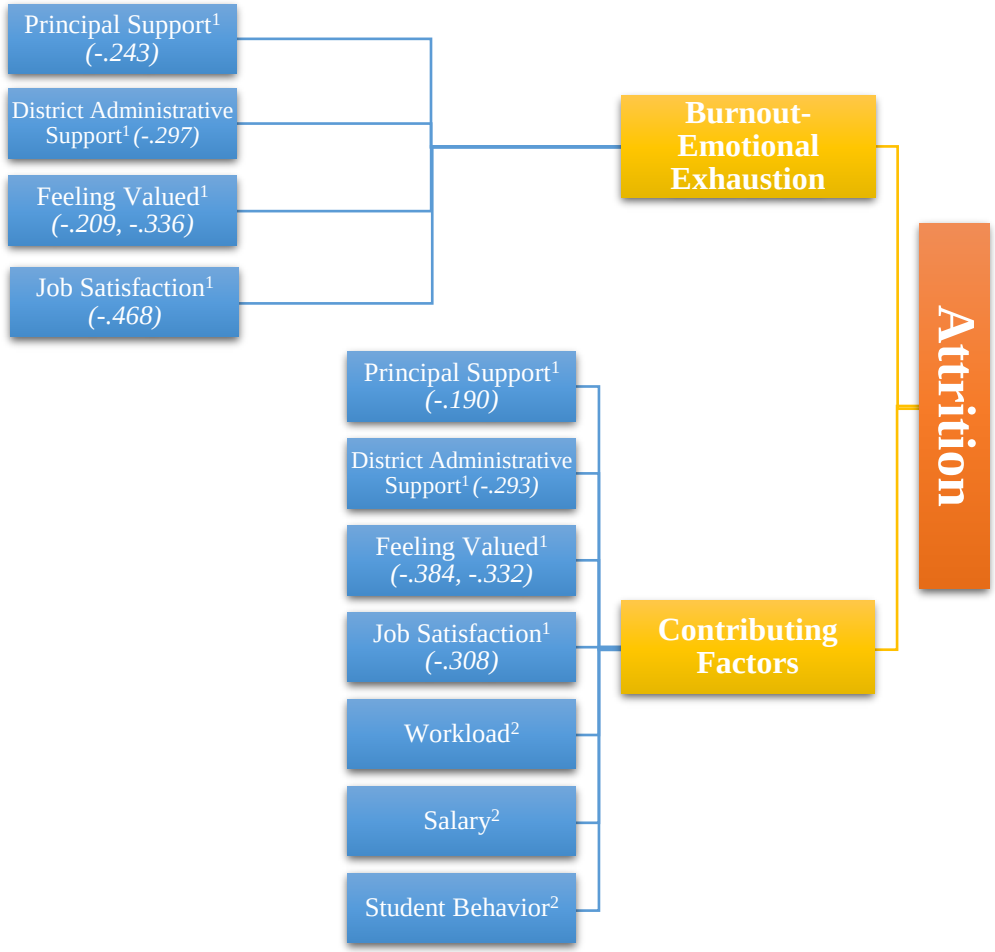
Interpretation of Findings

According to this study, when taking into account the theoretical framework, Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and Maslach's Burnout Theory, the environmental risk factors for

special education teachers that impact burnout were job satisfaction, principal and district administration support, in addition to feelings of value by students and their families. The environmental risk factors that impact retention of special education teachers were job satisfaction, principal and district administrative support, and feeling valued by students and their families. The burnout domain that largely impacted retention was the participants' level of emotional exhaustion. The theoretical representation of this study's findings is shown in Figure 17. Overall retention is impacted directly by burnout and by independent risk factors. Of the burnout domains, the one that presented the greatest impact was emotional exhaustion. In this study, there were specific risk factors that directly impacted emotional exhaustion and separately impacted retention. Differing from the triadic model of Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory, this model appears in a reverse hierarchy beginning with risk factors that include the following factors presenting preliminary correlations; principal support, district administrative support, feeling valued, and overall job satisfaction. These risk factors impact both decreased retention and increased burnout separately, with increased burnout ultimately leading to decreased retention. Workload, salary, and student behavior were also factors indicated by participants to have high impact on retention though preliminary correlations were not explored with these factors in this study. This model is not triadic like Bandura's (2001) theory, nor is it reciprocal, as retention is the resulting behavior from burnout and risk factors. Buffering these risk factors can ultimately directly impact emotional exhaustion and overall burnout, in addition to increasing overall retention.

Figure 17

Mathematical and Theoretical Model of Contributing Factors to Burnout and Attrition of Special Education Teachers



Note: [1] – Indicates significant correlation

[2] – Indicates factor noted in qualitative responses

Burnout and Retention Findings

When analyzing the overall burnout of these special education teachers, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment were explored as the domains of burnout. The majority of special educators reported feeling emotionally exhausted a few times a month. Depersonalization was reported at a much lower frequency, that is, a few times a year. On the other hand, personal accomplishment was experienced on a weekly basis. Consistent with these findings, other research that focused on special education teachers' experience of burnout indicated special education teachers experienced average emotional exhaustion (Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002; Gilmour et al., 2022; Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002; Langher et al., 2017; Garwood et al., 2018), low depersonalization, and high feelings of personal accomplishment. (Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002; Gilmour et al., 2022; Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002; Langher et al., 2017; Garwood et al., 2018). Based on the burnout theory (Maslach, 1981; Maslach et al., 1986; Maslach & Leiter; 1997; Maslach & Leiter; 2016), a combination of high emotional exhaustion and high depersonalization, with low personal accomplishment will very likely contribute to the overall elevated burnout experience. Special education is a high empathy field and teachers who work with students with disabilities have genuine care and compassion for the children they serve. It was not surprising that depersonalization was found to be lower and personal accomplishment was higher due to the teachers' values in this field. Special education teachers often have a passion for and choose to specialize specifically in supporting students with disabilities due to a desire to help children. The findings in this study are overall encouraging because in order for special education teachers to be effective, they need to remain connected to their students, students' families, and colleagues (displaying low depersonalization). Maintaining

connectedness and relationships with these individuals ensures proper evaluation and service development and delivery in order to best meet the needs of students in the special education setting. Continuing feelings of personal accomplishment are positive as well, due to the specialized focus on individual planning and progress of students being served by these special educators. Feelings of accomplishment and effectiveness, seeing their students' progress and grow, contribute to the overall wellbeing of the special educator as they will have increased feelings of making a positive impact for their students. Overall, the domain most significantly impacting special education teachers' burnout is emotional exhaustion.

Retention and attrition were analyzed through two dimensions, 1) leaving the current position and 2) leaving the field of special education. Within this study, approximately 10% of special education teachers reported no consideration of leaving their current positions, while over a third reported high consideration of leaving their current positions. Additionally, approximately 15% of special education teachers reported no consideration, while over a third reported high consideration of leaving special education. This finding is consistent with studies completed in Minnesota when surveying all PK-12 teachers. These data found a third of educators left their positions in the first five years of teaching (Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board, 2021a). Additionally, outside of Minnesota, teacher retention statistics remain consistent with the findings of this study (Ponnock et al., 2018; Ingersoll et al., 2021; Garcia & Weiss, 2019b; Moore et al., 2018). When putting this into perspective, the impact of losing over a third of special education teachers, whether it be to other districts or to other professions, within these public-school districts would be catastrophic. If these teachers follow through with their level of consideration of leaving, then the districts, students, and their families would be significantly affected. This staffing

crisis would impact the districts' abilities to provide adequate services and programming for students with special needs. Students would ultimately suffer the consequences as they would not be provided adequate services required to meet their needs and many may lose their required access to federal statute requiring all students to have access to free appropriate public education, or FAPE (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2017).

In response to the primary research question, *Is there a correlation between levels of burnout and retention in special education teachers serving in southeastern Minnesota?*, this study found a high correlation between emotional exhaustion and both dimensions of retention, consideration of their leaving current positions and consideration of leaving special education. This demonstrates that for special education teachers serving in southeastern Minnesota, as emotional exhaustion increases, so does the level of consideration to leave both their current positions and special education field. Low and moderate correlations were found between depersonalization and both dimensions of retention, meaning that as depersonalization increased the level of consideration increased for leaving their current positions and leaving special education and vice versa. Personal accomplishment also resulted in low to moderate negative correlations to the retention dimensions, as personal accomplishment increased, the level of consideration of leaving current positions and leaving the field of special education decreased and vice versa. Based on these findings, the study's null hypothesis was rejected. Overall, this research confirmed prior studies (e.g., Brunsting et al., 2024; Madigan & Kim, 2021) that the level of emotional exhaustion participants experienced was the primary burnout risk factor of their level of intended attrition. As special education teachers experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion, it severely impacts their abilities to meet the demands of their positions (Madigan & Kim, 2021).

Other Contributing Factors to Burnout and Retention

Job satisfaction was found to be negatively correlated with both retention and burnout domains, as a result as job satisfaction increases, attrition and burnout (emotional exhaustion) decreases. As job satisfaction increases, emotional exhaustion decreases and feelings of personal accomplishment increase. Additionally, as job satisfaction increases, the level of consideration of leaving either their current positions or the field of special education decreases. From a leadership perspective, it is critical to keep connected with teachers to gain a sense about how they are doing. Having positive feelings about their current positions increases the likelihood of a teacher's desire to remain in their current position and decreases feelings of burnout. Leaders finding ways to improve job satisfaction is important for principals, special education directors, and district administration to consider as they seek to retain current special education teachers. The impact of positive job satisfaction also increases feelings of accomplishment which positively impact the relationships special education teachers develop with their students, colleagues, and administration. These positive relationships improve collaboration regarding special education programming and lead to an overall more positive educational setting for students.

The supports provided by principals and district administrators, in addition to teachers' feeling valued by students and their families, were also found to be risk factors for special education teachers' emotional exhaustion and decision to leave their current positions. District administrative support and participants' feeling valued also impact the level of consideration of leaving special education. Additionally, as feelings of being valued by students and their families increase, depersonalization decreases while feelings of personal accomplishment increase. As feelings of being supported and valued by district

administration, students' and their families increase, the level of consideration given to leaving their positions or the field of special education decreases.

Overall, nearly half of special education teachers indicated building leadership as the most impactful risk factor when considering remaining in their current position. Through the exploration of correlational data, as administrative support increased, emotional exhaustion and attrition decreased. Support, ahead of all other factors, was the predominant theme that presented the most consistent impact on emotional exhaustion and attrition. This was evident in quantitative data collection as previously discussed, as well as the open-ended response questions asked of participants. Upon analysis of the qualitative data, the two open-ended responses explored 1) *What issues impact your desire to stay in your current teaching role?* and 2) *What is your district doing now that is positively impacting your satisfaction in your current position?* Theme analysis resulted in *support* as the most commonly addressed factor. For example, some of the supports highlighted by participants were feeling valued by administration, feeling connected, respect from administration, listening to ideas on how to best support teachers, and having regular check-ins with administration. Consequently, as districts provide increased and adequate support to special education teachers, emotional exhaustion and attrition will decrease, while job satisfaction will increase

Specifically linked to retention, workload, salary, and student behavior were other themes that rose to the surface. Special education teachers indicated workload as having the highest impact when considering leaving their position, while salary was the second highest. Student behaviors were ranked third. Workload, salary, and student behaviors were in the top four themes that emerged from qualitative responses from special education teachers regarding factors impacting their retention. Special education teachers stated the amount of

paperwork, increasing workload, not enough time to complete all aspects of the job, and the amount of work increasing while salary does not as some examples that impact their consideration regarding staying in their current role or not. With the added work and responsibilities required by these individuals, districts must ensure proper supports are in place to help assist as special education teachers navigate their role to best meet the needs of students. No correlational research was completed on the prior three factors discussed (workload, salary, and student behavior), however further exploration of the impact of this factor on burnout and retention is recommended.

Researchers have reported that as special education teachers report higher levels of job satisfaction (Brownell et al., 2002; Shibiti, 2020; Green, 2021; Madigan & Kim, 2021), more satisfaction with their salary (Brownell et al., 2002; Shibiti, 2020), and report a substantial work-life balance (Shibiti, 2020; Luk et al., 2009; Ziaian-Ghafari & Berg, 2019) their engagement increases and risk for attrition decreases. Deficiencies in administrative support leads to increased risk of emotional exhaustion, lower job satisfaction and ultimately attrition (Brownell et al., 2002; Ruble et al., 2023; Madigan & Kim, 2023). As special education teachers become increasingly overworked (Vucinic et al., 2022; Ruble et al., 2023; Madigan & Kim, 2021), the focus on inequities (e.g., salary, support) increases due to the increased emotional and mental load required in special education. This profession “demands emotional investment” (Vucinic et al., 2022, p. 542). When improperly managed, this leads to increased risk for emotional exhaustion (Ziaian-Ghafari & Berg, 2019; Ruble et al., 2023). The additional paperwork required by the state department of education is ever changing and reportedly redundant, while its completion takes valuable time away from the much-needed student/teacher interactions. Special education teachers primary focus and desire is not to

complete paperwork. They went into this field to work with children. Their primary focus should be to teach; however, state requirements frequently get in the way of providing adequate time to provide these supports to children. Support from building and district administration on creating a balanced model for special education could assist in ensuring the state requirements continue to be met, that appropriate services are provided to students, all the while ensuring special education teachers are caring for their mental and emotional wellbeing. Administration "facilitating a sense of belonging" (Hale-Jinks et al., 2006, p. 220) creates a supportive environment with a culture of collaboration. Creating a supportive environment can also decrease the risk of emotional exhaustion and increase overall job satisfaction, leading to increased retention (Dagli, 2012).

Federal Setting IV

It is also important to note that throughout the breakdown of subgroups in the data exploration, the subgroup that reportedly experienced the lowest level of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and the highest levels of personal accomplishment were individuals working in the federal setting IV. Special education teachers working in federal setting IV programs, within this study, also reported significantly lower consideration of leaving their current positions or the field of special education. Federal setting IV programs differ from other special education programming as these special education services are provided in an alternate campus from the larger general education school setting. Students being served in federal setting IV programs receive 100% of their educational services in the special education setting in the alternate campus. This is largely due to the student requiring additional supports and specialized programming required to secure students' success in the educational environment. Most commonly, these students have increased mental health

needs, struggle with exhibiting highly aggressive behavior in the school setting, display increased levels of disruptive behaviors in the classroom, or have significant challenges attending school with a larger student population. These students require increased behavioral and academic supports due to the high frequency and intensity of overt behaviors exhibited in the educational setting. Additionally, increased mental health supports are often provided in these settings to assist students with high levels of anxiety, depression, and other diagnoses. This additional programming is provided for students with diagnosis in order to receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) as required through the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in § 300.101 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2017).

One contributing factor for the scores of this segment of the sample being lower than the rest could also be the lower caseload size requirements as put forth by state statute. Minnesota state statute has caseload limits for students receiving special education services 100% of their school day, the caseload requirements are set based on the student disability category under which they are receiving special education services. Teachers of students with autism spectrum disorder, developmental cognitive delay severe profound, and developmental cognitive delay multiply impaired are only allowed six students on a teacher's caseload. Additionally, for all other disability categories served with 100% of their day in special education programming, only eight students are able to be on a special education teacher's caseload (Caseloads, 2015). With lower caseloads, this could reduce the workload of these special education teachers, contributing to lower emotional exhaustion and overall burnout. Some of these Federal Setting IV teacher participants indicated that workload was a factor in their consideration to remain in their current positions.

Another potential contributing factor to burnout scores being lower in federal setting IV programs could be the additional training provided to these teachers due to the high intensity of student behaviors they navigate in this setting. Student behavior was noted by multiple study participants as a contributing factor to their intentions of retention. With additional training on behavioral management and interventions, it is possible that these Federal Setting IV teachers are better equipped to manage challenging student behaviors in the educational setting.

Though the participant sample was relatively small (115 participants) and located within a specific region of Minnesota, it will be important to further examine the root cause of why these individuals are experiencing lower overall burnout and higher retention. With further and deeper exploration, specific interventions could be identified for use and implementation into other federal setting subgroups to further impact the overall burnout and retention of special education teachers.

Implications for Practice

This study revealed the highest burnout domain that impacts special education teachers is emotional exhaustion. This domain was consistently greater than the other two domains on retention. Research indicates that when compared to general education teachers, special education teachers experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion overall (Brunsting et al., 2022). Intensive focus on providing additional administrative support to special education teachers, for example having frequent check-ins, seek out their feedback, provide adequate and meaningful staff development on resiliency, collaboration, classroom management, and develop ways to give special educators additional time to meet the demands of the added paperwork requirements in special education. Additionally, provide them with wellness focused training, especially at the beginning of the school year could help

these teachers cope in high stress situations (Brunsting et al., 2022; Ansley et al., 2016; Olagunju et al., 2020; Fu et al, 2021; Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996; Ruble et al., 2023), increase training on communication and collaboration strategies (Fu et al., 2021; Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996; Ruble et al., 2023), improve physical and mental wellbeing (Fu et al., 2021; Ansley et al., 2016; Ruble et al., 2023) by increasing resiliency and overall increased wellness. "Teachers experience burnout when they do not have the resources they need (e.g., sufficient planning time, social support from administrators, appropriate professional learning opportunities) to meet the demands of their work" (Brunsting et al., 2024, p. 76).

To adequately address the workload placed on special education teachers with regard to due process requirements, the state and federal departments of education need to analyze the impact and necessity of the exorbitant amount of paperwork required for each student receiving special services. The levels of paperwork severely cut into the time special educators are able to spend providing direct services to students. This in turn impacts the effectiveness of the programming received by students with special needs. An assessment on the current amount required annual paperwork. A determination of need for this paperwork and an evaluation of the overall impact of the time required to manage the due process paperwork must be implemented to reduce redundancy and inefficiencies with these requirements.

It is important for administration to provide multiple opportunities to get a sense of the level of emotional exhaustion of their special education staff. This could be accomplished by having several screenings to regularly monitor the wellbeing of special education teachers throughout each school year. Emotional exhaustion is directly linked to special education teachers' determination to leave their current position (Brunsting et al., 2024). Knowing the

special education teachers' emotional exhaustion levels allows administration to provide appropriate interventions and supports throughout the year. With increased support in wellness training, special education teachers could have overall lower emotional exhaustion leading to higher job satisfaction, engagement, and increased retention.

Recommendations for Future Research

It would be beneficial for researchers to further study the following contributing factors to burnout and attrition; principal support, district administration support, feelings of value, workload, salary, and student behaviors. Further research should include correlational research to explore the scale of effectiveness and the confirmation of direct impact of these factors on burnout and attrition in special education teachers. In addition to correlational research, qualitative research is also recommended as a future study. Allowing special educators to express in more detail the reasoning behind their burnout, consideration of leaving, and job satisfaction would help guide leaders in the field of special education and district leaders. This insight would assist in the development of practices and procedures that positively impact the reduction of special education emotional exhaustion and increase retention.

Support was the most consistent theme present throughout the entire study, both through the quantitative and the qualitative data presented by study participants. This researcher recommends future qualitative research on defining support from the perspective of special education teachers in addition to building principals, special education directors, and superintendents is an important factor when investigating support for special education teachers. Gaining understanding of how support looks from both perspectives and what the term support means to these professionals, could assist in a more cohesive and truly supportive work environment for special education teachers.

Limitations

The sample was the primary limitation of this study. Participants for this study were limited to those serving in southeastern Minnesota. The researcher sought out study participants by first seeking approval from public school district special education directors. A contributing limitation of acquiring participants could have been the willingness or the capacity of the special education director to allow their teachers' participation. Additionally, the distribution of the survey being limited to the southeastern section of Minnesota limits the full scope of understanding of special education teacher burnout and attrition for the entire state.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between burnout domains and retention. Contributing factors leading to burnout and retention are the root of special education teacher burnout and concerns with attrition. Exploring these factors reveal potential areas for intervention to increase special education teacher well-being, job satisfaction, and overall retention. Special education teacher staffing and providing adequate supports for students in special education programs is key for districts in providing FAPE. Burned out teachers have a higher risk of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and increased chances of teachers leaving their jobs. The contributing factors to the level of consideration of special education teachers leaving their positions, the field of special education, or the field of teaching in general must be continually explored as data reveal that the area of special education licensure is an area of rising need in the state of Minnesota. Engaging in implementation of preventative measures will increase resiliency in special education teachers new to the field and could positively impact special education teachers currently serving in special education programs.

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APPENDIX A. Questionnaire

Special Education Teacher Burnout and Retention Survey

Introduction Implied Consent Form

You are being invited to participate in a dissertation research project conducted by Amy Schulz, Doctorate of Education Candidate at Minnesota State University Moorhead.

Study Title: Contributing Factors to Special Education Teacher Burnout and Retention

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the many factors that contribute to the stress many special education teachers experience that may lead to burnout and attrition in the field of special education. This study is designed to gain and understanding of the relationship between burnout and retention in addition to getting a better understanding of the contributing factors that lead to these challenges for current special education teachers.

What you Will Do in the Study: You will be asked to complete an online questionnaire in which you answer questions about your experiences as a special education teacher, levels of perceived burnout, and retention intentions.

Why and How Subjects were Selected: You were selected as a participant in this project because you are currently a K-12 special education teacher in the southeastern region of Minnesota.

Time Required: Your participation (i.e., completing a questionnaire) should take approximately 15 minutes.

Risks: By deciding to participate in this study you are at no more than minimal risk of harm. The questions presented in the questionnaire may slightly increase your current level of stress as you reflect on your work environment.

Benefits: The benefits of your participation include the development of potential interventions to mitigate burnout in special education teachers and increase special education teacher retention.

Use of Data: The information that is collected will be aggregated without identifiers. Knowledge from this research may be disseminated by publication and/or presentation to improve understanding related to on-campus versus remote work.

Confidentiality: Any information that you provide will be collected in a method in which your identity will be protected. No identifying information will be collected about you, as the

questionnaire is completely anonymous. The questionnaire results will be reviewed by the researcher. The aggregated data from these questionnaires may be published or presented. However, no individual participant information will be disclosed to protect the identity of the individual participants. All information collected will be anonymous.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal: Your participation in this questionnaire is voluntary. Refusal to participate or subsequent withdrawal does not result in penalty. By completing and engaging in this survey, you are voluntarily agreeing to participate. You may choose to end your participation in the survey at any time simply by closing out of the website browser.

Contact Info: If you have any questions about the research project, please contact Amy Schulz at: 218-328-3106 or email at: amy.zimmerman@go.mnstate.edu. The Minnesota State University Moorhead Institutional Review Board has reviewed this request to conduct this project.

Whom to contact about your rights: Any questions about your rights as a research subject or if you have any concerns/complaints about the research, you may contact Robert Nava, Chair of the MSUM Institutional Review Board, at 218-477-4308 or by email at: robert.nava@mnstate.edu.

Thank you for your time. Respectfully,

Amy Schulz

The purpose and nature of this research have been sufficiently explained to me. By completing the attached survey, I am implying consent to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time.

I consent to participate in this study and understand the results may be published.

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Q 1 What is your gender?

- ○ Man
- ○ Woman
- ○ Non-binary
- ○ Transgender
- ○ Other _____
- ○ Prefer not to say

Q 2 What is your age?

20 25 30 35 40 45 50 55 60 65

Click to write Choice 1

Q 3 What is your ethnicity?

- African American or Black
- Asian
- American Indian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- White
- Two or more races
- Other Indigenous peoples
- Other _____
- Prefer not to say

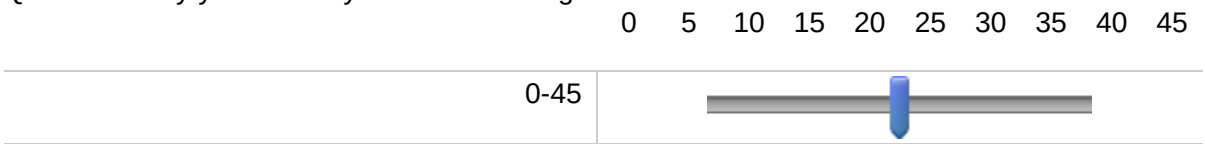
Q 4 Do you identify as Hispanic or Latinx?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure
- Prefer not to say

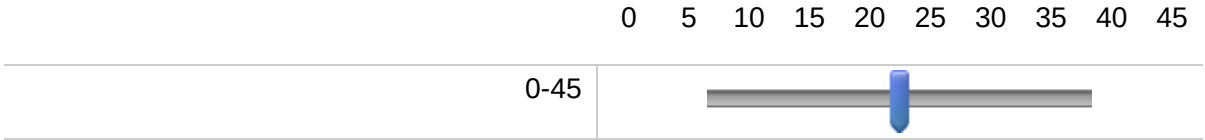
Q 5 What is your marital status?

- ○ Single
- ○ Married
- ○ Divorced
- ○ Partnership
- ○ Separated
- ○ Widowed
- ○ Other _____
- ○ Prefer not to say

Q 6 How many years have you been teaching?



Q 7 How many years have you been teaching in special education?



Q 8 What is your highest level of education?

- ○ Bachelor's Degree
- ○ Master's Degree
- ○ Specialist Degree
- ○ Doctoral Degree

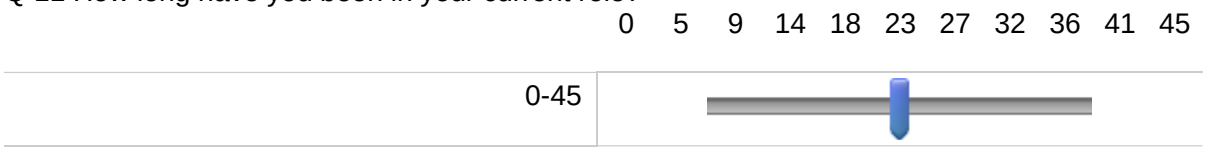
Q 9 What special education licenses do you currently hold?

- ☐ SLD
- ☐ EBD
- ☐ ASD
- ☐ DCD
- ☐ ABS

Q 10 What federal setting are you primarily (50% or more of your caseload) working in?

- ○ Federal Setting I
- ○ Federal Setting II
- ○ Federal Setting III
- ○ Federal Setting IV

Q 11 How long have you been in your current role?



Q 12 Which district are you currently employed by?

Q13 The Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educator Survey
(Maslach et al., 1986)

	NEVER Point 0	AT LEAST A FEW TIMES A YEAR Point 1	AT LEAST ONCE A MONTH Point 2	SERVERAL TIMES A MONTH Point 3	ONCE A WEEK Point 4	SEVERAL TIMES A WEEK Point 5	EVERY DAY Point 6
1. I feel emotionally exhausted because of my work.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
2. I feel worn out at the end of a working day.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
3. I feel tired as soon as I get up in the morning and see a new working day stretched out in front of me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
4. I can easily understand the actions of my colleagues/supervisors.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
5. I get the feeling that I treat some clients/colleagues impersonally, as if they were objects.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
6. Working with people the whole day is stressful for me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
7. I deal with other people's problems successfully.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
8. I feel burned out because of my work.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
9. I feel that I influence other people positively through my work.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
10. I have become more callous to people since I have started doing this job.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
11. I'm afraid that my work makes me emotionally harder.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
12. I feel full of energy.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
13. I feel frustrated by my work.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
14. I get the feeling that I work too hard.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

15. I'm not really interested in what is going on with many of my colleagues.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
16. Being in direct contact with people at work is too stressful.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
17. I find it easy to build a relaxed atmosphere in my working environment.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
18. I feel stimulated when I've been working with my colleagues.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
19. I have achieved many rewarding objectives in my work.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
20. I feel as if I'm at my wits' end.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
21. In my work I am very relaxed when dealing with emotional problems.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
22. I have the feeling that my colleagues blame me for some of their problems.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q 14 How did you obtain your special education licensure?

- ○ Traditional 4-year program
- ○ 5th year Master's Program
- ○ Fast Track Program
- ○ Alternative Licensure Program
- ○ Other _____

Q 15 Which institution of higher education did you obtain your special education licensure?
_____

Q 16 What license did you hold your first-year teaching in special education?

- ○ Tier 1 (variance)
- ○ Tier 2 (out-of-field permission)
- ○ Tier 3 (standard special education license)
- ○ Tier 4

Q 17 Please select the appropriate response regarding the level of preparation provided by your collegial institution.

	Exceptional	Proficient	Basic	Deficient
Due Process Paperwork	○	○	○	○
Classroom Management	○	○	○	○
Practicum Experiences	○	○	○	○
Content Specific Coursework	○	○	○	○
Behavioral Interventions	○	○	○	○
Academic Interventions	○	○	○	○
Time Management	○	○	○	○
Special Education Law	○	○	○	○
Parent Collaboration	○	○	○	○
Colleague Collaboration	○	○	○	○

Q 18 In the past 6 months, what is your consideration to leaving your current position?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

0-10

Q 19 In the past 6 months, what is your consideration to leaving the field of special education?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

0-10

Q 20 In the past 6 months, have you considered leaving the teaching profession?

- Yes
- No

Q 21 Are you actively seeking employment elsewhere?

- Yes
- No

Q 22 If you responded "yes" to any of the previous questions, please give your rationale.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Q 23 How satisfied are you with your current position?

- ○ very unsatisfied
- ○ unsatisfied
- ○ satisfied
- ○ very satisfied

Q 24 How much impact do the following factors play in your decision to stay in your current teaching position?

	High Impact	Medium Impact	Low Impact	No Impact
Salary	○	○	○	○
Workload	○	○	○	○
Due Process Paperwork	○	○	○	○
Building Leadership	○	○	○	○
District Leadership	○	○	○	○
Student Behavior	○	○	○	○
Parent Involvement	○	○	○	○
Support from Colleagues	○	○	○	○
Relevant Staff Development Opportunities	○	○	○	○

Q 25 Please rank the following factors from the MOST impactful to the LEAST impactful in your decision to leave your current position.

_____ Parent Involvement
_____ Student Behavior
_____ Salary
_____ Building Leadership
_____ District Leadership
_____ Workload
_____ Due Process Paperwork
_____ Support from Colleagues
_____ Relevant Staff Development Opportunities

Q 26 What is your district doing now that is positively impacting your satisfaction with your current teaching position?

_____

Q 27 What issues impact your desire to stay in your current teaching position?

_____

Q 28 Why do you work as a teacher?

_____

Q 29 Please select Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree for each statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
23. My building principal is supportive.	○	○	○	○	○
24. My district administration is supportive.	○	○	○	○	○
25. I am valued by my colleagues.	○	○	○	○	○
26. I am valued by my students.	○	○	○	○	○
27. I am valued by my students' families.	○	○	○	○	○
28. I have meaningful and adequate training and staff development opportunities in my current district.	○	○	○	○	○

Q 30 How do you define administrative support in your current district?

_____

APPENDIX B. IRB Approval Letter

Institutional Review Board

MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY MOORHEAD

DATE: May 5, 2023

TO: Ximena Suarez-Sousa, PhD, Principal Investigator
Amy Schulz, Associate investigator

FROM: Dr. Robert Nava, Chair
Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB

ACTION: APPROVED

PROJECT TITLE: [1928670-1] Contributing Factors to Special Education Teacher Burnout and Retention
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project
APPROVAL DATE: May 5, 2023
EXPIRATION DATE:
REVIEW TYPE: Exempt Review

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

This submission has received Exempt Review based on the applicable federal regulation. Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure. All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to the Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to the Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB.

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

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

If you have any questions, please contact the Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been issued in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Minnesota State University Moorhead's records.

APPENDIX C. District Permissions

September 9, 2022

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to grant Amy Schulz permission to conduct an action research study at [redacted] Schools during the 2023-2024 academic school year. I understand that this study poses no risk to those involved or the [redacted] School District. I also understand that all information received will be kept confidential and will only be used for purposes of this study.

Sincerely,

Executive Director of Special Services

[redacted]

[redacted]
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL SERVICES

August 23, 2022

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to grant Amy Schools permission to conduct an action research study at [redacted] Public Schools during the 2023-2024 academic year. I understand that this study poses no risk to those persons involved or the [redacted] Public School District. I also understand that all information received will be kept confidential and will only be used for purposes of this study.

Sincerely,

[redacted]
Executive Director of Special Services

[redacted]

[redacted]
Director of Student Support Services
[redacted] Public Schools
[redacted]

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to grant Amy Schulz permission to conduct an action research study at [redacted] Public Schools during the 2023-24 academic year. I understand the study poses no risk to those persons involved or the [redacted] Public School District. I also understand that all information received will be kept confidential and will only be used for purposes of this study.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

[redacted] Director of Student Support Services

November 9, 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to grant Amy Schulz permission to conduct an action research study at [redacted] Public Schools during the 2023-2024 academic year. I understand that this study poses no risk to those persons involved or the [redacted] Public School District. I also understand that all information received will be kept confidential and will only be used for the purposes of this study.

Sincerely,