



Virginia Commonwealth University  
VCU Scholars Compass

---

Doctor of Education Capstones

Dept. of Educational Leadership

---

2024

## Leveraging Leadership to Retain Early Career Teachers in Stafford County Public Schools

Christopher Gannon  
*Virginia Commonwealth University*


Caroline Canning  
*Virginia Commonwealth University*

Andrew Hoyt  
*Virginia Commonwealth University*

Lauren Johnson  
*Virginia Commonwealth University*

Thomas McAuley  
*Virginia Commonwealth University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/edd\\_capstone](https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/edd_capstone)

 Part of the [Educational Administration and Supervision Commons](#), [Educational Leadership Commons](#), and the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

© The Authors

---

Downloaded from

[https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/edd\\_capstone/36](https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/edd_capstone/36)

This Doctor of Education Capstone is brought to you for free and open access by the Dept. of Educational Leadership at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Education Capstones by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact [libcompass@vcu.edu](mailto:libcompass@vcu.edu).

**Leveraging Leadership to Retain Early Career Teachers  
in Stafford County Public Schools**

Caroline Canning, Christopher Gannon, Andrew Hoyt, Lauren Johnson, and Thomas McAuley

Virginia Commonwealth University

Capstone Project in Partial Completion of Requirements for the Educational Doctorate

Dr. Kimberly M. Bridges

Spring 2024

### Acknowledgements

We express our appreciation and gratitude to these individuals involved in our Capstone project:

**To our chair, Dr. Kimberly Bridges:** A heartfelt thanks for your dedication of time, support and expertise during the entire Capstone project. From the start, you equipped us with a level of thoughtful reflection, impactful recommendations, and always a note of positivity as we moved forward with the work. As our professor prior to the Capstone project, you provided us the groundwork of educational leadership knowledge that we continued to build upon and implement, making your guidance as teacher and chair so relevant and practical. Our Monday calls with you, Dr Bridges, will always stay with us as a driving force in our Capstone journey - we're so grateful that you led us every step of the way, many, many thanks!

**To our committee member, Dr. John Becker:** We consider ourselves extremely fortunate to have had your guidance and support throughout our Capstone Project. You brought years of dissertation experience, an expertise in our topic of teacher retention, and in depth knowledge of data visualization; all of which we benefited from. Not only were you our committee member, but one of our professors as well. You have been a positive presence for us throughout our doctoral journey. Thank you for devoting so much of your time, energy, and expertise to our team.

**To our committee member, Dr. Missy Hill:** We are grateful to have learned from such an incredible content expert by way of you, Dr. Hill. Your insight into current best practices, policy, systems, and strategies connected to supporting improved experiences for new teachers made our work so much more connected and actionable. Thank you for your careful eye for detail, and the care you took in pushing us to be divergent thinkers in this change work. Your personal expertise amplified our work, and helped us to better understand the high stakes connected to improving systems for mentorship, professional development, and central support of early career teachers. Thank you for being on this journey with us!

**To our Capstone partners, Dr. Amanda Schutz and Mr. Dan Reichard of Stafford County Public Schools:** We are incredibly thankful for all of your help and support. Your willingness to provide all of the data and resources that we needed was invaluable to the completion of this Capstone project. Your dedication to improving the experiences of early career teachers in SCPS is an inspiration, and we hope this work proves useful to that effort.

**To the Stafford County Public School teachers and principals who participated in surveys and interviews:** Thank you for your time and willingness to complete our interviews and surveys. Your open and honest feedback and insight paved the way for our findings. Providing meaningful recommendations to SCPS would not have been possible without your participation. Your dedication to improving retention of early career teachers at SCPS is appreciated.

**Caroline Canning** This work is dedicated to my girls, Harper and Rowan. Neither of you will remember the time this journey took, but I will never forget the sacrifices you both allowed me to make. Thank you for loving me unconditionally and letting me learn how to be better for both of you. I hope you will always chase the hard things, and remind yourselves that being **brave** does not mean being fearless. You can do hard things.

To my husband, Adam, thank you for never questioning my need for a little more time or requests to handle the night shift so I could knock out a few final paragraphs of work. This gave me enough room to grow and learn, and I am forever grateful for your belief in my process. You are a phenomenal father and partner, and I could not have done this without you.

To my mother, Cathy, thank you for teaching me the importance of kindness and of people. Watching you navigate the world with such grace and a genuine love for the small things helped me to embrace even the toughest moments of this experience. Thank you for your constant reassurance and late night messages. One day, I want to be just like you.

Finally, to Dr. Bridges, thank you for your unwavering belief in our team. You have such a brilliant way of asking tough questions and offering connected opportunities to encourage The Work along. It's been an absolute pleasure learning from you.

**Andrew Hoyt** As I reflect on this journey, I am filled with overwhelming gratitude. There are too many people to thank by name who have impacted and inspired me to get to this point. However, I would like to highlight a few individuals.

First and foremost, I want to thank my loving and supportive wife, Chiara. You have been the best partner in life; I truly could not have completed this work without you. You completely kept our family afloat and made sure all our needs were met throughout this process. You are the rock of our family, and our boys and I are beyond blessed to call you mama and wife.

To my sons: I love you beyond words or understanding. Being your father is the greatest "title" I hold. I'm sorry I could not play "one more game" or go "one more time" throughout this process as we both would have liked, but I look forward to making up for lost time with you!

To my father, Gary, thank you for teaching me there is no substitute for hard work. I know I would not have achieved what I have without you instilling a strong work ethic in me.

To my capstone team (TBD), it has been a privilege to work with and learn from each of you. I cannot imagine having better partners for this work. You all are inspiring individuals. I look forward to seeing all the great things you will continue to do in the field of education.

Last but certainly not least, thank you to all my VCU professors and cohort members. I have grown so much and am now a better educational leader thanks to my time shared with and learning from you.

**Chris Gannon** To my amazing and wonderful wife, Cheryl, I could not have asked for a better friend and partner. You should be awarded an honorary degree in patience for putting up with my decision to pursue a doctoral degree. Your love, support, and encouragement have kept me afloat through this process, especially when I doubted that I could make it through.

To my parents Pat, Mike, Kelley and Steve, thank you for instilling in me the value of education and working hard. I could not have achieved this without your support and guidance.

To my brothers, Kevin, Dennis and Brian, thank you for always inspiring me to learn more and become a better person.

To my best friend Joey, thank you for always being there to lighten the mood and keeping me grounded; your words of encouragement throughout this entire process have been invaluable.

To my Capstone teammates, I feel incredibly lucky to have had the chance to work alongside and learn from such an amazing group. Your dedication has been an inspiration, and I am honored to count you as friends.

To our Capstone chair, Dr. Bridges, thank you for your support and guidance throughout this entire process. Your positive attitude and mentorship were invaluable in helping us complete this milestone, and we cannot thank you enough.

**Lauren Johnson** For the past three years, my family provided me with support and encouragement again and again.

First, a thank you to my husband, George, who took on everything all the time - you're just wonderful! Next, to my amazing kids: Ethan, your constant dedication in school and sports motivated me to give 100% every moment, and Heather, whose version of excellence is always something exciting and unique, surely kept my bar high and eyes open to new ways of thinking, and Andrew who tackles steep challenges and tasks every day with hard work and determination kept me moving ahead, and Megan who shows me how to overcome obstacles with grace and fortitude. I am inspired by you all and love you so much.

Another note of appreciation to my larger circle of family and friends who were cheering me on while patiently understanding why my social life has been on hold. And especially my dad and

late mom who provided me love and courage to take each step with confidence and determination.

A special note of thanks to our terrific Chair, Dr. Kimberly Bridges, for your stream of support, direction, and belief in our work. Team TBD, you're aces and I couldn't ask for a better Capstone group of colleagues - I've learned from you all! Finally, to the Cohort Team and VCU Professors who provided the knowledge, understanding and friendship that I'm so grateful to have during this amazing journey.

### **Thomas McAuley**

I firmly believe that one should spend time in activities that propel them forward. Thanks to this program, I am a better man, and I have indeed moved forward. Reflecting on the past three years of my doctoral journey, I am filled with both pride and gratitude. This journey hasn't been easy, but as they say, nothing worth having comes easily. Completing this work would not have been possible without the values and traits instilled in me by many remarkable individuals.

To my mom: I drew upon your creativity and your consistent kindness and empathy, regardless of the circumstances. Your lessons kept me grounded through late nights and adversity.

To my dad: I drew upon your willingness to take risks. You are fearless, knowing your worth and believing in yourself in ways that many do not. This gave me the courage to undertake such a demanding program.

To my parents and step-parents: You have always shown love—to me and to each other. Your ability to put aside differences and demonstrate friendship is one of the greatest gifts I have received. I grew up in a family that exemplified love and unity.

To my brother, Earle: A fellow educator, devoted husband, and father to four incredible children who have grown into amazing adults. You know how to balance family, a demanding profession, and still have fun. I am eager to join you for fun adventures in the future. The water awaits!

To my daughter, Lauren: You truly inspire me, sweetie. I love you so much. Your quiet strength enables you to overcome any obstacle. I strive to be a better man because of you, and to make you as proud of me as I am of you. Remember, you are always enough!

To my capstone team: I marvel at each of your talents and how well we combined them to create such impressive work. I am thrilled that in the process of earning this degree, I also gained four friends. I look forward to seeing the tremendous impact you will have on students due to your passion for education.

To our Capstone Chair, Dr. Bridges: Thank you so much for your thoughtful insights, tremendous expertise, and the laughter that helped us complete our work in a manner that, I hope, makes Virginia Commonwealth University proud.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Chapter I: This is Stafford.....</b>	<b>11</b>
Background and Historical Knowledge About the Learning and Living Community.....	11
An Introduction to the Problem of Practice.....	12
Pandemic Impact.....	13
Pay Differences.....	16
Stafford Stacking Up.....	18
SCPS’ Content Staffing Needs Compared to Virginia.....	20
Turnover and Quality Learning Environments.....	22
Budget Implications of Teacher Turnover.....	23
Assessing SCPS’ Efforts.....	24
New Teacher Work Week.....	25
Mentor360.....	25
Mentor360: Two Paths.....	26
Skills Mentoring Framework.....	28
Individual School Nuances Create Unique Mentor360 Environments.....	28
Creating Division-Wide Buy-In Among the Mentoring Stakeholders.....	29
Identifying an Actionable Problem of Practice.....	29
Interviews.....	30
New Teacher Work Week Visit.....	30
Clarifying the Actionable Problem of Practice.....	31
Identifying Root Causes.....	32
Theory of Change and Research Questions.....	35
<b>Chapter II: Literature Review.....</b>	<b>38</b>
Recruitment and Retention.....	39
Growing Provisional Licenses.....	39
Rising Numbers of Out-of-Field Teachers.....	39
Contextual Challenges to Teacher Retention.....	40
Compensation and Pay.....	40
The Importance of Administrative Support.....	41
Teacher Wellness.....	44
Student Behaviors.....	45
Effective Methods to Retain Teachers.....	46
Proactive Leadership.....	46
Leadership Provides Ongoing Supports.....	48
Coaching for Capacity-Building.....	48
The Power of Strong Administrative Feedback for Early Career Teachers.....	49

Leaders Focus on Mental Health.....	54
Promising Policy Solutions.....	56
The Role of Self-Efficacy.....	57
Comprehensive Professional Learning.....	58
Professional Learning Communities.....	59
Virtual PLCs (VPLCs).....	61
Asynchronous Learning Networks.....	62
Mentor Programs.....	64
What Makes an Effective Mentor?.....	64
Connecting ECTs With the Right Mentor.....	65
Ongoing Development of Mentors.....	66
Measuring Success.....	68
<b>Chapter III: Methods.....</b>	<b>70</b>
Purpose of the Study.....	70
Positionality of the Capstone Team.....	71
Research Questions.....	71
Connecting Data to the Research Questions.....	72
Research Design.....	73
Survey and Interview Responses.....	76
Data Analysis and Triangulation.....	76
Quantitative Analysis.....	76
Qualitative Analysis.....	77
Merging.....	77
<b>Limitations.....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Chapter IV: Findings.....</b>	<b>80</b>
What Currently Exists at the School and Division Level to Support Early Career Teachers? 81	
Prep for Success Week.....	82
School-Based Professional Learning.....	85
Diverse Teams of Support for Early Career Teachers.....	89
Teachers Feel Valued.....	94
What is Working for Early Career Teachers? How Does Stafford Know it is Working?.....	97
Professional Learning Communities (...for Those With Access).....	98
Licensure Status and Professional Development.....	100
Supportive Leadership Matters.....	103
Quality Mentorship.....	106
What Collective Needs of a School and District Must be Considered in Early Career Teacher Support?.....	110
Pay as a Driver of Departure.....	110



Pay is an Issue for Early Career Teachers.....	111
Principals Recognize the Pay Issue.....	113
Pay Matters, but What Else is Keeping Teachers in SCPS?.....	114
Chapter Summary.....	115
<b>Chapter V: Recommendations.....</b>	<b>118</b>
Core Finding 1: Professional Development is Highly Variable.....	119
Recommendation 1: Build a More Streamlined Playbook of Standardized Topics for Ambassadors to Cover Through Professional Development for Early Career Teachers at the School Level.....	119
Recommendation 2: Develop Onboarding Plan for Early Career Teachers Hired Mid-Year 121	
Recommendation 3: Evaluate Professional Learning and Development.....	123
Core Finding 2: School Leadership Impacts Retention.....	125
Recommendation 4 : Design Responsive and Embedded Professional Development for Principals to Support Early Career Teachers.....	125
Recommendation 5: Encourage Cross-School Assistant Principal and Ambassador Partnerships: Observing Mentor Meetings from other Schools.....	129
Core Finding 3: Early Career Teachers Crave Quality Feedback.....	131
Recommendation 6: Create Diverse Teams to Support Early Career Teachers Through Feedback and Coaching Cycles.....	131
Core Finding 4: Need for Common Planning Time.....	137
Recommendation 7: Leverage the Master Schedule to Ensure Shared Planning Time and Improve Collaboration and Feedback for Early Career Teachers.....	137
Core Finding 5: Quality Mentorship Matters.....	139
Recommendation 8: Improve the Quality of Mentor-Pairing for ECTs.....	139
Recommendation 9: Offer Virtual Mentorship to ECTs Seeking Content Specific Support That Doesn't Already Exist in Their School Building, with Priority for SpED and ESOL..	146
Secondary Finding: Teacher Pay Increases Retention.....	149
Recommendation 10: Create Opportunities for Teachers to Earn Skills and Pay Increases Through Micro-credentials.....	149
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>153</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>156</b>
<b>Appendix A.....</b>	<b>182</b>
<b>Appendix B.....</b>	<b>183</b>
<b>Appendix C.....</b>	<b>184</b>
<b>Appendix D.....</b>	<b>190</b>
<b>Appendix E.....</b>	<b>191</b>
<b>Appendix F.....</b>	<b>194</b>
<b>Appendix G.....</b>	<b>195</b>

**Appendix H.....196**  
**Appendix I..... 197**

### Abstract

Stafford County Public Schools requested an evaluation of their current support of Early Career Teachers (ECTs) with one to three years experience, and its potential impact on retention efforts. They stamped this request with urgency, noting the COVID-19 pandemic and teacher pay as two driving factors, specifically, impacting retention of teachers within their first three years. Our Capstone team sought a deeper understanding of the following issues in three research questions: 1) types of support across their division and within their school buildings, 2) the impact of current practices of support, and 3) division-wide considerations for enhancing current systems of support for ECTs. While pay surfaced as a top consideration for a new teacher's intention to return, a review of the literature highlighted additional influences such as the condition of school leadership, access to quality mentorship, and healthy working environments as largely contributing factors. The Capstone team used a mixed-methods approach to collect new survey data from teachers with 1-3 and 4-7 years of experience and interview responses from building principals, corroborating these findings using secondary datasets from the Stafford team. Findings centered on variability in the ways ECTs are being supported at the school-level across the county. Specifically, the team found incongruencies in the types and frequency of professional learning being delivered to ECTs, access to common planning time during the school day for ECTs, and the quality of mentorship being offered to ECTs. The findings also included the importance of trusting relationships between ECTs and their leadership teams and the need for ECTs to feel valued in their professional placements. These findings informed 10 systemic improvement recommendations made by the Capstone team regarding new teacher onboarding and through-year support, professional learning for school-based leadership teams, and instructional coaching and mentor-pairing.

*keywords: new teacher support, teacher retention, mentoring programs, professional learning, early career teachers*

## **Chapter I: This is Stafford**

### **Background and Historical Knowledge About the Learning and Living Community**

Located 40 miles south of Washington D.C., Stafford County, Virginia is one of the fastest growing and highest income counties in America (U.S. Census, 2022). Thousands of the 160,900 people who live there make the daily commute to federal facilities as well as private companies in Washington D.C. and Northern Virginia. Their median household income is reported as \$119,000, which is notably higher than the national average of \$70,784 (U.S. Census, 2022); this level of income may help explain why the suburban county ranks so highly in rates of homeownership, working salary, and college graduates (DePietro, 2022). The Marine Corps Base Quantico, part of the northern piece of the county, serves as a professional headquarters for many citizens, making Stafford additionally rich in military personnel, families, and culture (DePietro, 2022). According to the 2022 Census, 54.54% of Stafford County identifies as White, 18.79% as Black, 15.07% as Hispanic or Latino. The remaining 11.6% is composed of individuals from various other racial and ethnic backgrounds, contributing to the county's diverse community.

The overwhelming majority of youth living in the area are served by Stafford County Public Schools (SCPS). Of the 33,420 PreK-12th grade learners in the county, 31,220 of them attend one of Stafford County's 35 public programs or schools (Virginia Department of Education, 2022). Led by superintendent Dr. Thomas Taylor, Stafford County is comprised of seventeen elementary schools, eight middle schools, five high schools, one alternative education school, two public day school programs, and two early childhood education programs. The division claims six tenets as part of their vision and mission for service: students, respect, opportunity, integrity, community, and excellence (Stafford County, 2023). According to the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE, 2022) all 35 schools are fully accredited with a

graduation rate of 94% which skews slightly higher than the state's average for the 2022-2023 school year. The demographics of SCPS are moderately different from those of the county as a whole. The student body identifies as 40% White, 24% Hispanic or Latino, and 21% Black. Of those students, 45.4% of them identify as economically disadvantaged, which is notably higher than the 5.4% average reported for the county as a whole (VDOE, 2022; U.S. Census, 2022).

Despite Stafford county's rapid growth, their percentage of county funding allocated to schools has decreased overtime; in 2010, 45% of SCPS' funding came from the county compared to only 37.5% in 2023 (Potomac Local, 2023). The FY24 budget requested an increase to county funding to specifically support "Attracting and retaining high quality staff"... with particular focus on teachers who support students with disabilities and English Language Learners (Budget, 2023). With a growing division of diverse learners, such a change in local financial support of schools has wide-reaching implications that impact leaders, teachers, and the students they are serving.

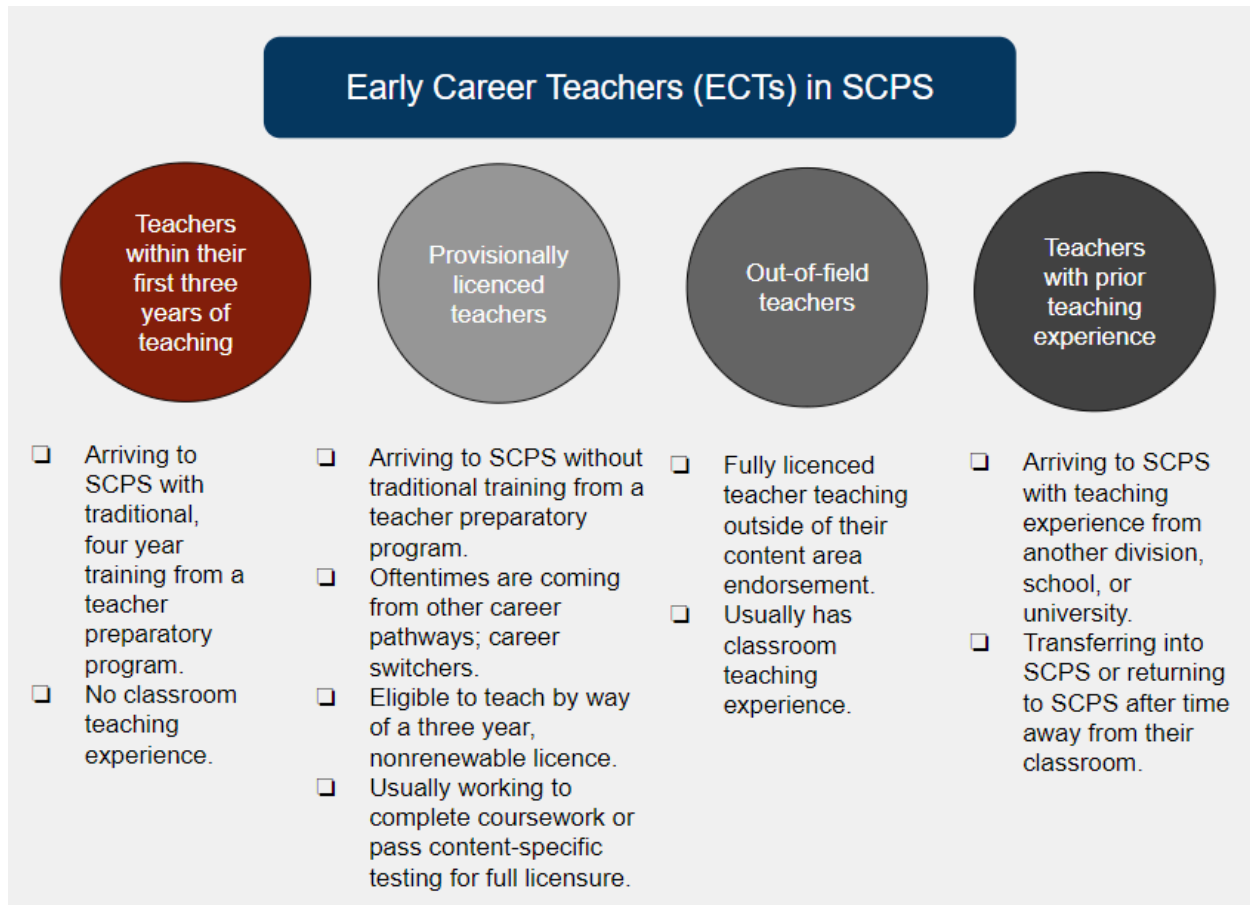
### **An Introduction to the Problem of Practice**

Similar to the experiences of other school divisions across the Commonwealth, SCPS articulated their problem of practice (POP) as one revolving around the public education hiring crisis and teacher shortage. What SCPS noted as compounding the staffing challenge is their proximity to larger, higher paying, northern Virginia school divisions. In discussions with the capstone team, they said these factors may also contribute to the rising number of provisionally licensed and out of field teachers SCPS is relying on to lead learning across their division. Further, they noted the number of new teachers who received their teaching preparation during COVID-19, participating in predominantly virtual instruction, are in need of greater and more immediate support. SCPS believed these to be the leading factors for the majority of their

staffing concerns, trickling down to subsequent problems all connected to the need for greater support of Early Career Teachers (ECTs). Figure 1 shows the different categories of ECTs in Stafford County Public Schools:

**Figure 1**

*Early Career Teachers Defined*



*Note.* ECTs in SCPS are understood as professionals who fall into one of these four categories.

While ECT support is not differentiated by the professional profiles listed above, context around the differences of each type of ECT will prove to be a critical part of the Capstone team's work.

**Pandemic Impact**

COVID has heightened a long-standing national shortage of teachers (Schmitt & deCourcy, 2022; Masters, 2021). Schmitt & deCourcy (2022) propose the shortage of teachers is,

generally, not the result of an insufficient number of potentially qualified teachers. Instead, the pair highlight highly stressful working conditions coupled with the declining compensation relative to other occupations that employ college graduates as the two driving factors that have led to an urgent national demand for teachers (Schmitt & deCourcy, 2022).

COVID created unprecedented disruptions in learning across the Commonwealth of Virginia. Districts report substantial challenges on recruiting and retaining a qualified teacher workforce, as well as low teacher morale and job satisfaction as key contributors to the school district's human capital struggles (JLARC, 2022). Division leadership in nearly all divisions surveyed (94 percent) indicated it has become more difficult to recruit and retain classroom teachers than it was before the pandemic. Additionally, nearly 90 percent indicated it was more difficult to retain classroom teachers (JLARC, 2022). Before the pandemic, there were about 800 vacant teaching positions statewide. This increased substantially to about 2,800 vacant teaching positions (3 percent of all teaching positions) in October 2021. More recently, the VDOE collected data from 111 school divisions, finding approximately 3,300 teacher vacancies in just those 111 divisions—a 25 percent increase from the vacancies reported by these same divisions in October 2021 (JLARC, 2022). The data show a striking combination: more teachers are leaving the profession while fewer are becoming licensed (JLARC, 2022). The implications for Stafford are relevant because the district has a higher than average number of teachers leaving their schools on an annual basis (SCPS Budget, 2021).

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, challenges with the teaching workforce were already evident (Walker, 2022). Indicators such as teaching position vacancies, teacher prep program numbers, out-of-field placements, and unqualified staffing, teacher shortages have been trending downward for the past decade (Nguyen et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic intensified the

teacher shortage dilemma, with more teachers leaving the profession at higher rates post-COVID than pre-COVID (Zamarro et al., 2021). When comparing fall 2020 and fall 2021, teacher turnover rates jumped 17%, with newly hired teachers being most significantly impacted (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2023). A report published by the *Government Accountability Office (GAO)*, “estimated that public education lost about 7% of its total teaching population (233,000 instructors) between 2019 and 2021” (Jones II, 2023). Focusing specifically on Virginia teachers, in 2021, the state of Virginia recorded its highest rate of teacher turnover (Breen, 2023).

According to research, all subgroups of teachers—male, female, Black, White, and Hispanic—experienced an increase in departure rates in 2021, with Black, Hispanic, and female teachers exhibiting higher percentages than their counterparts (Katz, et al., 2023). Schools in lower socio-economical areas and schools with higher numbers of students of color were impacted greatest by teacher shortages and teacher retention (Zamarro et al., 2022). Prior to the COVID-19 impact, there is evidence alternative certified teachers left the profession at higher rates than traditionally certified teachers (Redding & Smith, 2016).

The reasons for increased rates of teacher departures during and after COVID-19 vary. Prime factors reported were teacher burnout and high stress levels. Mental health was a major concern for teachers during the pandemic. One study by Kush, et al., (2022) utilizes survey data completed by the Carnegie Mellon University’s Delphi Group, which “indicates that teachers showed a significantly higher prevalence of negative mental health outcomes during the pandemic when compared to healthcare and office work” (Kush et al., 2022). Another study found teachers were nearly twice as likely to leave the profession over stress-related factors as they were to leave over insufficient pay (Diliberti et al., 2021). In this same study, teachers who left the profession and took new jobs were surveyed on the appeal of the new professions they



took. Most popular reasons given were more flexibility, better climate, no test accountability stressors, more pay, and less hours (Diliberti et al., 2021). A higher rate of retirement was also seen during COVID-19 instruction (Jung, 2020).

A final notable effect of COVID that impacts the context for ECTs' professional experiences is the way they learned and completed their pre-service journey to the classroom. The literature connects distance learning for pre-service teachers with a direct impact on their professional knowledge and performance (Sayir et al., 2022). This cohort of ECTs was not afforded the opportunity to see in-person instruction, planning, or effective school culture models. Without this hands-on practice with the supervision of an expert, pre-service teachers arrived in their classrooms without the skills needed for a successful first few years of teaching (Sayir et. al., 2022 p. 17).

### **Pay Differences**

SCPS also indicated higher pay elsewhere is hampering their ability to retain Early Career Teachers. This challenge is not unique to Stafford County; in Virginia, low pay has been consistently cited as a major impediment to recruitment and retention of teachers (Virginia Board of Education, 2022). However, the challenge is particularly evident in Stafford County, which neighbors larger, more affluent districts in Northern Virginia. Table 1 shows that Stafford falls below its three neighboring school divisions on starting salaries for new teachers with both Bachelor's and Master's degrees:

**Table 1***Differences in Starting Salary between SCPS and Neighboring Districts for New Teachers*

District	Bachelor's Degree (Difference)	Master's Degree (Difference)
Stafford	\$50,000	\$55,459
Prince William	\$54,761 (+\$4,761)	\$60,761 (+\$5,302)
Fairfax	\$54,913 (+\$4,913)	\$60,404 (+\$4,945)
Arlington	\$54,878 (+\$4,878)	\$62,830 (+\$7,371)

*Note.* Data from published salary scales for 2023-2024 school year.

The fact the neighboring districts identified in Table 1 all pay significantly more than SCPS could be one possible explanation for their difficulty in attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) noted teachers with lower first year salaries had a higher attrition rate than teachers who earned more in their first year (p. 28). Additionally, they found teachers in districts with higher maximum salaries were less likely to leave their schools than teachers in districts with lower maximum salaries (p. 28).

While pay may play a role in attrition rates, research suggests it isn't the only important factor in a teacher's decision to leave the classroom (Bryant et al., 2023). A 2019 study by the Economic Policy Institute identified pay as the fourth most common reason teachers leave education, with 24% of participants choosing this option as their top reason for leaving the classroom (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Of the 958 departing K-12 teachers surveyed, 43% of them reported, "...stress and the disappointments of teaching weren't worth it" (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Among the faculty who departed, 32% acknowledged their departure was related to dissatisfaction with school leadership. Further, 29% stated they did not feel as though they had enough support from their school or district. These data points highlight the need for SCPS to

explore the support systems in place as they consider the best strategies to recruit and retain an effective faculty for their schools.

### **Stafford Stacking Up**

A closer look at SCPS' teacher profile and licensure status revealed an urgent need for exploring enhanced systems of support, specifically for provisionally licensed and out-of-field teachers. While these teachers were not specified as part of the partner's request for Capstone assistance (RFA), the team found a notable percentage of Stafford's teacher population is qualified by a nontraditional route to teaching. According to the VDOE's Staffing and Vacancy Report (2023), 14.9% of SCPS' teachers are identified as teaching out-of-field. This figure is nearly three times higher than the state's reported 5.2% of out-of-field teachers. Additionally, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission's (JLARC) analysis of VDOE school quality data identified SCPS' percentage change in out-of-field teachers before and after COVID as one of the highest in the Commonwealth.

The JLARC analysis also revealed another 11.7% of SCPS' teachers are eligible by way of a provisional license, which exceeds the state's 9.5% average (Virginia Department of Education, 2023). Likewise, Stafford's percentage change in provisionally licensed teachers pre-pandemic (2020) to school year 2021 also ranks among one of the highest in Virginia; this makes them one of only four school divisions that appear on both of JLARC's lists (2022) of school divisions with the largest percentage of change in both out-of-field (see Table 2) and provisionally licenced teachers (see Table 3).

**Table 2**

*Divisions in Virginia with Largest Increase in Out-of-Field Teachers by Change in Percentage Points*

Division	Average Daily Membership (March 2022)	Pre-pandemic average	2021-2022	Change (in percentage points)
Franklin City	939	4%	35%	32
Colonial Beach	571	12%	38%	26
Buena Vista City	819	2%	20%	18
Halifax County	4,246	4%	22%	18
Highland County	174	16%	31%	14
Norton City	794	2%	16%	14
Tazewell County	5,244	1%	15%	14
<b>Stafford County</b>	<b>29,830</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>13</b>
Surry County	620	2%	15%	13
Orange County	4,722	8%	20%	12

*Note.* From JLARC's analysis of VDOE school quality data, SY14 compared to SY21. Here, SCPS ranks 8th in the state, with a 13% point change in out-of-field teachers.

**Table 3**

*Divisions in Virginia with Largest Increase in Provisionally Licensed Teachers by Change in Percentage Points*

Division	Average Daily Membership (March 2022)	Pre-pandemic average	2021-2022	Change (in percentage points)
Franklin City	939	24%	41%	16
Surry County	620	7%	23%	15
Halifax County	4,246	12%	23%	11
Fredericksburg City	3,376	14%	24%	10
Newport News City	25,268	9%	19%	10
Rappahannock County	715	5%	15%	10
<b>Stafford County</b>	<b>29,830</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>9</b>
Sussex County	952	10%	18%	8
King George County	4,329	14%	21%	7
Roanoke City	12,941	4%	12%	7

*Note.* From JLARC's analysis of VDOE school quality data, SY14 compared to SY21. Here, SCPS ranks 7th in the state for its percentage point change in provisionally licensed teachers.

These significant differences in both provisional and out-of-field teacher profiles support Stafford County Public Schools' attention to exploring the experiences and support systems currently being provided to their ECTs. They also revealed a critical nuance for the capstone team's work. Having such an inconsistent workforce has far-reaching implications.

### **SCPS' Content Staffing Needs Compared to Virginia**

SCPS is ranked as 8th highest in the state of Virginia for their percentage points of increased change in the number of out-of-field teachers they have as of the 2021-2022 school

year (see Table 2), and 7th highest for the number of provisionally licensed teachers placed in SCPS classrooms (see Table 3). They are also the largest school division on either of JLARC's (2022) top-ten lists. This means the scale of their need is greater than any other Virginia district that has reported similar significant changes between these pre-pandemic and 2021-2022 averages. A focus on Early Career Teachers is also warranted for Stafford County due to higher rates of shortages in key content areas such as special education and teachers serving multilingual learners (Virginia Department of Education, 2021). Table 4 shows comparison rates by content areas for SCPS versus the state of Virginia:

**Table 4**

*Virginia and Stafford Comparison of Unfilled Positions by Percentage*

Group Type	State Percent Unfilled	Stafford Percent Unfilled	Difference
CTE and other electives	3.8%	1.5%	-60.5%
Elementary, PK-6	4.3%	6.4%	48.8%
English Language and Literature	3.2%	2.1%	-34.4%
Life and Physical Sciences	3.6%	1.0%	-72.2%
Mathematics	4.0%	1.5%	-62.5%
Social Sciences and History	1.7%	0.3%	-82.4%
Physical, Health, and Safety Education	1.9%	0.0%	-100.0%
Special Education	5.9%	16.2%	174.6%
Title I	3.8%	0.0%	-100.0%
Visual and Performing Arts	2.1%	0.8%	-61.9%
World Language	4.7%	2.1%	-55.3%

*Note.* Workforce Data Report Comparisons Between Virginia and Stafford County, 2022

Table 4, based on the Virginia Workforce Report (2022), shows Social Studies and History classrooms are largely staffed. Conversely, in the state of Virginia, as well as Stafford, Special Education positions remain to be the most critical need. However, there is an astronomical difference when comparing Special Education staffing needs from Virginia to SCPS. Specifically, SCPS' needs for staffing Special Education positions comes in at a rate of 174% of Virginia's average.

### **Turnover and Quality Learning Environments**

Virginia public schools average a 14:1 student to teacher ratio. Stafford's average of 17:1 may add difficulties to both teachers and students, since timely and actionable feedback will be more difficult on both formative and summative practice, and these practices are drivers to increased learning (Virginia Department of Education, 2022; Hattie & Zierer, 2017). The additional care teachers must provide for each of the students in their classrooms makes the hours quickly compound with each rostered student (Virginia Public Schools Student: Teacher Ratio, 2023). In addition, the most productive learning environments honor personalized and differentiated instruction which requires an adept planning ability ECTs may not yet have (Heikkinen et al., 2018). Teachers also must make learning accommodations for students who qualify for special education, as well as medical and language services. All of these conditions shape the time and effort required of teachers. Eventually, burnout can set in.

Burnout has the potential to arrive even faster in environments where experienced teachers are made to support colleagues who are lacking foundational teaching skill or content knowledge on top of their own daily responsibilities (Bryant et al., 2023). In fact, Virginia Code provision §22.1-305.1 regarding Mentor Teacher Programs requires the Board of Education to establish guidelines that mentors, "(ii) be assigned a limited number of teachers at one time;

however, instructional personnel who are not assigned solely as mentors should not be assigned to more than four teachers at one time...” (Virginia Board of Education, 2021). Consequently, mentors may face burn-out due to the growing needs from supporting multiple Early Career Teachers. SCPS’ high rate of provisionally licensed and out-of-field teachers can impact the capacities of their established veteran teachers as well. It is required by the Commonwealth of Virginia for mentors to have reached continuing contract status which may create a situation in which one teacher may mentor multiple ECTs. If a school must have mentors who are not yet on continuing contract status, schools and the division will be out of compliance with the Code of Virginia. Therefore, it is imperative school divisions conduct thorough inspections of current systems of support for ECTs. Failure to do so may create impacts that could ripple out to the full workforce, and student outcomes could lag or further decline.

### **Budget Implications of Teacher Turnover**

Teacher turnover also presents significant financial implications that resonate throughout school districts (Sutcher et al., 2016). The intricacies of this issue delve into both direct and indirect expenses, each contributing to the financial toll it takes on school districts, including SCPS. Direct costs are the most visible aspect of teacher turnover's financial impact. Watlington et al., (2010) share the cost of teacher turnover includes cost of separation, cost of replacement staffing, net replacement pay, cost of training, and value of lost productivity as components that should be considered when calculating the cost of teacher turnover. Furthermore, onboarding new teachers involves training sessions, orientation programs such as SCPS’ Mentor360, and provision of necessary resources. Addressing each cost of separation impact comes with a high financial commitment. For example, any school division experiencing teacher attrition is left to consider operational costs for ongoing training around instructional technology resources,



assessment tools and pedagogical and content-specific training for every new ECT they recruit to fill those vacancies. Those needs will also depend on ECTs' prior training, licensure status, and content area expertise.

Nationally, the problem of teacher turnover costs upwards of \$8.5 billion. According to a Virginia Department of Education mentor training presentation (Virginia Department of Education, 2007), the direct cost of replacing an individual teacher in Virginia is 25-35% of the annual salary and benefit cost. This equates to an average cost of \$11,000 every time a teacher leaves the profession. For Stafford County, this amounts to a cost of \$11.9 million dollars over the last two school years (2021-2022 and 2022-2023). Watlington et al., (2010) posit the financial impact of teacher turnover on school districts is a multifaceted concern. While the exact monetary figure might vary year-to-year for SCPS, the broader understanding is clear: addressing teacher turnover is not just about educational quality but also about prudent financial management. Recognizing both the direct and indirect costs helps policymakers, administrators, and educators appreciate the far-reaching consequences and leads to the implementation of strategies that promote teacher retention and, ultimately, student success. In addition to the financial burden of teacher turnover, losing teachers challenges the overall school environment, with a lower positive school climate reported by school staff, and loss of institutional knowledge (Clabes, 2022).

### **Assessing SCPS' Efforts**

In the last two years, SCPS has taken steps to address the support of new teacher hires, led by initiatives tied to Mentor360 and New Teacher Work Week. Led by their Coordinator of Professional Learning, New Teacher Support Specialist, Dan Reichard, the division is entering year three of SCPS' Mentor360 program. This program focuses on supporting ECTs utilizing a

cohort model of mentors and mentees. Also, additional work is being done around mentorship and strategies for supporting ECTs by way of SCPS' partnerships with Reach Virginia and a Region 3 clinical faculty grant with Mary Washington University (Reichard, personal communication, 2023). Current efforts to support ECTs also include a revitalized orientation week.

### **New Teacher Work Week**

First year teachers who have mentors and a strong support system are significantly more likely to be successful and return for a second year (Gray & Taie, 2015). In an era where veteran teachers are expressing less on-the-job enthusiasm and more job related stress (Barnum, 2023), it is paramount to provide a strong support system for ECTs. One of the Coordinator's first initiatives was to enhance the new teacher academy of SCPS, rebranded as Prep for Success Week (PFSW). PFSW invites all new teachers to Stafford County; this includes teachers with zero experience and those with teaching experience who are new to SCPS. Additionally, SCPS provided monetary incentives to best ensure all new teachers attended each day. Attendees reported to their school-based location three days (Monday, Thursday, and Friday), and attended a district-wide event the other two days (Tuesday and Wednesday). The district-wide event occurred at Colonial Forge High School. See Appendix A for the complete Prep for Success Week 2023 schedule.

### **Mentor360**

Under the leadership of the Coordinator of Professional Learning and New Teacher Support, SCPS has rebranded the previous mentoring program into what it is called today: Mentor360. The structure of Mentor360 requires each school to appoint two Ambassadors. These Ambassadors serve as liaisons between the school's mentors and the Mentor360 district

organizers. This dual appointment is based on the belief that a team of two will form a stronger mentoring experience. This approach is particularly effective in schools experiencing high staff turnover and a large influx of new teachers (Reichard, personal communication, 2023).

*Mentoring Matters*, the SCPS adopted guidebook for their mentoring program, opens with the following statement: “Learning-focused mentoring relationships make a significant emotional and intellectual difference in the induction experience for teachers, as well as in their continuing professional practice” (Lipton et al., 2003). This guidebook has been, and continues to be, a dynamic resource for SCPS and the county-wide mentoring program is a significant point of emphasis.

Mentor360 has three main goals for the Ambassadors. The first goal is to foster the mentor/mentee relationship. In the past, according to the Coordinator, the lead mentors merely disseminated information to the mentees. The relationship component was not strong, and the depth of support was not robust. The second goal is for the Ambassadors to be the bridge and welcoming point of contact for the new hire between their hiring date and the first day mentors contractually return to work. The Prep for Success Week is an excellent example of that bridge in action. Third, Ambassadors work to create professional learning experiences based on a suggested list of foci offered on a monthly basis. Each Stafford County school engages in monthly educator support sessions, and on occasion, there are more formal meetings where the district participates to connect the ‘circle of support’ known as Mentor360.

### ***Mentor360: Two Paths***

A primary role at the SCPS district level is to develop the leadership and skill capacity of the Ambassadors; from there, the Ambassadors can build the capacity within mentors, and the mentors can build capacity and efficacy of ECTs. It is through this train-the-trainer model the

Mentor360 program has begun transforming the mentoring role for SCPS. There are two mentoring paths found within SCPS: the beginner educator path and a path for educators who have a minimum of three years experience yet are new to Stafford County. Each path requires a different set of supports.

The beginner path offers a mentor to new hires with zero to two years of experience. Mentor360 supports SCPS employees from social workers, psychologists, counselors, to teachers. The mentor is paid and trained through the mentoring framework. Beginning in the 2023-2024 school year, the county designed a two year Mentor360 framework to guide the mentor and provide support and resources for both Year One and Year Two of the new hires' career.

The second path is for those who have over three years of experience yet are in year one of experience with SCPS. According to the partner, the number of teachers who qualify for Path Two has grown significantly over the past few years. Path Two is also for current SCPS educators who may have transferred schools or changed contents within the county. This second path is a one year track. The support people for Path Two are called Colleagues. Colleagues, like mentors, are compensated, but a colleague is not expected to go as deeply into instructional strategies, and will instead focus their energy toward building institutional knowledge of that educator's new location. Because every school has a slightly different culture, climate, and way of accomplishing the vision of each administration, the Colleague strives to acclimate the new hire to their new environment. While all individuals who fall in either path attend Prep for Success Week, their sessions are differentiated to acknowledge and honor their years of experience.

### **Skills Mentoring Framework**

As of the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year, there was not an adopted coaching model for SCPS. In the interim, they use the skill mentoring framework from the research-based *Mentoring Matters* handbook (Lipton et al., 2003) with an emphasis on coaching, collaborating, and consulting. *Mentoring Matters* is the catalyst for the Ambassadors and mentors to dive into the work. SCPS has also enlisted the support of an outside organization Learning Forward to help create one framework for the division. Learning Forward, a professional learning association based out of Ohio, provides best practices and guidance to districts across the country. Learning Forward's work is "grounded in the *Standards for Professional Learning* which define an aspirational, coherent, and attainable vision for an effective and equitable system of professional learning" (Learning Forward, 2021). A stated goal of SCPS is to create a three year program of support for their new teachers, and Learning Forward has experience in this area. SCPS' Skills Mentoring Framework will incorporate a year three plan for the 2024-2025 school year.

### **Individual School Nuances Create Unique Mentor360 Environments**

Currently, Ambassadors are selected by building level administrators, though each building takes a different approach towards the selection process of their mentors. While there is a Mentoring Selection Toolkit to aid in the selection process, in some schools the principals select the mentors, in other schools it is a collaborative effort between the two entities, and other schools leave the responsibility solely up to the Ambassador. The differences in the schools are apparent in the monthly meetings as well, with some administrative teams meeting more frequently and being more hands-on than other administrative teams.

The role of the Ambassadors is different depending on their school and leadership team's expectations. During empathy interviews with the Capstone team, some Ambassadors stated they do not meet monthly, but may send out an email to see if a meeting needs to occur. Other Ambassadors stated it is a standing monthly meeting with the day and time held sacred and protected from other responsibilities. Some Ambassadors send out a monthly survey and use the survey results to craft new teacher meeting agendas.

### **Creating Division-Wide Buy-In Among the Mentoring Stakeholders**

In an attempt to create more cohesion within the division, there has been a coordinated effort to increase the programmatic buy-in and shared expectations of the Mentor360 Ambassadors and mentors. During the 2021-2022 school year, a new teacher focus group was created. Ambassadors from all of the district's schools were invited to participate in these focus groups to evaluate the current mentoring program. The focus group centered their efforts on level-setting expectations for Mentor360 by asking, "What do we desire to achieve?" and, "How can we ensure we achieve this?" This work helped create a centrally located resource hub to support Mentor360. Through the focus groups and an Ambassador retreat, all materials (framework, Teacher Prep Week, and mentoring track) have been created from the voices of hundreds of mentoring stakeholders working together.

### **Identifying an Actionable Problem of Practice**

SCPS envisioned their next steps being an evaluation of their mentor program with a focus on the following: mentor and mentee partnerships, expanding beyond first year teachers, specific support tracks, building level administration involvement, and overall impact of the program on teacher retention. In order to define the actionable Capstone problem of practice (POP), the Capstone team gained context and perspective around Stafford's concerns in a variety

of ways. The team pursued multiple opportunities to listen to and learn from the Stafford team. This allowed for examination, identification, and accurate understanding of the root causes connected to the POP. In order to do this, the team spent time interviewing the partners, listening to different groups of stakeholders at SCPS' new teacher work week, reviewing internal documents, and analyzing current data regarding teacher retention and mentoring.

### **Interviews**

The first step in learning more about the capstone Problem of Practice (POP) was to interview key members of the Stafford team to provide a deeper understanding of the genesis of the problem facing the district, namely, its new teacher onboarding and support efforts. This initial virtual meeting with Dr. Amanda Schutz, Director of Department of Research, Evaluation and Strategic Improvement for Stafford County, provided a foundation of understanding. Following this meeting, we met with Daniel Reichard, Coordinator of Professional Learning, New Teacher Support, Human Resources and Talent Development at Stafford County. In addition, the partner provided access to three different sources of data to further our understanding: End of Year (EOY) Surveys, Internal Teacher Feedback Mentor and New Teacher Data, and the Mentor360 data. Finally, members of the Capstone team attended the New Teacher Orientation to conduct first-hand empathy interviews and build understanding about the experience of new teachers.

### **New Teacher Work Week Visit**

Each of the thirty-one district schools were represented at the PFSW sessions. In addition to classroom teachers of a wide-range of subject material, other new support staff also attended (social workers, ITRT, school psychologists, etc.). Ambassadors were also present in their role as the lead mentors who facilitate the Mentor360 program at each school site. Attendees were

provided a guiding question for each day. The guiding questions (see Appendix A) built upon one another with the intent to illuminate the supports available and the tools to use them.

Each day at PFSW began with a whole group kick-off and keynote speaker designed to build excitement and inform. After the introductory sessions over the course of two days, teachers attended three content specific trainings, titled Content Academies. Other sessions included wellness expos and opportunities to discuss and strengthen their understanding of support offered to them. Time was incorporated for Ambassadors and new teachers to converse both collegially and informally. In addition to the SCPS focus, participants were encouraged to visit the gym in which fifty-seven local vendors were present for a Community Resource Fair (CRF). CRF exhibits included teacher stores/resources, faith organizations, real estate firms, college and universities, opportunities to volunteer for various community groups, health care, and much more. The goal of the CRF was twofold: provide resources and opportunities to participants and enable new teachers to quickly establish roots in the community.

The PFSW concluded with every teacher entering the last whole group session carrying a white cardboard circle and marker. New teacher attendees were asked to write down supports and key takeaways. Coordinator Reichard (personal communication, July 18, 2023) explained the circle is a tangible reminder the mentoring program is meant to be fully connected. The circle reinforces the brand of Mentor360.

### **Clarifying the Actionable Problem of Practice**

Based on its analyses and learning from the partner, the Capstone team began shaping the actionable Problem of Practice for SCPS. In its genesis, the RFA submitted by SCPS asked the team to evaluate their new teacher onboarding program. Specifically, the SCPS partner was interested in their return on the additional investments provided during their new teacher week,



mentoring program, and other, nondisclosed support the division provides for their new teachers. They added additional context specific to their proximity to northern Virginia and the number of ECTs who received their initial training during COVID as factors that increase the urgency in needing to find effective ways to support new teachers to SCPS. However, when we met to learn more about their request, SCPS mentioned several drivers that were unrelated to these supports (salary, political context, a change in bell schedule for middle schools, changes in leadership). Byrk et al., (2017) cautions about rushing to reach a solution, regardless of level of effectiveness. He defines solutionitis as, “The tendency to jump quickly on a solution before fully understanding the actual problem to be solved” (p.197). Instead of immediately trying to find proposed solutions to SCPS’ perceived problem of practice, the team conducted several intentional iterations of root cause analysis.

A further analysis of interviews, partner-provided surveys on teacher exits and mentoring, and literature pointed the team to a myriad of factors that were potentially contributing to Stafford’s pressing concern of low teacher retention rates. The initial focus on the analysis of new teacher onboarding programs shifted to the need for a cohesive and consistent experience for all ECTs to better impact overall retention efforts. Stafford is experiencing a particularly acute crisis; it exceeds the state averages in teachers leaving their district (Virginia Department of Education, 2022), has a higher percentage of both out of field and inexperienced teachers (Virginia Department of Education, 2023), and falls below neighboring districts in teacher salary. Its rate of growth in student population is some of the fastest in the state (Virginia Department of Education, 2023) which makes the issue of retaining ECTs even more critical.

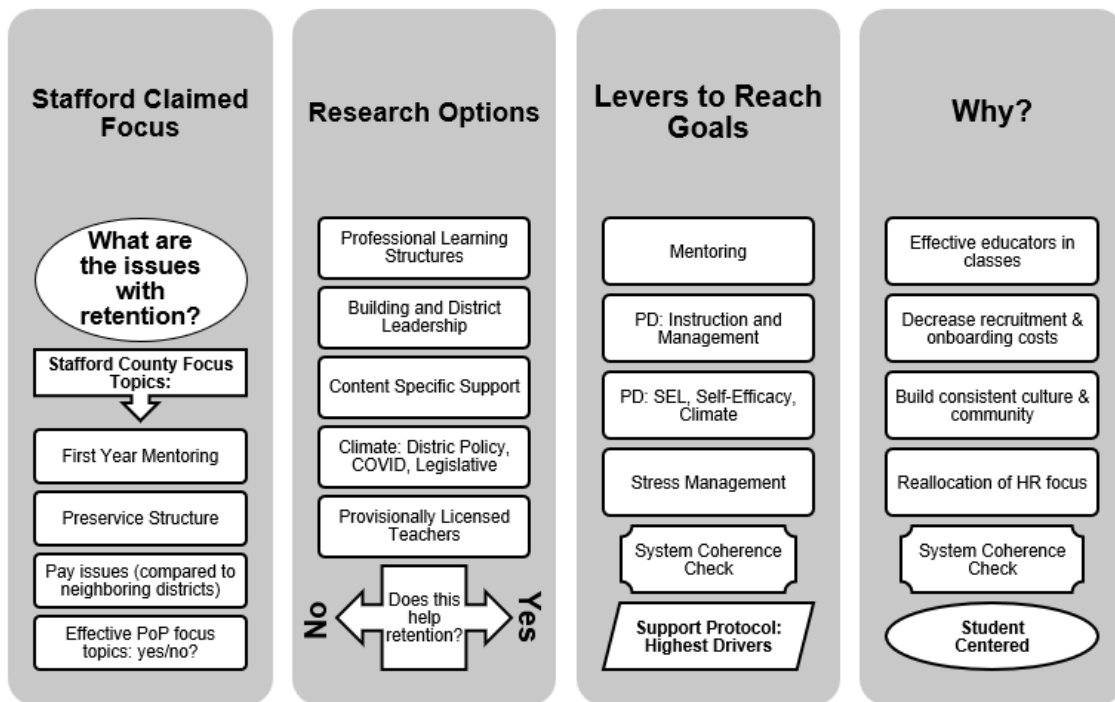
### **Identifying Root Causes**

In order to clarify the POP, the Capstone team used improvement science methods

including root-cause analysis (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020, p. 49). The Capstone team used the Five Why protocol (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020, p.51) to examine potential drivers by asking “Why” based on a clearly identified problem. The team engaged in this protocol in an iterative way; each found response provided an opportunity to drill down more specifically based on Stafford’s presented problem. Finally, the team completed a series of process maps which are found in Figure 2 and Figure 3.

**Figure 2**

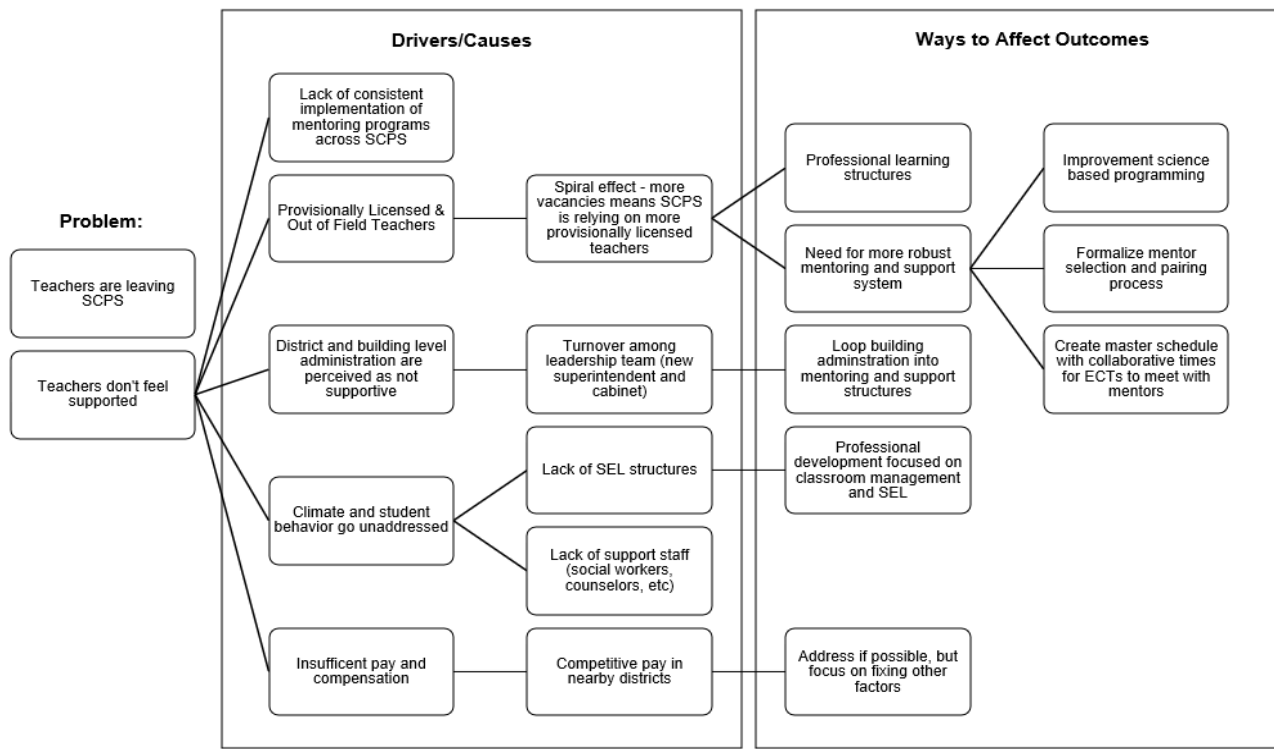
*Root Cause Process Map One*



*Note.* Here, the Capstone team considered their work in analyzing SCPS Mentor360 and exit survey data before identifying potential drivers for the identified problem of new teacher retention (column one). The team narrowed their focus to consider the different routes to improvement that research could support (column two). Column three lists different levers SCPS may consider activating based on the clarified POP, and column four attempts to highlight the user-centeredness of each potential pursuit of improvement.

**Figure 3**

*Root Cause Process Map Two*



*Note.* The process map illustrates the Capstone Team’s next iteration showing connections between potential drivers and outcomes for SCPS. All of these identified pathways are anchored to the larger identified problem of teacher retention.

During a final analysis, the Capstone teams used trending, thematic drivers to guide the discussion and ultimate creation of the revised actionable POP:

*Stafford County Public Schools is experiencing more teacher attrition than neighboring districts, particularly among Early Career Teachers. Data reveals the key drivers of teacher exits are financial (salary), lack of administrative support, and dissatisfaction with building climate. Stafford County also reported inconsistency with their expectations across schools within the district in the implementation of teacher support systems, and they do not currently have a differentiated, measurable long-term plan to support ECTs based on these identified drivers.*

### **Theory of Change and Research Questions**

A Theory of Change (TOC) suggests how measurable and individualized intervention may lead to systematic change. Hinnant-Crawford (2020) specifies, “A theory of change is the “why” of a change, whereas the theory of action is the “how” (p. 117). It uses evidence to help inform a responsive proposal that will lead to effective change, in this case, for SCPS. While the Capstone team initially focused on identifying measurable best practices for mentorship and strategies for supporting ECTs, we ultimately acknowledged that SCPS has already begun that work in a comprehensive way. Instead, we recognized that while SCPS has started building systems of support grounded by best practices for ECTs, there is not as much guidance in place for school leadership teams in implementing ECT support in a cohesive way across the division. Therefore, when it comes to affecting change for the experiences of ECTs in SCPS, the Capstone team identified the following theory of change (Figure 4):

**Figure 4***Identified Theory of Change*

<p><b><i>If SCPS enhances...</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● their current systems of support by identifying the factors that are working most effectively for Early Career Teachers...</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Then SCPS division-level leadership teams...</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● can advise building-level leadership teams by providing evidence based suggestions for effective and measurable support of their Early Career Teachers.</li> <li>● deepen the current quality of differentiated support for Early Career Teachers based on teachers' professional and communal needs.</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>...and building-level leadership teams will...</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● have actionable, cohesive, and sustainable structures to better support their Early Career Teachers.</li> <li>● help to provide measurable outcomes that better inform division-level decision making around long term Early Career Teacher support.</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Then SCPS' Early Career Teachers will...</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● increase their self-efficacy and sense of belonging in their school community.</li> <li>● retain through, and beyond, their first three years of teaching.</li> </ul>

A focus on finding what teachers and leadership teams are able to identify as effective will be the first step towards enhancing currently existing systems of support for ECTs. Those findings will help SCPS to provide more clear and explicit expectations for leadership teams, Ambassadors, and mentors based on what ECTs report as working best for them during their beginning years in the classroom. More clear and consistent expectations also creates more realistic opportunities to measure progress across the district. In an effort to focus on consistent ECT support across each of the 35 schools in Stafford County, the Capstone team crafted three Research Questions (RQs):

**1. What currently exists at the school and division levels to support Early Career Teachers?**

*Current Gap: Across the division, different schools offer differing levels and quality of support to their Early Career Teachers.*

*Research Goal: Identify the range of support that is currently available to Early Career Teachers in each school building. Identify division level support for Early Career Teachers that is currently available.*

**2. What considerations should be made by school-level leadership teams when implementing systems of support for Early Career Teachers in SCPS?**

2a. What's currently working for ECTs?

2b. How does SCPS know it's working?

*Current Gap: SCPS does not currently have a consistent way to identify what parts of their currently existing systems are working well for retaining ECTs.*

*Research Goal: A better understanding of what is working and what is not working will allow for SCPS leadership to refine their efforts by implementing actionable and evidence based suggestions for ECTs.*

**3. What collective needs of both a school and district must be considered in Early Career Teacher support?**

*Current Gap: SCPS' attention to division-wide needs may help them make systematic changes to better support ECTs.*

*Research Goal: Identify larger division themes that are influencing ECT experiences across all school buildings.*

## Chapter II: Literature Review

Chapter Two reviews literature connected to assessing the problem of Early Career Teacher retention. Here, the Capstone team outlines longstanding trends in teacher licensure and hiring at the national and state levels before further comparing those findings to the current status for Stafford. From there, this review offers contextual challenges to teacher retention by identifying the drivers of ECT attrition. Some of those drivers include compensation and pay (Steiner et al., 2023; Dilberti et al., 2021; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017), mental wellness (Wessels & Wood, 2019; Leiter & Maslach, 2017; Diliberti, 2021), lack of administrative support (McLaurin et al., 2009; Shuls & Flores, 2020), and a high-volume of student discipline (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2022; Welsh, 2023).

Finally, this review will define strategies suggested by the literature as working measurably-well for helping to retain ECTs. Among the several recommendations of the literature are the critical importance of dynamic administrative support and leadership (McLaurin et al., 2009; Shuls & Flores, 2020; Cells et al., 2023; Hamre et al., 2023), responsive Professional Learning (PL) (Carr et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2020; Cohen & Wiseman, 2022), and a measurable mentoring program (Dorner et al., 2020; Dawson, 2014; Virginia Board of Education, 2021). Although the literature presents a variety of reasons and contexts for attrition tied to Early Career Teachers, this chapter will primarily focus on a connection between levels of retention and school-based leadership, with the goal of providing an effective, sustainable, and measurable solution for Stafford County Public Schools (SCPS).

### **Recruitment and Retention**

Growing shortages have made it difficult to fill teacher vacancies with qualified educators. Pathways to teacher licensure were steadily evolving well before COVID-19, but the pandemic catalyzed the creation of a teacher-pool filled with professionals who earned their license by way of a non-traditional route.

#### **Growing Provisional Licenses**

At the conclusion of the 2022 school year, 9.5% of the Commonwealth's educators were eligible to teach by means of a nonrenewable, provisional license only, up from 7.7% of teachers who were provisionally licensed pre-pandemic (JLARC, 2022). During the 2021-2022 school year, Virginia issued a total of 8,434 provisional licenses (Cline, 2023). This number exceeds the pre-pandemic average of 6,787 annually allocated provisional licenses, reflecting a percentage increase of 24%. These short-term licenses granted by the VDOE are for educators who have not satisfied all of the state requirements to teach, but still have a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university. Provisional licenses allow teachers to complete teaching licensure requirements within a three year window.

#### **Rising Numbers of Out-of-Field Teachers**

Another 6.2% of Virginia teachers in SY 22 identified as teaching out-of-field (Peifer, 2023). An out-of-field teacher is an educator who has a teaching license, but has not completed coursework or certification in that content area. This percentage is an increase from the 2.4% average of teachers leading instruction out-of-field reported pre-pandemic (Peifer, 2023). Prior to the pandemic, Virginia recorded 2,100 teachers as out-of-field; in SY 22, this number grew to 5,350 (JLARC, 2022). This change matters to providing students with quality learning



experiences because without traditional methods of teaching coursework and content expertise, teacher effectiveness declines (JLARC, 2022).

Teacher attrition has wide-ranging negative impacts on the quality of education, student outcomes, school budgets, and the teaching profession as a whole. Reducing attrition rates and implementing strategies to support and retain teachers is essential for maintaining a stable and effective education system.

### **Contextual Challenges to Teacher Retention**

A sweeping concern across America is the shortage of a robust teacher pipeline to fill the demands of full time teacher positions. The ramifications prove disastrous to both students due to a lack of qualified teachers as well as districts who bear financial burdens to recruit and train an effective workforce, as noted in Kaufman et al. (2022), Castro (2023), and Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al. (2023). Teacher supply challenges are as much a reflection of retention challenges as they are of recruitment issues. Every teacher retained means fewer need to be recruited, so a systemic approach to addressing the teacher supply challenge must include measures aimed at improving retention.

### **Compensation and Pay**

Teacher compensation is especially acute in Virginia. Teacher wages in Virginia are almost 33% less than their peers in similarly educated professions, with Virginia currently ranking 25th in average salary for K-12 public school teachers at an average teacher salary of \$58,506 (compared to the national average of \$65,293) (Virginia Board of Education, 2022). Between 2015 and 2017, almost one quarter of the school divisions in Virginia experienced a decline in teacher salary (Sorenson et al., 2018). This has led to increased feelings of dissatisfaction among teachers, with 52% of Virginia teachers citing low pay as among the most

serious problems they face (JLARC, 2022). Low teacher pay along with long hours worked has often been cited as one of the largest motivators for teachers to leave the profession. When surveyed, only 24% of teachers felt their base salary was adequate, compared to 61% of other working adults (Steiner et al., 2023). Teachers are more likely to quit when they work in districts with lower wages and when their salaries are low (Allegretto & Mishel, 2016).

During the 2022-2023 school year, teachers reported working about 15 hours more than what is required by their contracts (Steiner et al., 2023). These longer hours combined with low salaries has resulted in what is often referred to as the “teacher pay penalty,” with teachers earning 17% less than comparable workers, with more experienced teachers facing a larger wage differential (Allegretto & Mischel, 2016). However, these estimates might actually overstate the comparability between teacher salaries and those of other workers given that teachers often work longer hours than what is required by their contracts and many do unpaid work over the summer to prepare for the next school year (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Early career and younger teachers (under 40) were more likely to cite low pay as their top reason for leaving, with 31 percent of younger teachers saying their salary was not sufficient to merit the stresses of teaching during the pandemic (Dilberti et al., 2021, p.7).

### **The Importance of Administrative Support**

Strong school leadership, particularly the principal, plays an important role in teacher retention (Becker & Grob, 2021). According to Boyd et al., (2011) school leadership is one of the most important factors impacting a teacher's decision to stay at their school or leave, surpassing even financial or salary concerns. Boyd et al. (2011) noted supportive administration was “more predictive of teachers’ intentions to remain in the school...than are the perceptions of any other school working condition” (p. 307). Boyd et. al. (2011) provide a helpful working

definition of “administrative support” as referring to “the extent to which principals and other school leaders make teachers’ work easier and help them to improve their teaching” (p. 307). A twenty year study further supports Boyd’s claim by stating, “research also shows clear links between effective leadership and important teacher outcomes, including more positive teacher working conditions and reduced turnover”(Grissom et al., 2021).

The importance of leadership at the building level is especially true for new teacher retention. School administrative support includes a variety of behaviors, from providing teachers with professional development opportunities, maintaining ongoing and positive communication, empowering teachers, and providing leadership opportunities for teachers (McLaurin et al., 2009; Shuls & Flores, 2020); however, ECTs need a balance too. ECTs should be empowered to say ‘no’ to preserve their energy for classroom instruction (Whitaker, et al., 2019). A supportive administrator understands this balance.

A study conducted by Becker and Grob (2021) determined a principal could improve teacher retention by prioritizing the following key areas: developing a shared vision, building trust, shared instructional leadership, promoting safe working conditions, and becoming bureaucratic shields for the teachers. The Becker and Grob (2021) study strengthens the assertion that a principal has a significant impact on teacher retention. Conversely, while the principal can positively impact a school’s retention efforts, Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) report one of the largest drivers of teacher attrition was “unhappiness with the school administration,” with 21% of teachers citing that as a reason for leaving the profession (p. 7). To combat this unhappiness with administration, especially for ECT’s, a connection between the two parties must exist, states Ghiraldini (2023). School administrators should assure the ECT that

they are on the same team, and create opportunities for teachers to reflect through frequent casual conversations with their administrators (Ghiraldini, 2023).

Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) noted that lack of administrative support has one of the highest impacts on teacher turnover percentages, with teachers being twice as likely to leave if they feel unsupported by administration. In particular, the researchers found teachers of color and teachers in high-poverty schools were more likely to cite being dissatisfied with administration as a reason for leaving the profession, exacerbating an already worrisome trend of higher teacher attrition rates among higher needs schools (including Title I schools). As Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) report, teacher turnover rates approach 25% among teachers who reported negative feelings about their administration, which was more than double the attrition rate of teachers who generally felt supported by their administration. This is supported by Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017), who found that receiving support from administration reduced the odds of first-year teachers leaving their school by almost half.

Further, teachers are more likely to indicate an intention to stay if they reported feelings of satisfaction with the leadership in their school, which “supersedes teacher need for higher pay” (Cells et al., 2023). Marinelli and Coca (2013) determined high levels of order within a school led to higher retention rates. The Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) echoes this, finding that “teachers often identify the quality of administrative support as more important to their decision [to leave or stay in the profession] than salaries”. Ghiraldini (2023) affirms this by ECTs stating, “the first few years for new teachers can be make or break, and school leaders can help ensure they want to keep teaching”.

### **Teacher Wellness**

Mental health concerns are another factor contributing to teacher retention (Mehta, 2023). The Educational Psychology Review (2022) supposes well-being consists of the following three dimensions: satisfaction with life, the absence of negative affect, and the presence of positive affect. When these three dimensions are present, one is considered to have a positive sense of well-being. Conversely, Bardach et al. (2022) maintains, having a sense of “ill-being,” the negative outcome of a low “well-being,” has significant negative ramification on mental health. The adverse effects of inadequate well-being encompass stress, burnout, and depressive symptoms like loss of interest, low mood, low self-efficacy, and anxiety (Maslach, 2001). These symptoms are triggered by chronic stress in the work environment, leading to feelings of being overwhelmed, exhausted, and an inability to cope (Leiter & Maslach, 2017). Unaddressed, these symptoms could contribute to a rise in teacher attrition (Bardarch, et al., 2021).

The teaching profession had already been dealing with teacher turnover due to high stress and burnout prior to the education events experienced during COVID-19 (Ryan et al., 2017). The alteration to instructional delivery and safety protocols during COVID-19 compounded the issues of stress and burnout for school teachers. Teachers needed to learn entirely new modes of instruction during remote learning (Diliberti, 2021). Oftentimes, learning these new technologies for virtual instruction led to teachers encountering technical difficulties, which added to stress and anxiety levels (Diliberti, 2021). Teachers also experienced longer work hours and less sleep as a result of having to revamp instruction (Diliberti, 2021).

One study conducted by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), revealed nearly one third “of public schools reported that the percentage of staff who have sought mental health services increased since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic” (“Mental Health and Well-Being,”

2022). When comparing the teaching profession up against other professions, such as healthcare and office workers, teachers reported higher levels of stress and anxiety (Kush et al., 2022).

When polling teachers, survey results showed teachers who were working remotely during the pandemic had higher levels of “depressive symptoms and feelings of isolation” (Kush et al., 2022).

Due to high levels of teacher burnout, teachers arguably now more than ever need to feel supported. School districts can learn from the impact COVID-19 had on teacher mental wellness when planning supports for teachers. Care should be given on how teachers are supported with new initiatives. Additionally, safeguards should be put in place to monitor teachers’ mental well-being. The goal of the support is to prevent teacher burnout, ultimately limiting the amount of educators leaving the field.

### **Student Behaviors**

The COVID-19 pandemic’s disruption to learning had a significant impact on student behaviors in the school setting, which is a high driver for teacher dissatisfaction in the workplace (IRIS, 2023). This is to be expected “given the substantial lost learning time, additional trauma and stress” experienced during COVID-19 (Welsh, 2023). Research conducted by the NCES (2022) indicated that “84 percent of public schools agreed or strongly agreed that students’ behavioral development has been negatively impacted” by the pandemic. “Tardiness and classroom disruptions” (School Pulse Panel, 2022) make up the majority of minor offenses affected by COVID-19.

Compared to pre-pandemic data, four main areas of prohibited student behavior experienced the most significant increases. These areas included the following offenses, “Classroom disruptions ... Acts of disrespect towards teachers and staff ... Rowdiness outside of

the classroom ... [and] prohibited use of electronic devices” (NCES, 2022). On a large scale, the 2021-2022 school year exhibited a national trend of increased “incidents involving student misconduct, crime and violence” (After COVID, 2023). With these new indicators present, staff support needs to be adapted to meet the needs. Early career teachers, specifically, will need additional or modified professional learning to improve skills in classroom management and relationship building to adequately meet their student needs. An absence of modified support leaves ECTs ill prepared to face the challenges present, leading them to become overwhelmed, stressed, and more likely to leave the classroom within their first three years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022).

### **Effective Methods to Retain Teachers**

Although there are persistent reasons for teachers leaving the field, there are also systematic structures that research suggests to support ECTs. According to Reitman and Karge (2019), six themes that emerge from data are required for teachers to remain in the profession: “individual relationships, pedagogical knowledge, teacher perceptions of professional competence, mentoring, professional learning, and reflection” (p. 14). Prelli (2016) asserts that in order to create actionable, cohesive and sustainable solutions, it is crucial to concentrate on specific themes. Prioritizing areas such as mentoring, enhancing instructional and cultural capacities of building-level leadership teams, and developing teacher efficacy is essential. A closer look at these drivers shows areas of policy, practice and research connected to retention.

### **Proactive Leadership**

School leaders are key individuals with the power to influence school effectiveness, bring about change, and impact teacher retention (Qadach et al., 2019). A study from The Learning Policy Institute (2017) states, “studies across the nation have found that the quality of leadership

can have a large effect on teacher turnover. “Strong leaders can inspire average teachers to greatness” Casas (2017), “and highly effective school leadership plays an instrumental role in supporting, inspiring, and guiding new teachers through this transitional phase of their career” (Cha & Cohen-Vogel, 2011).

Shuls and Flores (2020) recommend building level leaders create collaborative environments where novice teachers can shadow and learn from more experienced mentor teachers, including sharing a common planning time. Cells et al. (2023) highlight three specific attributes of effective principals that have had a higher success rate at retaining teachers: implementing effective management practices, building teacher capacity, and having strong content and pedagogical knowledge (p. 348). Becker et al. (2021) similarly suggest five key areas of focus for school principals in reducing teacher attrition: “shared vision developer, instructional leader, relational trust builder, safety officer, and bureaucratic shield” (p. 27).

Administrators should also be acutely aware of the workload they place on teachers, especially new teachers. Administrators should avoid a long and storied practice of providing the most difficult circumstances to new teachers (Barnum, 2019). In a research study out of Los Angeles, Barnum shares, “teachers in their first few years end up in classrooms with more struggling students.” Too often administrators enable a “rite of passage” mentality, where those veteran teachers have “paid their dues” and thus receive a more balanced work-load, and a roster considered favorable. By providing a manageable workload to new teachers they can focus their energies on honing their skills without the overwhelming stress of too many responsibilities and an unfair number of students with disruptive tendencies.



### ***Leadership Provides Ongoing Supports***

Building resilient new teachers is an ongoing venture for building level administrators. Navigating the ever-evolving landscape of education, school-based administrators face the monumental task of providing resources aimed at ensuring new teachers are successful. Creating social support beyond a mentoring program is a resource which building and division level administrators must create with intentionality (Pomalki, et. al., 2010). Supportive colleagues can create an environment where the teacher feels respected, can acquire new skills (Cohen & Wills, 1985), and provide opportunities for new perspectives on work-related issues (Kahn et al., 2006). These social supports are formed through the creation of the master schedule, the document which lists every teacher's class, planning period, and teacher's room number. Creating a master schedule which builds in time for collegial support is necessary (Lambersky, 2016). Strategies include building in common planning periods for teachers of the same content, and close room proximity to promote dialogue which builds in social support (Lambersky, 2016). Providing social and emotional learning, Greenberg (2017) posits, as a public health approach to education and its incorporation into the school dynamics can significantly amplify the outcomes for students and teachers alike. These social resources underline the importance of targeted social support and are linked to whether or not teachers intend to stay on the job (Bakker & Demerout, 2007).

### ***Coaching for Capacity-Building***

A school culture with a growth mindset increases the job satisfaction of its ECTs (Prelli, 2016). Instructional coaches have a pivotal role in sustaining this learning-culture (Aguilar, 2016). Once teachers identify their instructional goals, it is the job of a coach to participate in rigorous observation, feedback, and planning for continuous learning (Silver, 2022; Hamre et al.,

2023). The literature makes a distinction between active participation and evaluative participation. The job of a coach is not to evaluate a teacher's performance by facilitating and unannounced observation. Instead, active participation should be premeditated; when it is time for a coach to observe the identified problem statement in a classroom, they should confirm an ideal time with teachers for observations and immediate feedback (Sweeney & Mausbach, 2018). Knowing the most effective coaching honors a cyclical approach to support (Sweeney & Mausbach, 2018; Silver, 2022; Knight, 2017; Schulze, 2016) means feedback is the throughline for improvement. Not only should coaches consistently offer feedback, but they should also ask for feedback in order to not make assumptions about the support they are offering (Silver, 2022; Hamre et al., 2023). When coaches actively participate in these ways, there is evidence to support learning outcomes improve (CoachingReport; Carr et al., 2017) leaving teachers feeling more confident in their ability to successfully offer meaningful instruction to their students (Kavanagh, 2021).

### ***The Power of Strong Administrative Feedback for Early Career Teachers***

In a study conducted by Fry (2015), in which first year teachers were monitored and surveyed over the entire year, seventy-five percent were frustrated with the feedback they received from their administrators. In the early stages of a teaching career, Fry (2015) continues, new educators find themselves at a significant point of growth, not just in understanding their students, but also in crafting their own teaching styles. It is at this stage that feedback from building-level administrators — the principals and other leaders who know the school's unique environment inside out — can be an invaluable resource. This feedback isn't just about corrections or evaluations; it's about helping new teachers find their footing and grow in their roles (Goodwin, 2012), encouraging a path that harmonizes both with their personal strengths

and the specific needs of their students. Goodwin (2012) shares that new teachers often report they suffer from "benign neglect" of administrators. To help avoid this fate, administrators can cultivate relationships and build capacity by leveraging mentoring and feedback.

**Strong Feedback Creates Self-Efficacy.** Moreover, it is important for feedback to be empathetic (Gutierrez, 2018), acknowledging the emotional journey that comes with being a new teacher (Ovando, 2006). For new teachers, it's a time of both excitement and uncertainty. Gutierrez (2018) surmises that constructive feedback can help navigate these emotions by turning them into a force for personal and professional growth. In other words, feedback can serve as a steady hand, guiding new teachers through the highs and lows of their early career, offering support, encouragement, and constructive critique in balanced measure (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008).

In providing feedback, it's crucial for administrators to tailor their approach to each individual, recognizing their unique strengths and areas where they can improve (Ovando, 2006). This personalized approach ensures feedback is not just about pointing out shortcomings but also about celebrating successes (Kirtman & Fullan, 2011) and encouraging new teachers to build on their strengths. It's about creating a two-way street where new teachers can also share their perspectives, fostering a collaborative environment of mutual growth. It also requires principals to be trained in giving effective feedback (Gutierrez, 2018).

In conclusion, feedback from building-level administrators to new teachers holds a place of great significance in the early stages of a teaching career (Goleman & Senge, 2014). More than just a tool for improvement, it is a pillar of support, aiding new teachers in finding their own path in the complex landscape of education. Through thoughtful, constructive, and empathetic feedback (Gutierrez, 2018), administrators can help to nurture a new generation of teachers who

are not only proficient in their roles but also engaged, enthusiastic, and resilient in the face of challenges. This in turn creates a positive and vibrant school environment, where both teachers and students can thrive. It's a nurturing cycle that begins with understanding and guidance, fostering a space where the strategies suggested enhance teacher growth (Fullan & Boyle, 2014).

**Administrative Feedback Differentiated for a New Teacher.** Feedback for a new teacher is comparatively different than feedback for a veteran teacher, and a strong leader must differentiate their instructional leadership accordingly (Williamson & Blackburn, 2021). Further, the way leaders must provide feedback to a teacher who is not yet licenced or provisionally licenced also differs from how a teacher who has earned a degree in education must receive actionable and timely feedback around instruction. Administrative feedback is a pivotal cornerstone in a new teacher's development and growth within a school setting. At the very outset, it should be underscored, states Williamson and Blackburn (2021), that feedback from a building level administrator should strike a delicate balance between encouragement and constructive criticism. This implies nurturing the nascent potential of the teacher while honing their skills for long-term efficacy.

To begin with, a feedback process that emphasizes the strengths of the new teacher can be incredibly affirming. Feedback is one of the most powerful influences for new teachers, but this impact can be positive or negative (Hattie & Timperly, 2007). For this reason, it is critical the administrator understands its personnel and crafts the feedback accordingly (Walsh, 2022). Since there is a continuum of expertise found even amongst new teachers, it is important for leaders to find out where their teachers are on that expertise continuum (Heifetz & Linksy, 2017).

Failing to understand the needs of the new teacher and delivering the feedback in a way it will not be received as intended may lead to unintended consequences (Williamson & Blackburn,

2021). Instead of fostering growth, such approaches may hinder it, setting back teachers' development rather than advancing it (Costa & Garmston, 2006). It is not just about mentioning the teachers did a good job but delving deeper to pinpoint the exact moments where the teacher exhibited a strong understanding and connectivity with the students. This could encompass a range of abilities including innovative lesson planning, fostering a conducive learning environment, and showcasing patience and understanding with students (Williams, 2021). Highlighting these strengths not only encourages the teacher to further nurture these qualities but also aids in building their confidence.

Following the strengths, a detailed segment on areas for improvement would be critical. These shouldn't be presented as weaknesses but as opportunities for growth. For instance, if a teacher is struggling with classroom management, the administrator should provide specific examples observed during the class and then offer strategies or resources to improve in that area (Walsh, 2022). Feedback could involve suggesting workshops or training sessions available for novice teachers. Moreover, new teacher feedback may involve providing insights on developing a more interactive and inclusive teaching methodology that facilitates an active learning environment (Rusticus, et al., 2022).

Furthermore, feedback should be a continuous, iterative process, not a one-time event Williamson & Blackburn, (2021). This means the administrator should commit to revisiting the discussed points in the future to see how the teacher has progressed. In this ongoing dialogue, it should be two-way communication, where the teacher feels empowered to express their concerns, share their experiences, and seek guidance (Costa & Garmston, 2006). This creates a supportive, collaborative atmosphere that is conducive to the professional growth of the teacher.

Feedback, instructional and operational, should come from multiple aligned personnel to provide the new teacher with various perspectives of which they can choose. Often feedback from an administrator may seem punitive, so it's important teachers, especially new teachers, receive feedback from those who do not have the authority to place one on a growth plan (seen as a negative), or to reassign duties, or possibly fire. Brene Brown (2015), social worker and public speaker, states, "We need support. We need folks who will let us try on new ways of being without judging us." Having multiple voices providing feedback enables teachers to try new approaches, without fear of repercussions.

Regardless of who is providing the feedback, as long as it is aligned, the feedback should be delivered with empathy and understanding (Valenzuela, 2022). Teaching, especially in the early stages of one's career, can be exceedingly demanding and sometimes overwhelming. "A sensitive approach to feedback", Valenzuela (2022) states, "can make a considerable difference in encouraging the teacher to persevere through the challenges and grow in their new roles". Believing they were good at teaching was the top reason for staying according to the Why Teach Survey compiled by LKMco and Pearson (McNeil, 2015).

The feedback from a building level administrator to a new teacher should be a rich tapestry woven with threads of encouragement, detailed constructive criticism, and an ongoing commitment to the teacher's professional development (Valenzuela, 2022). The nuances of such feedback lie in its detailed, specific nature, and its orientation towards growth and development. It should be seen as a collaborative tool, guiding new teachers towards a path of continuous learning and adaptation, helping them become assets to the educational institution and fostering a nurturing environment for students to thrive in (Hattie & Timperly, 2007). By creating a feedback loop that is both encouraging and constructively critical, administrators can foster a

culture of excellence and continuous growth, nurturing the teachers to reach their highest potential, which may provide them the courage and resolve to remain in the field.

**Prioritizing School Culture.** School leaders must prioritize creating a positive and inclusive school culture (Grillo, 2021). A welcoming environment fosters a sense of belonging for teachers, especially new teachers, as this will enable them to invest their time, energy, and emotions to the school (DeBella, 2021). Without a strong sense of belonging, teachers will feel less loyalty to the school administration, the vision the administration has put in place, and to their colleagues around them (Bjorklund Jr., 2023). The longer this feeling persists, the more likely the teacher will begin to seek employment outside of the school (Cha & Cohen-Vogel, 2011).

When discussing a positive school culture, it is important to acknowledge the need to hire teachers with the same racial and cultural background as its students (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Ingersoll (2003) states the overall shortage of teachers and the underrepresentation of teachers of color has turned from a recruitment focus, to one of retention. Studies reveal a “revolving door” with large numbers of teachers of color leaving prior to retirement (Ingersoll, 2003). At 22%, black teacher turnover rates are nearly 50% greater than non-Black teacher turnover rates (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Developing a school culture that values diversity and its varied backgrounds, ethnicities, plays a significant role in teacher retention.

### ***Leaders Focus on Mental Health***

To combat teacher attrition resulting from a lack of well-being and mental health, building-level leaders must prioritize the growing mental health crisis in schools (Schaufeli & Greenglass, 2001). Nurturing the well-being and mental health of new teachers is critical (Bardach, et al., 2022) for all school-based administrative teams (Qadach, et al., 2019) to

maintain a positive learning environment. Building level school leaders are poised at an opportune position to foster a nurturing and inclusive environment that not only recognizes but actively attends to the mental health needs of new teachers. Nurturing their mental health goes beyond occasional workshops; it requires an environment steeped in understanding, patience, and proactive support. Establishing open channels of communication where ECTs can voice their concerns without fear of judgment or retaliation can be pivotal in ensuring mental tranquility and a sense of belonging (Wessels & Wood, 2019).

Going a step further, school leaders should strive to create a workplace environment that promotes the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of its teachers (Wessels & Wood, 2019), thereby carving a path for a harmonized school setting (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). Work-life balance should not just be a term thrown around but a practice entrenched in the daily workings of the school. School leaders can do so by setting reasonable expectations, encouraging self-care, and respecting the personal time of the teachers. It is not uncommon for new teachers to be overwhelmed with work, and here, the role of a leader is to guide them in effectively managing their time without succumbing to burnout (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). Teacher burnout has been linked to a low sense of well-being (Hakanen, et al., 2006), poor mental health (Schonfeld & Bianchi, 2016; Capone et al., 2019), and job satisfaction (Robinson, et al., 2019). School leaders can mitigate teacher burnout by building an empathetic rapport and being attuned to the needs of teachers leaders can foster a community where teachers feel valued and supported, which would invariably reflect in their teaching methods, creating a ripple effect of positivity and engagement in the classrooms.

In addition to being a support system, leaders should facilitate professional development sessions (Hausman & Goldring, 2001) focusing on self-care, and resilience-building,



incorporating feedback from new teachers to ensure relevance and improved student achievement (Handford & Leithwood, 2013). By taking a proactive stance, school leaders can build a foundation of trust (Handford & Leithwood, 2013) and open dialogue that stands the test of time, where the focus shifts from mere survival to thriving, paving the way for a nurturing and inclusive educational environment for all. Through a conscientious and human-centered approach, building-level school leaders can steer the ship towards an environment where the mental health of new teachers is not just a priority but a revered value, nurturing a generation of educators who are well-rounded and mentally resilient, ready to shape the minds of the future.

### **Promising Policy Solutions**

Tom Gasner (1995), designer of the longest-running mentoring program in the United States at University of Wisconsin-Whitewater Beginning Teacher Assistance Program, provides suggestions for developing a mentoring program based on the experiences at UW-Whitewater (Perry, B., & Hayes, K., 2011). Gasner surmised that because of local differences, individual school districts should design a mentoring program that suits the needs of the district. Gasner argues it is important for the entire faculty to welcome the beginning teacher, not just the principal or the mentor. In effect, Gasner is arguing for social integration into the school community.

From a state success lens, Virginia specifically took steps to announce \$12 million for teacher recruitment and retention, including “Grants to Support Tuition and Fees for Current & Aspiring Educators” in a press release from VDOE (2022, January 14). Notably, these funds are part of the \$12 million ESSER-III funded state-level efforts aimed to focus on teacher recruitment and retention. The press release (VDOE 2020) further explains that the grant funds are to encourage and assist aspiring educators and other school staff to earn state teaching

licensure. These steps illustrate the state's need to financially incentivize teachers to become licensed.

Parallel to this grant is a national Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program which allows for forgiveness of up to \$17,500 on student loans (U. S. Department of Education, 2022). Under the Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program, if a candidate teaches full time for five complete and consecutive academic years in a low-income school or educational service agency, and meet other qualifications, they may be eligible for forgiveness of up to \$17,500 on their Direct Subsidized and Unsubsidized Loans and Subsidized and Unsubsidized Federal Stafford Loans.

### **The Role of Self-Efficacy**

A better sense of self-efficacy is connected to job satisfaction and ultimately teacher retention (Darver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Cohen & Wiseman, 2022). Teacher effectiveness is one of the most prominent factors with the ability to influence student outcomes (Karim et al., 2021; Hattie, 2020); one powerful driver for effectiveness is a teacher's own belief that they can offer meaningful learning to affect desirable changes for students (Guo et al., 2012). As this belief strengthens, educators take pride in improving their teaching skills because they believe students depend on the quality instruction they offer. A teacher's self-efficacy refers to their personal belief that they have the ability to perform the actions required to make progress towards a measurable goal (Karim et al., 2021). It is important to note a strong sense of self-efficacy has a wide range of outcomes for students including positive effects on cognitive achievements and attainment (Guo et al. 2012; Hattie, 2020).

When it comes to professionals newly entering the classroom, swiftly acquiring a sense of self-efficacy has been directly connected to rates of ECT retention (Renbarger & Davis, 2019). Divisions may wonder how they can help ECTs develop a stronger belief in their own

ability to deliver meaningful learning to students. This belief may ultimately impact an ECT's decision to stay in the classroom (Klassen et al., 2009; Renbarger & Davis, 2019).

Having a strong vision and mission in place will enable staff to understand their overall purpose (Ensley et al., 2006). With clearly defined action items to support the vision and mission, a teacher is more likely to be comforted by knowing how they can contribute (Albert, 2020), and these action items enable teachers to see a clear path to early success. This early success will grow their self-efficacy (Lambersky, 2016). Having a high belief in oneself is a driver in job satisfaction, and ultimately, teacher retention (Albert, 2020). An inability to have early success can lead teachers to experiencing workplace stress and anxiety. Such a reflective look is powerful; teachers' self-perception is a key driver for engagement, effectiveness, and retention. Three of the most impactful supports in a ECT's process of developing a strong sense of self-efficacy are complex professional learning, quality curricular resources that endorse evidence based best practices, and an accessible support team of coaches and colleagues (Hattie, 2020; Karim et al., 2021; DuFour, 2014; Waters, 2019; Klassen et al., 2009; Renbarger & Davis, 2019).

### **Comprehensive Professional Learning**

Access to consistent, high-quality PL has been proven to improve an ECT's likelihood for continuing in the classroom within the first four years of their career. Unfortunately, traditional PL often fails to be differentiated and has been found to be incidental and not structured in a way that promotes complex learning by teachers (Carr et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2020; Cohen & Wiseman, 2022). These sessions tend to be procedural with a focus on teacher-centered instruction vs. student-centered learning (Redding & Henry, 2018) They are also usually large, single stop sessions instead of ongoing, sustained opportunities to learn (Cohen & Wiseman,

2022). One-stop workshop learning is especially unsuccessful for ECTs and professionals lacking institutional knowledge due to an alternative route to licensure (Dorner et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2020; Redding & Smith, 2016).

### ***Professional Learning Communities***

When it comes to encouraging the evolution of current PL practice to more complex learning access for ECTs, many divisions have considered how small teams of teachers may further develop together over time. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are defined as small groups of teachers committed to, "...a collaborative effort with the explicit goal of improving practice, often with a facilitator who guides discussion by focusing the discourse of the group on critical analysis" (McConnell & Parker, 2013; Attard, 2012). They may also be described as professional spaces with shared vision and values (Lumpe, 2007). This idea originates from the field of community-based adult education whereas a person's holistic consideration should be involved in the learning opportunities they are afforded (Webster-Wright, 2009; DuFour 2014). In a collaborative PLC model, professionals learn together over time, and are given the chance to participate in a social inquiry that provides the opportunity to, "...address issues of social justice and diversity" (Webster-Wright, 2009; Campbell 2017; Dufour et al., 2006). Here, the learning is not solely based on specific content. Rather, teachers can team up to talk about the process of learning and highlight what potential barriers, social or academic, might exist to impact student opportunities for progress. At the heart of the PLC structure is collaboration.

When leaders are able to prioritize grade or course level PLCs within their building's schedule, it leaves room for PL to happen during the school day with colleagues who are serving within the same community. PL that is presented within a PLC structure provides the opportunity

for ongoing support for collaborative teams of teachers to, “...actively explore and test teaching strategies relevant to their own teaching contexts” (McConnell & Parker, 2013). Within a PLC structure, a team can receive strategy or content-specific learning before turning that learning into classroom practice. Once a new strategy is tested in a classroom, teachers return to their PLC team to reflect on implementation and receive feedback from their colleagues before evaluating the overall results of the new practice (Lumpe, 2007; Attard, 2012). By honoring these additional, embedded practices, PLCs have recursive and extended opportunities to implement a single strategy many times based on the feedback they receive from their colleagues or instructional leaders.

ECTs who serve in schools where their perception is an environment that is more collaborative are proven to stay in the teaching profession for a longer period of time (Van de Borre et. al, 2021). Dr. Patricia Waters (2019) studied the impact of PLC work on ECTs and found new teachers who participate in healthy PLCs had significant increases in performance and confidence. The strongest significance Waters (2019) found was that ECTs who function as a part of a well-established PLC develop resilient feelings of well-being. The ECTs felt valued and supported, and were more likely to continue their work in their current teaching placement than other ECTs who did not have access to the support of a PLC. Further, DuFour’s work (2014) suggests PLCs are the most efficient and effective way to support new teacher needs because they provide space for teachers to ask questions, admit uncertainties, and authentically engage in continued learning directly connected to instructional needs. Schools prioritizing common planning time for PLC work may still recognize logistical obstacles, particularly when PLCs are built with several ECTs who may not yet have the craft of planning under their professional belts (Wageman & Lowe, 2019).

*Virtual PLCs (VPLCs)*

While PLCs are becoming increasingly popular in schools thanks to their strong support from the National Commissions on Teaching and America's Future (2003) and similar scholarship, it is not one that is yet universal. It can be difficult to structure a schedule around teams having common, collaborative time for planning and learning (Courtney et al., 2017). Districts may also have limitations when it comes to the number of faculty teaching certain classes or similar subject areas which presents a barrier to having access to homogenous groups of teachers (McConnell & Parker, 2013; Campbell 2017). One proposed solution to this logistical barrier is the use of virtual PLCs (VPLCs) (McConnell & Parker, 2013; Attard, 2012).

VPLCs may be particularly helpful for teachers serving in rural or more isolated areas where finding access to PL programs that meet their specific needs is difficult. While VPLCs do not allow for teachers to physically be in the same space, an analysis of feedback data suggests they are still an effective method for academic and instructional discourse as well as professional networking (McConnell & Parker, 2013). The value of access to a PLC to further instructional knowledge and practice proved to be more important than the modality of the meeting. Whether teachers met and learned virtually or face-to-face, there were six key components that appeared in the answers of all McConnell and Parker's (2013) focus groups by the conclusion of their study. Teachers, no matter the mode of the PLC, experienced collaboration in very similar manners:

1. Sharing articles or information found by others
2. Group members giving a new perspective on evidence
3. Hearing practical solutions others have tried
4. Accountability to the group

5. Focus on professional discourse
6. Developing professional friendships

Though a building finds a way to provide common planning or virtual access to PLCs for their teachers, it also does not necessarily mean their professional learning will suddenly become effective. When PLCs include teachers who do not share a common goal, the groups are likely to be less effective in bringing about changes in teacher practice (McConnell & Parker, 2013).

Also, as mentioned by Lumpe (2007), a PLC in best practice must have guidance and feedback from an adept administrative team who sets and inspects expectations for progress. Without a dynamic leadership team, (V)PLCs cannot thrive.

### *Asynchronous Learning Networks*

Emerging from a global pandemic has affected the way many divisions may think about online access to complex PL. Asynchronous Learning Networks (ALN) can be defined as an opportunity to, "...combine self-study with substantial, rapid, asynchronous interactivity with others; in ALN, learners use computer and communications technologies to work with remote learning resources that may include coaches and other learners, but without the requirement to be online at the same time" (Goodwin et al., 2001). In some cases, states Goodwin et al., (2001), ALN may include occasional synchronous online sessions for collaboration, as well. Examples of asynchronous learning include teacher social networks, discussion boards, self-paced online courses, and resource-sharing websites (Bates & Phalen, 2016).

ALNs can be useful for extending interactions between ECTs and content or instructional experts that would be difficult to provide at scale in any other format (Bates & Phalen, 2016; Varkonyi, 2017). They allow teachers to select specific learning goals and styles that best suit their needs (Bates & Phalen, 2016; O'Byrne & Pytash, 2015). They also could serve as the

conduit between a school or division's offerings of annual PL and a teacher's specific needs. For example, if a division office hands each school a prefixed list of PL sessions for the school year, but there is not a session specific to a particular teacher's need, an ALN would provide them virtual access to that knowledge or coaching (Bates & Phalen, 2016). It may also be the case that particular expertise is not available in a school or division, but it is available online.

Opening the access doors to all virtual platforms and opportunities for learning may be dizzying for teachers trying to find quality PL fits for their personal learning goals (O'Byrne & Pytash, 2015). Divisions should consider how they will select and provide access to platforms and resources that complement the instructional vision they have set for specific groups of schools or teachers (Varkonyi, 2017; O'Byrne & Pytash, 2015). In this case, what points of asynchronous access may be best suited for ECTs? From there, division or school level leadership teams can curate personalized PL plans to best support the timely and responsive needs of their new teachers. If a virtual PL playlist is not intentionally built to match the larger vision of the division and school building, the learning may feel disconnected and irrelevant. It should also be noted collaboration is still an imperative part of any type of successful PL structure, so school and division-based teams should consider how they will save and provide space for ECTs to network after the independent learning has been completed (Bates & Phalen, 2016; McConnell & Parker, 2013; Lumpe, 2007). Regardless of the platform, professional learning allows the transaction of knowledge and opens the possibility of collaboration, collegiality and building trust, an important driver to an effective instructional learning community.



## **Mentor Programs**

In addition to complex professional learning, establishing a mentorship program for ECTs improves retention (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010). A strong mentorship program provides a safety net, ensuring new teachers have a colleague to turn to for guidance, emotional support, and answers to day-to-day questions (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2008). A school division's commitment to understanding the complexities involved in creating a sustainable and effective mentor program is also essential. Traditionally, mentor programs are reserved for new teachers who might benefit from the help and advice of a more experienced teacher in their first few years in the classroom (Dorner et al., 2020; Dawson, 2014; Virginia Board, 2021). In Virginia, all public school divisions are required to implement a *Mentor Teacher Program* that satisfies the requirements and expectations outlined in the Code of Virginia, § 22.1-305.1 (Virginia Board of Education, 2021). Within these expectations are guidelines for division and school level leadership teams, suggestions for program design, professional learning, and program evaluation (Virginia Board of Education, 2021). Though the parameters according to these guidance documents are vast, there seems to be a noticeable emphasis on the importance and quality of *mentors* and *measurability*.

### ***What Makes an Effective Mentor?***

An ideal mentor is a guide who helps support another teacher in a gradual release to successful and independent classroom practice (SREB, 2018). In best practice, mentors are collaborative, goal focused, problem solvers who provide actionable feedback to their mentee in a way that is consistent and comprehensible (Alred and Garvey, 2014; Carr et al., 2017). They also are identified via personal recruitment efforts and have substantial classroom teaching experience; they are skilled and reflective practitioners in both their content areas and classroom

management (SREB, 2018); and committed to their own continual growth and development (Weimer, 2020). Finally, mentors should be well-versed in division policy and procedure, and in school and community climate and culture (Zaffini, 2015; Weimer, 2020). For example, they should have a comprehensive understanding of their school's student and family needs related to learning, but also to wellness, value, and safety.

School divisions usually assign mentors to mentees based on location and content expertise, but there may be far less consideration when it comes to a mentor's ability to help provide a quality, supportive experience for a new teacher (Dawson, 2014). This, of course, is most likely connected to an array of reasons including veteran teachers' willingness to participate in a mentor program, incentives included for mentors, a lack of clear, consistent structures for mentor/mentee expectations, time, and cost restraints (Carr et al., 2017; Dawson, 2014). However, this piece is absolutely pivotal in the success of a mentoring program.

The caliber of mentor assignments causes variation in a new teacher's experiences (Blazar, 2020; Cohen & Wiseman, 2022; Van den Borre et al., 2021), and ultimately has the potential to impact early career teacher retention (Weimer, 2020). In fact, without an incredibly intentional effort to connect mentees with a highly qualified mentor, research "...finds no evidence that assignment to a mentor is linked with reduced odds of leaving teaching for alternatively certified teachers..." It is only when ECTs receive "...helpful feedback from their mentor, they are predicted to leave teaching at a much lower rate" (Redding & Smith, 2016). This correlation shows the importance of an effective and differentiated mentoring program to build the capacity and resilience of Early Career Teachers .

### ***Connecting ECTs With the Right Mentor***

Research about how mentors should be selected is not nearly as robust as what qualities

make for great teacher-mentors. However, the literature that does exist suggests the process for mentor identification must be rigorous, well-defined, transparent, and fair (Moir et al., 2009; Weimer, 2020). Instead of mentors being identified from a single-dimension, usually veteran teachers, experienced mentors, and schools and district administrators would all participate in identifying teacher-leaders who create and adhere to selection criteria that endorse accountability for high standards that work in alignment with the mission of schools and the larger division (Moir et al., 2009; Zaffini 2015; Weimer, 2020). Mentors being selected based solely on their reputations with students or colleagues as being highly regarded has been proven ineffective (Bartell, 2005; Weimer, 2020), thus bolstering the concept of a selection process driven by holistic and comprehensive criteria versus anecdotal recommendations.

Mentors are teachers-of-teachers, and with a field of new educators arriving to the classroom without traditional training, the requirements for mentors to work with adults of various backgrounds is becoming more and more strenuous (Weimer, 2020). Even if a mentor is understood to be a phenomenal classroom teacher, leading learning for students proves to be very different from supporting and facilitating learning for adults (Berg & Conway, 2016; Zaffini, 2015) especially when a teacher is responsible for sharing *why* they make the instructional or classroom decisions that they do. This learning becomes even more challenging with new teachers who have received zero hours of traditional coursework in their classroom preparation. Mentor selection and connection with novice teachers certainly plays a part in a program's success, but research suggests what may be equally important is a mentor's own access to ongoing development themselves (Weimer, 2020; Dawson, 2014; New Teacher Center, 2023).

### ***Ongoing Development of Mentors***

Mentor training should include opportunities for critical self reflection, access to new

instructional strategies, and learning connected to new techniques and technology that may improve teaching (Weimer, 2020). In fact, Koballa et al. (2010) describes one of the most valuable developmental tools for mentors within an established program being time to reflect on their past teaching experiences and being mentored themselves as novice teachers. These help a mentor's own self-efficacy to develop which means better and more effective partnerships for new teachers, and an ultimate impact on retention (Callahan, 2016). Potentially, new teachers with access to great mentors may also consider becoming a mentor themselves, thus continuing a cycle of effective mentoring and teacher retention (Weimer, 2020; Gagen & Bowie, 2005).

There also seems to be a throughline within ECT support by way of a division's commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). The New Teacher Center (2023) reports more than 50% of teachers in high-needs districts leave within the first five years; schools that are traditionally "hard to staff" have the highest rates of turnover among new teachers (Learning Policy Institute, 2017) and are less likely to have mentors in their same grade level, content area, and school which makes it incredibly difficult to have consistent conversations around instruction, classroom management, and lesson planning (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). ECTs serving historically marginalized communities report being underprepared to meet the needs of their culturally and linguistically diverse students (Nickel & Crosby, 2021; Nelson & Guerra, 2014; New Teacher Center, 2023). Mentoring programs, coaching, and PL must focus on ways to promote equitable learning and development of cultural competence for teachers and leaders (Reist, 2020; Nickel & Crosby 2021). Novice teachers who have had access to DEI training by way of their teacher-prep program notice a glaring deficiency as they enter teaching experiences that have been built on antiquated systems that don't center equity throughout all of their instructional and communal service (Lee, 2006; Reist, 2020). Especially in underserved

communities where there is a higher representation of students coming from low-income families, ECT support being built on a commitment to equity is critical to retention (Kardos & Johnson, 2008; Reist, 2020; Achinstein & Athanases, 2005).

Notice that these suggestions stretch well beyond a singular week of orientation or a program built on a prescriptive and regimented approach to mentoring, and that is because preparation and support must be personalized in order to be most effective (Weimer, 2020). Mentoring cannot be reduced to simple strategies or tips, rather the focus must be on a systematic and recursive approach for teachers, novice and mentors, to develop, apply, and reflect on appropriate knowledge and skills (Hall et al., 2017; Weimer, 2020).

### **Measuring Success**

Though providing mentoring for ECTs is a state requirement of every public school division in Virginia (Virginia Board of Education, 2021), the way each division applies the elements for evaluation is left up to their own resolution (see Appendix B). This causes variance because, when left to each individual school building in a division, there are often different parameters placed around the obligation to participate in new teacher mentoring programs, coaching frameworks, and long term PL. Such variance may also include the target audience for support and what incentives are being offered to new teachers, mentors, and school leaders to continue their quality participation in the program (Van den Borre et al., 2021). Changes in ECT support take time to faithfully implement and promote, ultimately, impact changes to downstream outcomes like student achievement and retention (Kennedy, 2016; Cohen & Wiseman, 2022). For these reasons, it can be extremely difficult for a large school division to assess the quality of mentor-mentee programs, coaching, and PL efforts at scale. Even the most established organizations built to support ECT retention efforts (New Teacher Center, 2022)

report the effectiveness of in-service training is challenging to measure and remains largely unclear (Hammond & Gardner, 2017; Van den Borre et al., 2021). In order to improve an outcome, an organization must ensure progress can be measured (Bryk et al., 2015). Applying a consistent framework for measurement of impact is a critical need for evaluating currently existing systems and processes to become more efficient, effective, and cohesive (Bryk et al., 2015).

### **Chapter III: Methods**

SCPS is committed to building, implementing, and improving systems of support for their ECTs. Even so, SCPS continues reporting comparatively higher numbers of ECTs than neighboring divisions and the state of Virginia at large, making a focus on retention and Early Career Teacher support imperative (A. Schutz, Personal Communication, July 10, 2023). The literature reports higher rates of ECT satisfaction and retention in school communities with high quality mentor-mentee experiences (Blazar, 2020; Cohen & Wiseman, 2022; Van den Borre et al., 2021), strong administrative leadership and instructional support (Podolsky et al., 2016), and supportive working environments (Kahn et al., 2006, Lambersky, 2016). For Stafford, increasing ECT retention rates will require gaining clarity around what types of building-level supports are being offered and working most effectively, including and beyond Mentor360, to positively affect ECT experiences. Without a more firm understanding of what experiences and supports are motivating ECTs to stay in SCPS beyond their first three years of teaching, Stafford's attempt to refine and enhance their current systems of support has the potential to be disconnected from the actual needs and experiences of the new teachers they are trying to retain.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The goal of this study was to help address the actionable Problem of Practice (POP) by developing a more precise understanding of how effectively ECT support is being implemented throughout their division. To form a comprehensive understanding of currently existing support and what is working best for ECTs, the team considered the perspectives of Early Career Teachers and of building level leadership teams striving to provide consistent and ongoing support to their new teachers. Capturing perspectives and feedback from diverse teams of professionals in SCPS surfaced inconsistencies in implementation of ECT support at the division

and building levels. With a clearer understanding of what is offered and what is working well for ECTs in Stafford, the Capstone team was able to target recommendations and steps to help SCPS enhance their current Early Career Teacher support practices.

### **Positionality of the Capstone Team**

As the Capstone team initiated this work, we found it critically important to acknowledge the experiences we possess that shape and inform the way we navigate this work. We all readily acknowledge the privilege that is afforded to us as white, able-bodied professionals who have access to opportunities for continuing education at this doctoral level. While we do not lead any of the efforts for SCPS, we all also recognize the biases that exist due to our world views as teachers, administrators, and division-level leaders who were all, at one time, also ECTs. Though we all experienced lives as Early Career Teachers, our experiences do not necessarily reflect those of teachers leading learning in today's world nor in the local context of Stafford. Our commitment was to approach this work with extreme care and responsibility as to better support teachers and leadership teams who have pledged their best professional efforts to each of their school communities.

### **Research Questions**

Through our field work, the Capstone team aimed to answer the following questions:

- 1. What currently exists at the school and division levels to support Early Career Teachers?**

*Current Gap: Across the division, different schools offer differing levels and quality of support to their Early Career Teachers.*

*Research Goal: Identify the range of support that is currently available to Early Career Teachers in each school building. Identify division level support for Early Career Teachers that is currently available.*



**2. What considerations should be made by school-level leadership teams when implementing systems of support for Early Career Teachers in SCPS?**

- 2a. What's currently working for ECTs?
- 2b. How does SCPS know it's working?

*Current Gap: SCPS does not currently have a consistent way to identify what parts of their currently existing systems are working well for retaining ECTs.*

*Research Goal: A better understanding of what is working and what is not working will allow for SCPS leadership to refine their efforts by implementing actionable and evidence based suggestions for ECTs.*

**3. What collective needs of both a school and district must be considered in Early Career Teacher support?**

*Current Gap: SCPS' attention to division-wide needs may help them make systematic changes to better support ECTs.*

*Research Goal: Identify larger division themes that are influencing ECT experiences across all school buildings.*

**Connecting Data to the Research Questions**

It was critical for the Capstone team to consider diverse and quality data during data collection and analysis. The team mapped data sources directly to each Research Question (RQ) and triangulated diverse sources of data to corroborate themes discovered during analysis. Triangulation helps to make findings more valid, and can help to reduce biases that may be present when using a single source for data collection (Bhandari, 2023). The alignment of data sources to research questions and to one another can be found in Table 5.

**Table 5***Connecting research questions to data collection*

Research Questions (RQs)	*Secondary Data Analysis October 2023- January 2024	Teacher Survey November- January 2024	Principal Interviews January 2024
1. What currently exists at the school and division levels to support Early Career Teachers?	X	X	X
2. What considerations should be made by school-level leadership teams when implementing systems of support for Early Career Teachers in SCPS?		X	X
3. What collective needs of both a school and district must be considered in Early Career Teacher support?		X	X

*Note.* Table 5 shows data collection aligned to each of the team’s research questions. \*Secondary datasets from SCPS included exit surveys, Mentor360 data, school-leadership profile composites, and teacher profile composite information by school. The teacher survey and principal interviews were created and conducted by the Capstone team.

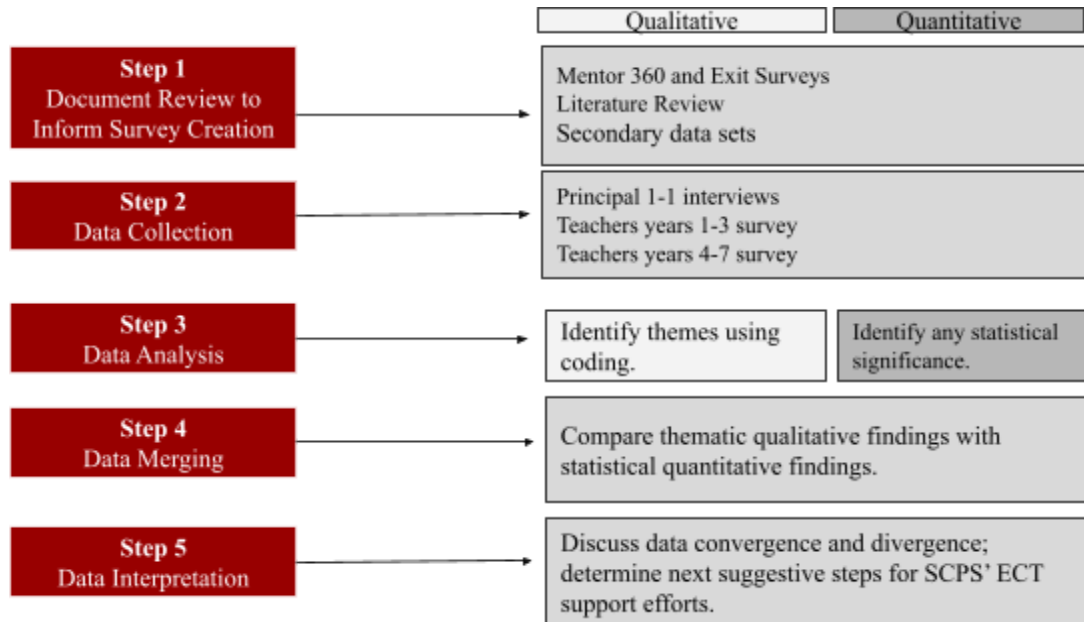
### **Research Design**

The Capstone team used a mixed-methods design in our efforts to collect diverse and valid data from SCPS. We would analyze findings from secondary data sets, teacher survey

responses, and principal interviews to find larger themes supported by multiple sources. Figure 5 outlines the process used through the methods portion of our work.

**Figure 5**

*Capstone Team's Data Collection Process*



*Note.* Figure 5 provides an explicit description of the iterative process for collecting and analyzing data connected to better understanding current practices for supporting ECTs in SCPS.

Before designing the Teacher Survey or questions to accompany principal interviews, the Capstone team reviewed documents to learn more about ECT support and implementation in SCPS and gather existing information connected to each of the defined research questions and the secondary datasets provided by the Stafford team. These documents included exit surveys, Mentor360 data, school-leadership profile composites, and teacher profile information by school. This work was imperative to building responsive questions for both the teacher survey and principal interviews that would yield new findings to help clarify division, building, and professional needs of ECTs.

Survey and interview questions were designed to be clear, specific, and aligned to the three Research Questions driving the Capstone team's work. After conducting a thorough analysis and review of the secondary datasets, the team presented a mixed-methods survey to collect information about ECTs (years 1-7) to SCPS' leadership and specialist team. The teacher survey provided the opportunity to collect qualitative and quantitative data that would help create a robust composite of ECT experiences. Each section was carefully designed to collect new learning around how ECT support at the division, school, and classroom levels was perceived by new teachers. The survey utilized branching and skip logic based on participants responses to ensure only the relevant questions were presented to participants.

The Capstone team leveraged the established relationships made by SCPS' Coordinator of Professional Learning for New Teacher Support, Dan Reichard, to send email requests for ECTs to complete the team's survey (Appendix C). In an attempt to collect valid results from participants, identifying markers for each response were limited to the participant's current school placement, role in the building, licensure status, and years of service. No names or employee IDs were collected unless desired by the participant.

Running concurrently with the ongoing ECT teacher survey, were virtual one-on-one interviews set with building principals. During each interview, principals were asked eight questions that were built to align with parts of the teacher survey, and to the team's Research Questions. The questions were built and vetted to ensure as little bias as possible with the ultimate goal of collecting more information about school-specific supports for ECTs, leadership teams' confidence around supporting new teachers, and principals' access to PL connected to ECT support (Appendix D). To ensure quality responses, principals who participated in these interviews were provided with all eight questions before each session began. They were also

asked for permission to record each session with the promise their name or school building would not be used in the final analysis of presented findings. The Capstone team took notes as each member conducted their interviews; the notes were later coded to identify themes among principal responses. These data were used with the teacher survey responses to begin identifying converging and diverging themes across the division.

### **Survey and Interview Responses**

The initial email to SCPS teachers who fit the survey criteria was sent out on November 30, 2023. A follow-up reminder was sent in early January, 2024 to help boost participation, and the survey closed January 12, 2024. After the closing of the survey, responses were analyzed by the team to determine statistical validity and ensure validity of the responses as we began our data analysis. Overall, the team received 177 total responses to the teacher survey, 94 of which were from Early Career Teachers years 1-3 and 83 from teachers years 4-7 , ensuring that our data was representative of the intended audience.

The team also conducted virtual interviews with willing principals between January 3, 2024 and January 12, 2024. The team interviewed a total of 11 principals (seven elementary, three secondary, and one specialized center), during which team members took notes; the notes were later compared and coded to identify themes among principal responses. The data yielded from the interviews was then merged with the survey responses to provide a comprehensive data set that the team then used to develop our findings and recommendations.

### **Data Analysis and Triangulation**

#### **Quantitative Analysis**

The Capstone team used Google Forms to create and administer the teacher surveys, and to manage data collection utilizing Google Sheets. Once the raw data from the surveys were

received, the team organized and sorted the multiple-choice, multiple-response and Likert scale responses across several variables, including school site, licensure status, and plans for returning to SCPS. Then, as a team, the responses were analyzed to determine equitable representation in the responses, including frequency distributions and any variability (especially between different school sites).

### **Qualitative Analysis**

The Capstone team collected the responses to free-response questions on a separate Google spreadsheet for our qualitative analysis. As a team, we analyzed the free-response survey data, and engaged in a coding process in order to identify trends and themes that emerged in teacher and leader feedback. We used both Voyant tools and Dedoose, online software programs, to analyze the full text of participant responses. As a team, we developed a codebook to look for emerging themes and patterns in the responses. The development of an agreed upon set of codes assisted in generating meaningful themes where we see overlap in participant responses that can be categorized together (Billups, 2019). Initial codes were created from a reading of the literature, and as the Capstone team met, additional codes were determined by reaching agreement on the interpretation of the answers to the free-response questions collectively. We used the same code book as we examined responses from each of the surveys, in order to look for convergence and divergence in participant responses. We also kept a detailed audit trail as recommended by Maxwell (2013), including copies of Capstone notes and any code books developed to help document the process of analyzing this data.

### **Merging**

Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative data in our research design improved the validity of our findings by comparing information obtained from different methods of data

collection (Bamberger, 2012, p. 4). We compared responses from our initial data review to the survey responses (especially responses to the open-ended questions) and focus group discussions to find areas of convergence and agreement. Additionally, statistical analysis of the quantitative data provided detailed patterns of responses, which was then paired with the qualitative data to provide a deeper understanding of participant responses (Driscoll et al., 2007, p. 26).

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this proposed study include access to robust and complete data, willingness of stakeholders to respond to surveys, and the chance at incomplete responses to the surveys. The first limitation is linked to the data provided from SCPS that includes two sets of secondary data: teacher exit survey data and survey responses from mentors and mentees. In examining the teacher exit survey data, we are limited by the data collected by SCPS, which does not include years of experience or teacher licensure status. Additionally, this data may not include responses from all teachers who are leaving SCPS, so this limits our ability to specifically focus on ECT retention since we don't have precise data on the number of teacher exits from that group. Participant responses may also not be wholly truthful or share their honest opinions on why they chose to leave SCPS.

We also faced potential limitations in our data collection from the surveys of administrators and teachers. At the outset of planning, we had illustrated four concerns. First, we were concerned we may not receive a high response rate to our surveys, so we may have to extend our survey window to ensure we collect a statistically significant response from both groups. Second, we are relying on the willingness of survey respondents to share their honest opinions. This may hamper the team in drawing conclusions about mentoring and support in SCPS. Third, although communication structures exist from Stafford County's Central Office's

Mentor360 program to individual schools, the process may be cumbersome or not clear. For example, if the Ambassador receives the communication and administration is not the intended audience for communication, they may not have access to details about the program which may impact their survey responses. In addition, the communication structure from Central Office's Mentor360 program to the schools may vary due to correct correspondence between Administration, Mentors and Mentees. Therefore, the responses may be limited due to not having knowledge of the survey and focus group opportunities in an effective communications manner. However, in retrospect, we were able to mitigate the concerns we faced and address these issues using analysis and collaboration.



### **Chapter IV: Findings**

Stafford's original Request for Assistance (RFA) sought to better understand why teachers within their first three years are leaving SCPS at higher rates than in neighboring divisions. Their perception of the problem linked SCPS' proximity to northern Virginia, teacher compensation, and COVID-19 as root causes for their high rates of Early Career Teacher (ECT) attrition. As the Capstone team began to better understand the actionable Problem of Practice (POP) related to ECT retention, an emphasis on clear and consistent expectations connected to differentiated support systems for Early Career Teachers based on their professional needs surfaced as a more precise area for focus. Stafford's comparatively high rate of provisionally licensed teachers also pointed to the need to better understand potential opportunities for differentiated support of ECTs. Additionally, one commonality across findings is the needs of ECTs vary widely, as each brings a different perspective, experience, and knowledge base about teaching (Lipton et al., 2003).

Conducting Chapter Two's literature review continued to shape the team's understanding of systematic approaches, based on evidence-based best practices, to support Early Career Teachers. Chapter Two emphasized Stafford's comparatively high rate of provisionally licensed teachers as a driver to better understanding potential opportunities for differentiated support of ECTs. Here, the team explored supportive administrative teams, teacher wellness, supportive policy potential, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and mentoring as contributing factors for consideration of personalized, sustainable ECT support.

Designing a methodology to collect data around the Capstone team's three research questions led the team to build a mixed-methods teacher survey of ECTs and create an eight question protocol for one-on-one principal interviews. The Capstone team triangulated responses

to identify trends and themes across the data from these two efforts with the secondary data sets provided by SCPS. Additionally, the team relied on multiple sources of data provided by SCPS regarding their mentor program.

Chapter Four begins by offering findings connected to current systems of support for ECTs in SCPS (RQ 1). Though variable in the types of PL being offered through its system, the Mentor360 program proved to be the prominent vehicle for new teacher support. Findings for RQ1 also highlight ECT support teams being diverse, and the fact that ECTs in SCPS, at large, feel valued in their school communities. RQ2 evaluates the effectiveness of these opportunities for support. Though not every ECT is provided access to one, PLCs were found to be a universal support described as an in-house system of assistance, outside of the Mentor360 program, supporting ECTs. Here, the team found the need for differentiated support due to the diverse profile of teacher licensure status, the importance ECTs emphasize in supportive leadership practices, and the variability in mentoring experiences.

Finally, RQ3's findings provide division-wide contextual considerations for ECT support. Findings regarding teachers feeling valued through compensation are noted here, but, as reflected in the literature, pay is not the only or most important determinant of ECT retention. Instead, we found ECTs prioritize the importance of teacher-voice and professional relationships with colleagues and leadership team in their considerations to stay in their roles with SCPS.

### **What Currently Exists at the School and Division Level to Support Early Career Teachers?**

As noted in the literature, access to consistent, high quality differentiated professional learning has been shown to improve teacher retention, specifically among Early Career Teachers (Carr et al., 2017). The need for differentiated professional learning is especially acute for new and provisionally licensed teachers, who often lack experience and background knowledge in

teaching (Redding & Smith, 2016; Lipton et al., 2003). This is particularly important for SCPS, given the large number of provisionally licensed and out-of-field teachers in the district.

### ***Prep for Success Week***

We reviewed teacher survey results about the professional learning provided during the SCPS Prep for Success Week prior to the 2022-2023 school year. Specifically, we examined the responses from teachers with zero to five years experience when asked to identify the Prep for Success week components they felt were most useful. Teachers were also given an open-ended response prompt to share feedback on specific Prep for Success week components. While this data was not collected by the team, it did help provide a snapshot of teachers' perceptions surrounding the usefulness of the professional learning provided at Prep for Success week. Table 6 below highlights some of the responses among Early Career Teachers.

**Table 6***Teacher Reported Benefits of Prep for Success Week*

Frequency of Being Cited as Among Top Elements of Prep For Success Week 2022		
	Teacher Experience	
	Zero Years (n=50)	1-2 Years (n=43)
School Specific Orientation	20%	19%
Time with School Based Support System*	26%	26%
Division Wide Kickoff	26%	26%
Mentor360 Huddle	12%	7%
Contributions to Feeling Prepared and Connected		
Strongly or Somewhat Agree with “I feel prepared for the upcoming school year”	87%	85%
Strongly or Somewhat Agree with “I feel connected to the community at my school”	96%	95%

\*includes Mentor360 Ambassador, Mentor, Teacher-Leaders and Administrators

*Note.* Both groups (0 years and 1-2 years) cited time with their base school support system as the most important piece of Prep for Success Week, which aligns with their strong feelings of connection to their school community.

These responses suggest Early Career Teachers have a strong desire to connect with building-specific support teams they see as the most important in providing them with day-to-day support. As one ECT noted in their survey, “school specific information and time was definitely appreciated.” Other teachers agreed, stating “the time spent with mentors was extremely helpful with planning and school procedures” and time spent with building support systems demonstrated to them that “the support and the support systems are clearly there when it comes to new educators.” This survey data also suggests that for most ECTs, Prep for Success

Week is working, and personalized support may better serve new teachers within SCPS. This is especially important given Stafford County’s diverse profile of teacher licensure, which includes high levels of provisionally licensed and unlicensed ECTs (see Table 7 below).

**Table 7**

*ECT Survey Data – Teacher Licensure Profile*

Licensure Status	Percentage
Provisional License	51%
Fully Licensed	34%
Do Not Hold a License	15%

*Note.* Data from Capstone team created teacher survey

Among the 94 respondents who were within their first three years of teaching, over half reported having received a provisional license, while an additional fifteen percent reported currently not holding a license at all. Overall, less than one-third of respondents reported being fully licensed after attending a fully accredited teacher preparation program. This corresponds with the overall trend of high provisional licensure among ECTs within SCPS, with 13% of SCPS teachers holding a provisional license (which is 4.4% higher than the state average in Virginia). The high percentage of Early Career Teachers in SCPS with alternative licensure or no license also suggests they likely received less pedagogical training (outside what they'll get with the division) when compared to teachers in traditional licensure pathways.

Given the licensure diversity among ECTs in Stafford, some ECT responses to the Prep for Success Week survey point to the desire for more personalized professional learning. As one teacher who started in the middle of the last year remarked, they started “with no formal training or prep. Taking FIT [the Foundations in Teaching professional learning] this year was so enlightening! I wish so much that I had this class before I started teaching!” However, another

teacher disagreed, arguing “for Career Switchers who have completed Phase 1 at Shenandoah it was repetitive. This was all covered in courses during Phase 1. It was a nice refresher but I would have loved more time working in my content area.” Another respondent suggested a more differentiated, personalized path with choices during Prep for Success Week: “...you could ask teachers who are coming from graduate programs like myself if they would like to partake as I felt it was very repetitive from what I learned from grad school.”

### ***School-Based Professional Learning***

To help assess the current state of professional learning offerings in SCPS, data was gathered from several sources. First, the team conducted interviews with eleven principals at the PreK, Elementary, and Middle/High School levels to help determine what professional learning is being offered from the district level that is specifically geared towards support of Early Career Teachers, as well as any obstacles they have in providing support to Early Career Teachers. For example, school based PL assumes there is time, staffing, and specific content focus directed at the discrete needs for each ECT. A lack of any of these support leads to an obstacle for effective PL at the school level.

While several of the principals were complimentary of the Prep for Success week (specifically mentioned by four of the principals during the interviews), there was less consensus about the extent and quality of professional learning and support for Early Career Teachers after that week. Three of the principals surveyed cited a lack of specific professional learning for administrators on working with ECTs as an obstacle to providing support for those teachers in their buildings. Several principals remarked that lack of knowledge about this group of teachers led to professional learning at the school level that is not specifically differentiated for ECTs. One principal remarked they noticed a difference between Early Career Teachers who have gone

through traditional preparation programs and are fully licensed compared to provisionally licensed teachers and career switchers. They stated the latter set of ECTs need “intense support instructionally,” so they have taken a more active role personally in providing support while also relying on their Ambassador to provide support in the form of the monthly prescribed meetings from SCPS. Another principal stated they have not attended professional learning about ECTs, but their assistant principals are of “huge help” in differentiating support to meet the needs and experiences of ECTs in their building. This array of responses from principals suggests that across schools within SCPS, ECTs are not always experiencing the same level(s) or consistency of support, and there is tremendous variability in terms of who is specifically tasked with providing support.

Additionally, the team reviewed data provided by SCPS from surveys of mentors. This data revealed that mentors were tasked with providing assistance to ECTs across a range of topics, with each topic receiving varying levels of attention. Table 8 below details the mentee responses about the extent of support they provided across different areas and topics. Content & Curriculum Knowledge was identified as the topic with the highest percentage of “substantial” time and support identified, followed by school procedures, while the topic of differentiating instruction received the lowest percentage of responses that it received substantial support. This highlights that mentor provided support varies widely by school, with topics being differentiated to meet the needs of ECTs within each building.

**Table 8***Amount of Support Provided by Mentor Teachers on Selected Topics*

	Level of Time and Support Spent on Topic			
	Not at all	Minimal	Moderate	Substantial
Classroom Management	5.3%	22.8%	47.4%	24.6%
Content & Curriculum Knowledge	7%	14%	36.8%	42.1%
Lesson Planning	8.8%	26.3%	35.1%	21.1%
Assessment Strategies	8.8%	33.3%	36.8%	21.1%
Differentiating Instruction	7%	40.4%	40.4%	12.3%
Student Relationships	8.8%	38.6%	35.1%	26.3%
School Procedures	3.5%	12.3%	52.6%	31.6%

*Note.* Data from SCPS mentor survey.

Additionally, mentors were asked how many hours per month they spent on mentoring, and responses ranged from 1 hour up to 40 hours. When asked what percent of their professional responsibilities are devoted to mentoring, responses ranged from 1% to 30%. This range suggests professional learning is highly variable across all buildings, and it is hard to accurately gauge what is actually working since Ambassadors and mentors are planning different experiences across school sites. The professional learning experiences being provided through the mentorship program are highly variable across school sites in terms of content, time/level of support time spent engaged in mentorship.

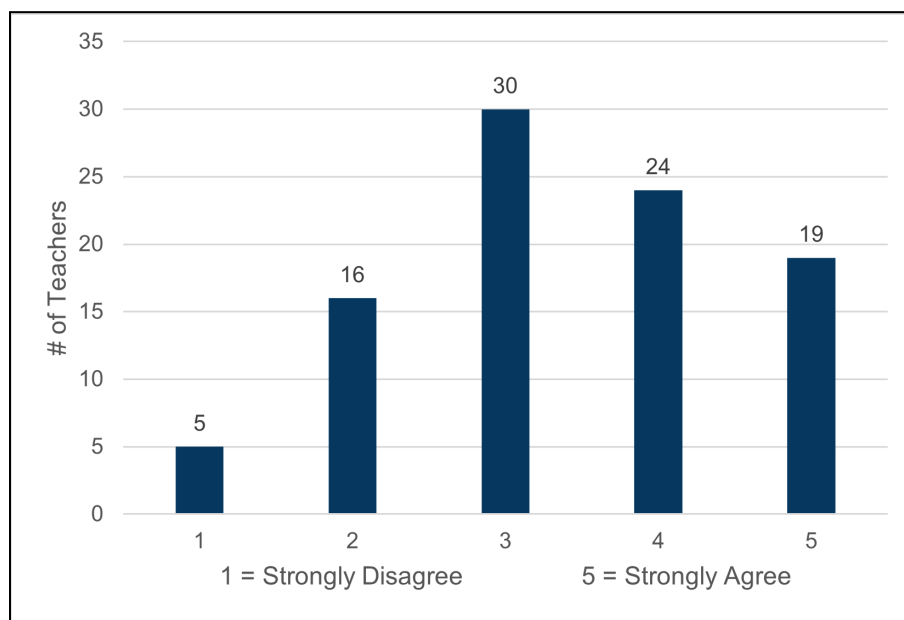
Although variability of time, support and topics covered could potentially indicate mentors are differentiating their support based on ECT needs in their building, this assumption is



tempered by data from the Capstone team’s survey of Early Career Teachers, which was used to determine ECT views on professional development offerings. When asked their level of agreement with the statement “The professional development I receive aligns to the specific professional needs I have,” nearly a third were neutral while another 21% either disagreed or strongly disagreed (see Figure 6 below).

**Figure 6**

*Agreement with alignment of professional learning to needs among Early Career Teachers*

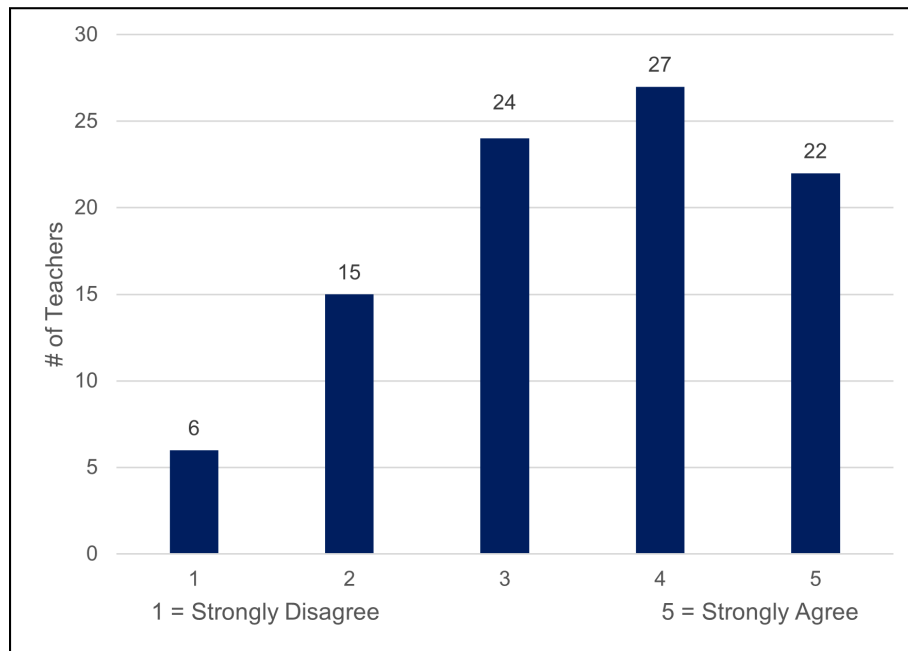


*Note.* Data only includes responses from Early Career Teachers to the Capstone teacher survey.

This data again suggests mentors are conducting their own professional learning for ECTs in their building without alignment to the needs of teachers within their first three years of experience. This is further evidenced by the fact 46% of Early Career Teachers were neutral, disagreed or strongly disagreed (as reflected by an answer of 3 or below) with the statement “The professional development I receive enhances my ability to improve student learning” (see Figure 7).

**Figure 7**

*Agreement with impact of professional learning among Early Career Teachers*



*Note.* Data only includes responses from Early Career Teachers to the Capstone teacher survey.

### ***Diverse Teams of Support for Early Career Teachers***

Leveraging the diversity of support for ECTs proves to be a valuable tool to support their success. Knowing there are differences in mentor support and alignment of PL to the needs of ECTs across SCPS, the team also sought to hear from those leading the work at the school level. Specifically, we sought to learn the confidence the principals had about supporting Early Career Teachers. Out of the eleven principals, a nuanced picture emerged. Four principals expressed a strong sense of confidence, three conveyed a moderate level of confidence, and three shared a lesser confidence in their capacity to provide guidance and support to ECTs.

**Table 9***Principal Confidence Level in Providing Support for Early Career Teachers*

Confidence Level In Supporting ECTs	Number of Principals
Very Confident	4
Moderately Confident	3
Less Confident	3
Chose to not answer	1
Total	11

*Note.* Data from principal interviews conducted by Capstone team.

The information displayed in Table 9 reflects the self-reported efficacy among interviewed principals of SCPS in regards to their ability to support ECTs. The variance in reported confidence suggests some SCPS principals may be prepared for the challenge of meeting the needs of ECTs and growing their skill sets, while others may not be. The data also indicates (see Table 10) levels of confidence are not attributed to years of experience.

**Table 10***Principal Confidence Level in Providing Support for Early Career Teachers by Experience*

Confidence Level in Supporting ECTs	Years of Experiences
Very Confident	5, 9, 14, 11
Moderately Confident	1, 19, 3
Less Confident	11, 1, 7

*Note.* Data from principal interviews conducted by Capstone team.

The above data was collected through a review of notes taken during principal interviews.

Comments and reflections of the principals were coded and analyzed to determine which confidence rating group each principal belonged to. Once the responses were coded, years of experience were attached to their classification. By using this multifaceted approach, we were able to determine the correct category for each principal with a high level of certainty.

There is not a direct correlation between years of experience and high levels of confidence. Principals with a wide range of years of experience fell into each category. For instance, the moderately confident category includes principals with 1, 19, and 3 years of experience. Both relatively new and highly experienced principals can share similar confidence levels, further negating direct correlation between experience and confidence. Despite varying levels of confidence that weren't associated with years of experience, the team did find a relationship between the principals with higher years of experience and the understanding that providing meaningful ECT support would take dedicated time.

Because Early Career Teachers need a myriad of support to ensure a successful entry into the profession and to set them up for long term success and job satisfaction (Kelly et al., 2019), the team sought to determine who teachers deem the most beneficial and helpful to them. ECTs were asked, “*Which member of your school leadership team is most responsible for providing you support?*” Table 11 highlights two separate groups of teachers and their identification of who on the leadership team most supported them. The first group are teachers who voiced they were ‘*Unsure*’ or declaratively stating, ‘*Not Returning*’ to SCPS within the next two years, and the second group voicing a resounding ‘*Yes*’ to returning to SCPS.

**Table 11***Teacher Identification of Primary Support Provider*

Support Source	Unsure/Not Returning (% Support)	Returning (% Support)
Assistant Principals	26%	40%
Mentors	26%	34%
Principals	17%	14%
Coaches	19%	8.50%
Department Chairs	3.40%	0%
Co-Workers	8.60%	3.50%

*Note.* Data from Capstone team teacher survey.

Table 11 illustrates several key insights about the perceived support sources among teachers, differentiated by their intentions to either remain with SCPS or to leave within the next two years. Both groups cite assistant principals as a significant source of support, with 40% of teachers planning to return choosing the AP as the biggest source of support compared to 26% of those unsure or not returning choosing the AP. This indicates assistant principals play a pivotal role in positively influencing a teacher’s decision to stay within the district. One teacher respondent amplified this point in the qualitative section of the survey, “*Most of the Assistant Principals provide 99% of the support.*” Mentors were also identified as important to both groups (second highest support system), with a higher percentage of mentors identified by teachers intending to return (34%) compared to those ‘*unsure*’ or ‘*not returning*’ (26%). This suggests mentoring is a powerful mechanism in retaining SCPS ECTs

Principals were seen as a support source by a smaller proportion of both groups, with a slightly higher percentage selecting principals among those unsure or not returning (17%) than

those returning (14%). This implies that while principals are considered a source of support, their impact might be less significant in influencing teachers' decisions to stay or leave. This may be due to the varied responsibilities of principals, who often do not have supporting ECTs as a specific or assigned duty, unlike assistant principals. Consequently, the support provided by principals can potentially be less impactful.

Coaches were cited as the most responsible for support by 19% of unsure or non-returning teachers but only 8.5% by returning teachers. This suggests coaches have a more pronounced role in supporting teachers who are struggling or being identified as persons in need of support. One subject who voiced they would be returning stated, "The whole coaching team works together." This lens of collaboration is a common thread woven throughout the analysis illustrating that the success of ECTs is tied to effective teaming across multiple stakeholders.

Department chairs were identified as being most responsible for support by a small percentage of '*unsure*' or '*non-returning*' teachers (3.4%), and none of the returning teachers indicated them as primary support (0%). This minimal percentage might reflect a perceived lack of support or a less direct role for department chairs to provide direct support to ECTs.

Co-workers also were identified by a small percentage in both groupings with slightly higher percentages among '*unsure*' or '*non-returning*' teachers (8.6%) compared to returning teachers (3.5%). While co-workers have been shown to play a pivotal role in setting the culture and climate of a school (Peetz, 2023), it is likely their unofficial role in providing direct support to ECTs may explain the low percentages.

In summary, Table 11 reveals significant insights into how teachers' perceptions of support vary depending on their intention to return to the school district. The data suggests that while certain roles are considered as sources for ECT support (ex: Assistant Principals, Mentors)

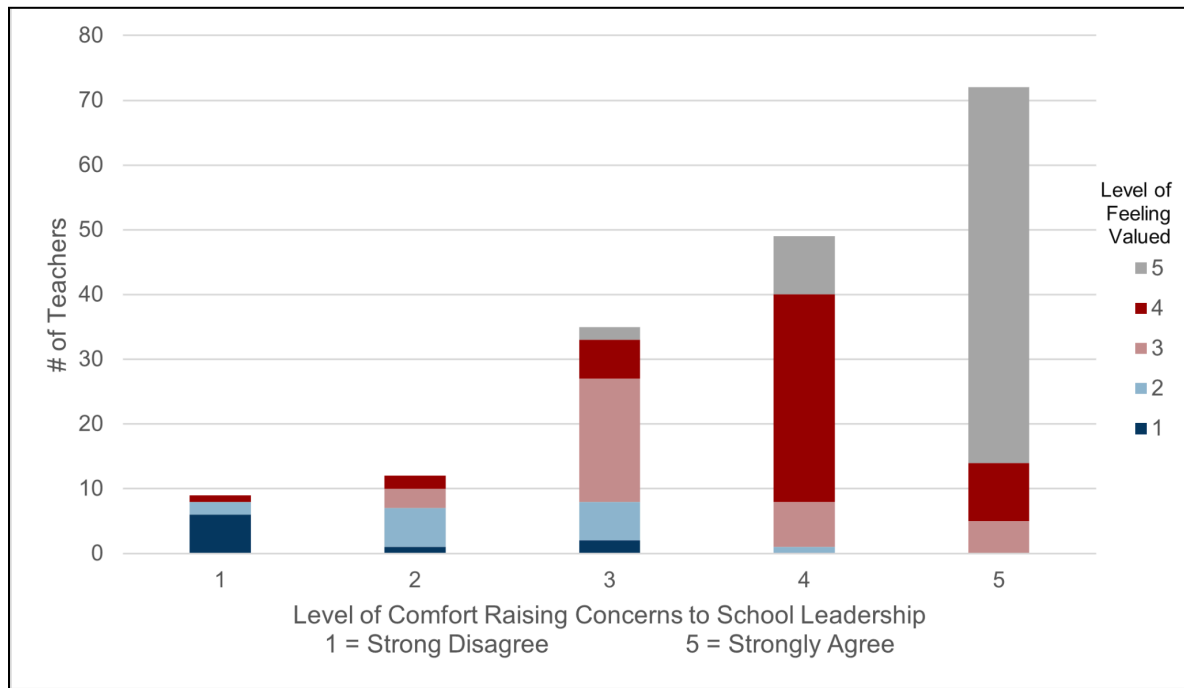
by ECTs certain of their return, coaches and principals may have a more targeted impact on teachers who are uncertain about their future in the district. These findings could be instrumental in guiding district policies and professional focus for the various leadership team members at the school level.

### ***Teachers Feel Valued***

One of the most impactful leadership practices on a teacher's wellbeing are those which enable the teacher to feel valued (Cann et al., 2020). Given the critical importance of teachers feeling valued, it became imperative to delve into this topic more thoroughly among SCPS teachers. Figure 8 utilizes data gleaned from the Teacher Participant Survey. The chart visualizes the relationship between teachers feeling valued (on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest) and their comfort level in speaking with their administrators. Each bar has been 'stacked' with a teacher's perception of feeling valued, and is divided into segments that indicate the number of teachers at each "*comfort level*" in speaking with the leadership team of their school.

**Figure 8**

*Relationship Between Teachers Feeling Valued by School Leaders and their Comfort Level in Raising Concerns to School Leaders*



*Note.* Data from Capstone team teacher survey.

Figure 8 reflects a clear association between high ratings of feeling valued and the comfort level in raising concerns to school leaders. Particularly, at the highest perceived value level (5), a significant majority of teachers feel the highest comfort in speaking with leadership. Conversely, at the lowest perceived value level (1), most teachers are at the lower end of the comfort scale in speaking with leadership, with no teachers reporting the highest comfort levels (4 or 5).

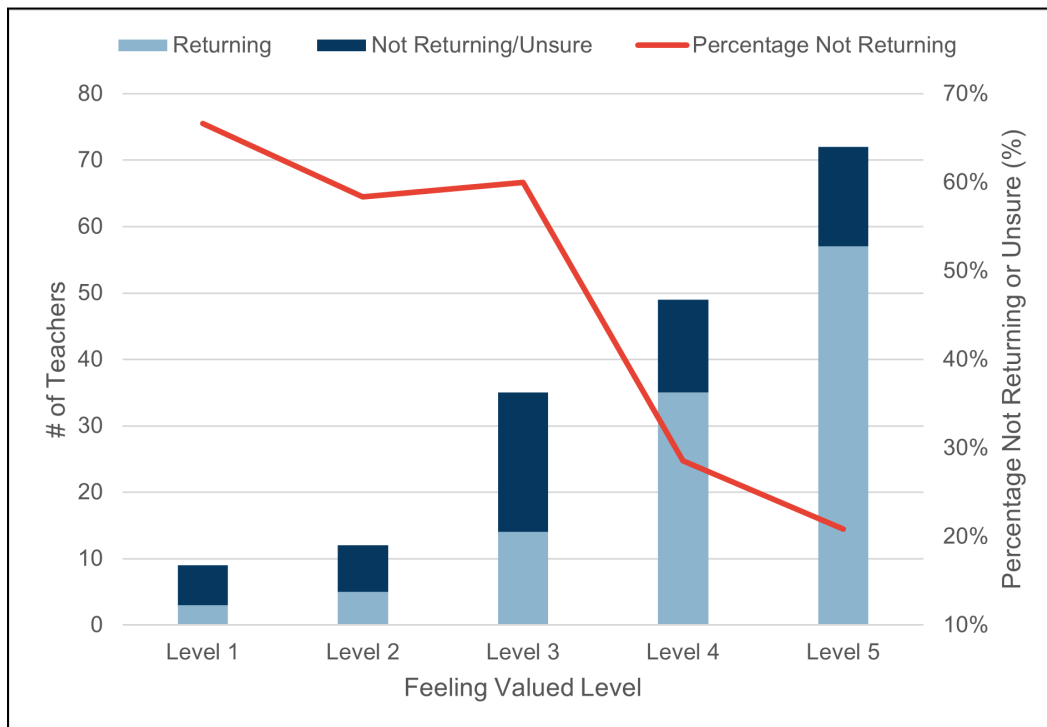
For SCPS teachers who feel moderately valued (level 3), there's a wide spread across comfort levels, with the highest number of teachers feeling moderately comfortable (comfort level 3), suggesting that feeling somewhat valued can result in mixed feelings about comfort in communication with leadership. The data effectively points to a positive relationship between the



level of value teachers feel from their leaders and their comfort in communicating with them. Job satisfaction among teachers is directly linked to their sense of value by school leaders, particularly in environments where collaboration and open communication with leaders are encouraged (Abdulahi, 2020). This highlights the importance of teachers feeling valued in fostering open and comfortable communication channels as well as the potential for these conditions to build job satisfaction of new teachers within schools of SCPS. With an understanding of the importance of teachers feeling valued by the administrative teams, we cross-referenced the results of feeling valued with their stated intent to leave. Figure 9 illustrates profound correlations.

**Figure 9**

*Teacher Retention and Feeling Valued by School Leadership*



*Note.* Data compiled from Capstone teacher survey.

Figure 9 combines two visualizations. The stacked bar chart shows the number of returning teachers (light blue) and the teachers who indicated they would not return (dark blue) across different levels of feeling valued, from Level 1 (lowest sense of value) to Level 5 (highest sense of value). Additionally, the red line graph represents the percentage of teachers not returning at each level of feeling valued, highlighting a potential trend where a higher sense of value may correlate with a higher likelihood of returning. While there is a small sample size of teachers who identify in the lower levels of feeling valued, categories of Level 1 and Level 2 (9 and 12 respectively), the percentage of those teachers not returning is substantial, indicating a direct correlation between teacher attrition and their perception of being valued by leadership. Conversely, teachers who stated the highest level (5) of sense of being valued (74 teachers in total) have a clear contrast with teachers who have a low sense of value. The teachers who feel valued are staying in SCPS, while those who don't are seeking other opportunities.

When considering the findings from Figures 8 and 9, it becomes evident the perception of being valued by school leadership and the ability to communicate openly with administrators are intertwined factors that influence new teacher retention. This is supported by literature which shows the connection between schools who foster a positive organizational climate where teachers feel valued and comfortable to engage in meaningful conversations with their administrators and a more stable and satisfied teacher workforce (Prothero, 2021).

### **What is Working for Early Career Teachers? How Does Stafford Know it is Working?**

As outlined in the findings connected to RQ1, the Capstone team recognizes the extensive access to ECT support for teachers in SCPS; research question two (RQ2) further explores how well the existing systems of support are working. Additionally, for the support that is working well, the team wondered how Stafford is able to measure implementation

effectiveness. RQ2 yielded findings that take specific Early Career Teacher needs into consideration as they relate to teacher licensure status, access to Professional Learning, school leadership team support, and quality mentorship in SCPS.

***Professional Learning Communities (...for Those With Access)***

Early Career Teachers who have common planning time during the school day, and who use that common planning time to work with a Professional Learning Community (PLC), report their support as sustainable, low risk, and high quality. As revealed through our search of the literature, new teachers who participate in healthy PLCs have a significant increase in performance and confidence...and develop resilient feelings of well-being (Waters, 2019). Further, DuFour's work (2014) suggests PLCs are the most efficient and effective way to support new teacher needs because they hold space for teachers to ask questions, admit uncertainties, and authentically engage in continued learning directly connected to instructional needs. Knowing the value PLCs offer, the Capstone team included an entire section around ECTs' access to common planning time and collaboration in the distributed ECT survey. While those questions helped to collect quantitative measures regarding collaborative planning time, PLCs were also mentioned as a leading strategy to support ECTs by 45% of principals. The topic also trended in the open ended, qualitative responses from teachers who completed the ECT survey.

When asked on the survey if their school leadership team expected them to participate in PLCs, 94% of teachers responded yes. However, while the data shows that the overwhelming majority of ECTs are expected to participate in these collaborative instructional teams, only 60% of survey respondents agreed they actually have intentional time allocated during their school day to participate in PLC work. This means that despite a high expectation for teachers to participate in PLCs 40% of respondents do not have access to built-in, collaborative time with

colleagues and building leaders through intentional PLCs. Further, 73% of ECTs years 1-3 who stated they were 'unsure' or 'no' regarding if they would return to SCPS in next two years also stated they do not have time to meet or collaborate during the school day. This suggests the critical importance of collaborative time in an ECT's decision to remain in their role in SCPS, yet a distinct gap in time built into the school day to be part of a PLC team.

The importance of PLC time for ECTs also appeared in responses to open-ended questions, "What support did you receive in your early teaching career that has been most valuable to you?" and "Think about the most effective professional development you have received - what was the most valuable aspect of that learning experience?" The Capstone team identified themes corroborated by findings in the literature review. These themes include PLCs being a low-stakes place for ECTs to ask questions about content and functionality of a classroom experience as described by one ECT:

Being able to just sit and chat about my struggles and build an active working relationship with my Principals during planning time was most valuable for me. They made and continue to make time to work with me while giving me the freedom to be who I am as a person and teacher.

ECTs also shared the value in PLCs being used to deliver immediate, actionable feedback: "The best support has been my teaching team providing me with ideas and walking me through how to do things." and "Time with my team to discuss practical, real world suggestions that can be implemented the next day has been the most helpful." Finally, PLC meetings that include ECTs provide job-embedded Professional Learning that can be personalized and teacher-centered: "The best PL was time with my PLC which allowed me to learn from other teachers' experiences..."

These findings suggest a shared expectation and desire for consistent common planning time across schools and departments so ECTs can receive the sustainable, job-embedded support offered in PLCs. Given their comparatively higher rates of provisionally licensed and out-of-field teachers, understanding the need for dedicated time for PLCs and where the gaps exist is especially critical for SCPS.

### ***Licensure Status and Professional Development***

As covered in chapter 1, our review of the Virginia Department of Education’s (VDOE) School Quality Profiles found SCPS is above state averages in provisionally licensed teachers and teachers teaching out of their certification field. Table 12 displays the comparison of SCPS and state percentages in the two categories, as well as identifies the differential between the two data points. SCPS at 13% provisionally licensed teachers, is 4.4% above the state average of 8.6%. When it comes to out-of-field teachers, SCPS is 3.7% points higher than the state, with 10.1% compared to the state average of 6.4%. These percentages illustrate that SCPS has more inexperienced teachers as part of its total workforce than many other school divisions in the state. This disparity in experienced teachers requires consideration when planning out systems of support.

**Table 12**

#### *Provisionally licensed and Out of Field Teachers – SCPS to State Comparison*

	Provisionally Licensed Teachers	Out-of-Field Teachers
SCPS	13%	10.1%
State	8.6%	6.4%
Difference (SCPS to State)	+4.4%	+3.7%

*Note.* Data from VDOE School Quality Profiles.

Analyzing data from the Capstone team's Early Career Teachers (ECTs) survey presents even more noteworthy findings regarding teacher licensure status at SCPS. As noted earlier in this chapter, and illustrated on Table 7, among ECTs within their first three years who completed the survey, the number of provisionally licensed ECTs and ECTs who do not currently hold a license is astounding. Of the ECTs surveyed, only 34% of the teachers are fully licensed. Compare this number to a significant 51% provisionally licensed and 15% non-licensed ECTs. With the majority of ECTs surveyed not being fully licensed, it is important to consider that this group received little to no training prior to entering the classroom in addition to having limited years of classroom experience.

A key consideration for selecting appropriate Professional Learning for this unique population is to know what supports are most desirable to and effective for ECTs. Utilizing the qualitative portion of the mixed methods teacher survey, we were able to analyze teacher responses on what they believed were the most effective professional development opportunities they had received, and what they felt were the most valuable aspects of those learning experiences. Teacher responses to our inquiry can be broken down into three main themes: alignment to their specific needs, shared experiences with other ECTs, and authentic "hands on" experiences.

The first recurring theme of effective Professional Learning perceptions from the ECT survey data was that of *alignment*, demonstrated both quantitatively and qualitatively. Fifty-one percent of teacher respondents stated Professional Development did not align to their specific professional needs (score of 3 or below). Further, teachers shared occurrences where the training or development they received did not align to their needs. The circumstances of the non-alignment varied, yet the main examples were from Special Education teachers. These

teachers mentioned the majority of PL provided by SCPS involved general education topics. Some examples of responses included, “professional development is geared towards general education - I am a SPED teacher” and “training I received was directed towards general education teachers. I wish they would have offered courses that are applicable to SPED teachers.” The same experiences were true for elective teachers. One teacher respondent stated, “I teach in the arts, so the only way I can receive relevant PL is by attending conferences.” While another responded, “I teach an elective, so many development strategies do not apply in my classroom.” A teacher in the 4-7 year experience range desired professional learning that was “targeted to [their] core endorsement,” however, this teacher also made note that most of the trainings “assume [they are] a rookie.” The quotes and rating responses point to the teachers’ desire for professional development specialized to their content area.

Another theme from ECT responses on effective PL was a desire to *collaborate and share with other teachers*. Responses like, “getting to speak with other first-time teachers,” “leaning on other new hires,” and “helpful to have a cohort of fellow new teachers, all with different levels of experience and backgrounds, to share tips and learn together,” all illustrate the desire ECTs expressed for communal time with peers. Based on the responses, this time seemed to create a camaraderie around the shared experience of being new to the field of education. Two survey subjects shared: “Hearing from other first year teachers and knowing that my struggles were not just my own but that of the collective. Getting to celebrate achievements that veteran teachers did not dismiss or consider too little to celebrate” and “Hearing first year teachers are having similar issues as myself. It eased any self-doubt I was experiencing.” These survey responses suggest ECTs are seeking embedded opportunities to meet with fellow ECTs.

The last theme from ECT survey responses on effective professional learning is *authentic “hands on” experiences that can be quickly implemented into the classroom*. Many respondents expressed a preference for authentic PL they could practice in real time. One teacher shared the benefits stating, “[PL involved] hands-on learning, which allowed me to understand, remember more, and apply what I learned.” Others submitted comments like, “I was given hands on learning where I did not have to sit and just listen and took products away with me,” “hands on practice with the particular strategy or skill,” and “authentic experiences and reflection.” Another aspect paired with the authentic learning was their ability to quickly implement in class what they learned. Two respondents communicated such views, stating “I valued learning new strategies that I could actually apply in my classroom as I learned them,” and “practical real-world suggestions that can be implemented the next day.” We found ECTs valued hands-on, applicable training as their most effective professional development opportunities.

In summary, teacher survey results on perceptions of effective professional development illustrated preferences among Early Career Teachers for PL aligned to specific professional needs, shared time with other ECTs, and authentic, easily implemented training. Because SCPS has higher than state averages of provisionally licensed and out-of-field teachers, the data points to the need to move beyond “one size fits all” professional learning at SCPS.

### ***Supportive Leadership Matters***

As Chapter Two’s literature review uncovered, strong and supportive leadership is an important factor in retaining teachers (Becker & Grob, 2021). The findings from the ECT survey and principal interviews corroborated what the literature suggests. According to survey responses, 68% of ECT respondents feel valued by their leadership teams. In addition, as seen in Table 13, the majority of surveyed teachers ranked “Supportive School Leadership” #1 over



“Mentoring” (#2) and “Professional Learning” (#3) for impact on continuing employment with SCPS. Analysis of the secondary dataset from SCPS’ 2022-2023 Teacher Exit Survey also lends insights into the importance of school leadership for teacher retention. Both “Negative View of Leadership” and “Lack of Support” were in the top five reasons for leaving the county. After pay, which we address below, departing teachers identified “Negative View of Leadership” as the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest reason for leaving, and “Lack of Support” as the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest reason given (Figure 10 provides a further breakdown of the numbers). This suggests the support of school leaders plays a significant role in whether new teachers stay or leave the division.

**Table 13**

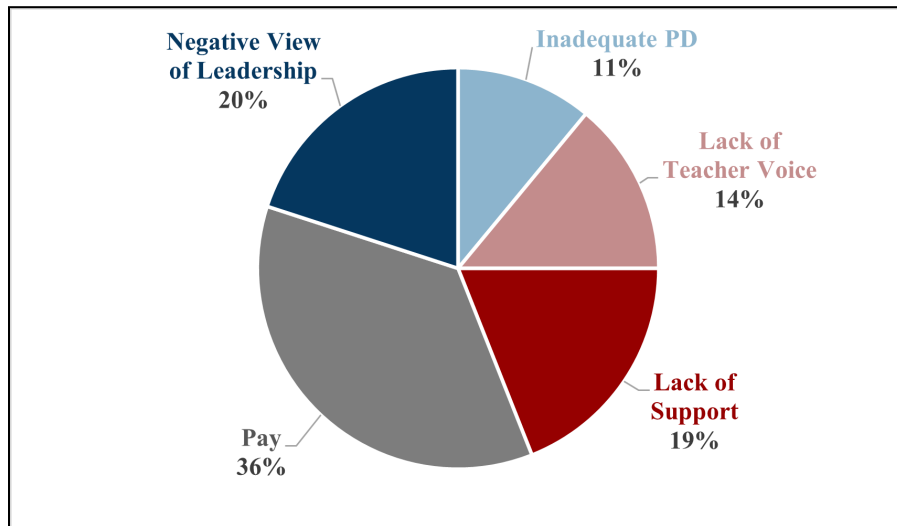
*Impact on Continuing Employment with SCPS*

Ranking	Category	Count
1st	Supportive School Leadership	98
2nd	Mentoring Programs	52
3rd	Professional Learning Opportunities	34

*Note.* Data from Capstone team teacher survey.

**Figure 10**

*Top Five Reasons Teachers Left SCPS During 2022-2023 School Year*



*Note.* Data taken from SCPS' 2022-2023 Exit Survey.

Meaningful leadership team feedback is another key factor in supporting ECTs. In the team's survey, 62% of teacher respondents agree/strongly agree with the statement, "The instructional feedback I receive from my leadership team feels helpful." In our principal interviews, in addition to the ECTs mentors, principals noted they utilize coaches and specialists to support their teachers. These are supports available for all teachers, not specific to ECTs. Furthermore, principals utilized the support teams in varying ways. These findings imply the school leadership team, including building administrators, mentors, and coaches, all play a crucial role in feedback to ECTs.

School principals are an important part of the school leadership team in providing support to ECTs. However, principal interviews revealed there is no explicit professional learning for leadership on how to directly support ECTs. When discussing division level support for building level administration with regard to how to support ECTs, one principal stated, "I'll be honest, there isn't a lot," while others shared that they do not receive training or professional learning on

supporting teachers or on early career teacher dynamics. This suggests a gap between principal need and available support such assistance.

In summary, ECTs value strong and supportive leadership, as well as meaningful feedback—yet while many feel supported in this way, a significant portion do not. Both categories also play a factor in the teachers’ decision-making process when considering returning to SCPS. In addition, there is a diverse leadership team responsible for supporting ECTs, consisting of principals and assistant principals, coaches, specialists, and mentors, yet no leadership professional development on supporting ECTs for these roles. This suggests there is desire and opportunity for helping leadership teams provide support specific to ECT needs.

### ***Quality Mentorship***

While Mentor360 Ambassadors are responsible for working with division and school level leadership to help facilitate mentorship in SCPS, only 1.7% of ECTs cited them as the person most responsible for their support. Instead, mentors were cited by 26.9% of ECTs as the person most responsible for their support, which makes their training and sustainable growth a critical priority for consideration of the SCPS team.

It’s worth noting the majority of ECTs who completed internal feedback surveys for Stafford’s Mentor360 program are having positive experiences with their assigned mentors. From the Capstone team’s survey, 57% of ECTs rated their experience in the Mentor360 program as having a substantial impact on their decision to stay in SCPS. Additionally, 73% said the support they receive(d) from their mentor was responsive to the needs they had as an Early Career Teacher. A notable theme for ECTs having positive experiences were their preferences for mentors with similar communicative styles and working habits as themselves: “...she is so easy to talk to... I know I can send her a message or swing by her room whenever I have time...she

always gets back to me right away... ” and another ECT shared, “I have several years of experience, so having a mentor who wasn’t always looming at my door was important for our partnership to work” and “I know every Thursday afternoon we meet to review my plans...having someone ...on the same timeline as me helps so much.” However, for those who are not finding quality support through mentorship, there are two themes worth amplifying: logistical barriers to quality mentorship and disinterested or unqualified mentors.

**Logistical barriers to quality mentorship.** Teacher attrition rates vary across schools in SCPS. Because of this, certain buildings, historically, are serving higher numbers of ECTs than others. This creates logistical barriers to mentoring and means mentor-pairing for new teachers can be more difficult in locations with higher turnover. In comparing data from Mentor360’s feedback surveys and from the Capstone’s ECT survey, of the responses that rated their mentoring experience as less impactful than the responses of their colleagues, 39% mentioned a logistical barrier in access to their mentor.

One ECT shared, “It’s difficult organizing/planning for a subject my mentor teacher doesn’t teach...” another stated, “...In my building...there is no mentor that does what I do...” Another logistical barrier for mentor-matching is a lack of common planning times between mentors and ECTs. Without a master schedule built with the intention to support ECTs, one teacher shared, “I don’t have time for...observations in my mentor's room” though it was a recommendation from their administrator and mentor. An ECT from a middle school mentioned not knowing how to further advocate for their needs as scheduling made it difficult for their mentor to check-in: “[I’d like]...More check-ins. I struggle to reach out sometimes because of scheduling, so it would be nice if mentors checked in to see if I was lost.” Finally, in buildings with larger numbers of new teachers, some mentors are required to support multiple ECTs.

Dividing their time across several ECTs impacts the experiences of new teachers in SCPS as noted by one mentee who understood their mentor to be overextended: “My mentor... has too much on her plate with her role that she doesn’t have the time to help with what I need.” It’s worth noting ECTs from Special Education (SpED) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provided more feedback regarding logistical barriers for mentoring when compared to any other content area.

**Disinterested, “voluntold” unqualified mentors.** For ECTs having less impactful mentoring experiences, 36% of responses mentioned the perception of their assigned mentor being disinterested in their position. For those understanding their mentor to be disinterested, ECTs noted a lack of effort to plan meetings, answer questions, relay important information, or provide feedback. In one school, one ECT shared there was a, “...Lack of guidance from my team (and mentor)” and another said “My main concern this year has been the lack of support and help from assigned Mentors...” In another response, a new teacher shared that they had not connected with their assigned mentor in months: “My mentor could talk to me. I haven't met with them since September...”

Disinterested was also coded in responses that amplified a perception of mentors being tasked with their mentoring jobs versus volunteering to support ECTs because of an interest or related skill set. One ECT shared, “They were told they would be my mentor, and it’s obvious that they were drafted to fulfill that role.” This understanding surfaced in schools across SCPS with another sharing “I believe my mentor wasn’t interested in being a mentor. I think if I had a mentor who was matched with me based on my personality, it would have made my first year teaching experience better,” and a different ECT expressing an interest in “...having a mentor who was actually interested in being a mentor...having her available to answer questions... having a

person who was willing to work with me.” This matters for Stafford, because without appropriate vetting of mentors and intentional pairing with mentees, mentoring programs have been proven ineffective (Bartell, 2005; Weimer, 2020).

Finally, 29% of the responses provided by ECTs having less impactful mentoring experiences suggested their mentor was unqualified to provide the support they needed. Unqualified was coded in responses that highlighted a disconnect between an ECT’s self-identified need and what they felt their advisor was capable of providing to them through mentorship. For example, one ECT requested more training for their mentor, “Ensure that assigned mentors are receiving training for how to support new teachers to Stafford who have taught before...”, based on their previous professional experience. Another spoke more generally, but still suggested “I think my mentor could be better with more training...” ECTs represented in these data also shared a desire for SCPS to monitor mentoring experiences once pairings have been determined. “Ensure that assigned mentors are mentoring effectively...” shared one ECT as a suggestion for a way their experience could be improved, while another shared, “My mentor is being compensated for a job they have not done...” A final finding to note in connection to the ECTs reporting less impactful mentoring experiences is a commonality in their content backgrounds. Of any content area, the two with the highest number of ECTs reporting dissatisfaction with their mentorship were those supporting students with disabilities and students learning English as a second language.

These attributes of less impactful mentoring experiences suggest ECTs seek motivated mentors who have the capacity to provide effective support. Effective pairing of mentors with Early Career Teachers is a critically important consideration for any new-teacher support system as the literature proved in Chapter Two: Without an incredibly intentional effort to connect

mentees with a highly qualified mentor, research “...finds no evidence that assignment to a mentor is linked with reduced odds of leaving teaching for alternatively certified teachers...” It is only when ECTs receive “...helpful feedback from their mentor, they are predicted to leave teaching at a much lower rate” (Redding & Smith, 2016).

### **What Collective Needs of a School and District Must be Considered in Early Career Teacher Support?**

The collective needs within SCPS affect all schools across the district. Although schools often function independently, together they form a complex ecosystem. This dynamic places an importance on the district to maintain the delicate balance of operating with coherence for all, while meeting the collective needs of each individual school. Analysis of SCPS exit interviews, teacher surveys, and principal interviews revealed the main factors contributing to attrition. Confirming the Capstone partners’ hypothesis informed by the literature and partner discussions, teacher pay emerged as the primary concern. However, other significant factors include the need for differentiated support for ECTs, a positive working environment, and strong culture.

### **Pay as a Driver of Departure**

Teacher pay is an issue in Virginia; the state ranks 25th in average salary for K-12 public school teachers at an average salary of \$58,506 compared to the national average of \$65,293. (Virginia Board of Education, 2022). In fact, JLARC (2022) cited low pay along with long hours worked as the highest drivers for teachers leaving the profession. This finding was also supported by Allegretto & Mishel (2016), who claimed teachers are more likely to quit when they work in districts with lower wages and when their salaries are low.

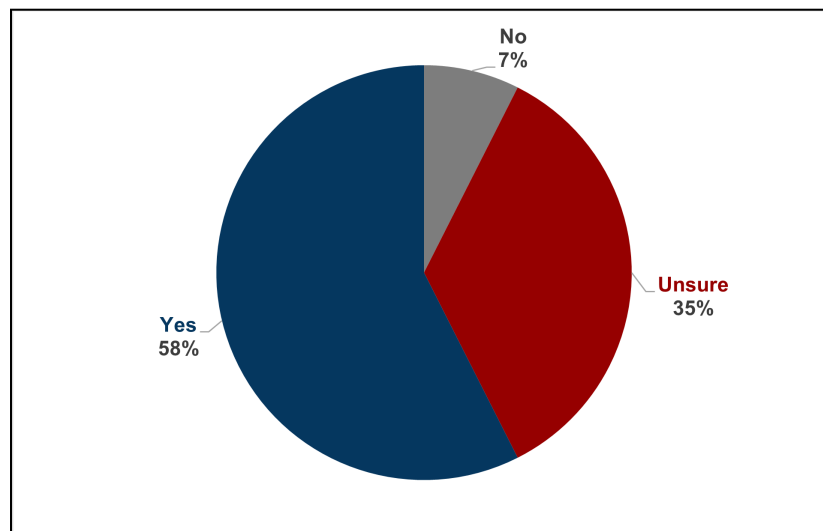
In examining teacher exit survey data collected by SCPS, the team identified the top five reasons cited for leaving SCPS (see Figure 10 earlier). Pay had the largest number of responses. The data revealed both the relevance and importance of pay as a driver of teacher departures.

### *Pay is an Issue for Early Career Teachers*

ECTs, along with teachers under 40 years old, were more likely to cite low pay as their top reason for leaving the profession, with 31 percent of younger teachers saying their salary was not sufficient to merit the stresses of teaching during the pandemic (Dilberti et al., 2021, p.7). When asked if they planned to continue working in SCPS for the next two years, 42% of Early Career Teachers responded to the Capstone team's survey that they either were not planning to return or were unsure (see Figure 11), with pay being the most frequently given reason among teachers who provided additional follow up information.

### **Figure 11**

#### *Early Career Teacher Plans to Continue Employment in SCPS*



*Note:* Data from Capstone team survey of Early Career Teachers; 42% of ECTs report being unsure or no when asked about their plans to continue employment in SCPS over the next two years.



Teachers who responded “no” or “unsure” when asked if they were planning to continue working in SCPS for the next two years (n=40) were asked a follow up question about what the main factors were that would go into their decision about continued employment in SCPS next year. Teachers gave several reasons in response to this open ended question, with the most frequently given reasons listed in Table 14.

**Table 14**

*Reasons Given for ECT Response of “No” or “Unsure” to continuing with SCPS*

Reason Given	Frequency
Pay	10
Leadership & Support	9
Personal/Family	7
School Climate	7
Moving/Relocation	4
Stress/Mental Health	4

*Note:* From Capstone team survey of Early Career Teachers.

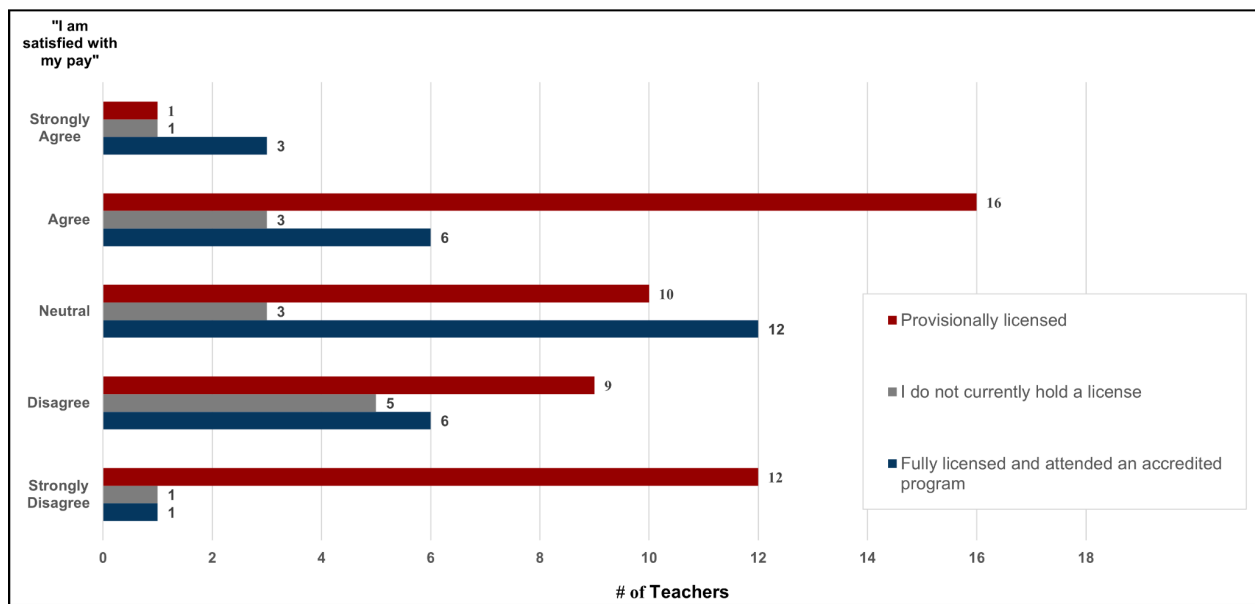
Twenty five percent of these teachers specifically mentioned pay, which was the most frequent reason given. This suggests teacher pay is the largest driver of ECT retention decisions, but it is not the sole driver. One teacher who was unsure if they would return highlighted the multiple reasons that played into their return decision, remarking “if the supports for student behaviors do not increase, as well as the pay, I will unfortunately have to move north where at least the pay better matches the expectations asked of me.”

Figure 12 illustrates the difficulty principals face in addressing compensation for Early Career Teachers in SCPS. When asked their level of agreement with the statement “I am satisfied with my pay,” few Early Career Teachers strongly agreed (5 out of 89, or 5.6%). This data does

show that while there is some variance among provisionally licensed teachers, most Early Career Teachers responded “neutral” or “disagree” with regards to their satisfaction with their pay.

**Figure 12**

*Pay Satisfaction by Licensure Status among Early Career Teachers*



*Note.* Data from Capstone team teacher survey.

### ***Principals Recognize the Pay Issue***

Principals also recognized the concern in principal interview responses. During the Capstone team interviews of 11 principals, there were eight questions asked of each principal along with a section for their additional thoughts. Pay was mentioned twelve times by six principals during these interviews, illustrating clear recognition of the challenge for keeping ECTs. The majority of responses corresponding to pay occurred with question eight, “What is your perception of the main reasons why ECTs leave your school?” as well as an open-ended question for any other thoughts. One principal stated, “The part where we are losing staff in turnover is competitive pay in the county right beside us.” Said another, “Same work for 20K more.” There was another question that garnered compensation-related answers, which asked

“What obstacles have you experienced in your ability to support ECTs?” In response, the principal cited concerns of losing ECTs to neighboring districts, such as Prince William County and Fairfax County, who have higher starting salaries as cited in Table 1. Another middle school principal cited a concern that teacher pay not being aligned with the cost of living exacerbates the teacher shortage. The perception of low pay as a factor in ECT retention was reflected in one principal’s comment: “The payscale is not always friendly.” As a closing discussion, another principal stated, “Pay would help,” as a way to support ECT retention.

A related factor mentioned during the principal interviews is that teachers are asked to do more with less money. Another principal echoed this, “Teachers are leaving due to time and money, budgets getting thinner and thinner. Teachers spend funding for schools out of their own pocket.” In fact, this principal also noted some of her staff live just above paycheck to paycheck in her Title 1 building. To combat this concern, the school, out of their own pockets, not SCPS budget, sends home food boxes home for students and staff. The principal said this comment with a sense of pride for her community, yet, when asked about the broader discussion to support basic living expenses of staff, she replied, “No one talks about that.”

### **Pay Matters, but What Else is Keeping Teachers in SCPS?**

As noted above, supportive leadership can override pay concerns and contribute to a sense of belonging and feeling supported, helping with teacher retention. In evaluating other key factors driving ECT retention, the survey provided a checklist of four options, with the ability to add responses. Respondents selected the following reasons for staying at SCPS: location was selected by 48%; positive working environment by 20%; climate by 19%; and pay by 13%. Other answers included factors such as having their own children attend SCPS, ability to work a convenient schedule, and opportunities to coach or sponsor activities (all cited by less than 5% of

respondents). This suggests that while pay may be a driver of ECT attrition, there are other drivers that might mitigate the concern about pay.

The role of a positive working environment and school climate is critical. Building climate, as defined by Riley (2008) is "...a distinct theme when walking in the hallways" (p. 26). The authors continue, "Strong instructional leaders create a climate...conducive to learning" (p. 26). In connection, as stated in the literature review, a positive school climate with a growth mindset increases the job satisfaction of its ECTs (Prelli, 2016). The school climate is crucial to ECT decisions to remain in SCPS or not, based on ECT responses to the Capstone teams' survey. For example, narrative responses from ECTs remarked "school culture to me is so important. If your workplace is not a positive one, where you feel important and appreciated, it makes you feel like you are replaceable." Others noted "job satisfaction and feeling valued/supported as an employee" were critically important when formulating their decision to return to SCPS the following year. In short, "the main factor is that I am being paid enough to sustain myself. The other deciding factor is that I am very close with my colleagues, I love the climate of SHS." This was echoed by an ECT who stated they would return because "I love the school in which I currently work in and I have the support I need."

By continuing to focus on the community needs of pay, positive working conditions, and positive climate as the main drivers for ECT retention, district and school leaders have the potential to make meaningful impact on turnover.

### **Chapter Summary**

In RQ1, our team sought to answer what currently exists at the school and division level to support ECTs. Survey data from SCPS' *Prep for Success Week* indicated teachers appreciated and desired more time with their school-based support teams. Combining data from *Prep for*

*Success Week* and our teacher created survey suggests a need to incorporate differentiated support during the initial onboarding process. When examining school based PL and teams of support for ECTs, findings showed variation across schools in professional learning, mentor support, and principal comfort levels. Principal interview responses pointed to varying levels of comfort in supporting ECTs, with no direct correlation between years experience and comfort levels. ECTs planning to return to SCPS cited assistant principals and mentors as playing the biggest factor in their support. Coaches were identified as being the main support personnel for ECTs who had been identified as needing the most support. The importance of teacher value presented itself for the first time in RQ1's findings, with a clear connection between teachers feeling valued and comfort level in communicating with leadership, as well as a correlation between those teachers who feel valued by leadership and their plans to stay teaching within the district.

Findings of what is currently working in SCPS for ECTs (RQ2), was broken down into four categories: Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), licensure status and professional learning (PL), supportive leadership, and quality mentorship. Data analysis pointed to the importance of PLCs and collaborative time for ECTs. However, a lack of shared planning time for teachers to meet existed for most ECTs surveyed. The ECTs expressed preference for PL specific to content areas, allowed for shared time with other ECTs, and was structured in practical easily applied formats. ECTs value supportive leadership who provide clear communication and feedback. Data indicates the presence of a diverse support team for ECTs in the form of principals and assistant principals, coaches, specialists, and mentors. However, in certain cases, a need for additional training on providing support specific to ECTs is needed. Findings showed differing degrees of perceived mentor quality by school. The data collected

provided great insight on factors impacting the quality of mentorship. Higher turnover rates in schools contributed to additional burdens in assigning mentors. More mentors needed resulted in certain mentors being assigned multiple mentees, mentors assisting ECTs outside of their content backgrounds, differing planning times for mentors and mentees, disinterested mentors, and underskilled mentors.

RQ3 covered considerations of collective needs of ECT support at both school and district levels. Using the same data sources from RQ1 and RQ2, the Capstone team determined ECTs are unsatisfied with their pay. However, pay alone is not the only factor contributing to ECT retention. Survey results had ECTs ranking both a positive working environment and school culture above pay in importance when considering whether or not to return for employment. Strong findings indicate school leaders play a significant role in building a positive climate within their schools. Given SCPS is higher than state averages and most other school divisions in both provisionally licensed and out-of-field teachers, the findings from RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3 point to a substantial need for differentiated support specialized toward the needs of ECTs. To that end, recommendations and actions that follow were informed by analysis of the unique elements of the problem and context, knowledge from the scholarly literature, and these findings.

## Chapter V: Recommendations

The Capstone team ultimately created 10 recommendations for SCPS. These recommendations are grouped into five categories aligned with Chapter Four's findings. The five core findings with their corresponding recommendations are as follows:

1. Professional development is highly variable (recommendations 1-3)
2. School leadership impacts retention (recommendations 4-6)
3. Early career teachers crave quality feedback (recommendation 7)
4. Need for common planning time (recommendation 8)
5. Quality mentorship matters (recommendations 9 and 10)

Each of the 10 recommendations were also carefully considered in collaboration with current ECT support and retention efforts already being provided by the partner. Readers will notice an explicit connection between new recommendations and Stafford's current systems of support, resources, and frameworks in an attempt to strengthen their quality. These connected suggestions honor the work that is already being done in Stafford, and moves away from a common practice of layering on additional solutions without weaving changes into the fiber of context and current practice.

As one step towards aligning recommendations with current practice, the Capstone team suggests that Stafford County Public Schools begin collecting data on teachers' years of service as a part of their exit interviews and survey efforts. This addition to existing tools would ensure a more robust understanding of the current rates of attrition for early career teachers (ECTs), and also help the division to measure the impact of their improvement efforts for supporting ECTs.

**Core Finding 1: Professional Development is Highly Variable*****Recommendation 1: Build a More Streamlined Playbook of Standardized Topics for Ambassadors to Cover Through Professional Development for Early Career Teachers at the School Level***

Early career teachers (ECTs) receiving pertinent and timely professional development is crucial in their professional growth, retention, and performance. Stafford County should create an ECT professional development playbook that can be consistently implemented by Ambassadors at the school-based level. Similar to the current SCPS ambassador monthly professional learning list, the playbook should include a list of specific topics to be covered, along with a corresponding timeline for when each topic should be covered throughout the course of the school year. The PL topics covered should be broken down into a tiered level of support that are differentiated based on the licensure status and content area of the ECTs. A sub-recommendation within this would be for Ambassadors to have an additional planning period allotted for the purpose of planning differentiated experiences and to conduct observations of ECTs.

**Rationale.** As noted in our introduction and findings, Stafford County Public Schools (SCPS) has high levels of provisionally licensed and out-of-field teachers. Therefore, there is a need for professional learning aligned to novice levels even more so than traditionally prepared new teachers. The Capstone team's teacher survey showed 51% of teacher respondents felt the professional development they received did not align to their professional needs. ECTs reported they wanted PL geared toward their content area or placement of teaching, such as special education, general education, and electives. The data from the teacher survey also indicated ECTs preferred interactive training with take-a-ways that could be easily applied into their



classrooms. Furthermore, SCPS' exit survey also saw *Inadequate Professional Development* make it into the Top 5 reasons given by teachers for leaving SCPS. These data point to a need to move beyond a *one size fits all* model and toward a differentiated and specialized system of professional development support for ECTs.

Our literature review also supports the recommendation of tiered PL support for ECTs. Participation in quality ongoing professional development for ECTs plays a crucial role in their decision to stay in the field of teaching (Ferguson-Patrick, 2011). However, studies show the majority of PL received by teachers is in the form of one-stop training for all staff, that fails to differentiate by specific teacher need, or incorporate follow-up opportunities for continued learning (Carr et al., 2017; Cohen & Wiseman, 2022). This form of PL has also proven to be detrimental to ECTs specifically, who are entering the field from a variety of alternative pathways (Redding & Smith, 2016).

**Suggested Steps.** We recommend the PL playbook be tiered by ECT licensure and teaching placement. There should be a set plan for provisionally licensed teachers and teachers who are teaching outside of their field. The PL playbook should be broken down by content, with division level specialists made available to provide training. We suggest the tailored experiences start during SCPS' *Prep for Success Week* with specialized sessions for provisionally licensed and out-of-field teachers. Based on ECT feedback from our surveys, we recommend PL incorporate time for peer-to-peer reflection, offer practical topics with hands-on-training, and be easily replicable in the classroom. When possible, the tiered professional learning (PL) should be implemented during already existing times in the school's schedule and calendar, such as building level PL days, faculty meetings, and PLC allotted time. The suggested SCPS team members involved in designing the playbook would be composed of division leadership who

oversee professional development, building level administration, coaches, specialists, and Ambassadors.

**Benefits.** Having differentiated professional learning and development specialized to early career teacher needs will benefit ECTs at SCPS in a variety of ways. First, provisionally licensed teachers who have not received a traditional education licensure pathway or participated in teacher prep programs, such as student teaching placements, will benefit from PL directed to their novice experience. Second, the playbook will assist ECTs in receiving aligned professional development to their specific needs. Additionally, the PL addressing ECTs particular needs, while incorporating desired topics and preferable formats, will assist ECTs in feeling more heard and valued by school leadership. Above all, quality PL leads to improved teacher retention. Intentional planning and guidance will help ensure quality experiences that better meet SCPS teachers' desire for differentiated, interactive, and applicable learning.

***Recommendation 2: Develop Onboarding Plan for Early Career Teachers Hired Mid-Year***

In certain instances, teachers are hired after the start of the school year. We recommend Stafford County implement an onboarding plan for early career teachers hired after the start of the official school year. Included in this plan, should be a condensed *Prep for Success Week*, which other new hires receive at the start of the school year.

**Rationale.** Compared to teachers who start off the year in their positions, mid-year hires are “less likely to stay in the district” (Papay & Kraft, 2016). One study showed teachers who are hired mid-year “are twice as likely to leave their schools—or the profession altogether—within a year” (Sparks, 2011). When drilling this down to ECTs specifically, first year teachers hired mid-year are leaving at a rate 15% higher than teachers hired at the start of the school year (Sparks, 2011). Apart from a drop in retention rates for late-hires, research also discovered a

negative correlation between teachers hired mid-year and student achievement (Papay & Kraft, 2016). Studies of students of mid-year hires indicated lower scores on reading and math standardized tests, compared to their student peers who received their instruction from on-time hires (Iasevoli, 2016). Furthermore, feedback from our teacher surveys indicated that teachers feeling valued increased retention and attrition rates. When teachers start the school year mid-year, there can be a tendency for them to not receive the same support as their counterparts who started off the year in their positions, which in turn can cause them to feel less valued by their schools and leadership (NYC Dept. of Education, n.d.).

**Suggested Steps.** The first recommended step is for SCPS to compile their current onboarding practices, starting with SCPS' *Prep for Success Week*. The goal is to provide late hires with access to materials, resources, and support that mirrors what SCPS' new hires received at the start of the school (NYC Dept. of Education, n.d.). We suggest SCPS complete a deep dive into their *Prep for Success Week* agenda and offerings, selecting what they believe to be the key aspects of onboarding dealing with components such as instruction and curriculum resources, school technology, gradebook and attendance, staff handbook, professional learning communities, important personnel, student supports, connection to department/grade level teams, and any other pertinent information needed to successfully start in their district. We recommend SCPS look at existing time built into their school calendar to complete this onboarding, such as staff development days, PLC time, and faculty meetings. Additionally, we encourage SCPS to investigate alternative options for consolidated orientations to be held over a course of time after-school and/or possibly Saturday programs (The School District of Philadelphia, 2023).

**Benefits.** Implementing this recommendation ensures ECTs hired mid-year receive effective onboarding. Providing support for ECTs joining the school division mid-year will help

them feel valued and increase retention rates among ECTs. This will improve the quality of instruction and support student performance. The recommendation directly aligns with *Goal 4* of SCPS' 2022-2027 *Strategic Plan*, which is to “Support and invest in all staff” (p. 2).

***Recommendation 3: Evaluate Professional Learning and Development***

Providing professional learning and development opportunities for ECTs is only the first step in building a system of ECT support. A school system must also be able to measure the effectiveness of the PL and use that information to inform continual improvement. Thus, we recommend developing a framework for PL evaluation. We propose SCPS takes into consideration how PL quality is measured. The goal is to move beyond feedback on ECT satisfaction of PL received towards deeper measures that evaluate outcomes against objectives, such as learning transfer and reliable indicators of success. We also recommend evaluation of PL be more cyclical and utilize a multi-method approach. To do so, we suggest utilizing the Capstone team-created professional learning program evaluation tool (Appendix E).

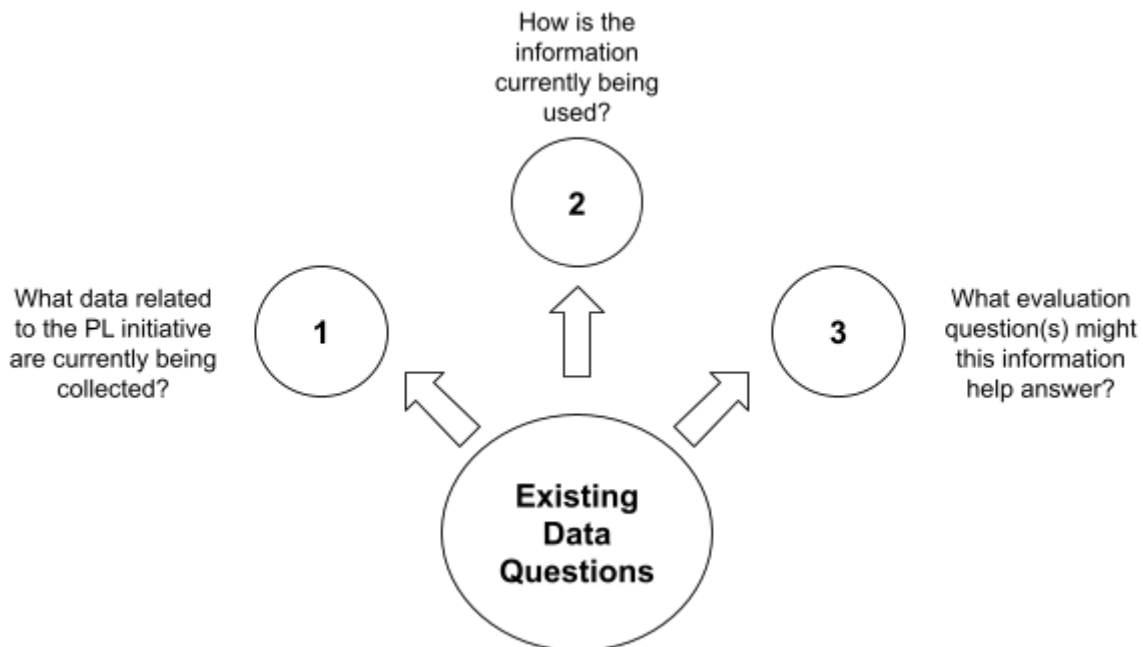
**Rationale.** As mentioned in Recommendation #1, teacher survey data indicated 51% of teacher respondents felt the PL they received did not align to their needs, and inadequate PL was the fifth highest reason given for teachers leaving SCPS in their exit surveys. School districts allocate a substantial number of resources and capital, both financial and human, toward providing professional learning and development for their teachers. However, many studies show a lack of insight on whether the provided PL has been effective (Breslow & Brock, 2020). By evaluating the effectiveness of PL endeavors, SCPS would have more data to determine future expenditures in professional learning. Decision makers could better decide which PL to continue with, which to discontinue, and which to add (Guskey, 2013). Furthermore, “evaluation also provides important insight about the strengths and challenges of professional learning, and how

current efforts can be improved” (Breslow & Brock, 2020, pp.1-2). Lastly, PL is one of the main factors in improving teacher quality, and research shows, “enhancing teacher quality is key to improving the quality of an educational system” (Borg, 2018).

**Suggested Steps.** We suggest SCPS starts off with mapping what currently exists regarding evaluation of offered professional learning and development. The mapping process would include making a list of all current professional development offered and any professional development partnerships SCPS has. In addition, SCPS should identify any available data connected to their professional development offerings and partnerships. Once this list has been determined, there are three overview questions SCPS should answer for the initial evaluation process (which are illustrated in Figure 13): What is currently being collected, how is it being used, and what does it tell us (Breslow & Brock, 2020, p.17)?

**Figure 13**

*Evaluative Questions for Existing Data Related to PL*



*Note.* Adapted from Breslow & Bock (2020).

Once SCPS' current PL offerings have been appraised, we recommend SCPS use our Capstone team-created professional learning program evaluation tool (Appendix E) for all future PL/PD initiatives. The Capstone team developed program evaluation tool can be used to assess the impact professional development offerings have on ECT retention efforts. This tool provides questions SCPS should consider as well as suggested data sources to help evaluate their various professional learning offerings and partnerships.

**Benefits.** The recommendation establishes an evaluation and progress monitoring tool for professional development and learning at Stafford. Reconfiguring the evaluation system for PL directly relates to goal 3, objective 4, strategy 1 of SCPS' *2022-2027 Strategic Plan*: "Align resources to meet school, educator, and student needs" (p.12). Having a clearer understanding of what PL works will help achieve the objective of aligning resources. This recommendation will help ensure the finances are used wisely and SCPS obtains a return on their PL investments. Improving the evaluation system will lead to better quality of PL, ensuring PL is effective for ECTs, which will, in turn, contribute to an increased retention rate of ECTs (Ferguson-Patrick, 2011).

## **Core Finding 2: School Leadership Impacts Retention**

### ***Recommendation 4 : Design Responsive and Embedded Professional Development for***

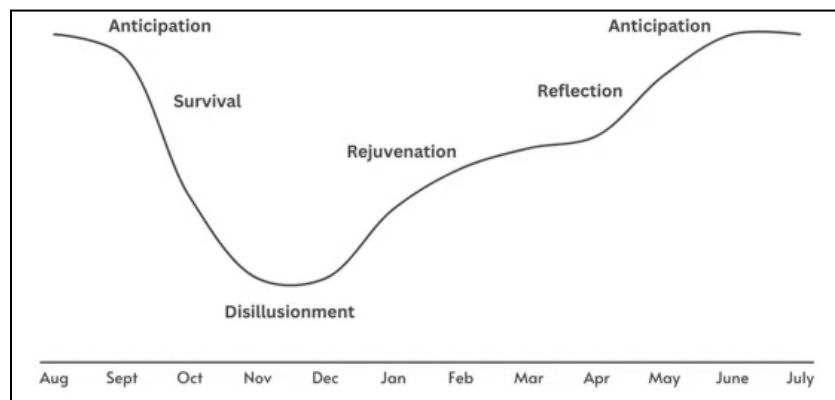
#### ***Principals to Support Early Career Teachers***

Our team's findings illustrated the need for more robust offerings of professional learning designed specifically for principals. To meet this need, SCSP should integrate professional learning into monthly principal meetings to enhance, augment, and guide the support systems which are already in place for ECTs. Principals have direct impact on setting up the conditions of professional development for the early career teachers within their building, and Weston, et al.,

(2021) learned through a study that conditions for professional development are at least as important as the content. To further ensure ECTs are successful, principals must have a strong foundational knowledge of the psyche or attitude new teachers traditionally experience during their first year of teaching (See Figure 14).

**Figure 14**

*Phases of First-Year Teachers' Attitude Towards Teaching*



*Note.* Adapted from Ellen Moir's *Phases of First-Year Teaching* (1990).

**Rationale.** Just four of eleven principals stated in interview they were 'very confident' in supporting early career teachers, and only 14% of teacher survey respondents who intend to return to SCPS cited principals as their primary support person. These findings make it imperative SCPS provide principals with more impactful professional development aligned to teacher needs. As noted in the literature, "Administrators don't have a lot in their tool kit in terms of what they're able to really do to change teachers' behaviors and offer support" (Will, 2019). The work of providing professional learning to principals can address a common need for actionable strategies.

Principal's must build strong relationships with new teachers for maximum effectiveness, as the dynamic between principals and teachers are crucial for the success of schools. Once

relationships are formed, trust follows (Will, 2019), and it is especially important for ECTs to trust their principal, as initiatives and guidance are introduced to the ECT. SCPS teacher survey respondent results (see Figure 8) connect the need for teachers to feel valued to enable them to be comfortable in communicating with school leaders. The additional professional learning sessions will better equip principals to build trust with ECTs by providing opportunities to engage in dialogue with other principals and human resource staff members about the best approaches to connect with new teachers.

**Next Steps.** This recommendation involves time, a commodity hard to come by. Our team understands how concentrated with information each principal meeting agenda is each month, and this fact increases the effectiveness of this recommendation. Having a dedicated time set aside monthly during principal meetings clearly demonstrates the importance SCPS' Central Office is placing on ECT support. Implementation of this recommendation will demonstrate total buy-in from every level of SCPS and reinforce the need to focus on ECTs. This buy-in will best ensure professional learning is reaching each school with fidelity. The following steps are scheduled to provide SCPS with an overall focus for each month's principal meeting during the academic year (see Appendix F). To best meet the needs of ECTs, our recommendations align with Ellen Moir's (1990) referenced phases of first year teachers (See Figure 14 above).

For September and October, when teachers are ebbing out of the "anticipation phase" and flowing into the 'Survival' phase, teachers are most receptive to relationship building techniques as they begin to sense challenges upon them. For this reason, principals will share with their colleagues relationship building strategies for ECTs. This 'think tank' will provide opportunities for principals to share what is going well, to reflect on relationships which are not strong, and to



create an action plan to address the ECTs of whom the principal feels they need to focus on. October's meeting will focus on the learning from the September initiative.

In November, a historically difficult time for the morale of new teachers as illustrated by Ellen Moir, principals share strategies to build morale. In December, we recommend SCPS Human Resources department provides professional learning on how to conduct *Stay interviews*. A Stay Interview is “a structured discussion a leader conducts with an individual employee to learn specific actions the leader can take to strengthen the employees engagement and retention within the organization” (Finnegan, 2015). This creates an opportunity to learn if a teacher plans to remain within the school, and if not, to have time to remove some of the barriers for this teacher.

January and February are months in which we recommend principals hear feedback from instructional coaches. This will positively impact student achievement, as the coaches share their perspective on areas in which ECTs need the most support. ECTs within SCPS complete surveys throughout the year to provide insight to their needs. Reviewing these surveys will keep the principal informed of potential school-wide concerns, as well as other barriers ECTs may be experiencing. The results will be shared with Ambassadors and mentors, and thus ECTs will feel validated and heard, a concern they have expressed through collected surveys. Validating the ECTs will help retain them.

The rationale for March's principal meeting recommendation is to support ECTs in providing the appropriate remediation for students. This will drive student learning and increase results on state mandated assessments. The reflection strategies recommended in April will give principals and Ambassadors insights into the mentoring programs effectiveness. In May, we recommend inviting the Ambassadors to the portion of the principal meeting reserved for ECT

support. During the meeting in May, principals and Ambassadors will focus on refining the program for the upcoming academic year. Refining the program will include the principal and ambassador to assess the program's overall performance, identify strengths and weaknesses, reflect upon the mentor selection process, and use these insights to create a targeted action plan for the upcoming year. This plan will address future needs and build on the lessons from what has been effective and what has not.

**Benefits.** Monthly principal meetings that include time set aside for an intentional focus on ECT support will help ensure each school within SCPS has the conditions in place for ECTs to thrive. When principals are given time to discuss pressing concerns such as teacher retention with their colleagues, they not only build their skill sets but also feel valued. Research by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) claims there is a positive correlation between effective leadership and teacher satisfaction and retention. Principals who are well-versed in supporting new teachers can create a nurturing environment that not only enhances teacher performance but also contributes to a stable and engaged teaching staff. This, in turn, positively impacts student achievement, as teachers who feel supported are more likely to implement innovative teaching strategies and remain committed to the profession. This should significantly improve teacher retention rates.

***Recommendation 5: Encourage Cross-School Assistant Principal and Ambassador***

***Partnerships: Observing Mentor Meetings from other Schools***

Assistant principals and Ambassadors should engage in cross-school observations by attending Ambassador-led meetings at different schools. Data displayed in Table 11 highlights the important role assistant principals play in supporting ECTs. This initiative would involve

creating partnerships between schools, where they mutually agree to observe one another's Ambassador-led meetings.

**Rationale.** With assistant principals being cited by SCPS ECT's as the ones most responsible for providing support (see Table 11), it is important to leverage their influence and impact. Cross-school collaboration, one study indicated, increases positive outcomes in professional development, and increases both social capital and intellectual capital (Umekubo et al., 2015). When these two capital entities are combined, opportunities to develop organizational learning occurs (Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009). The cross-school observations of the Ambassador-led meetings will provide educators with unique opportunities to gain insights, strategies, and practices that can be applied back to their own schools and efforts to support ECTs. This will help address the thoughts expressed by three principals who stated there was a lack of specific professional learning for administrators. Furthermore, such exchanges foster a culture of continuous improvement and professional growth among educational leaders (Umekubo, et al., 2015). The collegial interactions between assistant principals and Ambassadors will encourage the sharing of effective ECT support practices, thereby enhancing the overall quality of both programs.

**Next Steps.** To implement this recommendation, schools should first identify potential partner schools with similar or complementary strengths and challenges. Next, they should establish norms, objectives, and expectations of the observation process. This includes scheduling visits, defining the focus areas of observation, and agreeing on feedback tools. After each observation has concluded, schools should arrange for a session debriefing. The debriefing will serve as a mechanism for participants (assistant principals/Ambassadors ) to reflect, exchange insights, and create next steps for implementing new strategies. Finally, the next

observation cycle should be scheduled to continue the collaboration and to continuously grow the knowledge base of both schools.

**Benefits.** The benefits of this cross-school observation initiative are many. It promotes a culture of openness and mutual learning among educational leaders, which can lead to the adoption of innovative practices and strategies. Through the observation cycles and debriefing exercise, the skillsets of the assistant principals and Ambassadors will see their leadership skills enhanced, as well as learning more tools for meeting the needs of the ECTs in their building. Additionally, this initiative may strengthen the network among schools, and thus foster more collaborative opportunities in the future. Finally, by providing new leadership opportunities to assistant principals, this will enable them to build important skill sets, which may assist SCPS in building leadership capacity, and growing future principal-ready leaders.

### **Core Finding 3: Early Career Teachers Crave Quality Feedback**

#### ***Recommendation 6: Create Diverse Teams to Support Early Career Teachers Through Feedback and Coaching Cycles***

Powerful feedback promotes ECT effectiveness which leads to increased student achievement and teacher retention. When schools intentionally create diverse teams that support ECTs, there is an opportunity to tie building teams tightly to teacher success using feedback as the common driver. The SCPS teams, including administrators, coaches, mentors, and Ambassadors, are in a position to collaborate to provide ECT targeted and practical feedback. To allow for centralized SCPS cohesion and consistency, as well as school-based autonomy, this recommendation supports staffing, leadership, and student needs while leveraging the rich diversity of a school-based team.

Additionally, the team must be aligned in their feedback focus and consistency of

language. A consistent approach to feedback allows for explicit target goals that unites the feedback even for diverse teams providing instructional support. With this approach, there are three positive outcomes:

1. Consistency in the team's awareness of the targeted area of support for each teacher,
2. Understanding of each person's role in supporting the ECT,
3. Clear communication amongst the team in each of these areas.

When each team member knows the coaching framework and specific focus for an ECT, and understands the part they play in ECT development and feedback, then the team unites in providing effective, targeted and aligned feedback which improves ECT retention.

**Rationale.** The results from the Capstone survey data illustrate there are many school staff members who work with ECTs; APs and mentors are particularly noted for their support. Based on the survey and interview findings, ECTs prefer the direct support of dedicated school-based staff to support their success and development. Leveraging the number of staff who impact ECTs allows for a cohesive and extensive support network.

The literature, as well as survey and interview results, clearly stamp the importance of diverse teams and feedback. As Williamson & Blackburn (2021) stated, effective leaders differentiate their leadership, this includes targeted feedback for ECTs. The importance of effective feedback was noted in a study conducted by Fry (2015), in which seventy-five percent of teachers were frustrated with the feedback they received from their administrators. As Goodwin (2012) noted, feedback isn't just about corrections or evaluations, it's about helping new teachers find their footing and grow in their roles. In addition to feedback, a focus on a consistent coaching cycle is a top priority due to the multiple partnerships SCPS maintains.

A feedback process that emphasizes the strengths of the new teacher can be incredibly

affirming. Plus, ECTs need positive feedback to reinforce their choice to join the education profession. Of note, Whitaker et al. (2019) claimed administrators should provide feedback to ECTs during their first days to create expectations of support and improvement. In addition, when an ECT's strengths are affirmed by leadership, this is a powerful influence and motivation (Heifetz & Linksy, 2017). Conversely, when leadership fails to provide targeted and impactful feedback, this could impede teacher growth (Costa & Garmston, 2006). Some perspectives and voices may resonate with an ECT more strongly than others, supporting the need for a diverse team dedicated to ECT support and feedback. As Hattie & Timperly (2007) noted, such collaboration and dedication to a continuous path of learning and adaptation has the ultimate goal of allowing students to thrive in a supportive and nurturing environment.

**Suggested Steps.** One step in targeted support to new teachers who struggle for a variety of reasons is to provide a timeline for coaches, mentors, or administrators on how to intervene and provide support. There would not be a mid-year alarm for a struggling ECT; assessment of progress would be continuous by the school team. To prevent teachers from struggling in isolation, the Administrative Team would rely on specificity in a coaching cycle, feedback language, and scheduled observations. From an evaluative lens, they would also be able to apply a rubric of consistent feedback language and practices to track teacher progress, or the lack thereof.

Also, the same cohort offering support can prioritize time with the struggling ECT to ensure time is spent on planning, observations, feedback and achieving small, yet measurable goals for improvement. A second step is to collaborate with partners to maintain a consistent cycle across the district; this should include monthly focus topics for multiple categories of teachers within the ECT framework based on instructional support, professional support and

personal support. An additional step could be an intentional focus depending on content and licensure status. The timeline and calendar would provide guidelines for the number of observations, topics of focus, and number of feedback sessions that should occur within a specified timeframe. Finally, a coaching cycle for the coaches (such as mentors, assistant principals, principals, and Ambassadors) would be another impactful move. A framework for all coaching cycles and feedback calendars would be created centrally and shared with all stakeholders, along with targeted PL, to ensure understanding of the process and goals, as well as consistent implementation across schools.

Using the coaching calendar, feedback needs to tie to an actionable and measurable step in the school year calendar. For example, starting the year with a focus on routines, procedures and building relationships, would be options for the first month or two of school. In fact, being mindful of the connotation that *feedback* may imply a corrective action, SCPS should consider using terms such as “advice” or “debriefing” to support a psychologically safe environment, as noted by To (2022). Feedback should also highlight what teachers are doing well to validate their work and promote a sense of value and efficacy. To help reach this goal, the ECT should be actively involved in the conversation.

Feedback should be relevant to the ultimate goal of student learning. Due to the many partnerships and guidelines SCPS offers for ECTs, there must be alignment. One way to reach this goal is to use the monthly calendar of focus topics with conversation stems, and anticipated ECT responses, so mentors can focus on discrete, and targeted, areas of support using common structures. In addition, the creation of PL for Principals to support ECTs could also have aligned topics so the entire building is focused on one important skill per month for ECTs along with guidelines for levels of performance (see Appendix G for sample tiered decision tree focused on

ECT growth developed by the Capstone team). Using common language in non-evaluative feedback from coaches combined with evaluative feedback from administrators helps to streamline messages and amplify action steps.

Allowing the mentor to observe the mentee's classroom along with another member of the team is another way for the three individuals (ECT, mentor being observed, and additional observer) to collaborate while widening the circle of impact. The observations should align with the focus during the specific part of the coaching cycle to support consistency and school-wide practices for ECTs. An overarching consideration is to recognize that each ECT receives feedback differently and certain words, tone, manners, and processes work for some and not others. Taking the time to build a relationship with each ECT and know how they accept feedback increases their sense of value to the school community.

The importance of school-based teams providing effective feedback correlates to the concept of a Web of Support (Varga 2021). This approach recognizes the varied players and their interconnectedness. In this framework, there is a youth at the core of the web, however, SCPS can consider this central position as an ECT. In the middle of the Web of Support, the ECT is tied to multiple relationships and resources that serve as an ecosystem. Varga surmises, "Fostering connection between adults can better equip each adult with the knowledge necessary to support young people towards their goals" (p.2). Similarly, by considering all the team members tasked with providing support, the Web of Support can illustrate the different parts that each plays. Namely, Principals and Administrators are evaluative, while Coaches and Mentors are in a supportive role. All these players must fully understand their role in supporting ECTs, and this understanding should be developed intentionally and aligned with the coaching cycle. This step allows for the team's unification in the language used for support and provides focus for the



ECT's development through use of a rubric, as noted in Appendix G, to norm progress and communication.

**Benefits.** A feedback/coaching cycle builds a supportive network using the commonality of feedback. All stakeholders benefit. The ECT benefits from improved practice targeted to their need (behavior, academics, planning, relationships, etc.). This in turn increases self-efficacy and boosts confidence leading to a feeling of value as a teacher, community member, and individual. The mentor, Ambassador, coaches and administrators benefit from supporting a new teacher by building an effective relationship and using consistent language that could be used for other teachers as well, making the process one of streamlined, yet targeted, support. Notably, when Administrators, especially the Assistant Principals who are responsible for working with the majority of ECTs, can use feedback as a way to make connections, encourage improvement, and be a listening ear, then the teacher will be more invested in improvement. The largest benefit lies with the students: as the teacher improves, the student learning and engagement does as well.

From a practical perspective, having consistent calendar focus topics, recommendations for feedback language, and collaboration among the teacher support team to ensure aligned and effective feedback will build coherence in providing effective feedback. Notably, an additional benefit of creating year-long phases of ECT development recognizes the cycle of anticipation, survival, disillusionment, rejuvenation, reflection and anticipation (Moir, 1999). A positive outcome of this approach is that it recognizes the challenges facing an ECT and weaves in support for both instructional and management classroom success along with acknowledgement of teachers' growth and value.

**Core Finding 4: Need for Common Planning Time*****Recommendation 7: Leverage the Master Schedule to Ensure Shared Planning Time and Improve Collaboration and Feedback for Early Career Teachers***

A well-crafted master schedule can help support the needs of early career teachers in multiple ways. School leaders should construct a master schedule that builds in time for frequent meetings between early career teachers and mentors, provides opportunities for ECTs to engage in common planning with experienced teachers, and gives ECTs access to professional learning on an ongoing basis. These strategies all have enormous potential that can lead to increased teacher retention (Grossman & Davis, 2012).

**Rationale.** Building in time for mentoring and support during the teaching day is critical for the success of early career teachers. Our review of the literature stressed the importance of creating a master schedule which builds in time for collegial support and common planning (Lambersky, 2016). Successful school leaders intentionally create collaborative environments where early career teachers can learn from more experienced mentor teachers, including sharing a common planning time (Shules & Flores, 2020). In addition, school leaders should strive towards creating a teaching schedule for early career teachers that builds in time for mentoring and support as well as time for ongoing professional learning (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; Grossman & Davis, 2012).

From our teacher survey, we found that SCPS early career teachers indicated a desire for more time for common planning and meeting as Professional Learning Communities. Additionally, our principal interviews were supportive of Professional Learning Communities as a leading support strategy for ECTs, suggesting that prioritizing time for collaborative planning should be a priority for SCPS. Further, we found principals who felt ‘less confident’ about their

ability to support ECTs recognized the importance of finding time to provide this support; as one principal noted, there is often a lack of time within the school day to provide the depth of meaningful and effective feedback for ECTs. The majority of early career teachers in our survey reported that the mentoring program had a positive impact on their decision to stay in SCPS, so providing a common planning time that includes mentoring would help support increased retention of early career teachers.

**Suggested Steps.** We suggest SCPS begin with professional development offerings for building leaders, offering master scheduling workshop sessions for district level leaders, principals, assistant principals, as well as other administrators who have input into scheduling practices (for example, a director of student services or guidance department). This workshop model would focus on leader-led learning around successful implementation of common planning times, relying on those principals already leveraging their master schedule to build in common planning time. Through our principal interviews, the Capstone team was able to identify three school principals (one at the secondary level and two at the elementary level) who have begun this process and might be willing to lead peer learning at a principal meeting. Across SCPS, ECTs are expected to participate in PLCs. Knowing schools have this effective structure in place, the possibility of common planning time is a launching point for multi-faced ECT success, especially since this practice is widely ingrained across SCPS. In addition, SCPS should leverage their outside partnerships as well, some of whom might be able to provide more in-depth and robust professional learning on master scheduling practices.

We also recognize shifting scheduling practices is potentially a long and more involved process than simply switching planning periods for teachers. We recommend giving time for schools to shift their scheduling practices to include common planning time for teachers, with the

immediate goal of prioritizing common planning time for teachers in critical need areas, including special education and English for Speakers of Other Languages. Later, as capacity grows, there should then be a shift to provide common planning time for teachers across all other subject areas as well. As part of this, every effort should also be made to provide common planning for mentors and ECTs as well.

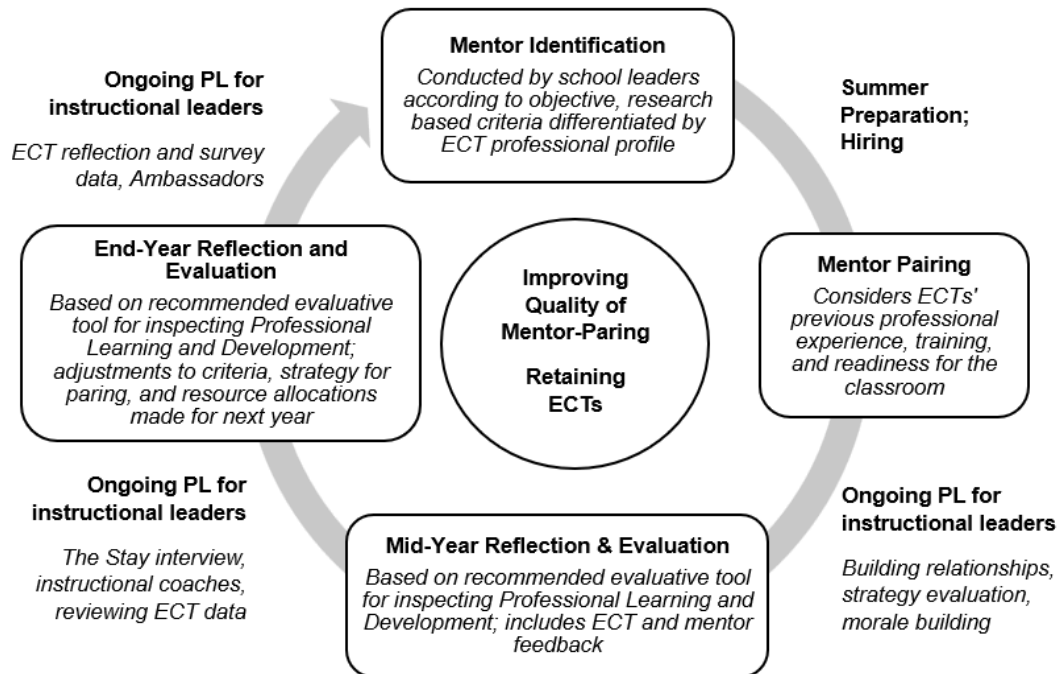
**Benefits.** A well crafted master schedule can go a long way to support ECTs and lead to positive outcomes in ECT retention. First, this recommendation would provide time for early career teachers to participate in Professional Learning Communities. ECTs find value in participating in PLCs, which provide them the opportunity to engage in continued learning and planning directly connected to instructional needs. Time for common planning with a PLC is crucial towards increasing ECT retention, given the critical importance of collaborative time in an ECTs decision to remain in SCPS. Second, the master schedule would provide embedded time for mentoring and support during the school day. Having a common planning time would allow teachers time to not only practice new teaching strategies but also get feedback from their mentors as well, increasing new teacher effectiveness and feelings of satisfaction and leading to higher levels of Early Career Teacher retention.

#### **Core Finding 5: Quality Mentorship Matters**

##### ***Recommendation 8: Improve the Quality of Mentor-Pairing for ECTs***

Rather than recommending changes to mentor support in SCPS, this recommendation focuses on quality *mentor-pairing* made by school-based leadership teams. We recommend SCPS continue using objective criteria for identifying quality mentors across their buildings, but add differentiated criteria for identifying mentors based on the professional needs of ECTs (Appendix H). These criteria should be grounded in evidence-based best practices for what

research proves to make the best mentors for new teachers arriving with a range of prior experience and training. Specifically, SCPS should consider how criteria for pairing mentors with provisionally licensed and out of field teachers may differ from those identifying mentors supporting new teachers with traditional training or previous teaching experience. These criteria can also anchor extended professional learning opportunities for instructional leadership teams supporting mentors and ECTs in SCPS. Notably, mentor-pairing requires extensive frontloading to ensure each year's success; however a final piece of this recommendation suggests extending the pairing process by adding additional opportunities for leadership teams to evaluate and reflect on the effectiveness of their pairings throughout the course of a year and across several years of implementation. Figure 15, built by the Capstone team, suggests how the pairing process can become strengthened by enhancing the quality of pairing between ECTs and their mentors; quality-pairing, in this cycle, can be determined by the same tool the Capstone team is recommending SCPS use to evaluate their PL efforts (Appendix E).

**Figure 15***Mentor-Pairing Reflective Cycle for Instructional Leaders*

*Note:* This model shows the recommended reflective cycle, built by the Capstone team, for improving mentor-pairings across SCPS. Steps one and two use the Capstone team-created differentiated criteria map to enhance SCPS' current efforts around mentor-pairing (Appendix H). Steps three and four provide two, through year opportunities for leadership teams to measure the quality of their pairing efforts using an evaluative tool like the one built by the Capstone team (Appendix E). Surrounding this cycle is ongoing PL for leadership teams (as mentioned in recommendation four).

**Rationale.** A critical piece in successful retention efforts of new teachers is their access to quality mentorship (Carr et al., 2017; SREB, 2018). Without an intentional effort to connect mentees with a highly qualified mentor, research "...finds no evidence that assignment to a mentor is linked with reduced odds of leaving teaching for alternatively certified teachers..." It is

only when ECTs receive “...helpful feedback ...and support from their mentor [that] they are predicted to leave teaching at a much lower rate” (Redding & Smith, 2016). We see this supported in the responses of ECTs seeking motivated mentors who have the capacity to provide effective support. According to the literature, qualities of an effective mentor include being collaborative, goal focused problem solvers who provide actionable feedback to new teachers (Alred and Garvey, 2014; Carr et al., 2017). Effective mentors have a deep understanding in division and school-based policy, and also prove to be committed to continuing their own professional development through learning and additional leadership opportunities (SREB, 2018). Great mentors are not always the most popular teachers, though leadership teams tend to default to choosing these teachers as ideal candidates for the job because they are well liked among a staff (Berg & Conway, 2016; Zaffini, 2015). Instead, evaluating mentor candidates by using consistent division-wide criteria to prioritize traits like the ones listed above (collaborative, problem solvers, deep understanding of policy...) makes the identification process more aligned to the mentorship experiences SCPS seeks to provide.

While most new teachers are having positive experiences through mentorship in the Mentor360 program, those who report less meaningful mentoring support share their concerns around logistical barriers to accessing their mentor, or unqualified, uninterested mentors. If the goal is to improve mentorship experiences for all ECTs, Stafford must first examine how they are identifying qualified teachers to serve as mentors in their buildings. Currently, SCPS’ guidance around identifying quality mentors and pairing them with ECTs does not take into consideration the new teacher’s professional profile and what it might mean for their first-year needs. An enhancement to their current practice and guidance means ECTs are connected with not only an in-house quality mentor, but with one who specifically has strengths lending themselves to more

personalized support of new teachers. When this happens, school-based teams can measure the quality of mentor-pairings overtime, making adjustments to their pairing strategies based on the quality of mentor-support generated using the differentiated criteria for identification (Appendix H).

Identifying quality mentors, however, is simply the first step in the recommended reflective mentor-pairing cycle (Figure 15). Step two involves considering ECTs' previous professional experiences as an integral part of successful pairing. The literature recommends new teachers be matched with mentors from the same content area backgrounds, and who have common prep-times to allow time for feedback and collaborative instructional planning (Berg & Conway, 2016; Zaffini, 2015). However, we also know, according to the analysis of secondary Stafford data, new teachers appreciate having mentors who complement their preferred working and communicative styles. ECTs in Stafford also highlighted a desire to be paired with a mentor who understands their professional needs. For example, if they arrive to Stafford with previous teaching experience or, inversely, arrive as a provisionally licenced teacher without traditional teacher training, ECTs report appreciating mentorship that personalizes their support based on those previous professional experiences. This recommendation, perhaps, is most critical for retention efforts of teachers joining the Stafford team through non-traditional routes to licensure. Because SCPS has such high rates of out of field placements and provisionally licensed teachers, using differentiated criteria will ensure targeted support for the high numbers of teachers arriving to Stafford without traditional training.

The Capstone team also recommends SCPS leaders using an evaluative tool to measure the success of their attempted pairings both throughout a year and annually (Appendix E). Deeper evaluation of larger, systematic programs or initiatives is supported in the literature as



opportunities for “reflection, refinement, and adaptation” even after an effort has reached full implementation (Kaffenberger et al., 2023). This recommended evaluative tool (Appendix E) not only considers ECTs’ reactions to mentoring, which is reflected in the current feedback and survey data collected by SCPS, but it pushes instructional leadership teams to consider what ECTs are learning through mentorship, how ECTs are applying new knowledge through mentorship, how the school community is embracing ECT support, and how ECT support through mentorship is impacting student learning outcomes. Each of these reporting levels require teams to attach data to their claims, ensuring the reflective practice is not skewed by personal regard for mentors and their new teacher pair.

**Suggested Steps.** The Capstone team recommends the partner continues collaborating with school and division-level experts to curate guidance documents that offer evidence-based criteria for identifying quality mentors. However, if not currently outlined, this guidance should consider differentiated criteria for mentor identification with ECTs’ professional needs and profiles in mind (Appendix H). These criteria should consider mentors’ skill sets and qualities that may be best serving for specific types of ECTs seeking support within their first years in Stafford. After completion, this enhanced guidance document should be shared with school leadership teams and Ambassadors, and division experts may consider holding virtual office hours or professional learning around how the resource was built and suggestions for its use.

Next, instructional leadership teams should group their ECTs into larger categories based on their previous professional experiences. Appendix H outlines these suggested categories to help guide pairing success: previous teaching experience versus no teaching experience; provisionally licenced, out of field, traditional teacher-training; returning from previous experience in SCPS, or joining the SCPS team from another school location. Based on their

professional needs and scheduling availability, ECTs can then be paired with a quality mentor who can most closely match their first-year needs. In the event a school does not have access to in-house, quality mentors to support the needs of their ECTs, an instructional leader can submit their information to a larger request list as needing virtual access to a mentor from another building (see Recommendation 3 for virtual mentorship).

Once a school team has made their pairings, this cycle encourages instructional leaders to complete two opportunities for evaluative reflection throughout a school year. Teams should use a reflective tool (Appendix E) to ensure depth to their estimates of successful pairings for their ECTs. This tool also requires leadership teams to attach objective measures to their responses which is a missing piece to the evaluative feedback that is currently being collected through SCPS' Mentor360 feedback forms.

A final critical component of this reflective effort is a commitment to ongoing PL for instructional leaders. Professional learning for leaders supporting mentor-pairing for ECTs should be offered by stakeholders at the division level, but might also include leader-led learning where teams who have found ways to already successfully implement successful pairings share small case-study examples from their own buildings. This evidentiary learning not only helps to cultivate buy-in for the communal-wide need to retain new teachers, but it also helps to build the capacity and confidence of leaders who are already finding success.

**Benefits.** If both the Mentor360 program's framework for identifying mentors and the Professional Learning being offered to building leaders aligns to this reflective evaluation cycle for mentor pairing, mentor quality becomes less variable, and support becomes more consistent. Pairing ECTs more intentionally based on their prior professional experience also means mentor support becomes more personalized. Establishing differentiated, research-based criteria to help

identify suitable mentors and evaluating the quality of mentor-pairings over time will help to increase the duration and number of effective mentorships within the already existing program. When pairings are successful they will increase the level of satisfaction and quality of support for ECTs in Stafford County. With consistent support, larger evaluation measures at the division level can be made.

***Recommendation 9: Offer Virtual Mentorship to ECTs Seeking Content Specific Support That Doesn't Already Exist in Their School Building, with Priority for SpED and ESOL***

In buildings without access to enough mentors with similar content expertise as the ones of their new teachers, SCPS should consider virtual pairings for mentorship. Though leadership teams try their best to intentionally match ECTs with appropriate mentors, the reality is that new teachers oftentimes are paired with their mentor by default. When a leadership team is forced to connect an ECT with a mentor from a different content area, it leaves new teachers feeling frustrated and mentors feeling limited in how to best support the needs of their mentee. Virtual mentorship provides an opportunity to ensure all new teachers are connected with a highly-qualified mentor from their same content or area of expertise.

**Rationale.** The quality of a mentor is the highest contributing factor to successful mentorship during an ECT's first years in the classroom (Blazar, 2020; Cohen & Wiseman, 2022; Van den Borre et al., 2021; Redding & Smith, 2016). When teachers are paired with a mentor from outside their content or area of speciality expertise, it leaves the new teacher without a direct line of support when they seek feedback or instructional assistance specific to their area's content. According to the analysis of SCPS' secondary documents and of the Capstone team's teacher survey, this is most frequently happening for ECTs entering the fields of special education (SpED) and English speakers of other languages (ESOL). The Virginia Workforce

Report (2022) corroborates this prioritization as they reported that in 2022, 16.2% of SpED positions in Stafford County were left unfilled. This means a significant number of new teachers specific to this area require quality mentors, but might not have in-building access to mentors with their same background. In the Capstone's Teacher survey and throughout Stafford's secondary datasets, new teachers from SpED and ESOL shared that while content knowledge is helpful, where their mentorship was lacking was in complex understanding of compliance-based requirements. This matters because the caliber of mentor assignments causes variation in a new teacher's experiences (Blazar, 2020; Cohen & Wiseman, 2022; Van den Borre et al., 2021), and ultimately has the potential to impact early career teacher retention (Weimer, 2020). When paired with a teacher who was not as familiar with the legalities connected to SpED or ESOL, specifically around accommodations and assessment, ECTs reported their mentorship being disconnected and less helpful. This area continues to be a prioritized need for Stafford as, most recently, they announced a net increase of 59 new full-time employees with particular focus on adding teachers to support English Language Learners and students with disabilities (Potomac, 2023).

**Suggested Steps.** As a part of the mentor identification process, when leaders recognize they don't have access to an in-house, quality mentor for ECTs, they should submit those new teachers' information in request for virtual mentorship (see recommendation #8). SCPS should consider this line of support specifically for SpED and ESOL teachers, as teacher and principal feedback supports their need of having a quality and accessible mentor who is an expert in regulatory compliance work and division policy. From there, Ambassadors, with the stewardship of the partner, could help facilitate pairings between ECTs in need of mentorship, and qualified mentors willing to provide virtual support from other buildings around the division.

Using the same differentiated, research-based criteria as mentioned in the reflective-evaluation cycle (see recommendation #8), SCPS should consider including criteria to their current handbook around a mentor's willingness to be compensated for supporting an additional mentee outside of their building who is in need of weekly support online. In some cases, a quality mentor may prefer online support themselves, where they are able to log on and connect with ECTs needing mentorship versus being responsible for both an in-house and online mentee. Virtual mentorship would follow the Mentor360 framework and ensure every school has access to quality teacher-experts for supporting ECTs, even if they don't all work in the same school building.

If 1-1 pairing of mentees with virtual mentors is not viable, SCPS should still consider creating virtual access to PLCs (VPLCs) for new teachers to meet on a regular basis. In VPLCs, ECTs from across the division meet to learn and plan together in small groups based on their needs or desired learning. This would give SCPS an additional, embedded opportunity to grow ECT capacity without requiring that quality experts all live equally within every school building across the division. Here, SCPS may also consider leveraging the expertise of their many community partners as they consider topics for VPLC learning and support for ECTs seeking virtual mentorship.

**Benefits.** Virtual access to mentorship for ECTs ensures every new teacher has a direct point of contact to someone serving as an expert in their same field. When this happens, ECTs are able to find answers to pragmatic and pedagogical questions that can be directly applied to their professional practice. Developing working relationships with mentors, even virtually, encourages a spirit of collaboration and professional networking which are both critical components of growing new teachers who successfully plant and sustainably develop themselves

during their first three years in the classroom (Blazar, 2020; Cohen & Wiseman, 2022). Virtual mentorship also offers a convenience factor to Stafford. Mentors who are willing and able to provide this virtual support are not required to drive across the division to sit with their mentee, but instead can log into a virtual space within and throughout a school day to still deliver the on-time support ECTs require. Especially for school buildings that historically serve higher numbers of ECTs, virtual mentorship helps to create equitable access to quality mentors for all new teachers without the cost of time.

### **Secondary Finding: Teacher Pay Increases Retention**

#### ***Recommendation 10: Create Opportunities for Teachers to Earn Skills and Pay Increases Through Micro-credentials***

Given the scope of the Capstone work, our team acknowledges it is not realistic to adopt a recommendation for SCPS to increase starting salary to a level that is competitive with its neighbors; therefore we recognized the division's need to be creative in addressing pay concerns that come up as one piece of the ECT retention puzzle. To that end, we recommend SCPS provide opportunities for teachers to earn micro-credentials that are tied to the pay scale or a stipend. Micro-credentials are "short, competency-based recognition that allows an educator to demonstrate mastery in a particular area" (nea.org, n.d.). Successful completion of earning the micro-credential would increase the teachers 'step' in the pay cycle, or provide a stipend to augment their salary. Understanding the anticipated limitations of the SCPS budget, we recommend SCPS caps the number of steps a teacher can gain for micro-credentials, to two.

**Rationale.** In our survey, teachers cited pay as their top reason for leaving SCPS, and principals, during interviews, acknowledged pay as a factor for teacher attrition as well. Data found within Figure 10 also identifies Lack of Teacher Voice and Inadequate Professional

Development within the top five reasons teachers leave SCPS. The micro-credential recommendation addresses each of these reasons teachers are leaving SCPS.

Micro-credentials allow teachers to acquire skills which contribute directly to improved teaching practices and student outcomes; compensation tied to earning micro-credentials could incentivize both knowledge acquisition and retention. Two traditional pathways for a teacher to increase their salary is through acquiring years of experience as they await ‘step’ increases and by obtaining advanced degrees (Nittler, 2018). However, these advanced degrees often lead a teacher out of the classroom and into administrative positions. Micro-credentials provide a pathway to increase teacher pay while allowing the teacher to remain within the classroom at the school level. The micro-credential also addresses the concerns of SCPS teachers and their perceived lack of teacher voice and inadequate professional development by allowing them to choose a customized growth plan. Rather than participate in a one-size fits all model, SCPS teachers can focus on areas directly relevant to their identified needs. In addition, many micro-credentials are asynchronous, enabling the learner to engage in the material at a time which meets their schedule.

SCPS teachers stated they want more voice and they indicated they want stronger options for professional learning. Micro-credentials will transform professional development for SCPS as it creates opportunities for teachers to increase their skills in areas of high interest to them. Successful completion of a micro-credential will signify expertise in a specific skill or competency. One study completed by Erickson (2019) revealed a significant positive relationship between personalized professional learning (in the form of micro credentialing) and teacher self-efficacy, including an “increased sense of expertise in an area of competency” (Erickson, 2019). This recognition will enable a teacher to increase their perceived status in a school as

‘expert’ in a particular area, and this may boost a teacher’s feeling of being valued by administration and other staff members within a school.

**Suggested Steps.** The first step towards implementing the micro-credential pathway towards more pay and greater professional learning is deciding on the pay structure. There are two main pay pathways SCPS can take: step increase or direct stipend. Because it becomes built into the pay scale and obligates the district to fund these increases, the step increase would incur more cost to the county long-term than direct stipend, depending on the amount the county would allocate for a stipend. We recommend, to have the greatest impact, a step increase. For a teacher to qualify for either monetary gain, they must successfully complete the micro-credential.

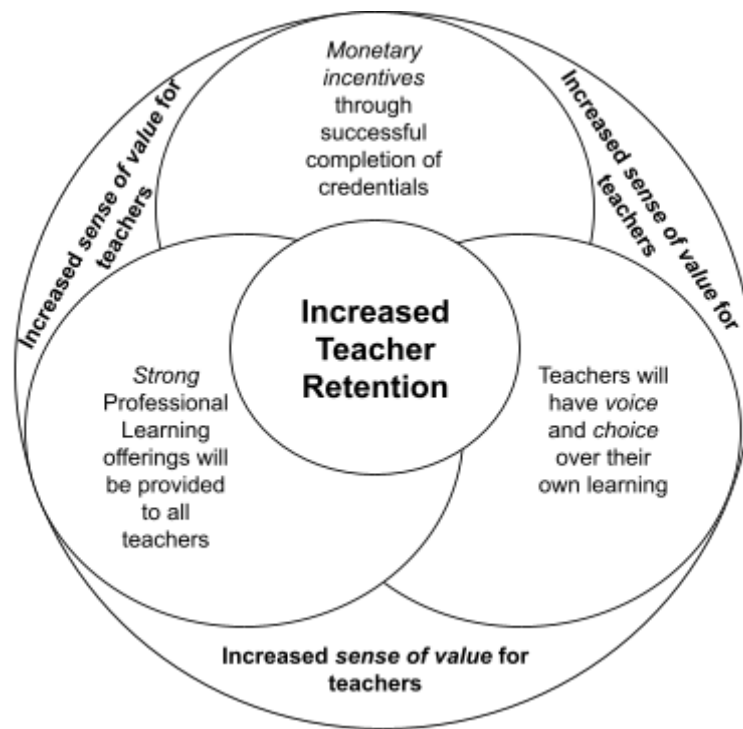
The next step is determining the micro-credential menu for teachers to select from. The Capstone team has selected the National Education Association (NEA) as a micro-credential resource due to its national reputation and a membership base of over three million (nea.org, n.d.). The NEA, at the time of these recommendations, offers thirty-eight categories with 221 micro-credentials split between them. Utilizing the NEA bank of resources would eliminate the need for SCPS leaders to take the time to create ‘from scratch’ micro-credentials. The NEA states each micro-credential takes approximately fifteen hours to complete. Our team recommends a teacher must complete three micro-credentials, approximately 45 hours of PL, within the same broader category to earn a step increase. A teacher may choose to complete one or two micro-credentials for one stipend, with the specific amount decided upon by SCPS decision makers. To decide upon which micro-credential categories would be best for SCPS to offer, a committee made up of principals, teachers with a wide range of backgrounds and experiences (ECTs, veterans, varied demographics, and licensure paths), along selected central



office staff members would convene to provide input. The committee's recommendation would then be integrated into the annual SCPS budget.

Once the pay structure and course offerings have been decided upon, a communication plan needs to be enacted. The communication plan would include informational meetings and webinars for teachers and staff to learn about the program, ask questions, and receive guidance on how to get started. The county would then put information onto their website and other social media outlets so a wide audience would be captured. Appendix I provides a detailed description of the communication plan.

**Benefits.** Through micro-credentials, teachers will have an opportunity to increase their pay while staying within the classroom. The credentials also fosters a culture of learning among teachers, and addresses their voiced concerns about currently having a lack of voice and wanting stronger PL offerings. This will elevate their pedagogy, thus improving the academic experiences of SCPS students. It also acknowledges and addresses the wide-range of needs of the teachers of SCPS. Teachers can tailor a PL framework which works best for them. ECTs have unique needs especially, and often have varied licensure pathways which require a PL structure which can best ensure they are successful. Another key benefit is a sense of feeling valued and being heard as micro-credentials is an answer to concerns teachers, especially ECT's, have voiced on surveys. Finally, this compensation pathway may attract new teachers to SCPS as other divisions competing for teachers may not offer this attractive feature towards increased pay and opportunity for ongoing skill acquisition. Figure 16 below provides a visual summary of the key benefits of micro-credentials.

**Figure 16***Benefits of Micro-Credentials***Conclusion**

The Capstone team began this work by looking deeply at Stafford County Public School's current context and challenges around Early Career Teacher support and retention. Though salary was discovered to be a key driver of new teacher attrition, the team's actionable problem of practice revealed a lack of administrative support and dissatisfaction with building climate as two additional contributing factors impacting retention of ECTs. A third factor was Stafford's reported inconsistency among expectations across schools within the district in their implementation of teacher support systems (ex: Mentor360). These variances make long term measurability of ECT support efforts difficult to manage.

After identifying SCPS' problem of practice, the team explored literature to deepen our understanding of larger contextual challenges of teacher retention. With Stafford's specific needs in mind, the team investigated the impact of strong leadership, feedback and coaching, and mentorship on Early Career Teacher retention. This scholarship helped the team to build a responsive teacher survey and principal interview experience with the goal of collecting new data around ECT retention efforts for Stafford County. These collections efforts would help to identify what currently exists to support new teachers in Stafford (RQ1), what is working well for new teachers and their leadership teams (RQ2), and what division needs SCPS should consider in their communal efforts to retain new teachers (RQ3). The team used Stafford's secondary data to corroborate findings rendered by the teacher survey and principal interviews.

Connected to RQ1, the Capstone team found several currently existing systems of support for ECTs in SCPS. New teachers and principals alike highlighted the current division-level support being provided by the Mentor 360 program and new teacher onboarding week. At the school level, the team found that ECTs in Stafford are supported by diverse teams, and are offered Ambassador-designed PL on a monthly basis. The Capstone team discovered variability in the supports being offered at the school level, leading to differing levels and quality of support being provided to ECTs across the division. RQ2 allowed the team to find what supports were working more effectively for SCPS, and if they weren't working, how could they be improved. Here, ECTs and leadership teams shared priorities such as common planning time as a vehicle for weekly support of new teachers, the types of PL that ECTs find to be most helpful, new teachers' appreciation of strong leadership teams, and the power of quality mentorship. Again, while these supports were named as ones that were mostly working for ECTs, the Capstone team uncovered variance in how building level leadership teams prioritized

time and resources connected to each of these systems. Finally, RQ3 proved that teacher pay is a heavily contributing factor in a teacher's decision to retain, however, other drivers like school culture and having a positive working environment should also be considered in division-wide efforts to retain new teachers.

These findings led the Capstone team to develop ten recommendations that intentionally connect to currently existing systems of support in Stafford County Public Schools. Each recommendation outlines targeted action steps for addressing the unique needs of Stafford, while also ensuring responsive action is connected and sustainable for the partner. Though Stafford has begun the important work of supporting highly qualified new teachers, their need is greater than simply retention. On the other side of these efforts are students and their access to quality learning. Finding ways to enhance their current systems of support for new teachers means Stafford will not only grow and retain their faculty, but will ensure every student is provided with the quality of learning they deserve.

### References

- Abdulahi, B. A. (2020). Determinants of Teacher's Job Satisfaction: School Culture Perspective. *Humaniora*, 32(2), 151–162.
- Achinstein, B., & Athanases, S. Z. (2005a). Focusing new teachers on diversity and equity: Toward a knowledge base for mentors. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21(7), 843–862. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.05.017>
- Aguilar, E. (2016, August 11). *School leaders: 6 strategies for retaining new teachers*. Edutopia. <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/school-leaders-six-strategies-retaining-new-teachers-elena-aguilar>
- Albert, M. (2020). If these emails could talk: The pitfalls of hastily implementing a teacher mentoring program. *Taboo: The Journal of Culture & Education*, 20–64.
- Allegretto, S. A., & Mishel, L. (2016). *The teacher pay gap is wider than ever: Teachers' pay continues to fall further behind pay of comparable workers*. Economic Policy Institute.
- Alliance for Excellent Education. (2004). *Tapping the potential: Retaining and developing high-quality new teachers*. Washington, DC: Author
- Bacher-Hicks, A., Chi, O., & Orellana, A. (2023). Two years later: How covid-19 has shaped the teacher workforce. *Educational Researcher*, 52(4): 219-229. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9974372/>
- Bamberger, M. (2012, August). *Introduction to mixed methods in impact evaluation* (Publication No. 3). InterAction. <https://www.interaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Mixed-Methods-in-Impact-Evaluation-English.PLf>

- Bardach, L., Klassen, R. M., & Perry, N. E. (2022). Teachers' psychological characteristics: Do they matter for teacher effectiveness, teachers' well-being, retention, and interpersonal relations? *Educational Psychology Review*, 34(1), 259–300.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-021-09614-9>
- Barnum, M. (2019). New teachers often get the students who are furthest behind — and that's a problem for both. *Chalkbeat*.  
<https://www.chalkbeat.org/2023/6/28/23775695/teacher-turnover-morale-crisis-solutions-pay-support>
- Barnum, M. (2023, June 27). The teaching profession is facing a post-pandemic crisis. *Chalkbeat*.  
<https://www.chalkbeat.org/2023/6/27/23774375/teachers-turnover-attrition-quitting-moral-e-burnout-pandemic-crisis-covid>
- Bartell, C. A. (2005). *Cultivating high-quality teaching through induction and mentoring*. Corwin Press.
- Becker, J. & Grob, L. (2021). *The School Principal and Teacher Retention*. Richmond, VA: Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium.
- Becker, J. D., Robnolt, V., Dye, K., & Ross, E. (2021). *Will they stay or will they go? Analysis of the 2019 DOE working conditions survey*. Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium.
- Berg, M. H., & Conway, C. (2016). The design and implementation of the asta mentor program: Perceptions of program developers and mentor Preparation Workshop participants. *String Research Journal*, 7(1), 63–82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/194849921600700103>

Bhandari, P. (2023, June 22). *Triangulation in Research | Guide, Types, Examples*. Scribbr.

<https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/triangulation/>

Bickmore, S. T., & Bickmore, D. L. (2010). Revealing the principal's role in The induction process: Novice teachers telling their stories. *Journal of School Leadership, 20*(4),

445–469. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105268461002000404>

Billups, F. D. (2019). Qualitative data collection tools: Design, development, and applications.

*Qualitative Research Methods*, Vol. 55. Sage.

Bjorklund Jr., P. (2023). I kind of have that place to sit: First-year teachers' experiences of belonging. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 131*.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104187>

Blazar, D. (2020). Teacher Coaching to Improve Instruction at Scale: Opportunities and Challenges in Policy Contexts. *Teachers College Record, 122*(10), 1-9.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/016146812012201001>

Borg, S. (2018). Evaluating the impact of professional development. *RELC Journal, 49*(2),

195-216). <https://journals-sagepub-com.proxy.library.vcu.edu/doi/epub/10.1177/0033688218784371>

Boyd, D., Grossman, P., Ing, M., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2011). The influence of

school administrators on teacher retention decisions. *American Educational Research Journal, 48*(2), 303-333. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831210380788>

Breen, A. (2023). After high post-pandemic return rates, teachers left in record numbers in 2021. *University of Virginia (UVA)*.

<https://news.virginia.edu/content/after-high-post-pandemic-return-rates-teachers-left-record-numbers-2021>

- Breslow, N. & Bock, G. (2020). Evaluating professional learning: A tool for schools and districts. *Institute of Education Sciences*.  
[https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northeast/pdf/ne\\_5.3.5\\_evaluation\\_pd\\_brief\\_12-22-20\\_accessible.pdf](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northeast/pdf/ne_5.3.5_evaluation_pd_brief_12-22-20_accessible.pdf)
- Brown, B. (2015). *Daring greatly: How the courage to be vulnerable transforms the way we live, Love, parent and lead*. Avery.
- Bryant, J., Ram, S., Scott, D., & Williams, C. (2023, March 2). *K–12 teachers are quitting. what would make them stay?*. McKinsey & Company.  
<https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/k-12-teachers-are-quitting-what-would-make-them-stay#/>
- Byrk, A., Gomez, Louis, Grunow, A., LeMahieu, P. (2017) *Learning to Improve: How America's Schools Can Get Better at Getting Better*. Harvard Education Press.
- Callahan, J. (2016). Encouraging retention of new teachers through mentoring strategies. *The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin: International Journal for Professional Educators*, 83, 1–6.
- Cann, R. F., Riedel-Prabhakar, R., & Powell, D. (2020). A model of positive school leadership to improve teacher wellbeing. *International Journal of Applied Positive Psychology*, 6(2), 195–218. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41042-020-00045-5>
- Capone, V., Joshanloo, M., & Park, M. S.-A. (2019). Burnout, depression, efficacy beliefs, and work-related variables among school teachers. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 95, 97–108. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2019.02.001>
- Carr, M. L., Holmes, W., & Flynn, K. (2017). Using Mentoring, Coaching, and Self-Mentoring to Support Public School Educators. *Clearing House*, 90(4), 116–124.  
<https://doi-org.proxy.library.vcu.edu/10.1080/00098655.2017.1316624>



- Carver, C. L., & Feiman-Nemser, S. (2008). Using policy to improve teacher induction. *Educational Policy*, 23(2), 295–328. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904807310036>
- Carver-Thomas, D. & Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). *Teacher turnover: Why it matters and what we can do about it*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.
- Carver-Thomas, D., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2019). *The trouble with teacher turnover: How teacher attrition affects students and schools*. Education Policy Analysis Archives, 27, 36. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.27.3699>
- Castro, A. (2023). Managing competing demands in a teacher shortage context: The impact of teacher shortages on principal leadership practices. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 59(1), 218–250. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X221140849>.
- Cells, P., Sabina, L. L., Touchton, D., Shankar-Brown, R., & Sabina, K. L. (2022). Addressing teacher retention within the first three to five years of employment. *Athens Journal of Education*, 10(2), 345-364. <https://doi.org/10.30958/aje.10-2-9>
- Cha, S.-H., & Cohen-Vogel, L. (2011). Why they quit: A focused look at teachers who leave for other occupations. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 22(4), 371–392. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2011.587437>
- Clabes, J. (2022, February 21). *Losing our teachers: High turnover, shortages, burnout are a problem for our schools and children*. NKyTribune. <https://nkytribune.com/2022/02/losing-our-teachers-high-turnover-shortages-burnout-are-a-problem-for-our-schools-and-children/>

Cline, N. (2023, April 4). *Virginia relying more heavily on provisional licenses to fill teacher shortages* • *Virginia Mercury*. Virginia Mercury.

<https://virginiamercury.com/2023/04/04/virginia-relying-more-heavily-on-provisional-licenses-to-fill-teacher-shortages/>

Cochran-Smith M. *Walking the road: Race, diversity, and social justice in teacher education* 2004. New York Teachers College Press

Cohen, J. & Wiseman, E. (2022). Supporting professional learning at scale: Evidence from the District of Columbia public schools. *Teachers College Record*, 124(12), 62-94.

<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1365955>

Costa, A. L., & Garmston, R. J. (2006). *Cognitive coaching: A foundation for renaissance schools*. Hawker Brownlow Education.

Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., Gardner, M. (2017). *Effective Teacher Professional Development*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute

Davis, E. (2014). *Making Mentoring Work*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Dawson, P. (2014). Beyond a definition. *Educational Researcher*, 43(3) 137–145

<https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X14528751>

DeBella, A. (2021, March 26). *How to foster a welcoming environment for new teachers*.

Teaching Channel.

<https://www.teachingchannel.com/k12-hub/blog/welcoming-environment-new-teachers/>

DePietro, A. (2022, November 9). *Richest counties in the U.S.* Forbes.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/andrewdepietro/2021/12/21/richest-counties-in-the-us/?sh=4c14a9402ecd>

Dilberti, M., Schwartz, H., & Grant, D. (2021). Stress topped the reasons why public school teachers quit, even before covid-19. *RAND Corporation. Research Report.*

[https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RRA1121-2.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1121-2.html)

Dorner, H., Misic, G., & Rymarenko, M. (2020). Online mentoring for academic practice: Strategies, implications, and Innovations. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, 1483*(1), 98–111. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nyas.14301>

Driscoll, D. L., Appiah-Yeboah, A., Salib, P., & Rupert, D. J. (2007). Merging qualitative and quantitative data in mixed methods research: How to and why not. *Ecological and Environmental Anthropology (University of Georgia), 3*(1), 19-28.

DuFour, R. (2014). *Harnessing the Power of PLCS*. *Educational Leadership, 71*(8), 30-35.

Education, V. D. of. (2023). *Stafford County Public Schools*. Virginia School Quality Profiles.

<https://schoolquality.virginia.gov/divisions/stafford-county-public-schools>

*Education Workforce Data & Reports | Virginia Department of Education*. (2023). Virginia Department of Education. Retrieved August 28, 2023, from

<https://www.doe.virginia.gov/teaching-learning-assessment/teaching-in-virginia/education-workforce-data-reports>

Ensley, M. D., Hmieleski, K. M., & Pearce, C. L. (2006). The importance of vertical and shared leadership within new venture top management teams: Implications for the performance of startups. *The Leadership Quarterly, 17*(3), 217–231.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2006.02.002>

Erickson, P. W. (2019). *Micro-credentialing: A transformative tool for educator re-licensure and educator efficacy* (dissertation).

<http://proxy.library.vcu.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/micro-credentialing-transformative-tool-educator/docview/2310307817/se-2?accountid=14780>

Ferguson-Patrick, K. (2011). Professional development of Early Career Teachers : A pedagogical focus on cooperative learning. *Issues in Education*, 21(2), 109-129.

<https://www.iier.org.au/iier21/ferguson-patrick.pdf>

Fry, S. (2015). First-year teachers and induction support: Ups, Downs, and in-betweens. *The Qualitative Report*. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2007.1635>

Fullan, M. & Boyle, A. (2014). *Big-city school reforms: Lessons from New York, Toronto, and London*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Gagen, L., & Bowie, S. (2005). Effective mentoring: A case for training mentors for novice teachers. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 76(7), 40–45.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/07303084.2005.10609312>

Garcia, E., & Weiss, E. (2019). The teacher shortage is real, large and growing, and worse than we thought The first report in ‘The Perfect Storm in the Teacher Labor Market’ series.

*Economic Policy Institute*.

<https://www.epi.org/publication/the-teacher-shortage-is-real-large-and-growing-and-worse-than-we-thought-the-first-report-in-the-perfect-storm-in-the-teacher-labor-market-series>

Ghiraldini, K. (2023, February 22). *New teachers are a long-term investment*. Edutopia.

<https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-principals-support-new-teachers/>

Goleman, D., & Senge, P. (2014). *The triple focus: a new approach to education*. Florence, Massachusetts: More than Sound.

Goodwin, B. (2012, May 1). *Research says new teachers face three common challenges*. ASCD. <https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/new-teachers-face-three-common-challenges>

Goodwin, C., Graham, M., & Scarborough, H. (2001). Developing an asynchronous Learning Environment. *Educational Technology and Society*. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/26392249\\_Developing\\_an\\_Asynchronous\\_Learning\\_Network](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/26392249_Developing_an_Asynchronous_Learning_Network)

Gray, L., & Taie, S. (2015, April). Public school teacher attrition and mobility in the first five years. National Center for Education Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2015/2015337.PLf>

Greenberg, M. T., Domitrovich, C. E., Weissberg, R. P., & Durlak, J. A. (2017). Social and emotional learning as a public health approach to education. *The Future of Children*, 27(1), 13–32. <https://doi.org/10.1353/foc.2017.0001>

Grillo, M. (2021). The administrator's role in Universal Design for Learning's successful implementation. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 54(5), 372–379. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00400599211022030>

Grissom, Jason A., Anna J. Egalite, and Constance A. Lindsay. 2021. "How Principals Affect Students and Schools: A Systematic Synthesis of Two Decades of Research." New York: The Wallace Foundation. <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/principalsynthesis>.

Grossman, P., & Davis, E. (2012). Mentoring that fits. *Educational Leadership*, 69(8), 54-57.

Guskey, T. (2013). Does it make a difference? Evaluating professional development. *ASCD*.

[https://pdo.ascd.org/LMSCourses/PL13OC010M/media/Leading\\_Prof\\_Learning\\_M6\\_Reading1.pdf](https://pdo.ascd.org/LMSCourses/PL13OC010M/media/Leading_Prof_Learning_M6_Reading1.pdf)

Gutierrez, L. T. (2018). *Building Teacher Self-Efficacy through Administrator Feedback*.

<https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.w5yn-55tc>

Hakanen, J. J., Bakker, A. B., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2006). Burnout and work engagement among teachers. *Journal of School Psychology, 43*(6), 495–513.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2005.11.001>

Hall, D. M., Hughes, M. A., & Thelk, A. D. (2017). Developing Mentorship Skills in Clinical Faculty: A Best Practices Approach to Supporting Beginning Teachers. *Teacher Educators' Journal, 10*, 77-98.

Hamre, V. K., Einarsen, V. S., & Notelaers, G. (2023). Psychosocial safety climate as a moderator in role stressor- bullying relationships: A multilevel approach. *Safety Science, 164*,

106165. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssci.2023.106165>

Handford, V., & Leithwood, K. (2013). Why Teachers Trust School leaders. *Journal of Educational Administration, 51*(2), 194–212.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/09578231311304706>

Hattie, J., & Zierer, K. (2017). *10 Mindframes for Visible Learning: Teaching for Success* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315206387>

Hattie, J. (2018). *Collective Teacher Efficacy*. You Tube,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UCMV692itfg>

Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of educational research, 77*(1), 81-112.

- Hausman, C. S., & Goldring, E. B. (2001). Sustaining teacher commitment: The role of professional communities. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 76(2), 30–51.  
[https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327930pje7602\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327930pje7602_3)
- Heifetz, R. A., & Linsky, M. (2017). *Leadership on the line: Staying alive through the dangers of change*. Harvard Business Review Press.
- Heikkinen, H. L., Wilkinson, J., Aspfors, J., & Bristol, L. (2018). Understanding mentoring of new teachers: Communicative and strategic practices in Australia and Finland. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 71, 1-11.
- Hinnant-Crawford, B.N. (2020). *Improvement science in education: A primer*. Meyers Education Press, Gorman, ME.
- Iasevoli, B. (2016, September 26). *Study: Students suffer when teachers are hired after the school year starts*. Education Week.  
<https://www.edweek.org/leadership/study-students-suffer-when-teachers-are-hired-after-the-school-year-starts/2016/09>
- Institute of Education Sciences. (2022, April). *Mental Health and Well-Being*.  
<https://ies.ed.gov/schoolsurvey/spp/>
- Ingersoll RM. Who controls teachers' work: Power and accountability in America's schools 2003 Cambridge, MA Harvard University Press
- IRIS Center. (2023). *What should teachers understand about effective classroom behavior management?* <https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/beh1/cresource/q1/p01/>
- Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, (2021). *Report to the Governor and the General Assembly of Virginia: State Spending on the K-12 Standards of Quality: 2021 Update*. <https://jlarc.virginia.gov/pdfs/reports/Rpt561-2.pdf>

Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, (2021). *Report to the Governor and General Assembly of Virginia: State Spending: 2021 Update*.

<https://jlarc.virginia.gov/pdfs/reports/Rpt554.pdf>

Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, (2022). *Report to the Governor and General Assembly of Virginia: Pandemic Impact on Public K-12 Education*.

<https://jlarc.virginia.gov/PLfs/reports/Rpt568.PLf>

Johnson, A. D., Clegorne, N., Croft, S. J., & Ford, A. Y. (2020). The Professional Learning Needs of school principals. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 16(4),

305–338. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1942775120933933>

Jones II, A. (2023, February 11). Most of the us is dealing with a teaching shortage, but the data isn't so simple. *ABC News*.

<https://abcnews.go.com/US/map-shows-us-states-dealing-teaching-shortage-data/story?id=96752632>

Jones, N. D., Camburn, E. M., Kelcey, B., & Quintero, E. (2022). Teachers' time use and affect before and after COVID-19 school closures. *AERA Open*, 8(1), 1-14.

Jung, C. (2020, December 21). One challenge to reopening schools: Finding enough teachers.

*WBURnpr*. <https://www.wbur.org/news/2020/12/21/massachusetts-teacher-shortage>

Kaffenberger, Michelle, Jason Silberstein, and Marla Spivack, 'Evaluating Systems: Three Approaches for Analyzing Education Systems and Informing Action', in Anu Rangarajan (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Program Design and Implementation Evaluation* (2023; online edn, Oxford Academic), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190059668.013.35>



- Kardos, S. M., & Johnson, S. M. (2007). On their own and presumed expert: New teachers' experience with their colleagues. *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education*, 109(9), 2083–2106. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146810710900903>
- Katz, V. & Miller, L. (2023, April). Post-pandemic onset public school teacher retention and mobility in virginia. University of Virginia (UVA). *EdPolicyWorks*.  
<https://education.virginia.edu/documents/post-pandemic-onset-public-school-teacher-retention-and-mobility-virginia>
- Kaufman, Diliberti, M. K., & Hamilton, L. S. (2022). How principals' perceived resource needs and job demands are related to their dissatisfaction and intention to leave their schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. *AERA Open*, 8, 233285842210812.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584221081234>
- Kahn, J. H., Schneider, K. T., Jenkins-Henkelman, T. M., & Moyle, L. L. (2006). Emotional social support and job burnout among high-school teachers: Is it all due to dispositional affectivity? *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 27(6), 793–807.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/job.397>
- Kelly, N., Cespedes, M., Clara, M., & Hanaher, P. (2019). early career teachers' intentions to leave the profession: The complex relationships among preservice education, early career support, and job satisfaction. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 44(3), 93–113.  
<https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2018v44n3.6>
- Kennedy, M. M. (2016). How does professional development improve teaching? *Review of Educational Research*, 86(4), 945–980. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654315626800>
- Kirtman, L. & Fullan, M. (2011). Leadership. Key competencies for whole-system change. Bloomington, Indiana: Solution Tree Press.

- Koballa, T. R., Kittleson, J., Bradbury, L. U., & Dias, M. J. (2010). Teacher thinking associated with science-specific mentor preparation. *Science Education, 94*(6), 1072–1091.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/sce.20400>
- Kush, J., Badillo-Goicoechea, E., Musci, R., & Stuart, E. (2022, December). Teachers' mental health during the covid-19 pandemic. *Educational Researcher, 51*(9), 593-597.  
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X221134>
- Lambersky, J. (2016). Understanding the human side of school leadership: Principals' impact on teachers' morale, self-efficacy, stress, and commitment. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 15*(4), 379–405. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2016.1181188>
- The role of principals in addressing teacher shortages.*(2017, February). Learning Policy Institute.
- Learning Forward: The Professional Learning Association. (2021, September 23). *Theory of change.* <https://services.learningforward.org/theory-of-change/>
- Lee, J. M., Anzai, Y., & Langlotz, C. P. (2006). Mentoring the mentors: aligning mentor and mentee expectations. *Academic Radiology, 13*(5), 556-561.
- Leiter, M. P., & Maslach, C. (2017). Burnout and engagement: Contributions to a new vision. *Burnout Research, 5*, 55–57. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.burn.2017.04.003>
- Lipton, L., Wellman, B. M., & Humbar, C. (2003). *Mentoring matters: A practical guide to learning-focused relationships.* MiraVia, LCC.
- Marinell, W. H., Coca, V. M. (2013). Who stays and who leaves? Findings from a three-part study of teacher turnover in NYC middle schools. New York, NY: Research Alliance for New York City Schools. Retrieved from

<https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/research-alliance/research/publications/who-stays-and-who-leaves>

Maslach, C. (2001). What have we learned about burnout and health? *Psychology & Health*, 16(5), 607–611. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08870440108405530>

Masters, K. (2021, December 6). Virginia teacher shortages spiked during the pandemic. experts are worried about what's to come. *Virginia Mercury*. <https://www.virginiamercury.com/2021/12/06/virginia-teacher-shortages-spiked-during-the-pandemic-experts-are-worried-about-whats-to-come>

Maxwell, J. (2013). Chapter 6, Validity: How might you be wrong? *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach* (3rd ed., pp. 121-138). SAGE.

McLaurin, S. E., Smith, W., & Smillie, A. (2009, October 31). *Teacher retention: Problems and solutions*. Online Submission. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED507446>

Mehta, J. (2023, March 2). 3 years since the pandemic wrecked attendance, kids still aren't showing up to school. *National Public Radio (NPR)*. <https://www.npr.org/2023/03/02/1160358099/school-attendance-chronic-absenteeism-covid>

*Mentoring new teachers: A fresh look* (2018, January). Southern Regional Education Board.

[https://www.sreb.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/mentoring\\_new\\_teachers\\_2.PLf](https://www.sreb.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/mentoring_new_teachers_2.PLf)

Moir, E. (1990). *Phases of first-year teaching*. Originally published in California New Teacher Project Newsletter.

Moir, E. (1999). *The stages of a teacher's first year. A better beginning: Supporting and mentoring new teachers*. ASCD.

Moir, E., Barlin, D., Gless, J., & Miles, J. (2009). *New teacher mentoring: Hopes and promise for improving teacher effectiveness*. Harvard Education Press.

<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED515444>

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). (2022). *More than 80 percent of U.S. public schools report the pandemic has negatively impacted student behavior and socio-emotional development*.

[https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press\\_releases/07\\_06\\_2022.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press_releases/07_06_2022.asp)

New Teacher Center. (2022). *Annual Report*.

[https://newteachercenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/NTC\\_2022-\\_AnnualReport.PLf](https://newteachercenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/NTC_2022-_AnnualReport.PLf)

New Teacher Center (2023). *Annual Report*.

[https://newteachercenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/NTC\\_2023\\_Annual-Report\\_Digital.pdf](https://newteachercenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/NTC_2023_Annual-Report_Digital.pdf)

Nittler, K. (2018, July 26). *How do school districts compensate teachers for advanced degrees?*.

National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ).

<https://www.nctq.org/blog/How-do-school-districts-compensate-teachers-for-advanced-degrees>

Nguyen, T., Lam, C., & Bruno, P. (2022, August). *Is there a national teacher shortage? A systematic examination of reports of teacher shortages in the United States*.

*EdWorkingPaper. No.22-631*. Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University:

<https://doi.org/10.26300/76eq-hj32>

- Nickel, J. & Crosby, S. (2021) Professional identity values and tensions for Early Career Teachers. *Teaching Education*, 33(3), 317-331, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2021.1895107>
- North Carolina Department of Instruction. (2023, March 1). *After COVID, NC report shows increase in student misconduct in 2021-22 - Reflecting nationwide trends*. <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/news/press-releases/2023/03/01/after-covid-nc-report-shows-increase-student-misconduct-2021-22-reflecting-nationwide-trends>
- NYC Department of Education. (n.d.). *Inclusive teacher recruitment & hiring toolkit*. [https://teachnyc.net/assets/Inclusive\\_Teacher\\_Recruitment\\_Hiring\\_Initiative/ITRHI\\_-\\_Toolkit\\_\(2\).pdf?utm\\_source=website&utm\\_medium=HIRE&utm\\_campaign=ITRHI+Launch](https://teachnyc.net/assets/Inclusive_Teacher_Recruitment_Hiring_Initiative/ITRHI_-_Toolkit_(2).pdf?utm_source=website&utm_medium=HIRE&utm_campaign=ITRHI+Launch)
- O'Byrne, W.I. & Pytash, K.E. (2015). Hybrid and Blended Learning. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 59(2), 137–140. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.463>
- Olsen, E. M., & Chrispeels, J. H. (2009). A pathway forward to school change: Leading together and achieving goals. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 8(4), 380–410. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700760802663476>
- Ozamiz-Etxebarria, N., Idoia, L. F., Lipnicki, D. M., Mondragon, N. I., & Santabárbara, J. (2023). Prevalence of burnout among teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic: A meta-analysis. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(6), 4866. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20064866>
- Papay, P. & Kraft, M. (2016). The productivity cost of inefficient hiring practices: Evidence from late teacher hiring. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 35(4), 791-817. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0047272715000304>

Peetz, C. (2023, August 24). *How to create a school culture that teachers won't want to leave.*

Education Week.

Peifer, K. (2023, April 5). *Virginia's provisional teacher surge.* Axios Richmond.

<https://www.axios.com/local/richmond/2023/04/05/virginia-provisional-teachers>

Perry, B., & Hayes, K. (2011). The effect of a new teacher induction program on new teachers reported teacher goals for excellence, mobility, and retention rates. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, 6(1), 1-12.

Podolsky, A., Kini, T., Bishop, J., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2016). *Solving the Teacher Shortage: How to Attract and Retain Excellent Educators.* Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

Prelli, G. E. (2016). How school leaders might promote higher levels of collective teacher efficacy at the level of school and team. *English Language Teaching*, 9(3), 174.

<https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v9n3p174>

Prothero, A. (2021, January 15). *The essential traits of a positive school climate.* Education Week.

<https://www.edweek.org/leadership/the-essential-traits-of-a-positive-school-climate/2020/10>

Qadach, M., Schechter, C., & Da'as, R. (2019). Instructional leadership and teachers' intent to leave: The mediating role of collective teacher efficacy and shared vision. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 48(4), 617-634.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143219836683>

- Redding, C. & Smith, T. (2016, August). Easy in, easy out: Are alternative certified teachers turning over at increased rates? *American Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 53, No. 4. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.3102/0002831216653206>
- Redding, C., & Henry, G. T. (2018). Leaving school early: An examination of novice teachers' within- and end-of-year turnover. *American Educational Research Journal*, 56(1), 204–236. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831218790542>
- Redding, C., & Smith, T. M. (2019). Supporting early career alternatively certified teachers: Evidence from the beginning Teacher Longitudinal Survey. *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education*, 121(11), 1–32. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811912101107>
- Reitman, G. C., & Karge, B. D. (2018, November 30). *Investing in teacher support leads to teacher retention: Six supports administrators should consider for new teachers*. Multicultural Education. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1250205>
- Renbarger, R., & Davis, B. (2019). Mentors, self-efficacy, or professional development: Which mediate job satisfaction for new teachers? *Journal of Teacher Education and Educators*, 8(1), 21-34. <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/jtee/issue/44909/559132>
- Robinson, O. P., Bridges, S. A., Rollins, L. H., & Schumacker, R. E. (2019). A study of the relation between special education burnout and job satisfaction. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 19(4), 295–303. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12448>
- Ronfeldt, M., & McQueen, K. (2017). Does new teacher induction really improve retention? *Journal of Teacher Education*, 68(4), 394-410. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487117702583>

- Ryan, S., von der Embse, N., Pendergast, L., Saeki, E., Segool, N., & Schwing, S. (2017, August). Leaving the teaching profession: The role of teacher stress and educational accountability policies on turnover intent. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 66*, 1-11. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0742051X16304140?via%3Dihub>
- Sayir, M., Aydin, N., & Aydeniz, S. (2022). The Impact of COVID-19 on Pre-Service Teachers' Teaching Practice. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies, 10*(3), 17-24. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.10n.3p.17>
- Schaufeli, W. B., & Greenglass, E. R. (2001). Introduction to special issue on burnout and health. *Psychology & Health, 16*(5), 501–510. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08870440108405523>
- Schmitt, J., & deCourcy, K. (2022, December 6). The pandemic has exacerbated a long-standing national shortage of teachers. *Economic Policy Institute*. <https://www.epi.org/publication/shortage-of-teachers/>
- Schonfeld, I. S., & Bianchi, R. (2015). Burnout and depression: Two entities or one? *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 72*(1), 22–37. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.22229>
- School Pulse Panel. (2022, May). *Institute of Education Sciences*. U.S. Department of Education. <https://ies.ed.gov/schoolsurvey/spp/>
- Shuls, J. V., & Flores, J. M. (2019, November 30). *Improving teacher retention through support and development*. *Journal of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies*. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1282763>
- Sorenson, L., Frank, J., Gais, T., & Sun, H. (2018, November). *Virginia is for teachers? An analysis of the state's teacher demand and supply*. Rockefeller Institute of Government.
- Sparks, S. (2011, March 15). *Study finds late-hired teachers likely to leave*. *Education Week*. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/study-finds-late-hired-teachers-likely-to-leave/2011/3>



Staffing. (2023). *Statistics & Reports | Virginia Department of Education*. Teacher and School Staffing Vacancies.

<https://www.doe.virginia.gov/data-policy-funding/data-reports/statistics-reports>

Stafford Schools. (2023). *About Us / Stafford Schools: At A Glance*.

<https://www.staffordschools.net/Page/33849>

Stafford County Mentoring Program Results (2023).

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1F0-rGYlaratc8vu48G9O\\_W8ICouqc6QLP4LcLvnuRSQ/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1F0-rGYlaratc8vu48G9O_W8ICouqc6QLP4LcLvnuRSQ/edit?usp=sharing).

Stafford County Public Schools. (n.d.). *22-27 Strategic Plan Book*.

<https://www.staffordschools.net//cms/lib/VA01818723/Centricity/Domain/3686/22-27%20Strategic%20Plan%20Book%20for%20web.pdf>

Stafford County, VA. (2023). *History*.

[https://staffordcountyva.gov/services/visitor\\_information/history.php\\_4](https://staffordcountyva.gov/services/visitor_information/history.php_4)

Stafford County Public School Budget (2021). FY21 Adopted Budget.

<https://www.staffordschools.net/cms/lib/VA01818723/Centricity/Domain/3006/FY21%20ADOPTED%20BUDGETS%20FINAL.PLF>

Steiner, Elizabeth D. and Ashley Woo (2021) *Job-Related Stress Threatens the Teacher Supply:*

*Key Findings from the 2021 State of the U.S. Teacher Survey*, RAND Corporation, RR-A1108-1, 2021. As of May 26, 2023:

[https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RRA1108-1.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1108-1.html)

Sutcher, L., Darling-Hammond, L., & Carver-Thomas, D. (2016, September). *A coming crisis in teaching? Teacher supply, demand, and shortages in the U.S.* Learning Policy Institute.

Sweeney, D., & Mausbach, A. (2018). *Leading student-centered coaching: Building principal and coach partnerships*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

The School District of Philadelphia. (2023, August 24). *New hire orientation*.

<https://www.philasd.org/teachingandlearning/professional-development/orientation/>

Umekubo, L. A., Chrispeels, J. H., & Daly, A. J. (2015). The cohort model: Lessons learned when principals collaborate. *Journal of Educational Change*, 16(4), 451–482.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-015-9256-2>

U.S. Census Bureau *QuickFacts: Virginia*. (2022). U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Virginia.

Retrieved August 28, 2023, from

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/VA/PST045222>

Van den Borre, L., Spruyt, B., & Van Droogenbroeck, F. (2021). Early career teacher retention intention: Individual, school and country characteristics. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 105, 103427.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103427>

Varga, S. M., & Zaff, J. F. (2021). *Using the Web of Support Framework*. Boston, MA: CERES Institute for Children & Youth.

Virginia Board of Education. (2021, September). *Guidelines for mentor teacher programs for beginning and experienced teachers*.

<https://www.doe.virginia.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/38482/63806191920997000>

[0](#)

Virginia Board of Education. (2022, December). *2022 annual report on the condition and needs of public schools in Virginia*.

<https://www.doe.virginia.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/35969/63805594774477000>

[0](#)

Virginia Department of Education (2021). *State superintendent announces \$1 million grant to research impact of pandemic on schools.*

Virginia Department of Education (November 2007). Mentor training presentation for 2-day training option. [PowerPoint slides].

<https://www.doe.virginia.gov/Home/Components/News/News/228/>

Virginia Department of Education (2022). *VDOE announces \$12 million for teacher recruitment and retention, including grants to support tuition and fees for current & aspiring educators.* <https://www.doe.virginia.gov/Home/Components/News/News/144/>

Virginia Department of Education (2022). *Career Switcher Program.*

<https://www.doe.virginia.gov/teaching-learning-assessment/teaching-in-virginia/educator-preparation-becoming-a-teacher/career-switcher-program>

Virginia Department of Education (2022). *Education Workforce Data & Reports.*

[https://www.doe.virginia.gov/teaching-learning-assessment/teaching-in-virginia/education-workforce-data-reports.](https://www.doe.virginia.gov/teaching-learning-assessment/teaching-in-virginia/education-workforce-data-reports)

Virginia Department of Education (June 2022). *Performance Standards for Teachers*

[https://www.doe.virginia.gov/teaching-learning-assessment/teaching-in-virginia/performance-evaluation/teachers.](https://www.doe.virginia.gov/teaching-learning-assessment/teaching-in-virginia/performance-evaluation/teachers)

Virginia Department of Education (2021). *Staffing and Vacancy Report.*

[https://p1pe.doe.virginia.gov/apex\\_captcha/home.do?apexTypeId=320](https://p1pe.doe.virginia.gov/apex_captcha/home.do?apexTypeId=320)we

Wageman, R. & Lowe, K. (2019). ‘Designing, launching, and coaching teams: The 60–30–10 rule and its implications for team coaching.’ In D. Clutterbuck, J. Gannon, S. Hayes, I. Jordanou, K. Lowe & D. MacKie (Eds.), *The Practitioner’s Handbook of Team Coaching* (pp. 121-137). Routledge.

- Walker, T. (2022, February 1). *Survey: Alarming number of educators may soon leave the profession*. neaToday.  
<https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/survey-alarming-number-educators-may-soon-leave-profession>
- Walsh, J. A. (2022). *Questioning for formative feedback: Meaningful dialogue to improve learning*. ASCD.
- Waters, P. (2019, March 31). *Relationships, resources, Resilience: Professional Learning Communities to improve teacher retention*. ERIC-Institute of Education Science.  
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED598821>
- Watlington, E., Shockley, R., Guglielmino, P., & Felsher, R. (2010, Summer). The high cost of leaving: An analysis of the cost of ... - Jstor Home. *Journal of Education Finance*.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/40704404>
- Weimer, K. R. (2020). Mentor identification, selection, preparation, and development: A literature review. *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education*, 39(3), 20–28.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/8755123320965138>
- Welsh, R. (2023). *Suspending suspensions: Time to reexamine discipline in schools in the age of COVID-19*. New York University.  
<https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/suspending-suspensions-time-reexamine-discipline-schools-age-covid-19>
- Wessels, E., & Wood, L. (2019). Fostering teachers' experiences of well-being: A participatory action learning and action research approach. *South African Journal of Education*, 39(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v39n1a1619>

- Weston, D., Hindley, B., & Cunningham, M. (2021). A culture of improvement: reviewing the research on teacher working conditions. Working paper version 1.1, February 2021. Teacher Development Trust. <https://tdtrust.org/coi/>
- Whitaker, T., Good, M. W., & Whitaker, K. (2019). How Principals Can Support New Teachers. *ASCD*, 77(1). <https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/how-principals-can-support-new-teachers>
- Will, M. (2019, October 15). *4 things principals can do (and 4 things they shouldn't) to build relationships with teachers*. Education Week. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/4-things-principals-can-do-and-4-things-they-shouldn-t-to-build-relationships-with-teachers/2019/10>
- Williamson, R., & Blackburn, B. (2021, December 6). *Offering constructive feedback to teachers*. MiddleWeb SmartBrief. <https://www.middleweb.com/44717/providing-constructive-feedback-to-teachers/>
- Williams, C. (2021, September 23). *How principals can give better teacher feedback (with examples)*. Center for Student Achievement Solutions. <https://www.studentachievementsolutions.com/how-principals-can-give-better-teacher-feedback>
- U. S. Department of Education (2022). *Teacher Loan Forgiveness*. <https://studentaid.gov/manage-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/teacher>
- Zaffini, E. D. (2015). Supporting music teacher mentors. *Music Educators Journal*, 102(1), 69–74. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0027432115588595>

Zamarro, G., Camp, A., Fuchsman, D., & McGee, J. (2022, February 22). Understanding how COVID-19 has changed teachers' chances of remaining in the classroom. University of Arkansas. *Education Reform*.

<https://scholarworks.uark.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1135&context=edrepub>

Zamarro, G., Camp, A., Fuchsman, D., & McGee, J. (2021, September 8). How the pandemic has changed teachers' commitment to remaining in the classroom. *Brookings*.

<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-the-pandemic-has-changed-teachers-commitment-to-remaining-in-the-classroom/>

Appendix A

Stafford County Prep for Success Week 2023 Weekly Schedule

Prep for Success Week 2023				
Monday, July 24	Tuesday, July 25	Wednesday, July 26	Thursday, July 27	Friday, July 28
<p><b>Location:</b> Your School (base) <b>Dress:</b> Business Casual</p>	<p><b>Location:</b> Colonial Forge High School <b>Dress:</b> School Spirit</p>	<p><b>Location:</b> Colonial Forge High School <b>Dress:</b> #ElevateStafford Shirt</p>	<p><b>Location:</b> Your School (base) <b>Dress:</b> Favorite Team</p>	<p><b>Location:</b> Your School (base) <b>Dress:</b> Casual</p>
<p><b>Guiding Question:</b> How might I create a system of support at my new school?</p>	<p><b>Guiding Question:</b> How might my Stafford Schools support system set me up for success in the first six weeks of the year?</p>	<p><b>Guiding Question:</b> How might my Stafford Schools support system contribute to my social, emotional, and professional preparation &amp; well being?</p>	<p><b>Guiding Question:</b> How might I utilize the content, resources, and my new support system to inspire and empower every student?</p>	<p><b>Guiding Question:</b> How might I utilize my support system, along with my strengths, to #ElevateStafford?</p>
<p><b>by 8</b>   Arrive at your school</p> <p>8 - 8:30   Breakfast</p> <p>8:30 - 12   Orientation to your school</p> <p>12 - 1   Lunch</p> <p>1 - 3:45   Your Time (set-up in classroom, plan, etc.)</p> <p>3:45   M360 Huddle with your Ambassador</p> <p>4:00   Leave your school for Inspire 360 Social</p> <p>4:30 - 6 pm   Inspire 360 Social at Adventure Brewing North <i>(Sponsored by the <a href="#">Stafford Education Foundation</a>)</i></p>	<p><b>by 8:00</b>   Arrive at Colonial Forge High School</p> <p>8 - 9   Check-In, Breakfast, &amp; Community Resources Fair Opens</p> <p>9 - 9:30   Division Kickoff</p> <p>9:30 - 10   Community Resource Fair &amp; Break</p> <p>10 - 12   Content Academy Part 1</p> <p>12 - 1   Lunch &amp; Learn (Community Resource Fair Open &amp; Tech Support Available)</p> <p>1 - 1:45   Creating My Support System</p> <p>2 - 3:15   Content Academy Part 2</p> <p>3:30 - 4:00   Student Panel moderated by Stafford Schools Teacher of the Year &amp; First Class Teacher of the Year</p> <p>4:00   Dinner <i>(Meet our <a href="#">Stafford County School Board</a>)</i></p>	<p>8 - 8:30   Check-In &amp; Breakfast</p> <p>8:30 - 9:30   The Impact of Trauma on Staff and Student Connection Keynote</p> <p>9:45 - 12   Content Academy Part 3</p> <p>12 - 1   Lunch and Learn (Wellness Expo &amp; Tech Support Available)</p> <p>1 - 3:30   Create Your Conference (Breakouts, Roundtables, and Pop Sessions)</p> <p>3:40- 4:00   Explorations in Courage, Accountability, Values, and Purpose Reflection</p> <p>4:00   Dinner and FXBG Regional Food Bank Meal Kits <i>(Sponsored by <a href="#">FXBG Regional Food Bank</a>)</i></p>	<p>8 - 8:30   Check-In &amp; Breakfast</p> <p>8 - 4:00   Student Support Services Content Academies for Psychologists, Diagnosticians, Social Workers, Nurses, Counselors</p> <p>8:30 - 9:30   Tech Time (follow up with your ITRT)</p> <p>9:30 - 11:30   Your Time (set-up in classroom, plan, etc.)</p> <p>11:30 - 12:30   Luncheon with your Mentor</p> <p>12:30 - 3:45 pm   Your Time (set-up in classroom, plan, etc.)</p> <p>3:45 - 4:00   M360 Huddle with your Ambassador</p> <p>4:00   Dinner <i>(pizzas and salads delivered to each school by <a href="#">Stafford Schools Senior Leadership</a>)</i></p>	<p>8:00 - 8:30   Check-In &amp; Breakfast</p> <p>8:30 - 9:00   Google Meet Closing (on location at your school); Prep for Success Week Survey</p> <p>9:00 - 3:45   Your Time (set-up in classroom, plan, etc.)</p> <p>Lunch at school site</p> <p>Before you leave   Dinner Voucher <i>(Sponsored by Chick-fil-A at Celebrate Virginia and Garrisonville)</i></p>

## Appendix B

### Guidelines Regarding Evaluation of Mentor Programs

#### 10. MENTOR TEACHER PROGRAM EVALUATION

**The Mentor Teacher Program has a comprehensive system of formative program development and evaluation that addresses all program requirements, involves program participants and other stakeholders, and leads to substantive improvements. The program provides meaningful opportunities for professional practitioners and a broad representation of school community members to become involved in program revision, development, and evaluation activities. Program sponsors participate in accountability processes designed to ensure program quality and effectiveness.**

##### *Program Elements for Mentor Teacher Program Evaluation*

- A. Local Mentor Teacher Program goals and the program requirements are the criteria for program evaluation. These criteria include an examination of beginning teachers' use of instructional strategies based on the *Virginia Standards of Learning*.
- B. Ongoing program evaluations include formative and summative processes using information from multiple internal and external sources, such as teachers, collaborating partners, site administrators, program staff, previous mentor program participants, and the program leadership team. Program directors oversee the development of research mechanisms and data collection strategies to track teacher retention, student achievement, and exit interview results.
- C. The Mentor Teacher Program regularly collects feedback about program quality and effectiveness from all participants, using both formal and informal measures. Program leaders analyze data, systematically share them with program sponsors and others, and use data to improve the Mentor Teacher Program and school or district policies related to teacher development.
- D. The results of program evaluation, the implications of new knowledge about teaching and learning, and the identified strengths and needs of beginning teachers form the basis for adjustments and improvements in program design.
- E. Mentor Teacher Program sponsors participate in external peer reviews designed to examine program quality and effectiveness.
- F. The ultimate measure of the success of the mentoring program will be improved academic achievement for all students and the retention of high quality and culturally diverse teachers.

*Note.* The information in this appendix is excerpted from the Virginia Board of Education's Guidelines for Mentor Teacher Programs (2021, p. 18)



## Appendix C

### Capstone Team Teacher Survey

#### General Information:

1. Which of the following best describes your licensure status?
  - Fully licensed and attended an accredited program
  - Fully licensed through an alternate route to licensure
  - Fully licensed, but teaching out of field of certification
  - Provisionally licensed
  - Provisionally licensed, but teaching out of field of certification
  - I do not currently hold a license
  
2. Years of experience
  - 1-3 years
  - 4-7 years
  
3. Which of the following schools do you currently work at?
  - Anne E. Moncure Elementary
  - Anthony Burns Elementary
  - Conway Elementary
  - Falmouth Elementary
  - Ferry Farm Elementary
  - Garrisonville Elementary
  - Grafton Village Elementary
  - Hampton Oaks Elementary
  - Hartwood Elementary
  - Kate Waller Barrett Elementary
  - Margaret Brent Elementary
  - Park Ridge Elementary
  - Rockhill Elementary
  - Rocky Run Elementary
  - Stafford Elementary
  - Widewater Elementary
  - Winding Creek Elementary
  - Andrew G. Wright Middle
  - Donald B. Dixon-Lyle R. Smith Middle
  - Edward E. Drew Jr. Middle
  - H.H. Poole Middle
  - Rodney E. Thompson Middle
  - Shirley C. Heim Middle
  - Stafford Middle
  - T. Benton Gayle Middle

- Brooke Point High
  - Colonial Forge High
  - Mountain View High
  - North Stafford High
  - Stafford Senior High
4. Have you ever been assigned a mentor in a Stafford County school?
- Yes
  - No
  - My mentor is currently teaching outside of my school building

### **Mentoring**

1. My assigned mentor provides (or provided) the support I need(ed) as an early career teacher.

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

1      2      3      4      5

2. The mentoring program has had a positive impact on my decision to stay in SCPS.

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

1      2      3      4      5

### **Professional Development and Learning**

1. The professional development I receive aligns to the specific professional needs I have.

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

1      2      3      4      5

2. The professional development I receive enhances my ability to improve student learning.

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

1      2      3      4      5

3. Think about the most effective professional development you have received - what was the most valuable aspect of that learning experience?

**School Leadership**

School leadership includes, but is not limited to, administration, instructional coaches, technology specialists, mentors and mentor Ambassadors .

1. The instructional feedback I receive from my leadership team feels helpful.

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

1      2      3      4      5

2. I feel valued by my school leadership team.

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

1      2      3      4      5

3. I feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to me with school leadership.

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

1      2      3      4      5

4. Which member of your school leadership team is most responsible for providing you support?

- Principal
- Assistant Principal
- Instructional Coach
- Mentor
- Mentor Ambassador
- Technology Specialist
- Other:

5. What type of support did you receive early in your teaching career that was most valuable to you?

**School Culture and Environment**

1. I feel a sense of belonging at my school.

Strongly Disagree

1      2      3      4      5

Strongly Agree

2. The teachers at this school like being here.

Strongly Disagree

1      2      3      4      5

Strongly Agree

3. Student behavior is a problem at my school.

Strongly Disagree

1      2      3      4      5

Strongly Agree

**Mental Health and Well-being**

1. My school leadership provides support for my mental health and well-being.

Strongly Disagree

1      2      3      4      5

Strongly Agree

2. I experience workplace stress and anxiety.

Strongly Disagree

1      2      3      4      5

Strongly Agree

**Planning and Collaboration**

1. My school leadership expects me to participate in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).

Strongly Disagree

1      2      3      4      5

Strongly Agree

2. I have time during the school day to meet and collaborate with my department/grade level team.

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

1      2      3      4      5

3. I feel that I can be successful with the number of students I teach in my class(es).

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

1      2      3      4      5

**Working in SCPS**

1. I am satisfied with my pay.

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

1      2      3      4      5

2. What are the main reasons you work in SCPS? *Select all that apply:*

- Location
- Pay
- Positive working environment
- Student population
- School culture
- Other:

3. Please rate the following in the order of impact on you as a teacher regarding reasons for continuing employment in SCPS (1 = most, 3 = least)

	1	2	3
<b>Supportive School Leadership</b>			
<b>Professional Learning Opportunities</b>			
<b>Mentoring Programs</b>			

4. Do you plan to continue working in SCPS for the next two years?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

5. What are the main factors that will go into your decision about continued employment in SCPS next year?

**Optional Demographic Information**

1. Gender Identity:

- agender
- female
- genderqueer or genderfluid
- male
- non-binary
- transgender female
- transgender male
- prefer not to disclose

2. Race/Ethnicity:

- Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin of any race
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Black or African American
- White
- Two or more races

**Appendix D****Capstone Team Principal Interview Questions**

**Question 1:** How long have you been in your current building serving as principal?

**Question 2:** Who else is included in your administrative team that helps support ECTs?

**Question 3:** Describe the systems of support you have in place to support ECTs.

**Question 4:** What type of support is working most effectively for your ECTs? Does this support look different depending on the type of ECTs in your building?

**Question 5:** What division-level resources or learning do you receive connected to supporting ECTs in your building?

**Question 6:** What obstacles have you experienced in your ability to support ECTs?

**Question 7:** How would you describe your own level of confidence in being able to successfully support ECTs in your building?

**Question 8:** What is your perception of the main reasons why ECTs leave your school?

Appendix E

Professional Learning Program Evaluation Tool

	Data Focus	Examples of Questions to Consider	Sample Data Sources to Examine	How can this information be used to inform district decisions about this program?
<b>Implementation</b>	<b>Participation</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> How many Early Career Teachers is this program serving? Who are they? Which schools are they in? <input type="checkbox"/> How many students are being taught by these Early Career Teachers? Which students?	<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher licensure <input type="checkbox"/> Student demographic data	
	<b>Program Quality</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> How much time are Early Career Teachers spending in professional learning for this program? <input type="checkbox"/> What professional standards are Early Career Teachers focusing on in this program? <input type="checkbox"/> How much time is spent on other duties (i.e. - paperwork or logistical items)? <input type="checkbox"/> Did Early Career Teachers receive new information to better support their instruction or professional knowledge? <input type="checkbox"/> Was the learning or support responsive to the needs of Early Career Teachers?	<input type="checkbox"/> Participant survey <input type="checkbox"/> Participant logs	



	<b>Data Focus</b>	<b>Examples of Questions to Consider</b>	<b>Sample Data Sources to Examine</b>	<b>How can this information be used to inform district decisions about this program?</b>
<b>Impact</b>	<b>Teacher Practice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How are Early Career Teachers improving as a result of this program? How do we know?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Are Early Career Teachers transferring their learning into actionable practice?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How are Early Career Teachers who participate in this program rated by their evaluators? How does this compare with other teachers who did not participate?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Which elements of this program seem to make the biggest difference in Early Career Teacher practice?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Do we see changes in Early Career Teacher habits based on new learning or support?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Classroom observations</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Mentor logs</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Teacher evaluations</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Participant survey</li> </ul>	
	<b>Teacher Retention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How many Early Career Teachers are staying at their original school? In the district?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How much did this program experience impact Early Career Teacher decisions to stay or leave the school or district?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How do our retention numbers among teachers who participated in this program compare with other districts who also utilize this program?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Retention data</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Exit interviews</li> </ul>	

<b>Data Focus</b>	<b>Examples of Questions to Consider</b>	<b>Sample Data Sources to Examine</b>	<b>How can this information be used to inform district decisions about this program?</b>
<b>Student Learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How, if at all, is student learning improving as a result of this program? How do we know?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> In comparison to the students of teachers who did not participate in this program, what evidence do we have of learning success for participating teachers' students?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How are specific student populations being impacted? How do we know the impact this program has on them?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Did this learning or support influence students' wellbeing? How do we know?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> State &amp; district assessment data</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Behavior &amp; discipline referral data</li> </ul>	
<b>School Climate &amp; Culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How has this support or learning impacted school climate or culture?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Do district and building leaders offer the resources Early Career Teachers need to implement this support or learning? What additional resources might need to be considered?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Was implementation of this learning supported by the school community and staff?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Participant survey</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> School climate survey</li> </ul>	

*Note.* Adapted from Davis (2014) and Guskey (2013)

## Appendix F

### Monthly Meeting Schedule for ECT Support During Principal Meetings

Month	Topic	Activity
September	Relationship Building strategies	Principals will brainstorm which ECT they have most successfully created a relationship with, and which they have not. They will reflect on what is and isn't working, and will share out their reflections. Action item to implement one new relationship building strategy between September's and October's meeting.
October	Follow-up to September Strategy	Principals will share their experience of implementing their chosen strategy. Is it working?
November	Morale Building	Acknowledging November is a difficult time for new teachers, discuss in groups how principals can boost morale for new staff members.
December	The "Stay" Interview PL	Principals will learn about Finnegan's Stay Interview. Facilitator can use the book, <i>The Stay Interview, A Manager's Guide</i> as a resource.
January	Instructional Coaches Share Out	Instructional content coaches share-out concerns they have seen from ECTs in their discipline. Principals will take this information back to ambassadors/Mentors to provide targeted support for ECTs.
February	Review Survey Results from ECTs.	First semester has concluded, and surveys from ECTs are in. Let's take a look at what our ECTs are saying. What surprises you? Is there anything different you need to do?
March	Strategies to support ECTs in Remediation Efforts.	Spring testing is around the corner! Students need to be identified for remediation. Coaches will inform principals which one or two strategies (limited to not overwhelm the ECT) will be most effective for the ECT to implement.
April	Reflection Strategies	ECT's are in Moer's 'Reflection' stage. HR will provide a qualitative survey to principals. Principals will take a moment to complete their belief about what is working well, and what areas need support. ECTs will also take survey and answers compared.
May	Principals/Ambassadors meet & reflect	Ambassadors report to this meeting to meet with their principal, and the ambassador/principal teams of other schools. Reflect on what may need to be changed for next year, and use ECT's reflection from April to help guide.

Appendix G

SCPS Decision Tree for ECT Growth and Effectiveness

### SCPS Tiered Decision Tree for ECT Growth and Effectiveness

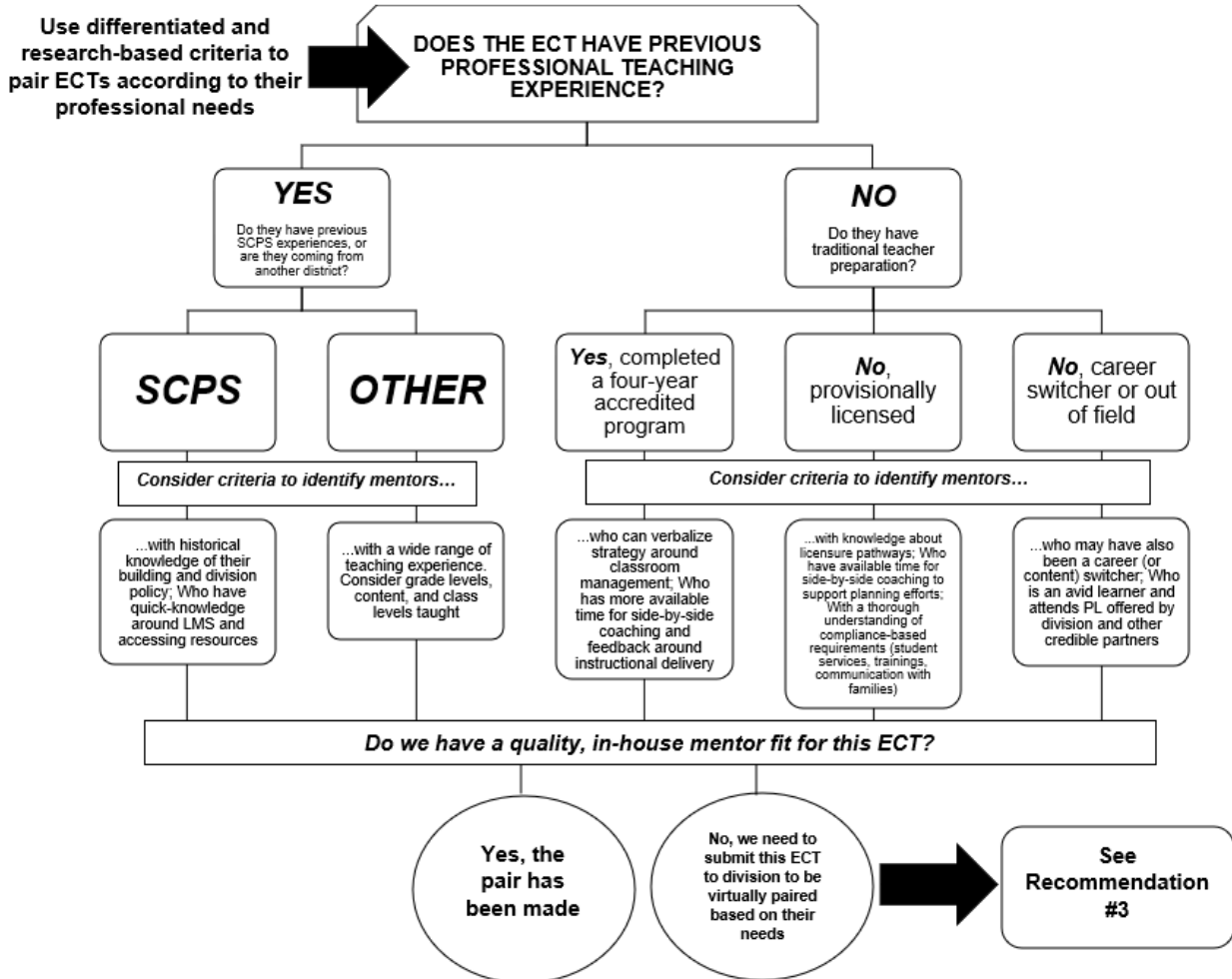
**ECTs should collaborate with school-based Mentors, Ambassadors and Administrators for specific individual and school needs**

**Step 1:** Mentor/Ambassador/Administrator refers to monthly Coaching Calendar for specific ECT focus topic  
**Step 2:** Use data to determine level of ECT proficiency to identify performance category below  
**Step 3:** Determine intervention(s) and how to progress monitor the ECT's levels of proficiency tied to measurable Coaching Calendar Goals

<p><b>Demonstrates Proficiency:</b> Did the ECT demonstrate <i>Proficiency</i> on the monthly Coaching Calendar focus topic?</p>	+	<p>Does the ECT's data indicate a level of Proficiency on each Coaching Calendar indicator?                  Does the ECT engage in reflective practices tied to growth?                  Does the school team determine unanimously that the ECT has demonstrated a level of proficiency on the monthly Calendar Focus?</p>	=	<p>ECT is on-track for Coaching Calendar focus and the school team can progress monitor achievement and move to the next month's focus topic.</p>
<p><b>Guidance:</b> The ECT receives on-going support from Mentor, Ambassador, Coach, and/or Administration. Daily performance is informed by frequent observations, debriefs, and collaborative conversations.</p>				
<p><b>Demonstrates Areas of Concerns:</b> Did the ECT demonstrate <i>Approaching</i> on the monthly Coaching Calendar focus topic?</p>	+	<p>Does the ECT's historical and current performance data indicate an Approaching level on each Coaching Calendar indicator?                  Does the ECT offer few reflections and minimal change to practice or mindset?                  Does the school team determine unanimously that the ECT demonstrates a level of approaching proficiency on the monthly Calendar focus?</p>	=	<p>Does the ECT have enough targeted support for Proficiency?                  Consider multiple data points for comparative purposes about practice and growth and specific needs.                  The ECT will either require further support or a change in the feedback and coaching cycle focus to address lacking prerequisite skills for the Coaching Calendar Focus.</p>
<p><b>Guidance:</b> Consider if the ECT needs additional support via coaching, observations, feedback and/or collaboration. Those providing guidance should collaborate to specify ECT need and create modified Calendar Focus to ensure foundational skills are proficient.</p>				
<p><b>Does Not Demonstrate Proficiency:</b> Did the ECT demonstrate <i>Emerging</i> on the monthly Coaching Calendar focus topic?</p>	+	<p>Does the ECT's historical and current performance indicate an Emerging level on each Coaching Calendar indicator?                  Did the ECT receive additional support targeted to concerns of practice or mindset?                  Does the school team determine unanimously that the ECT demonstrates a level of Emerging proficiency on the monthly Calendar focus?</p>	=	<p>School staff should use data to inform areas of gaps in practice and understanding should be reviewed to identify strengths and areas of need to determine specific interventions and Coaching Calendar focus.</p>
<p><b>Guidance:</b> Refer to observational data and coaching conversations to identify specific gaps in support and change in practice. As a school team, determine what ECT unmet needs are contributing to emerging category for monthly Coaching Calendar topic.</p>				
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Additional Considerations</b></p> <p>The above outlines how to ensure ECTs are meeting the goals set by the Coaching Framework and Coaching Calendar. Consider these additional steps to take to support ECT success:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide explicit direction and expectations for school-based Professional Learning to support the need for ECTs to feel seen and valued.</li> <li>• Ensure school-based leadership teams collaborate with Coaches, Mentors, and Ambassadors to find common language, findings, systems and supports for streamlined and clear communication of expectations to ECTs.</li> <li>• Schedule ECTs time to observe other teachers who are strong in the monthly Coaching Calendar topic of focus (management, relationships, rigor, etc) as a way to model expectations, build relationships, and create a supportive school community.</li> <li>• State expectations for practices during school content/grade level Professional Learning Community (PLC) collaboration to ensure ECTs are part of the team and the PLC goals align with feedback and expectations for ECTs.</li> </ul>				

Appendix H

Matching Tool for Mentor-Pairing for ECTs



## Appendix I

### Micro-Credentials: Communication Plan for SCPS

#### Objectives

- To inform all educators within SCPS about the new micro-credential plan.
- To encourage participation by highlighting growth in salary/stipends and professional learning.
- To capture the attention of selecting, completing, and obtaining recognition for micro-credentials.
- To solicit feedback for continuous improvement of the micro-credential offerings and process.

#### Target Audience

- Superintendent and central office staff
- School Board Members and the county treasurer
- School administrators
- Teachers and other educational staff at all levels of the district

#### Design Key Messages

- Overview of micro-credential program and its benefits to teachers.
- Details about the National Education Association's micro-credential resources.
- Explanation of process of completing micro-credentials and how they contribute to teacher's professional growth and pay structure.

#### Communication Channels

- Informational meetings and webinars, with specifically hosted sessions for teachers and staff to learn about the program.
- Email school district staff introducing the micro-credential program, with follow up emails detailing each step of the process.
- Printed materials, including distribution of explanative brochures and flyers in schools highlighting benefits of the micro-credential program.
- Leverage staff meetings and professional learning days to discuss micro-credentials and answer any questions.

#### Timeline

- Launch announcement: communicate the introduction of the micro-credential program and its benefits.
- Provide step-by-step instructions for accessing and completing micro-credentials.
- Ongoing support: offer continuous updates, highlight success stories, and make adjustments based on participant feedback.
- Evaluation and feedback: After first cycle of micro-credential completion, solicit feedback from participants to provide an enhanced experience for future participants.