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Examining Teacher Perceptions of District Policies on Teacher Absenteeism in Arkansas

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EXAMINING TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF DISTRICT POLICIES ON TEACHER
ABSENTEEISM IN ARKANSAS

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Abstract

School districts have adopted policies to limit chronic absenteeism, including changing policies to incentivize teachers to take fewer days off from the school year (Mershon, 2015) due to the effects of a teacher being out of the classroom. These effects include the effects on student achievement (Clotfelter et al., 2006; Ehrenberg et al., 1991), on colleagues and the school district (Bradley et al., 2007; Miller, 2008), and the use of substitutes in lieu of a teacher (Bruno, 2002; Herrmann & Rockoff, 2010). This qualitative, phenomenological study sought to understand teachers' perspectives regarding policies and practices that are aimed to promote teacher attendance. Using in-depth interviews, this study explored the perceptions and experiences of 12 participants ranging in ages, years working in education, years working in the Stuttgart School District, and grades of students taught. Findings in the study relate to (a) teacher motivations; (b) policy and practice effectiveness; (c) reasons for absences; (d) policy improvements and criticisms; and (e) mental health. Findings may inform policy makers at the state level, local school boards, and school administrators to create policies or practices that promote teacher attendance. The theoretical underpinning for this study was Maslow's Need Theory (Maslow, 1943).

Keywords: Teacher absenteeism, leave of absence, incentive, policy, Maslow's Need Theory.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Background of the Problem

Teacher attendance has been a topic of interest as more emphasis has been placed on student attendance in Arkansas' plan in accordance with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.). In June 2016, the Office for Civil Rights released teacher absenteeism data for the 2013-2014 school year, showing that 27% of teachers in the United States were chronically absent in that year (Griffith, 2017). Teacher absenteeism may be caused by a number of factors including working conditions (Bristol, 2017; Whitehead, 2006), employee demographics such as age (Bruno, 2002; Foldesy, & Foster, 1989), gender (Clotfelter et al., 2009; Educational Research Service, 1980; Hansen & Quintero, 2020; Scott & McClellan, 1990), family makeup (Germano, 2019; Williams et al., 2011), and time of the week or year (Miller et al., 2008a; Rhodes & Steers, 1990; Sawchuck, 2008). Other causes include psychological distress such as stress (Haberman, 2005), depression (Bakker et al., 2000; Green, 2014), and burnout (Bauer et al., 2006; Diaz, 2018; Maslach et al., 2001; Roloff & Brown, 2011).

Districts are considering changing policies to incentivize teachers to take fewer days off from the school year (Mershon, 2015) due to the effects of a teacher being out of the classroom. These effects include the effects on student achievement (Clotfelter et al., 2006; Ehrenberg et al., 1991), on colleagues, and the school district (Bradley et al., 2007; Miller, 2008), and the use of substitutes in lieu of a teacher (Bruno, 2002; Herrmann & Rockoff, 2010).

Though we know school districts have adopted policies to limit chronic absenteeism, there has not yet been any inquiry into the teachers' experiences under these policies in Arkansas. Thus, research needs to be done to understand what policies or practices promote or hinder teacher attendance in public schools.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand teachers' perspectives regarding policies that are aimed to promote teacher attendance. Using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as a theoretical foundation, this study will examine policies and, based on interviews and surveys, will determine if policies improve and/or hinder teacher attendance. Specifically, the research questions explored in this study are: RQ1: According to teachers, what policies or practices promote teacher attendance? And RQ2: According to teachers, what policies or practices hinder teacher attendance?

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the key terminology noted below were defined for understanding as:

- Absence: Failure to be present at a usual or expected place.

- Absenteeism: Chronic absence of an employee at their job.

- Chronic Absence: A measure of how much time a person misses for any reason; absences beyond the district leave policy.

- Educational Degree Level: The relative position, rank, or height on a scale given by an institution of learning upon completion of a course of study.

- Elementary school: for the purpose of this study, a primary school that includes students in grades Pre-K through 5th grade.

- Facilities: for the purpose of this study, the physical space in a school that supports teaching and learning, including cleanliness and available space to be productive.

- Incentive: Compensation that encourages teachers to achieve a specific goal. For the purpose of this study, incentives are typically monetary in nature but may also be other means meant to encourage teachers to take a finite number of absences from work.

- Instructional Level: Grade level taught by an individual.

- Leave: Short for a 'Leave of Absence' is a period of time that a teacher is away from their primary job while maintaining employee status. Leave includes time away taken for being sick, for personal reasons, bereavement, vacation, jury duty, and military leave.

- Satisfaction: for the purpose of this study, perception of employees who experience the following motivators in the workplace: achievement, recognition, love for work, responsibility, advancement, and growth (Herzberg, Mausner, Peterson, Richard, & Capwell, 1957).

- School leadership: For the purpose of this study, the cumulative activities of a broad set of leaders in a school. Effective actions of school leaders create trusting, supportive environments and address teacher concerns. School leaders are responsible for developing a vision, creating safe, orderly environments, positively impacting teaching and learning, interacting effectively with external constituencies, and acting with integrity.

- Socioeconomic status: for the purpose of this study, the relative standing in society based on income, power, background, and prestige (Woolfolk, 2007). The school's socioeconomic status is determined by the percentage of students who receive free and reduced meals.

- Student achievement: for the purpose of this study, the measurement of academic achievement attained by a student during the course of a school year determined by administration of a standardized test.

- Substitute Teacher: A person who teaches a school class when the regular teacher is unavailable due to illness, personal leave, or other reasons.

- Teacher absenteeism: for the purpose of this study, the rate at which teachers are absent from the classroom

- Teacher compensation: for the purpose of this study, the wages and other financial benefits earned from a teacher's labor.

- Teaching Experience: The number of years credited to a teacher for time spent within the classroom.

Significance of the Study

This study will examine teachers' views towards local school board policies that were created to improve teacher attendance. There are no known previous studies that have examined Arkansas teachers' perceptions of leave incentive policies. The study may help inform Arkansas School Board members of the views teachers have towards specific policies and identify policies that are effective at improving teacher attendance. This study may also inform classroom teachers of policies around the state from which they

may benefit; it will also give them an opportunity to voice their experiences and needs with regard to issues that motivate and/or hinder attendance.

Assumptions

In this qualitative study, it is assumed that the participants will answer the questions truthfully and candidly based on their own experiences as a classroom teacher. It is also assumed that each participant understands the questions asked by the researcher.

Limitations

This research will examine policies across school districts in Arkansas. First, districts vary due to location, local industry, populations served, and socioeconomic status. School board policies found favorable by teachers in some districts in Arkansas are not guaranteed success in other districts. Second, views concerning absenteeism among teachers varies from person to person. While the researcher attempted to interview a sampling of teachers with varying opinions, not all educators were interviewed, thus some viewpoints were not documented. This limitation is true for most school districts and should not prevent this research from informing school board members or being replicated in other school districts.

Delimitations

The participants for this study are certified teachers in the Stuttgart School District. The participants in Stuttgart School District are offered a financial incentive to encourage teachers to use minimal sick and/or personal leave.

Organization of the Study

Within chapter one, the researcher introduced and provided background for the study. Additionally, chapter one outlined the purpose of the study, its significance,

research questions, definitions of terms, assumptions, delimitations, and limitations of the study. Chapter two contains the theoretical framework for this study along with a detailed review of the literature relating to teacher absenteeism. Chapter three describes the participants and method of gathering research data. Chapter four will present an analysis of the data collected in the study, and finally, chapter five will present a discussion of the findings. The final chapter also gives thoughts and recommendations to future studies that might be considered.

Chapter II: Review of Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand teachers' perspectives regarding policies that are aimed to promote teacher attendance. This will be achieved by examining policies and interviewing/surveying teachers in order to understand if policies improve and/or hinder teacher attendance. This chapter provides an overview of previous research on teacher absenteeism and incentives. This chapter provides an extensive literature review addressing the following topics: (a) general information on teacher absenteeism; (b) causes of teacher absenteeism; (c) effects of teacher absenteeism; (d) attendance incentives; (e) effects of teacher absenteeism incentives; and (f) Need Theory as the theoretical underpinning of this study.

General Information on Teacher Absenteeism

For the purpose of this review, the terms 'absence' and 'absenteeism' must be clearly defined. Because many schools and districts use these terms interchangeably within policies, there is a need to be specific regarding their definitions (Hovey, 1999). According to *Merriam-Webster* (2020), absence is defined in this study as a failure to be present at a usual or expected place. Absenteeism is defined as a chronic absence of an employee at their job. Generally, an employee absence refers to a day missed from work for various reasons (Absenteeism, 2020). There are many legitimate reasons for a teacher to be absent. Typical reasons include illness, professional development, personal reasons, family bereavement, etc. (Alberta Teachers Association, 2019). Typically, absences taken for these reasons keep a teacher out of the classroom a few days. Employee absenteeism refers to the habitual absence of the employee.

For teachers, absences are classified as professional and personal. Professional absences pertain to professional development and school business and are typically initiated by the school, district, or governmental agency (Beebe Public Schools Personnel Policies, 2004). Personal absences are initiated by the employee and may include personal or family illness, personal business, or death in the family (Beebe Public Schools Personnel Policies, 2004). In public school education, absenteeism refers to any day missed from work as a result of sickness, injury, personal necessity, jury duty, and any other time, whether authorized or unauthorized, away from the job (Hovey, 1999). Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor (2009) found that teachers in the United States are absent nearly 5% of their contracted school year, while the rest of the American workforce misses less than 3% due to illness. Glatfelter (2006) and Pitkoff (2003) estimated that the typical K-12 student spends one year of the school experience under the teaching of substitutes and blame district and school policies for allowing this to occur. As such, the Arkansas legislature has passed laws to combat teacher absenteeism.

Arkansas Laws Concerning Teacher Absenteeism. James E. Allen, Jr., U.S. Commissioner of Education during the Nixon administration stated, "the States hold the strategic position of power and that their exercise of this power is ultimately the most significant factor in determining the character and vitality of education in our Nation" (Allen, 1969, p. 1). His quote characterizes the federal government's role in education; leaving it to the states to create and pass laws for their locally controlled school districts. Therefore, sick leave policies are found at the state level. Arkansas Teachers' Minimum Sick Leave Law requires every school district to provide sick leave with full pay for each of its teachers at a minimum of one day per month or major portion of the month (AR

Code § 6-17-1204, 2019). Further, according to Arkansas Code Annotated 6-17-1202 through 6-17-1209, an employee's sick leave for a school year (10 or more days) is available beginning with the first day of the school term (Howell & Walkenhorst, 2019a). A teacher is entitled to sick leave by state law only for personal illness or illness in the employee's immediate family (AR Code § 6-17-1204, 2019). Immediate family is defined in the law as a spouse, child, parent or any relative if the other relative lives in the same household as the teacher (AR Code § 6-17-1202, 2019). If a teacher resigns or otherwise leaves a teaching position for any reason before the end of the school year, the school district may deduct from the last paycheck the pay for any days of sick leave that were used in excess of the days earned (AR Code § 6-17-1204, 2019).

On the other hand, a teacher can accumulate up to 90 days of unused sick leave. And, if the teacher moves to another school system or to an education cooperative, a state agency, or a two-year college, that unused sick time can be transferred to the new job (AR Code § 6-17-1205, 2019). If a teacher must be absent from school because of an injury from an assault or other criminal act that occurred as part of the job, the employee can be granted a leave of absence with full pay for up to one year from the date of injury. The time off in that case is not to be charged to the teacher's sick leave (AR Code § 6-17-1206, 2019). Finally, state law establishes the minimum requirements for sick leave for teachers (Howell & Walkenhorst, 2019a). The law specifically states that local school districts are not prohibited from providing more days of sick leave or for having a more liberal policy for the administration of sick leave (AR Code § 6-17-1208, 2019). Such a policy, for example, can include the formation of sick leave pools or banks, and allowing married couples who are teachers to use each other's accumulated sick leave (AR Code §

6-17-1208, 2019). While these laws direct school districts to adopt specific leave policies, it is important to understand why teachers are taking leave and are absent from work.

Causes of Teacher Absenteeism

There are a number of reasons why teacher absenteeism persists. Teacher absenteeism can be attributed to school organizational challenges, such as poor working conditions and weak administrative leadership (Bristol, 2017). Factors leading to high absentee rates include organizational work culture, employee welfare facilities, salaries, leave policies, supervisors' behavior, present working conditions, and transportation (Verma & Chaubey, 2016). Daily stressors and anxiety due to high-stakes testing may also increase the number of teacher absences in a school year. Dworkin, Haney, Dworkin, and Teleschov (1990) found a small but statistically significant relationship between job stress and reported stress-induced illness. In 2009, Marley surveyed 1,000 teachers and found that teacher sick-leave days used due to stress had doubled since 2007. Marley (2009) also reported that 40% of affected teachers did not report stress as the reason for absence due to embarrassment. Teacher absences are more likely in systems with generous leave provisions (Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Rees, & Ehrenberg, 1991). Dworkin et al. (1990) suggested that internal system problems may cause high absenteeism and the first step in solving the teacher absence problem is identifying these issues. This study examines three main factors that contribute to teacher absenteeism: (a) the working conditions of the schools and communities in which they work, (b) the demographics of the teachers, and (c) the high stress of the job that can lead to teachers leaving the profession altogether.

Working conditions. Various characteristics of the school and district such as student absenteeism, socioeconomic status of the community, and support from supervisors may affect teacher absenteeism. A contributing factor may be teachers' daily exposure to large numbers of children, some of whom are carriers for infectious diseases. Ehrenberg et al. (1991) found that higher teacher absenteeism is associated with higher student absenteeism. Teachers working in schools serving high proportions of Black or Hispanic students are absent at a rate that is 3.5 and 3.2 percentage points higher, respectively, than a school with low proportions of Black or Hispanic students (Miller, 2012). Norton (1998) found teachers are more likely to be absent in schools with low socioeconomic status or that are failing academically. Underserved communities of color see higher rates of teacher absenteeism (Rogers & Nicole, 2014). Rates of teacher absence have been found to be higher in poor- performing urban elementary schools with high percentages of free/reduced lunch students (Imants & VanZoelen, 1995; Miller et al., 2008b). Clotfelter et al. (2009) reported that as the percentage of free or reduced price lunch goes up in an elementary school, so do teacher absences.

Supervisory support, or lack thereof, can also affect teacher attendance. Many teachers receive little curricular support from head teachers on how to improve practice (Johnson, 2004). This includes the lack of assistance with challenging students (Ingersoll, 2001). Schools across the nation vary widely, and teachers give many of the same reasons for dissatisfaction that can contribute to teacher absenteeism, including, overcrowding of classrooms, poor conditions of school buildings, lack of respect for the teaching profession, and job stress and burnout (Whitehead, 2006).

Employee demographics. Employee traits such as age, gender, family make-up, and grade level taught may affect the rate of teacher absenteeism (Bruno, 2002; Clotfelter et al., 2009). Prior absenteeism, education level, and supervisory positions were found to be significant predictors of absenteeism frequency (Rosenblatt & Shirom, 2005).

Age. Research is inconclusive as to whether age is directly related to teacher absenteeism. Several studies have shown that there is a relationship between age and absenteeism. Studies in Dade County, Florida, Akron, Ohio, and St. Louis, Missouri found that absent rates increased steadily though each age group with few exceptions (Foldesy, & Foster, 1989). As teachers approach retirement age and have accumulated sick days with the school district, teachers may begin to take their accumulated sick days for more personal reasons (Bruno, 2002).

 In results from a 2018 study, Felicitas, Goecke, and Kunze found that older employees may have a higher number of short term absences (three or fewer) compared to their younger colleagues, but age was not an indicator for employees' chronic absenteeism. In Keller's (1983) study, no findings support that age contributes to absenteeism. Several studies in Livonia, Michigan and Las Vegas, Nevada have indicated that age is not a major factor related to absenteeism (Foldesy, & Foster, 1989), but gender may be.

Gender. Research is also inconclusive concerning the effect of gender on absenteeism. Some research shows that men have higher absentee rates than women, whereas other research shows that women have higher absentee rates than men (Scott & McClellan, 1990; Clotfelter et al., 2009; Foldesy, & Foster, 1989). In 2004, Selmi noted

that even though women only made up 48.7% of the working population, they were 58.1% of workers using leave under the Family Medical Leave Act of 1993.

In a 1980 study, the Educational Research Service found that female teachers are absent more days per school year than males (Educational Research Service, 1980). The average number of absent days per school year for female teachers was 5.29, compared to 3.39 for men (Scott & McClellan, 1990). Clotfelter et al. (2009) reported female teachers miss 3.2 more days than men at age 25 and 35, but only 1.3 days more than men at age 45. More recently, a study in 2020 found that female teachers were chronically absent more than male teachers (Hansen & Quintero, 2020).

In Sanders and Nauta's (2004) study, findings suggest that gender is a lesser factor of absenteeism than social cohesiveness. Their conclusions found that gender positively correlates to inclusion in informal meetings and relationships, and cohesiveness among colleagues (Sanders & Nauta, 2004). Their findings suggest that women, because of their gender, miss more work because they are less likely to be included in the informal "team" aspect of the workplace (Sanders & Nauta, 2004). Jansen, Otten, and van der Zee (2015) found similar results in their study that observed gender dissimilarity (i.e., being of a different gender of one's colleagues). Researchers found gender dissimilarity was associated with higher absenteeism through lower levels of perceived inclusion, but only when the group had a negative outlook on diversity (Jansen, Otten, & van der Zee, 2015). These findings suggest that being a woman in a workplace with colleagues of a differing gender results in exclusion from informal gatherings, leading to a negative outlook on one's job, thus resulting in higher levels of absenteeism. However, this research may not explain the high levels of female teacher

absenteeism because female teachers make up 77% of public school teachers (Walker, 2018). While research shows that female teachers miss more days of work than their male counterparts, gender may play less of a factor compared to other factors such as marital status (Foldesy, & Foster, 1989).

   Family make-up. In 1978, a study found no relationship between family status and absenteeism in a four year study in an Iowa school district (Redmond, 1978). More recently, however, research has suggested that, caregiver status may contribute to teacher absenteeism. Most family caregivers of older adults are women, and more than ever before, women are in the workplace (Williams, Devaux, Petrac, & Feinberg, 2012). In 2010, nearly half (46.7%) of women worked outside the home, up from only 33% in 1960 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Because women are more likely to be in the workplace and to have family caregiving responsibilities than in the past, women may be negatively affected in the workplace (Williams et al., 2011). Family caregiving responsibilities at home can lead to negative consequences in work and income. A 2011 study suggests that family caregivers age 50 and older who leave the workforce to care for a parent lose, on average, nearly $304,000 in wages and benefits over their lifetime (MetLife Mature Market Institute, 2011). Workers that are caregivers also report that their caregiving responsibilities lead to negative workplace consequences due to arriving late, leaving early, or taking time off during the day to provide care (National Alliance for Caregiving & AARP, 2009). Working caregivers admit to taking a leave of absence, reducing work hours from full to part time, or even quit their jobs or retire early to give care (National Alliance for Caregiving & AARP, 2009). Thus, because female teachers make up 77% of public school teachers and a majority of caregivers are women,

caregiver status may affect teacher absenteeism (Walker, 2018; National Alliance for Caregiving & AARP, 2009).

Being a mother of young children may also affect teacher absenteeism. While women are more educated and more employed than ever before, they are still taking on most of the household duties (Germano, 2019). Working mothers spend more time on childcare than fathers (Germano, 2019). Fifty-four percent of women took leave from work when first becoming a parent as opposed to 42% of men (Germano, 2019). In addition, women take 10 times as much temporary leave from work as men when their child is born (Germano, 2019). Studies show that if childcare plans fall through, women are more likely to take care of the children (Leonhardt, 2020). When their child is sick, women are eight times more likely than men to look after the child (Germano, 2019).

Grade level taught. Some studies show that elementary school teachers are more likely to be absent than secondary school teachers (Scott & McClellan, 1990). Researchers speculate this difference may be associated with gender rather than grade level taught. Figure 1 shows the percent of male and female teachers at the elementary and secondary level in the 1999-2000 and 2017-2018 school years. In 1999 and 2017, female teachers made up 88% and 89% of elementary teachers respectively. In those same years, at the secondary level, female teachers were just 59% and 64%. While Redmond (1978) found no relationship between the number of absences of a teacher and the grade level taught, Clotfelter et al. (2009) reported elementary school teacher absences more than double that of high school teachers, 33.9 days compared to 16 days per school year.

Figure 1

Percentage distribution of teachers in public elementary and secondary schools, by instructional level and sex: School years 1999–2000 and 2017–18.
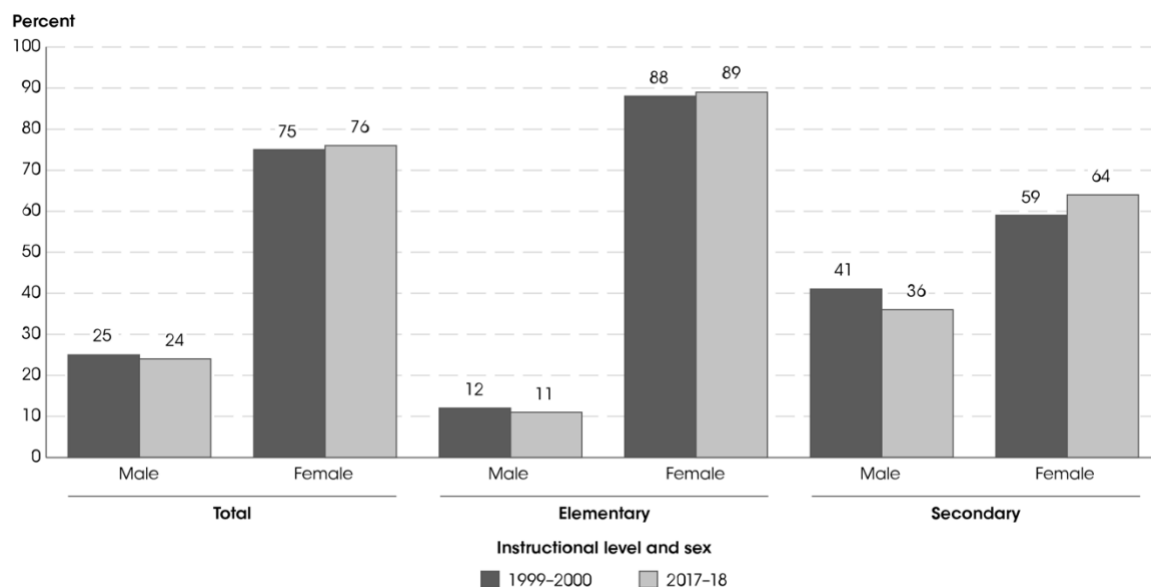
Note: Data are based on a head count of full-time and part-time teachers rather than on the number of full-time-equivalent teachers. Teachers were classified as elementary or secondary on the basis of the grades they taught, rather than on the level of the school in which they taught. In general, elementary teachers include those teaching prekindergarten through grade 6 and those teaching multiple grades, with a preponderance of grades taught being kindergarten through grade 6. In general, secondary teachers include those teaching any of grades 7 through 12 and those teaching multiple grades, with a preponderance of grades taught being grades 7 through 12 and usually with no grade taught being lower than grade 5. Reprinted from U.S. Department of Education. (2019). *National Center for Education Statistics*, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public School Teacher Data File," "Charter School Teacher Data File," "Public School Data File," and "Charter School Data File," 1999–2000; and National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), "Public School Teacher Data File," 2017–18.

Time of week and year. The time of the week and year also play a factor in teacher absenteeism. Miller et al. (2008a) noted studies that teachers are most often absent on Fridays and Mondays. This pattern suggests that absences on these days build longer blocks of leisure time (Rhodes & Steers, 1990). Sawchuck (2008) found that teachers were more likely to take personal or sick days right before summer and winter vacations. Similarly, this pattern may also allow for an extended block of time away from

work. Veteran teachers that are close to retirement have accumulated sick days with the school district and may take their accumulated sick days near the end of the school year (Bruno, 2002). Jacobson (1990) noted that this may be because districts only allow teachers to be financially compensated for a specific number of days. Rather than "lose" the additional days, teachers close to retirement will take the full allowance of their sick and personal leave (Jacobson, 1990).

Psychological distress. Teaching professionals report higher levels of work-related stress and symptoms of psychological health problems than the general population (Stapleton, Garby, & Sabot, 2020). Psychological distresses that can lead a teacher to take leave include stress, depression, and burnout.

Stress. One study conducted in Central Ohio found that physical illness related to stress was more often the reason for a teacher's absence (Douglas, 1976). In a 2014 Gallup-Healthways poll, 46% of K-12 teachers reported high daily stress (Gallup Inc., 2014). More recently, a survey published by the American Federation of Teachers (2017) showed that nearly two-thirds of teachers find their work always or often stressful. Teaching is a high stress job because many of the conditions which determine teacher effectiveness lie outside of a teacher's control and because the job requires a high level of continual alertness (Haberman, 2005). Individual teachers deal with stress in personal ways. Taking sick days when the teacher is not verifiably ill may be a way of coping with unpleasant conditions that could harm that person's health (Haberman, 2005). Haberman (2005) described the external causes of stress in educators as ambiguous role expectations, unreasonable time demands, large classes, poor staff relations, inadequate buildings and facilities, salary considerations, lack of resources, and fear of violence of

disruptive students. The working conditions of the schools, the demographics of the teachers and the community in which they work, and the high stress of the job can lead to teachers taking off more days from work or leaving the profession altogether. Researchers associate the high number of teachers leaving the classroom to the high levels of stress teachers must face on a daily basis as well as lack of job satisfaction (Shin, Noh, Jang, Park, & Lee, 2013; Perie & Baker, 1997).

Depression. According to Kleftaras (1998, p. 24), depression could generally be described as "a condition of pathological sadness that can be accompanied by a significant reduction of the sense of personal value and by the painful realization of deceleration of mental, psychomotor and physical faculties." Papastylianou, Kaila, & Polychronopoulos (2009, p. 298) explain that depression is defined by "its psychological (intense sadness, despair), behavioral (psychomotor deceleration, anhedonia, loss of interest), cognitive (feelings related to lack of hope and loss) and biological symptoms (decreased excitability of the sympathetic system, decreased mood for several functions)." Teachers may experience depression for a number of reasons, personally and professionally. Bakker et al.'s (2000) research showed that the lack of reciprocity in a teacher's relationship with their partner can predict depression, and that the lack of reciprocity in their relationship with students can predict burnout and, indirectly, depression. Maslach and Jackson (1997) explain that individuals tend to blame themselves for entering a depressed state rather than blaming the situation or organization. This mindset only adds to a sense of isolation and contributes to depression (Shin et al., 2013). An increase in depression can increase the number of absences a teacher may take. In Green's (2014) research, a regression analysis showed that as

depression in teachers increased, the desire to take a day off work due to self-perceived, teaching-related stress also tended to increase.

     Burnout. Increased teacher absenteeism has been linked to stress, anxiety, and burnout (Educational Research Service, 1980; Hamer, Landau, & Stern, 1981). Burnout is not an officially recognized psychological condition but rather "a type of psychological distress – a chronic negative psychological condition that results as day-to-day work stressors take their toll" on educators (Roloff & Brown, 2011, p. 453). While high stress may lead to burnout, burnout is not simply a form of stress. Teacher burnout affects the lives of thousands of highly effective teachers throughout the United States (Bosquet, 2012). Teacher burnout occurs over a period of time when the job functions and/or organizational structures of the school introduce stressors causing a teacher to feel ineffective at their job (Haberman, 2005). An educator who is experiencing burnout has low morale, low self-esteem, and is physically exhausted (Roloff & Brown, 2011). Haberman (2005) described the behavioral definition of burnout as a condition in which teachers remain as paid employees but stop functioning as professionals. The warning signs of teacher burnout include depersonalization, exhaustion or depression, and a lack of confidence in one's own abilities (Sanford, 2017). According to research published in the Journal of Clinical Psychology, there is a significant overlap between burnout and depression (Schonfeld & Bianchi, 2015). Educators experiencing burnout also show depressive symptoms including loss of interest or pleasure in activities, mood swings, and fatigue (Diaz, 2018). Another study, published in the International Journal of Stress Management, showed that 90% of participants who scored high on burnout also met the criteria for depression (Bianchi, Schonfeld, & Laurent, 2014). Given the correlating

results of these studies, burnout may be considered another form of depression (Diaz, 2018). Just as a loss of joy is a symptom of depression, burnout correlates with a feeling of loss of importance in one's job (Pines, 2005). Burnout can lead to teachers chronically being absent or quitting the profession altogether.

Although researchers have tried many ways of studying burnout in teachers, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) is held as the most reliable and valid measure for studying burnout (Sanford, 2017). The MBI is an introspective psychological inventory consisting of 22 items pertaining to occupational burnout (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 2016). The original form of the MBI was constructed with the goal to assess an individual's experience of burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The MBI-ES (Educators Survey) is a version of the original MBI that specifically measures burnout in educators, including teachers, administrators, other staff members working in any educational setting (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). The MBI-ES measures three areas of burnout among educators:

1. Emotional Exhaustion (EE) measures feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work.

2. Depersonalization (DP) measures an unfeeling and impersonal response toward recipients of one's instruction.

3. Personal Accomplishment (PA) measures feelings of competence and successful achievement in one's work (Maslach et al, 2001).

Kokkinos (2007) studied the relationship between teachers' personalities, job stressors, and the three dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. The researcher emphasized, "the manifestation of burnout

is a function of stressors engendered at both the environmental-organizational and personal levels" (p. 230). The researcher also noted that burnout dimensions of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization were more related to environmental stressors than they were to the teachers' own personalities. The dimension of personal accomplishment was found to be more related to personality variables (Kokkinos, 2007). Burnout is either cited by teachers themselves or presumed by researchers to be the primary reason for the elevated rate of premature retirement due to psychosomatic disorders and symptoms (Bauer et al., 2006).

Effects of Teacher Absenteeism

Negative effects emerge as a result of teacher absenteeism. In a paper published in 1983, Allen hypothesized that the productivity of an organization depends upon a manager's ability to reassign workers when there is an employee absence. A manager can use others in the organization to cover the responsibilities of the absent employee or find temporary replacements or substitutes (Allen, 1983). In a 2006 publication, Nicholson, Pauly, Polsky, Sharda, Szrek, and Berger used results of a survey of managers in 12 industries to test a number of hypotheses similar to Allen's. Their results found that absences had larger negative effects on productivity the more difficult it was to find a perfect replacement, the more time sensitive the work involved, and the more the worker functioned as part of a team. These findings suggest that the negative impact of the absences of teachers is substantial. This study examines three areas that are negatively impacted by teacher absenteeism: (a) the effects on students and student achievement; (b) the effects on colleagues; and (c) the effects on the school and community for which they serve.

Effects on students. Chronic teacher absenteeism can have a negative or null effect on students and their learning. Ehrenberg et al. (1991), after reviewing 70 school districts in the state of New York, found results showing teachers missing five or fewer days will raise student scores by three-fourths of one percentage point. This was only on one type of standardized test reviewed. Their research found teacher absenteeism does not influence student performance on any of the other elementary and secondary school standardized tests that were examined (Ehrenberg et al., 1991). Further, a study conducted by Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor (2006) using data from North Carolina also found that teacher absences negatively affect student achievement. In their study, using a large dataset in which teachers were observed over multiple years, the evidence indicated that 10 additional days of teacher absences decreased student achievement by one or two percent of a standard deviation (Clotfelter et al., 2006).

Substitute teachers. Student learning can also be negatively affected by teacher absenteeism because the absent teacher may be replaced by a temporary substitute. A regular high school classroom teacher must obtain a bachelor's degree, and in most cases, a degree that is related to their teaching assignment (Bruno, 2002). While there are exceptions, because of experience and degree level, substitute teachers are generally underqualified to teach in the field of a regular classroom teacher (Bruno, 2002). In some school districts, the minimum education requirement is quite low. For example, in Arkansas a substitute teacher needs only a high school diploma or Grade Equivalent Degree (G.E.D.) (Arkansas Department of Education, 2007).

A temporary substitute's average daily productivity, or contribution to student learning, is typically significantly lower than the teacher they replaced (Herrmann &

Rockoff, 2010). Substitute teachers may not have the knowledge and skills to deliver the type of instruction aligned with school reform efforts (Bruno, 2002). Substitute teachers may also not be equipped with a high-rigor lesson plan (Bruno, 2002). Frequent instruction delivered by substitute teachers can lead to low levels of student interest in learning (Bruno, 2002). Further, though substitute teachers can help fill in when the regular teacher is gone, there is not a guarantee that a substitute can be found to fill in for an absent teacher. Frontline Research and Learning Institute (2019) found that the average vacancy fill rate for an absent teacher is 80%. During the other 20% that a substitute can't be found, a class may have to be split, grouped with another class, or a teacher will have to forego their planning time to act as a substitute. (Bristol, 2017).

An effect of teacher absenteeism is the high cost of substitute teachers on a school district. Arkansas school districts spent more than $102.7 million for substitute teachers, maintenance staff, and food service workers in the 2017-2018 school year (Howell & Walkenhorst, 2019b). In 2016-2017, Arkansas school district spent approximately $99 million (Howell & Walkenhorst, 2019b). Table 1 shows substitute expenditure data from varying size districts around the state including Little Rock School District, the largest and Strong-Huttig School District, the smallest.

Table 1.

Arkansas School District Substitute Expenditure from 2017-2018 School Year

District	Certified Teachers	Enrollment	Substitute Costs
Little Rock School District	1,582	22,338	$4,373,957.44
Springdale School District	1,411	21,828	$7,272,200.37
Beebe School District	234	3,287	$643,227.79

Stuttgart School District	128	1,568	$201,653.66
Deer/Mt. Judea School District	67	359	$25,077.56
Strong-Huttig School District	44	341	$112,834.04

Effects on colleagues, school and district. Chronic teacher absenteeism can have a negative effect on other teachers in the building. Bradley, Green, and Leeves' (2007) findings suggest that if an employee has chronic absenteeism, this can cause other employees to be absent from work. More specifically to schools, their findings suggest that, per quarter, a teacher takes off work one more day if their average colleague takes 12 or eight days of leave in a primary school or a secondary school, respectively (Bradley, Green, & Leeves, 2007).

Teacher absenteeism can have negative effects on the schools and the district in which the teacher serves. As teachers miss more days of work, student achievement is negatively impacted, and regular routines and classroom procedures will be disrupted (Rundall, 1986). Teacher absenteeism negatively affects the district because of the high monetary cost associated with it. When a teacher is absent, both the teacher and substitute are being paid. Miller (2008) estimates the cost of absenteeism to be $4 billion annually. Joseph, Waymack, and Zielaski (2014) calculates the number to be as high as an annual cost of $1,800 for every teacher employed. This can be a huge cost for a school district.

Further, when a teacher is absent, a principal is compelled to disrupt instruction by splitting classes and asking another teacher to instruct a much larger class or by hiring a substitute (Bristol, 2017). Not only can these accommodations burden both teachers and students, but it places the students, teachers, and the district at a disadvantage when

annual state testing attempts to assess academic progress (Bristol, 2017). Teacher absenteeism can negatively affect students, colleagues, and the school districts in which teachers serve. Incentive measures are being adopted to encourage teachers to miss fewer days of work.

Attendance Incentives

To combat the negative effects of teachers taking frequent leave, districts are getting creative with policies that are intended to incentivize teachers to take minimal sick and personal days. The policies are prevalent throughout the country, including Arkansas. These incentives vary depending on the specific underlying issues facing a district. This study examines the different types of incentives that are being implemented around the country and in Arkansas.

Types of incentives nationwide. There are a number of districts across the country that have implemented incentive policies intended to reduce teacher absenteeism. The following are a collection of the varying types of incentives:

- Carthage, TX Independent School District offered every teacher who had perfect attendance for the year a share of a $5,000 pool of money (Koonce, 2007). The same district offered to buy back up to five district personal days from teachers at $50 per day (Koonce, 2007).

- Dallas, TX Independent School District launched the Staff and Teacher Attendance Reward (STAR) program. The district matches retirement contributions based on how many sick days a teacher takes. For teachers who have only one absence during the school year, the district matches 100% of their contribution to a district retirement account, up to $1,000

annually. Teachers who are out two days can get a 75% match, up to $700, and those with three to five absences earn a 50% match, up to $500 a year (Dallas Independent School District Employee Handbook, 2011).

- Sapulpa, OK Public School officials adopted policies that distributes the savings from substitute expenditures to teachers who take five or fewer sick days.

Types of incentives in Arkansas. Many districts in Arkansas have seen a rise in substitute teacher expenditure (Howell & Walkenhorst, 2019a). To help combat the negative effects of teacher absenteeism, including substitute expenses, a number of districts across the state have implemented incentive policies intended to reduce teacher absenteeism. The following are a collection of the varying types of incentives:

- Alpena School District awards teachers $125 bonus per semester for taking 3.5 absences or fewer (Alpena School District Personnel Policies, 2004).

- Beebe Public Schools buy back a teacher's unused sick days at a daily rate of pay (Beebe Public Schools Personnel Policies, 2004).

- Mountain Home Public Schools have adopted policies that award teachers up to nine personal days a year based on the number of sick days a teacher has accrued (Mountain Home Public Schools Personnel Policies, 2020).

- Stuttgart School District pays yearly stipends, up to $400.00, to teachers who take a minimal amount of sick and personal days (Stuttgart School District Personnel Policies, 2020).

Like other districts in Arkansas, Stuttgart School District created the stipend
policy to limit the negative effects of teacher absenteeism, including substitute expenses
(Howell & Walkenhorst, 2019b). Table 2 shows substitute expenditure data for Stuttgart
School District from 2014-2018.

Table 2.

Stuttgart School District Substitute Expenditures from 2014-2018 School Years

School Year	Substitute Expenditures
2014-2015	$201,077.46
2015-2016	238,510.85
2016-2017	265,649.31
2017-2018	201,653.66

While there have been efforts made around the country and in Arkansas to
incentivize teachers to take fewer days off from work, there has not been extensive
research on the effectiveness of all teacher absenteeism incentive policies.

Effects of Teacher Absenteeism Incentives

While there is a large amount of research on the effects teacher absenteeism has
on workplace culture, student achievement, and the local community, there is limited
research on the effects of incentive policies intended to reduce teacher absenteeism. The
studies examining the effectiveness of teacher incentive policies yield varying results.
This study examines research that has measured positive and null effects of teacher
absentee incentive policies. There are no studies demonstrating negative effects of
absentee incentive policies.

Positive results. In 1986, a study was conducted to examine the effects of pay incentives on teacher absences in one New York district. This district's incentive plan involved setting aside a pool of funds to be divided among teachers who, at the end of the year, had fewer than seven absences. Using a paired sample t-test of 292 teachers, Jacobson's research found that teacher absences declined significantly and perfect attendance rose from 8% to 34% during the first year of an attendance plan (Jacobson, 1989). The study also revealed that the significant reduction in sick leave was accompanied by a significant increase in the use of personal days.

Duflo, Hanna, and Ryan's (2010) experimental study provides strong evidence of a causal relationship between teacher absence and student achievement. This study observed a random sample of elementary schools in rural India in which financial incentives for good attendance were provided to teachers. A year after the intervention began, test scores for students in the treatment schools were substantially higher (0.17 SD) than those of students in the control schools. Miller et al. (2008a) states "these findings may be peculiar to the context in which the study was done due to the background rate of absence was extremely high (42%) compared to rates observed in the US" (p. 184).

Null results. A report published by the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) examining 40 of the largest school districts across the country found that school districts with certain leave policies (such as paying teachers for unused leave, allowing teachers to carry over personal leave, and restricting leave on specific dates) had similar attendance rates in comparison to schools without such policies (Joseph, Waymack, & Zielaski, 2014).

In a study conducted at a technological university in Quezon City and Manila City in the Philippines, researchers asked if faculty absenteeism is influenced by policies that guide implementation on attendance monitoring, reporting, and usage of records (Maquilan & Miniano, 2019). A focus group discussion was used to determine the issues and prospects concerning the policies and implementation (Maquilan & Miniano, 2019). Faculty members, attendance checkers, academic heads, and Human Resource Department staff were part of the focus group. The results revealed that faculty absenteeism is not influenced by the extent of implementing the policy on attendance monitoring (Maquilan & Miniano, 2019).

Negative results. Published findings on the negative effects of incentives on teacher absenteeism is limited. Empirical studies demonstrating negative effects of incentives on teacher attendance could not be found.

Research Questions

This qualitative study will work to answer the following research questions: (a) According to teachers, what policies or practices promote teacher attendance? And, (b) According to teachers, what policies or practices hinder teacher attendance?

Theoretical Perspective

The theory that informs this study is Need Theory, developed by Maslow (1943). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a motivational theory comprising of a five-tier model of human needs. Listed from the bottom of the hierarchy going up, the needs are physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (Whitesel, 2010). These tiers are often depicted as levels of a pyramid as seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Notes. Listed from the bottom of the hierarchy going up, the needs are physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Adapted from Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs by U3155259. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Maslow (1943) expressed, initially, that the needs lower down in the hierarchy must be achieved before individuals can satisfy their needs higher up the ladder. However, later he stated that satisfaction of needs is not an "all-or-none" situation. He admitted that his earlier statements may have given "the false impression that a need must be satisfied 100% before the next need emerges" (1987, p. 69).

Maslow characterizes physiological needs as biological requirements for human survival; examples include air, food, drink, shelter, clothing, warmth, and sleep (Maslow, 1943). Maslow considered physiological needs the most important and if these needs are not met, the human body cannot function optimally (Maslow, 1943). Safety needs include security, order, predictability and control in one's life (Maslow, 1943). They also include

emotional security, financial security, employment, social welfare, law and order, freedom from fear, property, health and well-being (Maslow, 1954). Love and belongingness needs involve the need for interpersonal relationships (Maslow, 1943). Examples include friendship, intimacy, trust, acceptance, affiliating, and being part of a group (Maslow, 1943). Maslow (1943, 1954) classifies esteem needs into two categories: 1) esteem for oneself, such as dignity, achievement, mastery, and independence and 2) the desire for reputation or respect from others, for example status and prestige. Maslow (1943) describes self-actualization as the desire to be the most one can be and to accomplish everything that one can.

Maslow's first four needs are considered deficit needs; needs that will motivate people to action if left unfulfilled (Maslow, 1943). If an individual is hungry, they will be motivated to seek out food. When a deficit need has been mostly satisfied, the need will go away, and one's focus turns towards achieving the next set of needs. The fifth of Maslow's needs, self-actualization, rests atop the pyramid and is considered a growth need (Maslow, 1943). Growth needs do not motivate someone because they are without something, but rather from a desire to grow as a person. Maslow expressed that not everyone will move through the hierarchy in a uniform direction but may move back and forth between the different types of needs (Maslow, 1987).

Incentives are designed to encourage the performance of individuals. Incentives, whether a monetary bonus or increase in leave time, play an active role in increasing an individual's ability to fulfill their deficit needs, motivating them to develop their skills, and ultimately self-actualize. Lawzi (1995) stated that financial incentives satisfy basic human needs and encourage workers to do their best work. Jadallah (1997) wrote that

financial incentives aim to improve performance through encouraging individuals to behave in a desired away. Maslow, Frager, and Fadiman (1970) identify that esteem needs can be satisfied through recognition. Teachers who infrequently take absences are recognized by their districts in the form of bonuses and extra leave time. Maslow's Need Theory is a good fit for this study because the research questions seek to determine if, in order to meet personal needs, teachers alter their behaviors in order to earn incentives offered by districts aimed to reduce absenteeism.

Summary

The literature review for this qualitative study began with defining and contrasting employee "absence" and "absenteeism" and was followed with an explanation of Arkansas laws concerning teacher leave (AR Code § 6-17-1204 - 1209, 2019). The literature review further outlined the causes of teacher absenteeism related to working conditions (Bristol, 2017; Whitehead, 2006), employee demographics such as age (Bruno, 2002; Foldesy, & Foster, 1989), gender (Clotfelter et al., 2009; Educational Research Service, 1980; Hansen & Quintero, 2020; Scott & McClellan, 1990), family makeup (Germano, 2019; Williams et al., 2011), and time of the week or year (Miller et al., 2008a; Rhodes & Steers, 1990; Sawchuck, 2008). Other causes of teacher absenteeism covered in this review include psychological distress such as stress (Haberman, 2005), depression (Bakker et al., 2000; Green, 2014), and burnout (Bauer et al., 2006; Diaz, 2018; Maslach et al., 2001; Roloff & Brown, 2011).

Following a brief review of the causes of teacher absenteeism, the effects of teacher absenteeism were discussed including the effects on student achievement (Clotfelter et al., 2006; Ehrenberg et al., 1991), on colleagues, and the school district

(Bradley et al., 2007; Miller, 2008). Furthermore, the literature review discusses how the learning environment is affected by substitutes when a teacher is absent (Bruno, 2002; Herrmann & Rockoff, 2010). This review examined attendance incentives at the state and national level (Howell & Walkenhorst, 2019b) and examined any effects these incentives have had on curbing teacher absenteeism (Duflo et al., 2010; Jacobson, 1989; Joseph et al., 2014). The literature review concluded with a detailed explanation of Need Theory as the theoretical underpinning for this qualitative study (Maslow, 1943) and an explanation of how Maslow's Need Theory informed the research questions guiding the study. The next chapter in this document outlines the methods for data collection for this study.

Chapter III: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand teachers' perspectives regarding policies that are aimed to promote teacher attendance. This study examined policies and, based on interviews and surveys, determined if policies improved and/or hindered teacher attendance. Specifically, the research questions explored in this study were: RQ1: According to teachers, what policies or practices promote teacher attendance? And RQ2: According to teachers, what policies or practices hinder teacher attendance?

Research Design

A qualitative, phenomenological approach was used to conduct this research. Qualitative research uses data collection techniques such as observation, interviews, and working in the field and seeks to understand what people feel and why they feel that way (Patton, 2015). Qualitative methods allow for a depth of understanding that is not possible in quantitative approaches (Patton, 2015). Qualitative data come about through observations, interviews, and working in the field. The phenomenological approach focuses on how people make sense of experiences and how these experiences transform or determine perceptions whether consciously or unconsciously (Patton, 2015). This study sought to understand teachers' perceptions towards policies that are aimed to promote teacher attendance. The qualitative data collection technique of interviews and surveys was used to gather information about Arkansas teachers' perceptions of policies that are aimed to promote teacher attendance.

Participants

Participants in this study included teachers in Arkansas from a district that had adopted policies that are aimed to promote teacher attendance. All Arkansas public school districts offer a sick day buy back incentive through the Arkansas Teacher Retirement System (AR Code § 24-7-601, 2019). Many districts have policies that buy back an employee's sick days when the teacher accumulates a large number of days. These can vary from district to district, depending on the adopted policy. For example, in Beebe School District, an employee can begin to sell back sick days after accumulating 90 sick days (Beebe Public Schools Personnel Policies, 2004). However, in Atkins School District, an employee can begin to sell back sick days after accumulating 120 sick days (Atkins School District Personnel Policies, 2004). Most districts have a variation of this type of incentive policy. This study selected participants who worked in a district that had policies to reward employees for unused sick days prior to the 90-120 day amount. There were no other selection criteria for participants in this study.

Context of the study. The study was conducted in the state of Arkansas. There are 238 public/charter school districts in Arkansas. Many districts have adopted policies in recent years to reduce the amount of leave time teachers take from work (Mershon, 2015). Participants were from one district that has adopted policies that encourage teachers to take fewer days of leave. This district was chosen because of the proximity of the district and the researcher. This district was also chosen because of its rural nature and diversity in student and community population.

Stuttgart School District in Stuttgart, Arkansas provides for 1,553 students, 44.8% of which are African American, 43.1% are White, and 6.8% are Hispanic (My School

Info, 2020). Of the student body, 64% is on a free or reduced lunch program (My School Info, 2020). There are 129 full-time teachers in Stuttgart School District; 50 teachers work at Park Avenue Elementary School, 21 teachers work at Meekins Middle School, 19 teachers work at Stuttgart Junior High School, and 39 teachers work at Stuttgart High School (My School Info, 2020).

As of the 2010 census, there were 9,326 people, 3,866 households, and 2,505 families residing in the city of Stuttgart (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). In 2010, the racial makeup of the city was 58.7% White, 36.5% Black or African American, 0.7% Asian, 0.2% Native American, 2.4% from other races, and 1.4% from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race made up 3.5% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). In 2010, the median income for a household in the city was $35,948 and the median income for a family was $46,488 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

Sample. Twelve teachers were selected to participate in the study. Teachers were selected based on age, years of service in education, and grades/subject taught.

Sampling method. There were teachers across the state of Arkansas who fit the criteria for participation in this study. Due to the location of the researcher and the COVID-19 pandemic, the convenience sampling technique was the best choice for this study. Convenience sampling is a sampling of participants who are easy to reach or contact (Convenience Sample, 2020). Once permission was received from the school district, an email was sent to all teachers to encourage them to participate in the study. Willing participants were sent a survey containing demographic questions to help narrow the number of participants. The demographic survey questions are shown in Table 3. If a teacher was willing to participate in the study and their specific demographic

characteristics best represent the diversity of the teaching population, they were invited to participate in an interview. All teachers who were willing to participate were sorted into groups based on age, years of service in education, and grades/subject taught.

Table 3.

Demographic Survey Questions

Demographic Survey Questions	Answer Options
1. What is your age?	A. 18 – 25 years old B. 25 – 30 years old C. 30 – 45 years old D. 45+ years old
2. Please specify your ethnicity.	A. Caucasian B. African American C. Latinx or Hispanic D. Asian E. Indigenous American F. Indigenous Hawaiian or Pacific Islander G. Two or More H. Other/Unknown I. Prefer not to say
3. What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?	A. Some High School B. High School C. Bachelor's Degree D. Master's Degree E. Doctorate or higher F. Trade School
4. How long have you worked in education?	A. 0 - 5 years B. 6 – 10 years C. 11 – 15 years D. 16 – 20 years E. 21 – 25 years F. 26+ years
5. How long have you worked in your current district?	A. 0 - 5 years B. 6 – 10 years C. 11 – 15 years D. 16 – 20 years

	E. 21 – 25 years
	F. 26+ years

6. Which grades do you currently teach? Select all that apply.

Pre-K
Kindergarten
1st grade
2nd grade
3rd grade
4th grade
5th grade
6th grade
7th grade
8th grade
9th grade
10th grade
11th grade
12th grade

7. What subjects do you currently teach?

Answers will vary

8. Are you willing to participate in a face to face follow up interview?
Follow up: If yes, please provide your name, email, and phone number for further contact.

Yes, please
No, thank you

Data Collection

Data for this study was generated through interviews and observations. The

participants were interviewed via an online video communication platform: Cisco

Webex. In addition, a notebook describing setting, time and place of interviews was

noted by the researcher and used as data for coding.

Face to face interviews. Data were collected through semi-structured open-ended

interviews with individual teachers. The semi-structured interview approach means all

participants were asked the same prepared basic open-ended questions in the same order

(Patton, 2015). The interview method was chosen because of a need to find out what

motivates teachers to not take leave and if policies are a factor in the decision to miss a day of work. Feelings and thoughts are not things that can be easily interpreted even if they are observed. The interview method gives a researcher the opportunity to know how the teacher views policies that are aimed to promote teacher attendance and if these policies affected a teacher's behavior. This means the experiences of the participant has meaning (Patton, 2015). Due to the 2019 Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, the interviews took place via online video communication: Cisco Webex. It was safer for the researcher and participants to communicate via online video communication rather than in-person interviews. Also, due to a face mask mandate by the Governor of Arkansas, participants and researchers would need to wear a face mask for in-person interviews (Exec. Order No. 20-43, 2020). Face masks would prevent the researcher from documenting data resulting from facial reactions to questions or answers. Therefore, the safest and most thorough interview data collection was able to occur via online video communication.

Interview questions. The primary instrument for this study were standardized, open-ended interview questions (Patton, 2015). Qualitative research relies on a researcher's ability to ask relevant, open-ending questions that evoke comprehensive accounts of lived experiences and perceptions (Patton, 2015). The phenomenological interview questions were informed by a comprehensive literature review, the guiding research questions, Maslow's Need Theory (Maslow, 1943), and guidelines outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018). Interview questions are aligned to guiding research questions and provide the primary means of gathering data in order to identify emerging

themes, patterns, and categories (Patton, 2015). Interview questions and corresponding

research questions are shown in Table 4.

Table 4.

Interview Questions and Corresponding Research Questions

Interview Questions	Corresponding Research Questions
1. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Tell me a little about yourself including your name, your current role, and the number of years you have worked in education?	RQ1: According to teachers, what policies or practices promote teacher attendance?
2. What makes you want to come to work each day?	RQ1: According to teachers, what policies or practices promote teacher attendance?
3. What reasons, if any, prevent you from being able to come to school? Follow up: How would your answer have changed before/after COVID-19?	RQ2: According to teachers, what policies or practices hinder teacher attendance?
4. What are some recent examples for why you took a personal day? Follow up: Do you typically take all of your personal days each year?	RQ2: According to teachers, what policies or practices hinder teacher attendance?
5. What are some recent examples for why you took a sick day? Follow up: On average, how many sick days do you take each year? Follow up: Have you ever taken a sick day without going to the doctor?	RQ2: According to teachers, what policies or practices hinder teacher attendance?
6. Has an administrator ever requested a doctor's note when returning to work after taking a sick day?	RQ1: According to teachers, what policies or practices promote teacher attendance?
7. What's the highest number of consecutive days you have taken in a year?	RQ2: According to teachers, what policies or practices hinder teacher attendance?

8. In your opinion, do you have enough personal/sick days each year?	RQ1: According to teachers, what policies or practices promote teacher attendance?
9. Does your district have any policies or practices in place to encourage teachers to take fewer days of leave?	RQ1: According to teachers, what policies or practices promote teacher attendance?
10. After reviewing different policies from other districts, is there a policy that would promote or hinder teacher attendance, if enacted in your district?	RQ1: According to teachers, what policies or practices promote teacher attendance?
11. In your opinion, what policy(s) or practices could your district enact to encourage teachers to take fewer days of leave?	RQ1: According to teachers, what policies or practices promote teacher attendance?
12. Does your district have any policies or practices in place that results in teachers taking more days of leave?	RQ2: According to teachers, what policies or practices hinder teacher attendance?

Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent that a reader can have confidence in the research and findings of a study (Lincoln & Guba, 2016). As part of any research study, steps were taken to ensure that the findings were accurate and credible in the minds of the researcher, participants and readers of the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Credibility of the data in this study was ensured via the use of triangulation, peer review, and reflexivity.

Triangulation. Triangulation of data requires checking for consistency across data collected from a variety of methods (Patton, 2015). For this study, data was collected from interviews. Coding and cross-checking information obtained from both data collection methods provided coherent justification for emerging themes, which aided in credibility (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015).

Peer review. An additional method for ensuring credibility is peer review, wherein another person, in addition to the researcher, reviews the data analysis to evaluate the research, provide insight, and asks reflective questions of the researcher (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015). An Arkansas Tech University doctoral student conducted a peer review of the qualitative data collected in this study, asking questions for interpretation and thus aiding in establishing credibility of the data collection and analysis process. The peer reviewed data codes to facilitate credible data analysis with the researcher.

Reflexivity. Reflexivity is a systematic approach to reflection (Patton, 2015). This type of reflection is "grounded in the in-depth, experimental, and interpersonal nature of qualitive inquiry" (Patton, 2015, p. 70). England (1994) described reflexivity as a "self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher" (p. 83). Reflectivity means to look deeply within in order to question and understand oneself (Schwandt, 1997). Reflexivity makes the researcher more aware of their own cultural, political, and social perspectives and biases (Patton, 2015). Reflexivity contributes to credibility because it "promotes an ongoing recursive relationship between the researcher's subjective responses and the intersubjective dynamics of the research process itself" (Probst, 2015, p. 37).

As I look within and identify my characteristics, I can better understand the biases I bring to my research and fieldwork. I am a white, cisgender, middle class, heterosexual millennial male. These identifiers have not changed over time. I have seen how these identifiers have directly benefited me, through personal experiences, and know they have not been a hindrance in my pursuits. I attended a public school during grades k-4. I, then,

attended a private school from fifth grade through high school graduation. The private school was attended my mostly wealthy white students. I wasn't exposed to much diversity during my k-12 education. During the summers, I traveled with my maternal grandparents, who both have advanced degrees, around the world and was exposed to differing cultures. My paternal grandparents both dropped out of school before the ninth grade. Both my parents have undergraduate degrees from the University of Alabama. I, too, attended the University of Alabama for my undergraduate degree. I earned my master's and specialist's degrees in Arkansas. Along with scholarships, I paid for my undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate degrees primarily by taking out student loans and working a full-time job.

Further information that affects my lens relates to family and my work ethic. I grew up in a middle class family in Alabama. My father owned a few small businesses while my mom worked as a nurse in a hospital, then at my highschool. It was always tough to find qualified employees to work in my dad's stores. My father paid the $5.25 state minimum wage to new employees which may have attracted those that lacked the experience and work ethic my father desired. Many employees would quit after their first paycheck, not come to work for their scheduled shifts, or show up, but not meet expectations. As a working adult, I rarely miss work. I believe I am an integral part of the day-to-day operations and if I miss work, the people I serve will suffer. I believe that leaves of absences are to be only used in an emergency.

I intended to research district policies that promote or hinder teacher attendance. I was interested in researching this topic to gain a better understanding of incentive policies and determine if they have a positive or negative effect on teacher absenteeism.

Other questions that may be answered during this research: Are there different types of incentive policies? Do teachers find these policies favorable? Will the data be similar for novice and veteran teachers? As a first and second year teacher, I relied heavily on Christmas bonuses and the quarterly incentive pay that was given for missing a finite amount of work. I know that I was impacted by district policies that promoted teacher attendance. I wanted to know if others had a similar experience to my own. I also wanted to seek out best practices and implement them in the school I lead.

Data Analysis

Once interviews are complete, they were transcribed. The data was analyzed for patterns using the constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1984). The goal of the constant comparative approach is to use coding to identify a phenomenon or pattern within a select set of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1984). The types of coding that were used were open coding and selective coding as defined by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Open coding is the process of "breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (p. 61) and selective coding is "the process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, [and] validating those relationships" (p. 116). By coding and making connections between data sets, patterns and themes were generated.

Summary

This chapter outlined the research methods that were used to answer the two research questions of this qualitative study, which explores teachers' perceptions of district practices and the effectiveness of policies intended to encourage teachers to take fewer days of leave. The chapter described the methodology including the instruments

that were used to conduct the research, which includes videoconference interviews. The

chapter also contained a reflexivity section, an explanation of the data analysis process,

and assurance of trustworthiness and ethical considerations that guided the paper.

Chapter IV: Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to understand teachers' perspectives regarding policies that are aimed to promote teacher attendance. The data for this research were collected from open-ended interview questions. Findings were analyzed using the constant comparative method to code and identify patterns and themes (Patton, 2015). The research questions were informed by Maslow's Need Theory (Maslow, 1943) and were designed to provide insight into teachers' perspectives towards policies or practices and if these improved and/or hindered teacher attendance.

The two research questions that guided this study included:

1. According to teachers, what policies or practices promote teacher attendance?

2. According to teachers, what policies or practices hinder teacher attendance?

Sample

Twelve participants ranging in ages, years working in education, years working in the Stuttgart School District, and grades of students taught were selected for this study using purposeful, random sampling (Patton, 2015). All (12/12) participants said they were aware of Stuttgart School District's attendance incentive policy at the time of the interview.

Table 5 summarizes the demographic information of the research participants. Participants in the study held a bachelor's or master's degree as their highest educational level achieved. Most of the participants (7/12) had 21-26+ years of experiences in education, while four of the 12 participants had zero to 10 years' experience. Most of the participants (7/12) taught students in the 9th-12th grades.

Table 5

Participant Demographics

Participant (Teacher)	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Number of Years in Education	Number of Years in Stuttgart	Grades Taught
1	F	N/A	30 – 45 years	16 – 20	0 – 5	5th – 6th
2	F	White	25 – 30 years	0 – 5	0 – 5	9th – 12th
3	F	White	46+ years	21 – 25	11 – 15	6th
4	F	White	31 – 45 years	6 – 10	0 – 5	6th
5	F	White	46+ years	26+	26+	7th – 12th
6	F	White	25 – 30 years	0 – 5	0 – 5	6th
7	M	White	46+ years	26+	21 – 25	6th – 12th
8	F	White	31 – 45 years	6 – 10	6 – 10	9th – 12th
9	F	White	31 – 45 years	21 – 25	21 – 25	K – 4th
10	F	White	31 – 45 years	21 – 25	11 – 15	5th – 12th
11	M	White	46+ years	21 – 25	21 – 25	9th – 12th
12	F	White	46+ years	26+	11 – 15	9th – 12th

Findings

Findings for this study were organized by themes within each of the two research questions outlined at the beginning of this chapter, as well as written reflections from prompts related to perceived meaningful experiences. The research questions and interview questions were informed by Maslow's Need Theory (Maslow, 1943) and were designed to provide insight into teachers' perspectives towards policies or practices and if these improved and/or hindered teacher attendance. Table 6 shows the themes that

emerged from each of the two research questions; (1) According to teachers, what policies or practices promote teacher attendance?; (2) According to teachers, what policies or practices hinder teacher attendance?

Table 6

Research Questions and Corresponding Themes

Research Question	Themes
1. According to teachers, what policies or practices promote teacher attendance?	Desire to teach students
	Desire to help staff
	Difficulty in taking leave
	Administrator influence
2. According to teachers, what policies or practices hinder teacher attendance?	Parental obligations
	Other family obligations
	Recovery from illness
	Quarantine due to COVID-19 exposure
	Personal and professional obligations
	Improving mental health

RQ 1: Policies of Practices Promoting Teacher Attendance

The first research question in this study involved promoting teacher attendance: "According to teachers, what policies or practices promote teacher attendance?" Interview questions informing RQ1 were, "What makes you want to come to work each day?" and "What policies or practices could your district enact to encourage teachers to take fewer days of leave?" Analysis revealed four common themes for promoting teacher

attendance: (a) desire to teach students; (b) desire to help staff; (c) difficulty in taking leave; and (d) administrator influence.

Desire to teach students. All (12/12) participants expressed that teaching students was the driving force that kept them coming to work each day. Typically the first reason they gave for coming to work each day, participants shared their love of children, seeing them learn, and wanting to be the teacher that helped students achieve their goals. For example, Participant 7, a veteran teacher with over 26 years of experience, said,

> I enjoy being an educator and enjoy being around kids. I imagine by the time I get to 70, I'll be tired of the classroom, but even then, that'll be tough for me. I love the students and hopefully they're going to learn. I feel blessed that I get to create, you know, my classes are a little different than what you get from a normal classroom teacher. Nothing is more enjoyable than to come here every day and teach those kids.

Participant 11, who has been teaching in Stuttgart for over 20 years, said,

> I just really enjoy teaching. You know, I love when that light goes off in their head and they get a hard subject, especially math. It's a hard subject for a lot of people. I love seeing students who maybe didn't like math, end up liking math, and pursuing things in math and developing as critical thinkers.

Participant 9, a library media specialist with over 20 years of teaching experience, said,

> I just want to be here for my kids and give them the best experience. I do feel like it's my responsibility to be here because no matter what, the profession calls for giving the kids the best academic experience.

Participant 8 was a 30-45 year old nontraditional teacher with under 10 years of experience. She shared her love for kids as the reason she comes to work each day, saying,

> I love seeing the kids. I hate all this COVID craziness because we don't get to see them as much and the kids aren't working as hard as they could be. They're not working to their full potential and I want to be here to make sure that I push the ones that are here to do the best that they can.

Desire to help staff. Some (5/12) participants stated their desire to help their colleagues was a motivator to come to work each day. Participants expressed the need for all teachers to be present at work so hardships that arise from a teacher being absent, are not placed upon a colleague during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participant 12 expressed their love for their partner teacher. Participant 1 has 16-20 years of teaching experience but has been teaching in Stuttgart less than five years. She said,

> For me, my staff needs us here more than ever. Missing right now is crippling our school. Subs are basically nonexistent and the teachers need all hands on deck. So, I feel like it's my duty, you know, as a teammate. Even though taking time for me to mentally recover can be needed right now, with the subs being a scarce as they are, it can be rough on the other teachers. I don't want to put that on anybody else.

Participant 5 is the gifted and talented coordinator for the district. She has over 26 years of classroom experience and has recently begun coaching teachers. She had a unique perspective:

In the roles that I have, I don't have a set group of students every single day, but this year I'm working with the principal and questioning strategies for teachers. I'm really enjoying the observations that I have been in.

Participant 10 is a 5-12 language arts coach with over 21 years of teacher experience. She offers a similar perspective, saying, "I enjoy being able to support teachers, finding methods and engaging strategies to increase reading ability and reading desire in their students." Participant 3, a sixth grade math teacher with over 20 years of experience, expressed the burden other staff members take on when a teacher takes a leave of absence and a sub can't be found:

Well, first of all, you worry about your coworkers; or I do anyway. You know, if I don't have a sub who can take my place, they'll have to split my class up with somebody else. It doesn't happen very often, but still, it's a lot on other teachers.

Difficulty in taking leave. Half (6/12) of the participants shared how the difficulties in preparing for a leave of absence (e.g., creating lesson plans and reteaching upon return from an absence) discourages teachers from taking an absence. For example, Participant 1 said,

When you're planning for a sub, as far as teacher, it is sometimes easier to come to work rather prepare for a sub. Sometimes the preparation can be really, really difficult. Planning for a sub is so difficult that unless I was just absolutely sick last year, I tried my best to make it to school.

Similarly, Participant 2, referencing how much time it takes to create substitute plans, said, "It's really easier for me to show up and power through than it is to miss a day."

Participants also expressed that taking leave can be difficult because they feel a substitute in the classroom is not a true replacement for the absent teacher. Every day of instruction from a classroom teacher is crucial for the success of a student's growth. If a substitute is not as effective as a highly qualified classroom teacher, then a day of instruction led by a substitute may be equitable to a loss day of instruction. Participants are motivated to come to work to prevent days of lost instruction. Participant 9 said, "No matter how good the sub plans are, there is just no substitute for you being here and it's really a pain to miss school." Similarly, Participant 8 said, "It's hard when teachers are, I mean, you know, they don't learn to their full potential especially the subs in the room. They need they need their teacher."

Participant 7 teaches non general education classes and expressed their concern with having a sub:

> If my co-teacher and I weren't going to be here, a sub isn't going to be here teach these kids band. We wouldn't be able to have a sub come in and rehearse. If there has to be sub, the kids are just going to sit there and we're going to have to give them some kind of a written rhythm exercise for them to do.

Administrator influence. Another common theme that participants shared was that their principal or district leadership directly affected how much time they miss from work. Participants expressed their principals would extend some grace and allow teachers to leave for 30 minutes to an hour for an appointment without docking them a half or full day. Participant 12 explains that this practice, in turn, caused them to miss less work. They said, "If you're telling me I have to take a half day instead of just leaving an hour

early, well, I'm leaving at 11:30am. Or I can stay the whole day and just miss that one hour."

Participant 11 echoed similar sentiments, stating,

> I mean, that's not a bad idea, because sometimes if you could leave an hour early, it may prevent you from taking a whole or half of a day. [The principals] work with you on that or they've always worked with me. You know, I had one principal forever and he worked with me. But he knew I would do the same for him as far as covering other classes or doing something on my spare time to help him. So, he didn't ever give me any trouble if I needed to leave an hour early. I think as long as you don't ask for it all the time, the principal will work with you.

Similarly, Participant 5 stated,

> Some [administrators] will be like, "oh, just leave 30 minutes early. It's no big deal." If it's a quick thing. And I think it shows that you support your teachers. Everybody has a life outside of school and if you can work with your staff and allow them some of those things, as long as they're not taking advantage of it. This also saves the district money because they don't have to pay a sub for half a day, only find someone to cover for an hour or so.

Participant 12 said,

> [My principal] will let my co-teacher cover my class if I need to run to the clinic really quick. As long as he covers my class, there's not an issue and I don't get docked pay and that helps.

Participants also spoke of their administrator's leniency surrounding duties during a teacher's planning time. By state law, teacher planning time is supposed to be related to

school business or students learning (AR Code § 6-17-114, 2019). Some teachers used it for personal reasons. Participant 12 said,

> My principal allows us to miss [work] for, like, a doctor's appointment, and it was during your conference period and it was in town where you could go and do that, and not be docked. It's nice if you need to just go run and quickly go get a doctor's appointment, you could run and do that. And you would only miss maybe an hour of work.

Participant 5 stated,

> For instance, yesterday we had somebody that needed to go meet a plumber at their house. They were having issues, so I covered their 8th period class. They had 7th period planning. They weren't docked anything.

> Participants shared how actions by the principal improves the culture of the staff and helps encourage teachers to take fewer absences. For example, Participant 12 stated,

> At one of my other schools, the principal went out of their way to come and see you once a day. They would pop in and say "Hey, how are you doing this? Is there anything I can get you?" You know, just to check on things. That really helped.

Participant 11 said that occasional gifts from an administrator encouraged them to not miss work, stating, "You know, gifts in your mailbox every now and then helps."

Participant 10 praised their principal for going out of their way to encourage teachers:

> I like, um, this year at the junior high, because [the principal] seems like she's been really making an effort to have, like, special random treats for the teachers. She might provide cookies or donuts one day or just, you know, an entire lunch or

little goody bags in the teacher's boxes. Stuff like that seems really matter. You

know, especially in a year, like this little things like that can brighten your day

and make things seem, I don't know, less hard for just a minute. So, I think little

things like that can make a teacher feel appreciated contribute to culture.

Participant 6, a sixth grade language arts teacher with less than five years of classroom

experience, credits their principal for hiring a team that encourages one another. They

said,

We finally have a group of cohesive people that aren't trying to leave to find a

different job. They are actually living here and are invested in each other.

Two participants shared how the interpretation of the policy by the superintendent

determined if they received the bonus pay for taking fewer days of leave. Due to wording

of the policy, 12 month employees who take vacation days may not receive the incentive

pay, depending on the interpretation by the superintendent. Participant 12 said,

It depends on which superintendent if I receive the bonus pay or not. Some

superintendents were really good at adhering to the policy, others were bad. They

didn't care what the policy said, If I took my vacation days, I lost the bonus.

Participant 7 is also a 12 month employee who shares the same experience. They said,

I don't like the policy. I get 10 vacation days because I'm a year 'round employee.

I have a 240-day contract. So, if I use my vacation days. I don't get perfect

attendance. Which is weird because now that I'm reading the policy, I'm

wondering why. Because it says only to count student contact days, so if I take

vacation during Christmas break that won't count against me. I could be wrong.

Summary of RQ1

Few teachers were motivated or affected by the formal incentive policies of Stuttgart School District. The most common motivators for teachers to take fewer days of leave was their desire to teach students and to help their colleagues. The informal practices and the flexible decision making ability of the schools' administrators also contributed to teachers taking fewer days of leave.

RQ 2: Policies or Practices Hindering Teacher Attendance

The second research question in this study involved hindering teacher attendance: "According to teachers, what policies or practices hinder teacher attendance?" Interview questions informing RQ1 were, "What reasons, if any, prevent you from being able to come to school?" and "Does your district have any policies or practices in place that result in teachers taking more days of leave?" Analysis revealed six common themes for promoting teacher attendance: (a) parental obligations; (b) other family obligations; (c) recovery from illness; (d) quarantine due to COVID-19 exposure; e) personal and professional obligations; and (f) improving mental health.

Parental obligations. While 10/12 participants have children, only 4/12 participants spoke of needing to take a leave of absence from work due to childbirth. 10/12 participants said that they have had to take off work to take care of a child that fell ill.

Birth. Expectant mothers and soon-to-be fathers may take a leave of absence for the birth and raising of a child. Teachers are required to use their built up sick and personal time in order to be paid during this parental leave. For example, Participant 11 said,

Well, the highest number [of absences] was when my son was born, and I took probably close to two weeks. But that's kind of the one exception in the 20 something years, you know, I've had to miss, I think.

Participant 1 said,

I used everything because I was pregnant and [my child] was a little surprise package, because I was pregnant at 40. So, I was immediately put into that high risk category. My doctor wanted to see me more often, which was good, but scary at the same time. So, I kind of had to use a lot of that leave for doctor's appointments and such. Then, I was put on bedrest for three weeks, then [my child] was born and I was out for six more weeks. So, nine weeks total. Participant 5 said they had to miss 40 days of work because of bedrest before delivery.

Participant 3 said,

When I had my first child, I had to be on bedrest, and it was earlier in my career. So, I didn't have any sick days built up and [the district] wound up docking my pay. I'm not sure how many days it was. I'd say, at least it was two to three weeks, maybe.

Illness of a child. 10/12 participants (all participants who had children) said that they have had to take off work to take care of a child that fell ill. For example, Participant 12 spoke of absences earlier in their career when they said, "I usually don't miss work. In my earlier years I missed when my kids were little, [Absences] were because of my kids." Participant 6 said, "I have a five year old and an eight month old, so all my

absences are all pretty much related to them." Another participant mentioned taking a personal day to take care of a sleepless child.

Other Family Obligations. In addition to caregiving for their children, participants also mentioned other family-related obligations of events that caused them to miss work. Bereavement, caring for elderly parents, and family events are among the reasons teachers took a leave of absence from work; each is discussed below.

Bereavement. Two participants specifically mentioned the deaths of family members as reasons the needed to miss work. For example, Participant 6 said, "The most I've ever missed was five days of school when I had a miscarriage." Participant 9 said that the most consecutive absences they had to take off from work was five days when their stepmom passed away. Participant 8 stated that they have to take two weeks off for the death of her mother.

Caring for older adults. Three participants in this study specifically indicated their role as a family caretaker caused them to miss work. Some participants are the sole caregiver for an aging parent. Participant 1 said,

> This year, unless it's circumstances involving COVID, or I need to be home to assist mom or my husband, or one of them may be sick. That's going to be really the only circumstances that are going to keep me from doing my job.

Participant 5 said, "My mother is elderly and doesn't get around real well, so if she has a doctor's appointment outside of town, I'll need to miss work."

Participant 8 said,

> This year, the only reasons I've missed is either when I've taken my mother to the doctor's and then when she was on hospice, and when she passed away. Those are

the only reasons I've missed this year at all, otherwise I would have been here every day.

Family events. Four participants in this study specifically mentioned taking personal leave to attend family events. Participant 6 explained that they took a day this attend a sporting event. Reasons given by other participants for taking personal time included: attending a wedding and attending grandchildren's school events

Recovery from illness. All (12/12) participants in this study indicated that illness has caused them to take a leave of absence. Participant 12, in response to the question, "What reasons prevent you from being able to come to school?" said, "Being sick. It would be because of my health. That's the only reason why I miss." Similarly, participant 7 responded, "Obviously having to deal with things that are out of my control, like being sick." Participant 10 answered, "I mean, all the obvious things, you know, illness." Similarly, Participant 4 responded, "I miss for illness of myself." Participant 11 answered, "I miss for sickness, but not very often at all."

Quarantine due to COVID-19 exposure. Some (4/12) participants stated they were forced to miss work due to being a primary contact to someone diagnosed with/showing symptoms of COVID-19. Due to state and federal health guidelines, if a participant is within six feet of someone for 15 consecutive minutes, a participant would be quarantined and be absent from work for up to 10 days. Some participants had symptoms of COVID-19 and had to miss work to be tested. For example, Participant 12 said,

Our school nurse recommended I get tested because I had some students that were exposed. So, I was quarantined for two days until I got my results back. But, I still

met with my students through virtual to make sure that instruction still carried on, which was kind [of] interesting.

Participant 9 said,

I got COVID in September, so I have missed more days than usual this year. I was out for six school days, but I truly should have been out more because they say you only have to quarantine for 10 days, but I came back as soon as I could because I have a new assistant.

Participant 6 had to take a sick day to take their child to the doctor. They said,

My son had a fever. It was 99, not quite 100 fever, but it's like 99 something and I had to go get him. Not related to Stuttgart [school district], but because of his preschool I had to go and grab him for, like, a day or something.

Participant 10 had a similar reason for an absence, stating, "I had to miss one day. It was a Friday. My oldest son woke up running a fever."

Personal and professional obligations. Participants described instances where they needed to take off of work for reasons other than being sick. These personal and professional reasons are each discussed below.

Personal reasons. 7/12 participants stated that they had taken a personal day within the last two years. However, only 3/12 participants said they took a personal day in the 2019-2020 school year. Participant 10 took a personal day to meet with the contractor of a new house they are building. Participant 7 said, "I took a half day to get my teaching license renewed. I actually ventured to the Department of Education building in Little Rock for the first time ever and had to go there to get my fingerprints

scanned." One participant said that, in a precious year, she took personal time to attend graduate school classes.

 Attending professional development. A few (3/12) participants explained that mandatory professional development (P.D.) was a reason for taking leave from school. In order to maintain a teaching license, teachers are required by local school board policies and state law to attend P.D. In most cases, districts offer professional development during summer months to prevent teachers from missing classroom time with students. Occasionally, due to the nature of the professional development, teachers are forced to miss instructional days with students to attend required P.D. Participant 11 stated, "I probably actually missed for school stuff more than anything before this year. You know, going to P. D. or different things. But there's not really a lot of times I miss school." Participant 3 had a similar statement when stating, "Yeah, I hardly ever missed. I have 109 sick days and so mine have been mainly professional development." Participant 5, when asked "What prevents you from being able to come to work?" said, "Um, professional development, now."

 Improving mental health. When participants were asked if they ever took a sick day without visiting the doctor, 12/12 affirmed they had taking a sick day without seeing a physician. Participants said there wasn't a need to have a doctor's appointment every time they or their children woke up feeling unwell. Half (6/12) of the participants stated that they have taken mental health days as sick days. Exhaustion from teaching lead to some participants taking these mental health days. For example, Participant 9 said, "Yes, I have taken a mental health day and, you know, it's easy to just self-diagnose myself when I feel sick."

Participant 2 said,

So, I'm actually sick if I take a sick day and it's very rare for me to be sick. And

actually, sometimes it's more like, I'm just exhausted than am actually sick. It's

kind of like mental health day, really.

Participant 1 said every year one day is kind of a mental health day, while

Participant 5 said they sometimes take off for their mental sanity. Participant 12 affirmed

taking days without seeing a physician and said, "A lot of times, [I] take what we call

mental health days." Participant 4, a nontraditional teacher with less than 10 years of

teaching experience, said, "I might take a day because of burnout. Yeah, burn out.

Definitely."

Two teachers expressed that added duties and responsibilities given to them by

administrators result in some teachers taking more mental health days. During the

interview with Participant 8, I could see a couple of teachers in the background who were

there organizing tickets for the week's football game. Our interview was interrupted

twice by the building secretary inquiring about the aforementioned tickets. She

mentioned that the school has "had several teachers leave and quit" causing this

participant to take on more responsibilities. The week of the interview, the principal

directed the participant to organize the distribution of the playoff football tickets to the

community. The participant expressed they "were happy to do it," but said, "it's a lot to

deal with."

Participant 10 said,

I think a lot of times and not necessarily like right now, but just throughout my

time and education, I think competent people in education pay the price for the

incompetent. The competent end up doing taking on a lot of responsibilities because they have good work ethic and are self-motivated. They end up taking care of their kids and taking care of their colleagues. Their administrators and colleagues know they're competent. So, they put more things on them and so I think stuff like that can just really take a toll on someone, you know. Then, they're like, 'I need a day. I need a day. I need to chill. I need to rest.' I think sometimes really good teachers have too much put upon them and that can make somebody just want to be like, 'I can't go today. I have to take a break.' And then when they do, they lose their bonus.

Summary of RQ2

Participants shared that taking a leave of absence, while infrequent, is necessary for various reasons including parental obligations, other family obligations, recovery from illness, quarantine due to COVID-19 exposure, personal and professional obligations, and improving mental health. While participants didn't explicitly state that Stuttgart's formal policies caused teachers to take more absences, half (6/12) of the participants did express the need to take mental health days. These mental health absences may be the result of informal practices that lead to teachers being overwhelmed with the amount of work placed upon them.

Reflections on Policies

While conducting interviews, two additional themes developed as participants shared their views on Stuttgart's policies. These themes were: a) effectiveness of incentive policies; and b) criticisms of incentive policies. These themes were not necessarily aligned with a research question, but were directly related to the research

purpose (i.e., to understand teachers' perspectives regarding policies that are aimed to promote teacher attendance).

Effectiveness of incentive policies. Two groups of participants emerged while collecting data; those participants that were motivated to take fewer days of leave due to incentive policies, and those participants that were not motivated by Stuttgart's incentive policies.

Motivated by incentive policies. A few (2/12) participants were motivated to take fewer days of absences due to Stuttgart's incentive policy. For example, Participant 9 stated,

> Personally, [the policy] makes me want to try to get [the bonus] if it's possible. When I got COVID this year, I thought 'well I'm not getting that bonus this year.' It's not a make or break kind of thing. I mean, they don't take away your pay, it's just kind of a little bump. I do like getting it though, particularly at the end of the year, heading into the summer. Like I said, I am motivated by it, but if I have to miss out; I miss out.

After giving it some thought, Participant 4 recalled that she was also motived to avoid taking a sick day:

> I don't think I have ever benefited from this policy. Actually, if I can clear correct myself, I believe I did actually earn it my first year. Last year, I did think about it when choosing not to take a sick day.

While conducting interviews, almost half (5/12) of the participants referenced a policy that allows teachers who have worked in the district for 17 or more years the option to trade sick days in for personal days. Policy 3.11 allows for any teacher, who has

accumulated 17 - 19 years of service, the option of trading one sick day for one personal day. A teacher who has accumulated 20 - 24 years has the option of trading two sick days for two personal days. A teacher who has worked for 25 - 29 years has the option of trading three sick leave days for three personal days. Finally, the policy allows for any teachers who have accumulated 30 years or more the option of trading four sick leave days for four personal days. Stuttgart's policies also pay teachers a substitute's daily rate of pay for any accrued days over 100. Participant 11 mentioned taking advantage of both of these policies, stating,

> As long as I've worked in Stuttgart, I can actually roll over some sick days to personal. I know I have rolled some over to personal, but I don't know if actually used them. Every year, I'm maxes out at 100 sick days. So, I get a nice little bonus in my check at the end of the year when they (the district) buy back my days.

Participant 9 also has converted sick days to personal days but admits to never needing to use them. She states, "If you work in the district long enough, you can transfer some over, but I don't even use those."

Participant 5 recalled her experience in using this policy:

> We have something similar to [the Mountain Home policy] and I should have looked it up before I talked to you, because I can't remember it exactly. I know I can trade sick days for like three or four more personal days. So that I end up with, like, six personal days, instead of two and if I decide not to go and use those during the year after I've converted them, they just go back to sick days. So, each year, I email our administrative assistant at the superintendent's office and just say

I want to swap as many sick days as possible for personal days and then it reflects

that on my check. Then, at the end of the year, if I haven't used them all, they just

go back to sick days.

Not motivated by incentive policies. Most participants (10/12) said they did not

consider the incentive policy when choosing to take a leave of absence from work. Each

participant had their own reason for not being motivated by the policy. For example,

Participant 10 said, "I've never benefited from the policy. I feel like if you have kids, it's

very hard to be able to accomplish the requirements." Participant 8 stated, "I have seen it

before; I've glanced at it, but I never really have read it, to be honest with you, because I

know it's never probably going to apply to me. This policy never crosses my mind."

Participant 3 has received the bonus pay in the past, but isn't motivated daily by the

policy. They state, "I've gotten the money before, but that's not what you're asking me. I

would say it's still a built in incentive. But, it's one of those long-term incentives, rather

than the short-term."

Participant 1 expressed their relationship with the incentive policy:

As far as I like that policy, I have not gotten it as of yet. I don't really think that

the bonus at the end of the year is the primary motivating factor of being here,

other than showing up and really doing your job. It's a plus don't get me wrong.

Participant 2, a teacher with less than five years of experience, benefitted from the

policy but wasn't even aware of the policy. They said,

I did get the extra money at the end of the school year my first year of teaching

for not missing any days, but I wasn't aware of the incentive. I found out about it

because I had some extra money in my bank account magically.

Participant 12, a teacher with over 25 years of experience, noted that they feel a sense of duty to reach out to the novice teachers to inform them of the policy because many of them are unaware. Participant 12 said,

A lot of our younger teachers don't look at the personnel policy. They're not familiar enough with it. Especially this year with [COVID-19]. The way that our situation was here, they didn't get any training as far as, 'here's the personnel policy. Sometime when you get a chance, look at it. So, for younger teachers, we have to put that effort in to help.

Participant 5 has benefited by a similar policy before it was rewritten. They shared,

I have not benefited from the current policy as it reads now. I used to get the bonus when it was given out quarterly, but now that its awarded yearly, I don't get it. I guess this sounds bad, but I'm not going to come in sick for an extra 200 bucks and make everybody around me sick. I think it also depends on where you are in life. If you're single and this your only income, then that money is going to go further. Not that I'm wealthy, but I'm at a point where I know I'm going to be able to pay my bills every month and have that little bit to live on.

Criticisms of incentive policies. During the interview, participants were shown incentive policies from two other districts. Most (11/12) participants favored the Stuttgart incentive policy over the two policies that were referenced. Half (6/12) of the participants had suggestions for improving Stuttgart's current incentive policy. For example, Participant 9 recalled when the policy paid teachers on a quarterly basis instead of the current annual basis. Participant 9 said, **"**The policy used to award you every nine weeks.

You could get 150 dollars every quarter, I think. And I do remember when it was that way because you would say, 'okay, I'm almost there. I've got this.'" Participant 10 said they would be more tempted if the policy was awarded more frequently, stating, "In order to get that little extra money I might try to push a doctor's appointment the next month or next nine weeks."

Similarly, Participant 6 suggests the policy would be more attainable if awarded more frequently:

If it was by semester or even by quarter, like, if it was every nine weeks, then I think I could get it. I can do short term. Also, a whole year is hard to plan for. I mean, you can't predict what's going to happen.

Participant 3 stated,

Yeah, I think per semester will be way better than the year because like I said, I think it's going to be like, it's really hard to just miss 2 days a year, but if you missed it at fall semester, you've got your spring to try and get it.

Participant 5 said that if the payout was "5000 dollars a semester" it may encourage them more than the current policy. Participant 5 also stated they they're afraid this policy may be encouraging sick employees to come to work, stating, "Some people may look at this and end up exposing other people to whatever their sicknesses is because they need that extra money."

Participant 8 shared frustrations about missing out on the incentive when taking vacation days. This participant also recommended only considering sick leave in the policy:

I think the vacation part is a little asinine because you get those in your contract if

you're a 12 month employee. I think if you lose the bonus because of vacations, I

just think that's ridiculous. I mean, I understand giving the incentive for sick days.

but punishing people for the personal days? I really think if they're going to do

give a bonus, it should be for taking a lot of sick days.

One participant stated that they didn't like any incentive policy. Participant 4 said,

Any policy that encourages people to come to school while sick is not a forward

thinking policy. This policy may not even play a significant factor at all, but

discouraging teachers from taking their leave, I think that's a negative thing. I

think it potentially can be harmful if you have an employee who has a long term

illness, or manages at a health issue, or, you know, has a disability that requires

any sort of medical appointments. I don't think that that's particularly fair to offer

a policy that somebody is disqualified from just from existing. I'm against all

absence incentive policies.

Summary

Chapter four outlined the findings resulting from the analysis of data gathered

from interviews conducted via online video communication. Findings were organized by

each of the following research questions:

1. According to teachers, what policies or practices promote teacher attendance?

2. According to teachers, what policies or practices hinder teacher attendance?

All of the 12 participants cited a desire to teach and inspire students as motivation

for going to work each day. Other reasons for taking minimal absences included: a desire

to help colleagues, the difficulty of preparing for a substitute, and the informal practices

of the building administrator. Few teachers were motivated or affected by the formal incentive policies of Stuttgart School District.

Participants shared that taking a leave of absence, while infrequent, is necessary for personal and professional reasons. While participants didn't explicitly state that Stuttgart's formal policies caused teachers to take more absences, half (6/12) of the participants did express the need to take mental health days. These mental health absences may be the result of informal practices that lead to teachers being overwhelmed with the amount of work placed upon them.

Participants also shared their experience with, and the effectiveness of, Stuttgart School District's attendance incentive policies. Participants offered improvements of the current policy while referencing policies from outside school districts, including increasing the financial amount of the bonus and increasing the frequency at which the bonus is awarded. Participants also shared criticisms of the existing policies, which included the policy not being a motivating factor while also preventing teachers with chronic illnesses being prohibited from receiving the bonus.

Chapter V: Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to understand teachers' perspectives regarding policies that are aimed to promote teacher attendance. The data for this research were collected from open-ended interview questions. Findings were analyzed using the constant comparative method to code and identify patterns and themes (Patton, 2015). The research questions were informed by Maslow's Need Theory (Maslow, 1943) and were designed to provide insight into teachers' perspectives towards policies or practices and if these improved and/or hindered teacher attendance. Participants (n=12) in this study were all licensed teachers, working in the Stuttgart School District. The two research questions that guided this study included:

1. According to teachers, what policies or practices promote teacher attendance?

2. According to teachers, what policies or practices hinder teacher attendance?

Summary of Findings

This study investigated two questions that examined the effects policies that are aimed to promote teacher attendance have on teachers. Data informing the research findings in this study were from 12 videoconference interviews. Topics examined through the interviews included (a) policies or practices promoting teacher attendance; and (b) policies or practices hindering teacher attendance. Key findings are summarized below for each of the two research questions.

Data informing RQ 1, "According to teachers, what policies or practices promote teacher attendance?" suggested that few teachers were motivated or affected by the formal incentive policies of Stuttgart School District. The most common motivator for

teachers to take fewer days of leave was their desire to teach students, to help their colleagues. The informal practices and the flexible decision making ability of the schools' administrators also contributed to teachers taking fewer days of leave.

Findings from RQ 2, "According to teachers, what policies or practices hinder teacher attendance?" suggested that, while infrequent, it is necessary for teachers to take a leave of absence for various reasons. While participants didn't explicitly state that Stuttgart's formal policies caused teachers to take more absences, half (6/12) of the participants did express the need to take mental health days. These mental health absences may be the result of informal practices that lead to teachers being overwhelmed with the amount of work placed upon them.

Findings from general reflections suggested that participants were not affected by the Stuttgart School District's attendance bonus policy. Participants offered improvements of the current policy including increasing the financial amount of the bonus and increasing the frequency at which the bonus is awarded. Participants also shared criticisms of the existing policies, which included the policy not being a motivating factor while also preventing teachers with chronic illnesses being prohibited from receiving the bonus.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand teachers' perspectives regarding policies that are aimed to promote teacher attendance. Findings in this study are important because they have the potential to inform state level policy makers as well as local school boards. Additionally, the findings are important because they may inform school administrators who work with teachers on a daily basis. Key findings in this study

related to (a) formal policy vs. informal practice; (b) considering others when deciding to take time off; (c) valid reasons for absences; (d) taking off work without going to the doctor.

Formal policy vs. informal practice. While all participants in this study were aware of their district's bonus pay policy, few teachers were motivated or affected by the formal incentive. Instead, participants frequently cited the informal practices and the flexible decision-making ability of the schools' administrators as greatly contributing to them taking fewer days of leave. Participants recalled occasions when their principal would allow a teacher to leave for 30 minutes to an hour for an appointment without docking them a half or full day. Participant 12 explained that this practice, in turn, caused them to miss less work. They explained that if the administrator requires them to take a half day for leaving work an hour early, then the teacher will go ahead and miss a half day of work instead of just the hour needed. Participants also spoke of their administrator's leniency surrounding duties during a teacher's planning time. By state law, teacher planning time is supposed to be related to school business or students learning (AR Code § 6-17-114, 2019). Allowing teachers to use this time without students to take care of personal obligations prevented them from having to take time off work. This finding is a contribution to the literature as informal practices and their effect on absences were not known to be significant or well documented in the literature review in preparation for this study.

These informal practices are a benefit to both the teacher and the school district. The teacher benefits because they are not docked a day, while the school district benefits because they will not have to pay a substitute for a half or full day. Arkansas school

districts spent more than $102.7 million for substitute teachers, maintenance staff, and food service workers in the 2017-2018 school year (Howell & Walkenhorst, 2019b). Joseph, Waymack, and Zielaski (2014) calculates the number to be as high as an annual cost of $1,800 for every teacher employed.

An incentive policy that was motivating for some veteran teachers was the ability to cash in accrued sick days. Prior research found teachers who are approaching retirement age and have accumulated sick days with the school district, may begin to take their accumulated sick days for more personal reasons (Bruno, 2002). Based on the findings of this study, Stuttgart's policy allowing teachers to cash in their accrued sick days is helping combat the results of Bruno's (2002) work.

Considering others when deciding to take time off. The most common motivator for teachers to take fewer days of leave was their desire to teach students and to help their colleagues. Research shows that teacher absences negatively affect student achievement (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2006). As teachers miss more days of work, student achievement is negatively impacted, and regular routines and classroom procedures will be disrupted (Rundall, 1986). Research also shows that frequent instruction delivered by substitute teachers can lead to low levels of student interest in learning (Bruno, 2002). Participants in this study expressed their desire to maximize their students' learning and knew the negative effects their absence could have on students.

Participants also considered their colleagues when deciding to take a day of leave. Their experiences are aligned to research that found when a teacher is absent, a principal is often compelled to disrupt instruction by splitting classes and asking another teacher to instruct a much larger class (Bristol, 2017). Frontline Research and Learning Institute

(2019) found that the average vacancy fill rate for an absent teacher is 80%. During the other 20% that a substitute can't be found, a class may have to be split, grouped with another class, or a teacher will have to forego their planning time to act as a substitute (Bristol, 2017). Participants in this study seemed to be aware of this, specifically noting the stress caused to other teachers when an absence can't be filled by a substitute.

Valid reasons for absences. Participants in this study shared that taking a leave of absence, while infrequent, is necessary for various (and appropriate) reasons. Participants expressed similar reasons for taking absences found in the research. Typical reasons include illness, professional development, personal reasons, and family bereavement (Alberta Teachers Association, 2019). Becoming a parent, especially for mothers, caused participants to take a long leave of absence from work. This finding is aligned to past research that found working mothers spend more time on childcare than fathers (Germano, 2019). Fifty-four percent of women took leave from work when first becoming a parent as opposed to 42% of men (Germano, 2019). In addition, women take 10 times as much temporary leave from work as men when their child is born (Germano, 2019). Studies show that if childcare plans fall through, women are more likely to take care of the children (Leonhardt, 2020). When their child is sick, women are eight times more likely than men to look after the child (Germano, 2019).

Illness, professional development, personal reasons, family bereavement, and parental obligations are valid reasons for taking a leave of absence from work. While the participants had generous leave provisions due to administrators being flexible with the leave policy, participants in this study weren't absent frequently. This contradicts

research that found that teacher absences are more likely in systems with generous leave provisions (Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Rees, & Ehrenberg, 1991).

Taking off work without going to the doctor. All (12/12) participants affirmed taking a sick day without seeing a physician. Participants said there wasn't a need to have a doctor's appointment every time they or their children woke up feeling unwell, as they were often able to diagnose themselves or their children.

Further, half (6/12) of the participants in this study stated they have taken mental health days as sick days. Exhaustion from teaching lead to some participants taking mental health days. Haberman (2005) found taking sick days when the teacher is not verifiably ill may be a way of coping with unpleasant conditions that could harm that person's health. Mental health absences may be the result of teachers being overwhelmed with the amount of work placed upon them. These findings are aligned to previous research. Dworkin, Haney, Dworkin, and Teleschov (1990) found a small but statistically significant relationship between job stress and reported stress-induced illness. One participant in this study discussed taking a sick day to avoid burnout. This participant's experience is aligned to previous research which found psychological distresses that can lead a teacher to take leave include stress, depression, and burnout (Stapleton, Garby, & Sabot, 2020).

Implications for Practice and Future Research

The implications of this research could inform and potentially impact teacher leave policies at the state level. This research can inform local school boards who create policies that directly impact teachers. Additionally, the findings should be considered by school administrators whose decisions can ultimately affect the number of absences a

teacher takes. Findings also implicated the need for future research. The implications are detailed below.

Practice for State of Arkansas. The Arkansas State Legislature creates laws that govern teacher leave. State law establishes the minimum requirements for sick leave for teachers (Howell & Walkenhorst, 2019a). However, no state level policy regarding teacher leave incentives was found during the review of the literature or planning phase of this study. Results of this study suggest that the Arkansas State Legislature should discuss and create policies or encourage practices that promote teacher attendance. This includes amending AR Code § 6-17-114 (2019) which mandates teacher planning time to be used "to schedule time for conferences, instructional planning, and preparation." The findings of this study suggest that the Arkansas State Legislature should consider altering the language to give the superintendent or his/her designee, the authority to be flexible with how planning time should be used for teachers.

Practice for Local School Boards. While state law sets the minimum requirements for sick leave for teachers, the law specifically states that local school districts are not prohibited from providing more days of sick leave or for having a more liberal policy for the administration of sick leave (AR Code § 6-17-1208, 2019). Therefore, local school boards have the autonomy to create policies that cater to the individual needs of the teachers within the district they control. Local school boards should discuss with their teachers and create policies or practices that motivate teachers to take minimal leave. For example, in Stuttgart, adjustments to existing policy may increase the likelihood that a teacher is motivated to have fewer absences. The incentive policies should be attainable by a diverse groups of teachers who have differing needs,

such as parents, expectant mothers, caregivers and those with chronic illnesses. In Stuttgart, these subgroups were automatically discounted from receiving the bonus pay and therefore, had no incentive to miss fewer days. Local school boards should work with their teachers to create incentive policies that factor in these common, but necessary, types of leave.

Practice for Administrators. This study found school administrators to have an important influence on teachers and the amount of leave taken from work. The informal practices and the flexible decision making ability of the schools' administrators contributed to teachers in this study taking fewer days of leave. To promote teachers taking fewer days of leave, school administrators should be flexible with how teachers use their planning time. While AR Code § 6-17-114 (2019) mandates teacher planning time to be used "to schedule time for conferences, instructional planning, and preparation," teachers may take fewer days of leave if they can use their planning time to tend to personal obligations. To promote teachers taking fewer days of leave, school administrators should also be flexible when docking time or days when a teacher leaves work for 30 minutes to an hour. This study found that teachers take fewer half and full days of leave when the school administrator used their discretion when a teacher needed to leave work early.

Future research. This study provided three important implications for future research; (a) replicating the study in other areas of Arkansas; (b) expanding the scope of the study; and (c) altering the protocol of the study.

Replication of the study. Future studies similar to this one should be replicated in other regions of Arkansas. There are no known previous studies that have examined how

or if Arkansas school district policies or practices promote or hinder teacher attendance.

It is evident that more research would be important to understand if the findings are

similar across other regions of the state. This would benefit both school boards and

educational leaders when considering what policies or practices motivate teachers and

promote or hinder teacher attendance. Groups such as the Arkansas School Board

Association and the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators could then

explore the data to determine if any policies could be adopted or dissolved across the

state to promote teacher attendance.

Expand scope of the study. Future studies similar to this one should be expanded

in other regions of Arkansas. This study narrowly focused on Stuttgart School District

and their bonus pay attendance incentive policy. There are districts in Arkansas that have

adopted attendance incentive policies similar to, and different from, Stuttgart's policy

that should be included in future research. Because teacher absenteeism is a nationwide

issue, future studies should also include districts from around the country. Furthermore,

this study collected data from 12 participants through interviews. Future research should

collect data from a larger and wider range of participant demographics.

Protocol of the study. Future studies should adjust protocol to collect more data

through surveys and financial records. Data collected in this study came from interviews

from voluntary participants. Participants who volunteered for this study did not take

frequent leave of absences and, therefore, did not contribute to teacher absenteeism rates.

Teachers, including those who tend to take frequent leaves of absence, may be more

likely to take surveys than volunteering for an interview. Therefore, a survey would

generate a larger sample size for future research. Also, a qualitative approach to this

study may yield more data. Future research should include district substitute expenditure

data including financial records from the years prior to an incentive being adopted and

the years following the adoption.

Another change in protocol in future research would be the addition of two

interview questions:

(a) What adjustments could be made to the weekly, monthly, or yearly school

calendar that would encourage teachers to take fewer days off from work?; and

(b) Do you have any children? If so, were you a teacher when you had them? If

so, did you consider the school year when planning to have children?

The first question would help the researcher know if changes to the school calendar,

which is set by state and local policies, might promote teacher attendance. The second

question, along with follow up questions, would give the researcher more information

and insight into teachers who have to take off work during the school year to have a

child.

Summary

Participants in this study included 12 teachers ranging in ages, years working in

education, years working in the Stuttgart School District, and grades of students taught.

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to understand teachers'

perspectives regarding policies that are aimed to promote teacher attendance. This

chapter summarized and discussed evidence of policy and practices that had an effect on

teacher attendance. This chapter concluded with an explanation of implications for

practice as well as implications for future research. Three implications for practice

included: (a) implementing policies and practices at the state level that promote teacher

attendance; (b) implementing policies and practices at the local school board level that promote teacher attendance; and (c) implementing practices at the building administrator level promote teacher attendance. Finally, there were three implications for future research: (a) replicating the study in other school districts and regions in Arkansas; (b) expanding the scope of future research to include other types of incentive policies and a larger/wider range of participants; and (c) altering the protocol of future studies to include more survey data, financial records, and more questions for participants.

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& Bacon.

Appendices

Appendix A: IRB Letter of Approval

ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

November 9, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

The Arkansas Tech University Institutional Review Board has approved the application for Tyler Reed's proposed research, entitled "Examining Effects of District Policies on Teacher Absenteeism." This protocol has been assigned approval code Reed_110620. The IRB approves for the researcher(s) to proceed with the project.

Please note that, in the event that any of the parameters of the study change, the researcher may be required to submit an amended application.

Sincerely,

Tennille Lasker-Scott
Institutional Review Board Member
Arkansas Tech University

Appendix B: Initial Email Requesting Survey Participation

Good Morning!

First and foremost, I hope all of you are staying safe and continuing to do amazing things in Stuttgart!

My name is Tyler Reed and I am the principal at Beebe Middle School in Beebe. Before that, I was a math teacher at SHS. I am also a doctoral student at Arkansas Tech working on my dissertation, which focuses on school board policies concerning teacher absenteeism. I would like you to participate in the study by completing a survey that should take no more than 1.5 minutes of your time. The information you provide will assist me in studying the positive and negative effects of leave incentive policies. No names of participants are asked on the survey document. If you indicate you are willing to participate in a follow-up interview, you will be asked to provide you name and contact info (for interview purposes only). Responses to the survey (and interview, if applicable) will remain confidential. Please feel free to contact me at my ATU email:treed18@atu.edu or my cell: xxx-xxx-xxxx should you have additional questions.

You can find the survey here. The survey will close on 12/1/20 at 11:59pm. I hope you will complete the survey for me to better understand the effectiveness of policies concerning teacher absenteeism.

Thank you for your help and everything you do for students!
Best,

Tyler

Tyler Reed, Ed.S
Principal
Beebe Middle School

Beebe Public Schools
1201 W Center
Beebe, AR 72012

Appendix C: Follow Up Email Requesting Survey Participation

Good morning!

I hope you had a safe and relaxing Thanksgiving break! This is a friendly reminder to complete the survey to assist me in my dissertation study at Arkansas Tech University. As a reminder, the study focuses on school board policies concerning teacher absenteeism.

You can find the 1.5 minute survey here. The survey will close today at 11:59pm. I hope you will complete the survey for me to better understand the effectiveness of policies concerning teacher absenteeism. Please feel free to contact me at my ATU email: treed18@atu.edu or my cell: xxx-xxx-xxxx should you have additional questions.

Thank you for your help and everything you do for students!

Best,

Tyler

Tyler Reed, Ed.S
Principal
Beebe Middle School

Beebe Public Schools
1201 W Center
Beebe, AR 72012

Appendix D: Sample Email Request to Interview

Hi Mr./Mrs. xxx!

Thanks for taking my survey and willing to have an interview! Is there a good time over the next two weeks that would be good for you? It shouldn't take more than 60 minutes. I'm flexible with time and day of the week. We can schedule it during your prep one day, after school, or even the weekend. Once it's scheduled, I will send you a link (with a login and password) to the meeting.

Below are a few things:

1) I've attached the leave incentive polices from Alpena, Mountain Home, and Stuttgart. I've highlighted the portions I would like you to review before our interview. You won't be quizzed at all, I just want to get your perspective on the policies.

2) Here is the info for the conference call. You have the option to download the WebX app to have the video conference call or when you click the link, there should be an option to have the conference call through your browser without downloading and software. If you have any issues, let me know!

Let me know what day/time works best.
Thanks again!

Tyler

Tyler Reed, Ed.S
Principal
Beebe Middle School

Beebe Public Schools
1201 W Center
Beebe, AR 72012