VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOM: PERSPECTIVES OF ELEMENTARY TEACHERS ON TEACHER ABSENTEEISM, AND THE RELATED FACTORS OF LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS AND TEACHER PREPARATION

by

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DEDICATION

To my husband, Quill. Thank you for your love and support. Your encouragement kept me focused during this journey and I am forever grateful.

To my children, Kourgee and Quill III. Thank you for motivating me to persevere and endure to the end. Your belief in me was my inspiration. This is proof that we can do all things through Christ, who strengthens us. I love you all.
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ABSTRACT

Employee absence can arise in any organization or institution; however, in education, teacher absenteeism places burdens on schools and hinders the ability of schools to provide quality and consistent instruction to students. Teacher absenteeism has been a topic of discussion in the West Tennessee study school district for many years. School and district leaders have pondered over what can be done to improve the attendance behaviors of teachers. Research asserts that teachers are the most important in-school determinant of student success, and for this reason, school and district leaders in the West Tennessee study district must gain an understanding of teacher absenteeism from the perspective of teachers. School leaders must also understand how their leadership behaviors affect teacher absenteeism, and how teachers view their preparedness to handle the realities of teaching. The perceptions of elementary teachers, in schools with past elevated teacher absenteeism were examined in this study. The perspectives of these teachers were analyzed so that school leaders, who are the second most influential school-level factor on student achievement, could potentially develop effective plans for supporting teachers, not only instructionally, but socially and personally as well.

The researcher examines teacher absenteeism through the lens of the Social Cognitive Theory. This theory is based on the idea that not only do humans learn from their interactions with others in a social context, but after observing the behaviors of others, people tend to develop similar behaviors. Findings from the study identified possible supports perceived by teachers to positively influence teacher absence behavior. The study also identified leadership behaviors teacher perceive to have a negative influence on teacher attendance behavior. This study concludes with recommendations teachers perceive could foster a stronger presence of teachers in schools and implications for practice for school leaders.
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**Introduction**

Most school administrators have been there: arriving to school early in the morning only to learn that there is no substitute available to cover a teacher’s absence. The subsequent scramble to provide coverage may involve dividing the class into small groups and assigning them to other teachers’ classrooms for the day. Another option might be to schedule all available staff, including your counselor, instructional coaches, and even administrators to teach for part of the day. A third option might involve asking other teachers to sacrifice their planning time in order to cover the class for an hour. A fourth option may involve pulling an assistant teacher from her normal duties of providing support for struggling students to cover the classroom. All of these emergency measures suffice in providing coverage for absent teachers; however, as many principals know, they do not lessen the impact teacher absenteeism have on students, teachers, and the entire school community. Neither does the implementation of these measures address the root causes of why teachers are absent from the classroom, and the supports they need from school leaders to be engaged, committed, and present.

Absenteeism is the habitual pattern of absence from a duty or obligation (Johns, 2007). Casio (2003) states it is any failure of an employee to report for or to remain at work as scheduled, regardless of reason. It is also interpreted as an employee’s intentional or habitual absence from work (Cucchiella, Massimo, & Luigi, 2014). Absences, as defined by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS] (2019), are instances when persons who usually work 35 or more hours per week worked less than 35 hours during the reference week for one of the following reasons: own illness, injury, or medical problems; childcare problems; other family or personal obligations; civic or military duty; and maternity or paternity leave. Teacher absences
can occur for many legitimate reasons, however, one of the main causes of teacher absenteeism, according to research, is stress.

Childs and Stoeber (2012) declares that stress is one of the leading causes of employee absenteeism, and it is becoming increasingly recognized as a phenomenon that has a negative effect on a growing number of people in the workplace. Across the nation, teaching is one of the most critical sectors in society. Yet, it is also among the most stressful occupations (Chen et al., 2022). According to McCarthy (2019), teaching is characterized by numerous and varied challenges, including administrative burdens, long hours, classroom management difficulties, and lack of autonomy. McCarthy claimed that teachers are not only isolated from colleagues for much of the day, spending less than 5% of their work time collaborating with peers, but they are also paid less than other workers with similar experience and education, a gap that has grown from 4.3% in 1996 to 17% in 2015, according to the Economic Policy Institute (Allegreto & Mishel, 2016). Further, teachers face significant social and political scrutiny as to how they do their jobs (Goldstein, 2014). These demands take a toll, resulting in job dissatisfaction, workplace fatigue, burnout, and reduced occupational commitment (McCarthy, 2019). To avoid these realities, teachers across the nation are missing from the classroom at alarming rates.

Teacher absences in the United States are notably large in comparison to other industries and countries (Hansen & Quintero, 2020). Data from the Office of Civil Rights (OCR, 2016) claim that nearly 29% of teachers were chronically absent (missing 10 or more school days) in the 2015-2016 school year. According to the Hansen and Quintero (2020), the Current Population Survey revealed that both male and female teacher absence rates are significantly higher than college educated workers in other industries, including other public service occupations. The survey concluded that 74% of female teachers were absent February-May and
September-November for the years 2016-2019 compared to 48% of all college-educated female workers, and 54% of college-educated female public service workers (Hansen & Quintero, 2020). The survey, which intentionally excluded summer and winter holidays to avoid over counting teacher absences, noted that the female nurse-absence rate is comparable to teachers and male nurses are absent about 20% less than male teachers (Hansen & Quintero, 2020).

The BLS (2019) also found that the absence rate of education and health professionals was much higher than other industries in the U.S. According to the BLS (2019), the absence rate of the education and health industry was 3.6%, while, the absence rate of the construction industry was 2.4%, manufacturing industry 2.5%, retail trade industry 3.0%, finance industry 2.2%, insurance industry 2.7%, food services industry 3.0%, real estate and rental and leasing industry 2.5%, and management, administrative, and waste services industry was 3.3%. For multiple jobholders, absence data refer only to work missed at their main jobs (BLS, 2019). The BLS (2019) defined absence rate as the ratio of workers with absences to total full-time wage and salary employment).

Employee absence can arise in any organization or institution; however, in education, teacher absenteeism place burdens on schools, undermining the ability of education agencies to provide quality and consistent instruction to students (Knoster, 2016). Miller (2012) claims that attention to the issue of teacher absenteeism is appropriate because teachers are the most important school-based determinant of students’ academic success. For this reason, school and district leaders in the West Tennessee study district must gain an understanding of teacher absenteeism from the perspective of teachers. School leaders must also understand how their leadership behaviors affect teacher absenteeism, and develop an effective plan for supporting teachers.
Recognizing that teacher absenteeism affects the equity of education access for students and functions as a school-based determinant of their academic success, the OCR included teacher absences as a new item on its biennial Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) survey in 2009 (Miller, 2012). While the state of Tennessee has designated the reduction of chronic absenteeism among students as school quality indicators in its Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (Tennessee Department of Education [TDOE], 2018) plan, it has not included chronic absenteeism among teachers. The main purpose of ESSA is to hold schools accountable for how students learn and achieve, and to make sure public schools provide a quality education for all students (TDOE, 2018). Barber and Mourshed (2007) and Nye et al. (2004) claim teachers themselves are the single most important component of teaching quality as it is the teachers’ individual knowledge and skill that strongly influence student learning and achievement. In order for quality teaching-learning to take place, a teacher must be present and prepared to deliver the lesson content (Suryahadi & Sambodho, 2013). In other words, Suryahadi and Sambodho (2013) claims that the quality of education is profoundly determined by the quality of the teaching, and the quality of teaching starts with teacher attendance.

Although many factors in student learning have not been explained, leadership is the second most influential school-level factor on student achievement, after teacher quality (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2007). Leadership is often described as the ability to enlist, mobilize, and motivate others to apply their abilities and resources to a given cause (Eyal & Roth, 2011). It illuminates the ways in which individuals influence others and persuade them to devote their utmost efforts to tasks that promote their goals (Eyal & Roth, 2011). Nevertheless, according to Bono and Judge (2003), few studies have directly examined the relationship between various styles of leadership and different types of motivation among
followers. This study has the potential to contribute to this gap by examining the beliefs and perceptions of teachers on teacher absenteeism, factors related to teacher absenteeism, and principal leadership behaviors that promote and support teacher engagement and commitment.

As they seek ways to improve teacher and school effectiveness, the study district school’s leaders are now paying close attention to the number of days teachers are missing, and seeking ways to increase the number of days teachers are present in the classroom. Knowing that one of the main causes of teacher absenteeism is stress (Kyriacou 2001, Childs and Stoeber, 2012), and given the challenge of teacher absenteeism and the impact it has on students, teachers, schools, and districts, the questions arise: How do teachers perceive teacher absenteeism? How do teachers perceive factors related to teacher attendance such as school culture and climate, their preparation to effectively deal with the realities of teaching, and school leadership behaviors? What can school and district leaders do to improve teacher attendance? Since teaching is a stressful profession and teacher absenteeism negatively affects student achievement and the overall functioning of a school and district, research should be done to discover how to best support teachers in handling the realities of teaching while improving teacher attendance in the classroom. I would like to conduct this research to find solutions of how to better support teachers in improving their presence in schools while simultaneously improving student success and achievement.

The focus of this study is to understand and define the problem of teacher absenteeism through the experiences and perspectives of the elementary teachers in schools with high percentages of teacher absenteeism. The study will also explore the elementary teachers’ perceptions on specific leadership behaviors that promote teacher commitment and engagement. Taking a diagnostic approach that engages those directly affected is a necessary first step in
addressing the phenomenon. This approach will serve as the basis for school leaders in understanding teacher absenteeism in the study school district and creating effective interventions and supports for teachers. This approach will also contribute in identifying specific leadership behaviors that foster positive school culture and improved teacher attendance.

**Background of the Study**

Between kindergarten and 12th grade a typical student is taught by someone other than the regularly assigned teacher for the equivalent of two-thirds of a school year (Griffin, 2017). About 6.5 million students attend schools where more than 50% of teachers are absent more than 10 days per year (United States Department of Education [ED], 2016), a level of absenteeism that is defined as chronically absent by the United States Department of Education Office of Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC). The CRDC (2014) revealed that 28% of teachers are absent more than ten days of school for reasons unrelated to school activities. A 2017 report concluded that 28.3% of teachers in traditional public schools miss more than ten school days a year for sick or personal leave (Griffin, 2017). Another study conducted by the National Council on Teacher Quality [NCTQ] (2014), found that on average, public school teachers in 40 of the country’s largest metropolitan areas for the 2012-2013 school year, missed nearly 11 days out of a 186-day school year. According to the study, 16% of all teachers were classified as chronically absent because they missed 18 days or more in the school year, accounting for almost a third of all absences. Roughly, one sixth of teachers missed more than 18 days in a school year (NCTQ, 2014).

Across the nation, 17% of students with disabilities (students served under IDEA) attend schools where over 50% of teachers are absent for more than 10 days, compared to 15.6% of students without disabilities. Additionally, the 2013-2014 Civil Rights Data Collection: A First
Look (2016) concluded that students of color are more likely to attend schools where 50% of teachers are absent more than 10 days. On any given school day, over 5% of teachers were absent from their jobs (ED, 2012; NCTQ, 2014). This percent greatly exceed the 2.8% national rate of absence for full time wage and salaried American workers (BLS, 2019). The data suggests absences among public school teachers are elevated, and a point of leverage worth investigation. Admittedly, more research is needed, especially on within-district factors that shape absence behavior, including school leadership and professional norms (Miller, 2012).

To determine if the study school district had a significant teacher absenteeism issue, four school districts, comparable in size to the study school district in the state of Tennessee, were examined. According to data collected by the CRDC Survey (2017), one comparable school district in West Tennessee, reported 99 teachers out of 732, or 13%, chronically absent in the 2017 school year. The success rate for this school district in the 2017-2018 school year was 37.3%. In the second comparable school district located in middle Tennessee, 216 teachers out of 894, or 24%, were considered chronically absent in the 2017 school year. The success rate for this district for 2017-2018 school year was 22.2%. The third comparable district, located in middle Tennessee, had an absenteeism rate of 21% for the 2017 school year with a success rate of 43.9% for the 2017-2018 school year. In this district, 259 teachers out of 1209 were considered chronically absent. The fourth school district, located in East Tennessee reported 14 teachers out of 728, or 2%, chronically absent on the CRDC Survey (2017), and a success rate of 32.5% in the 2017-2018 school year. In the study school district, according to the CRDC Survey (2017), 421 teachers out of 831, or 51%, were considered chronically absent from school. The success rate for the study district was 20.1 for the 2017-2018 school year. The data suggests absences among teachers in the study school district, during the 2017 school year, were elevated
compared to other districts.

**Statement of the Problem**

The setting of this study is a unique school district in West Tennessee. The school district is located in a county with a population of 98,000 residents. This West Tennessee school district has a total of 23 schools, more than 870 classroom teachers, and approximately 12,000 students. The district consists of urban, suburban, and rural elementary, middle, and high schools. The district also contains an alternative placement school, a cyber school, and a pre-k center. The district is ethnically diverse: 60.7% Black/African American, 28.3% White, 9% Hispanic, 1.5% Asian, 0.3% American Indian/Alaska Native, and 0.1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (TDOE, 2020). Nineteen schools receive funding through Title I. Title I, Part A (Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards (ED, 2018).

In the study district, teacher absenteeism is a challenge. Based on data collected by the CRDC, 229 teachers out of 922 teachers (25%), employed by the study school system were absent more than 10 days of the 2011 school year. The CRDC for the 2013 school year reported 222 teachers out of 894.6 (25%) full time equivalent teachers were absent more than 10 days. During the 2016-17 school year, 421 out of 831.8 (51%) teachers were absent more than 10 days (CRDC, 2017). According to teacher attendance data, recorded and documented by the district’s online electronic system called Smartfind, teachers in the study district missed a collective total of 11,056 days, or approximately 82,920 instructional hours, in the 2017-2018 school year (Smartfind, 2018), and a total of 11,600 days, or approximately 87,000 instructional hours, in the
2018-2019 school year (Smartfind, 2019). While some schools in the study school district have slightly better rates of teacher attendance than others, the problem is district-wide.

Not only is teacher attendance a challenge in the study school district, student achievement is also a challenge. For the 2018-19 school year, the overall success rate, or percentage of students who were at or above grade level in English Language Arts and Mathematics, in the study district was 20.7% (TDOE, 2020). The success rate not only shows whether students are performing on grade level on state exams, but it also shows whether the percentage of students on grade level is growing from one year to the next. The percentage of students at or above grade level in Mathematics during this same year was 20.3% (TDOE, 2020). For English Language Arts, the percentage of students at or above grade level was 20.7% (TDOE, 2020). The overall success rate for the state of Tennessee for the 2018-2019 school year was 36.4% (TDOE, 2020). The percentage of students at or on grade level for the state of Tennessee for this same year was 37% in Mathematics and 34.9% in English Language Arts (TDOE, 2020). The study district falls behind the state of Tennessee in all areas of student achievement.

Research asserts that students in schools serving predominantly low-income families experience teacher absence at higher rates than students in more affluent communities (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2009; Miller, Murnane, & Willett, 2008). This study is being conducted in a school system where over 71% of the students receive free and reduced priced lunch and 40.3% of the students are considered economically disadvantaged (TDOE, 2020). In the study school district, teachers are absent from the classroom at high rates, student achievement in several schools fall significantly below state averages, and several schools are considered low-performing schools. Low-performing schools are schools that are in the bottom
10 percent of performance in the State, or who have significant achievement gaps, based on student academic performance in reading/language arts and mathematics on the assessments required under the ESEA or graduation rates (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

High rates of teacher absenteeism often signal problems of accountability and governance that are themselves barriers to educational progress (Obiero, Mwebi, & Nyang’ara, 2017). Teacher attendance in this district is an issue that negatively effects every aspect of the education environment, and consequently requires urgent intervention. It is imperative that this research is conducted to determine the best course of action to reduce teacher absenteeism and improve student overall outcomes. As teachers and their school leaders are increasingly held accountable for implementing consistently effective teaching, calls for holding the programs that prepare them accountable have increased in kind (Coggshall, Bivona, & Reschly, 2012). Teacher preparation programs plays a vital role in ensuring that teachers have the necessary knowledge, skills and dispositions to provide high quality services to children. Inadequate teacher preparation has been cited as one of the reasons for disproportionately high rates of attrition among beginning teachers (Coggshall et al., 2012). Other reasons cited for high rates of attrition include poor teaching conditions, low salaries, a lack of autonomy, and poor school leadership. This study could have implications for teacher preparation programs as well as educational leadership programs.

Purpose of the Study

Research has confirmed that the teacher is the most important determinant of student success (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005); nevertheless, teacher absenteeism poses a major challenge for many schools. A teacher’s absence (either total or due to lateness) not only affects the working norms of his or her colleagues (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2013); but these behaviors can
cast a shadow on school standards, which may lead to a decrease in public trust and parental confidence in the educational system (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2013). Of course, not all lateness and absenteeism are signs of dysfunction. Many valid and legitimate reasons such as doctor appointment, illness, and bereavement may keep a teacher away from the classroom. However, whether the cause of lateness or absence is justified or not, it still hinders organizational operations and must be controlled (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2013).

The purpose of research is to add to knowledge or contribute to existing information about an issue, and inform policy debates (Creswell, 2012). For this study, the issue is teacher absenteeism. Absenteeism is one of the most researched topics in the field of human resource management (Gosselin, Lemyre, & Corneil, 2013). Scholars and researchers continue to examine the multifactorial phenomenon attempting to understand the determinants and consequences of an employee’s feeling towards absenteeism from work (Ritesh, 2013). The researcher’s intent is to (a) explore the perceptions of elementary teachers, in schools with high percentages of absenteeism in past years, on teacher absenteeism, (b) examine elementary school teachers’ perceptions of factors related to teacher absenteeism, such as school culture and climate, their preparation to handle the realities of teaching, and school leadership behaviors that promote teacher commitment and engagement behaviors, and (c) identify potentially effective approaches or interventions for reducing teacher absence behavior. The examination into the perceptions of teachers on the issue of teacher attendance has important educational implications for all teachers and educational leaders.

This study has the potential to drive conversation around teacher attendance at the elementary level, and provide school leaders and teachers with strategies to become more effective. It is the researcher’s aspiration that this effectiveness leads to a reduction in teacher
absenteeism and higher achievement and learning for students. An analysis of current and past literature regarding teacher absenteeism, leadership styles and behaviors, and teacher preparation programs has been compiled in order to better define the problem from a broader scope. Additionally, the researcher seeks to add to the evidence for improving teacher attendance behavior in the study school district by finding solutions to support a much stronger presence in schools by all teachers.

**Significance of the Study**

Many study findings report that teacher attendance is directly related to the academic outcomes of their students (Clotfelter et al., 2009). When a teacher is absent from the classroom, student learning is disrupted. When that teacher is repeatedly absent, student performance can be significantly impacted in a negative way (Clotfelter et al., 2009). According to Clotfelter et al. (2009), multiple studies indicate that a ten-day increase in teacher absence results in at least ten fewer days of learning for students. The findings of this study will lay the groundwork for developing supports, interventions, and professional development opportunities to reduce teacher absenteeism in the study district. The findings of this study could also have implications for educational leadership programs as they prepare leaders to lead schools and teacher preparation programs as they prepare teachers to apply the knowledge and theory learning into the real classroom. In light of the limited number of hours available in most pre service teacher education programs and the relatively short amount of time pre service teachers spend in field placements prior to assuming their first teaching positions, looking outside of university classrooms for ways in which to support and extend pre-service teachers' learning becomes more imperative (Siebert, 2005).

How school leaders and teaching peers view and deal with teacher absences are key
considerations in curbing or worsening their frequency. Every day counts for students and this study will aid the study district in supporting teachers by gaining an understanding of teacher absenteeism and the teaching and learning conditions in our schools that may affect attendance.

Investing in a system that keeps effective teachers in the classroom should be a priority for school leaders and policymakers (Joseph, Waymack, & Zielaski, 2014). A key part of that effort is examining teacher absenteeism, related factors, and needed supports from the perspective of teachers in schools with high rates of absenteeism. This topic is important because both school and district policies can influence teachers’ propensity to be absent (Miller et al., 2008).

**Overview of Theoretical/Conceptual Framework**

The theoretical framework is the foundation from which all knowledge is constructed (metaphorically and literally) for a research study (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). It provides a grounding base, or an anchor, for the literature review, and most importantly, the methods and analysis (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). The Social Cognitive Theory will be used to provide an anchor or framework for this study. The Social Cognitive Theory has seen wide applicability within the psychological disciplines, as well as in other fields such as education, business, and health (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2019). Because there are different social cognitive theoretical perspectives, the Social Cognitive Theory proposed by Albert Bandura will be used to analyze the perspectives of teachers, in schools with high rates of absenteeism, on teacher absenteeism and related factors.

According to Stajkovic and Sergent (2019), Bandura 1986 explained the cognitive morphology that facilitates the interactions among the three factors of personal, behavior, and environment. Bandura 1989 expanded on these conceptions by analyzing the central role of cognitive, vicarious, self-reflective, and self-regulatory processes though which human agency is
exercised (Stajkovic & Sergent, 2019). Bandura 2001 elaborated on the role of functional
consciousness in supporting the operation of these cognitive mechanisms (Stajkovic & Sergent,
2019). Bandura 2006 expanded upon his agentic theory of human development, adaption, and
change to articulate the core properties of human agency that transcend diverse spheres of life
and cultures (Stajkovic & Sergent, 2019). This theory describes the influence of individual
experiences, the actions of others, and environmental factors on individual health behaviors
(Wulfert, 2021). Wulfert (2021) claims that the Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory provides a
unified theoretical framework for analyzing the psychological processes that govern human
behavior. For this study, the human behavior is teacher absenteeism.

The goal of the Social Cognitive Theory is to explain how behavior develops, how it is
maintained, and through what processes it can be modified (Wulfert, 2021). Wulfert (2021)
asserts that the Social Cognitive Theory seeks to accomplish this by identifying the determinants
of human action and the mechanisms through which they operate. Bandura’s theory is based on a
model of reciprocal determinism (Wulfert, 2021). Bandura theorized that human performance
results from reciprocal interactions between three factors or triadic reciprocal determinism:
personal factors, behavioral factors, and environmental factors (Cook & Artino, 2016). The
Social Cognitive Theory will serve as the framework to analyze teachers’ perspectives of their
personal experiences, the behaviors of others, and environmental factors on teachers’ attendance.

Overview Research Design

This study will utilize the qualitative case study methodology. Qualitative case study
methodology provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts
(Baxter & Jack, 2008). The case study approach allows in-depth, multi-faceted explorations of
complex issues, such as teacher absenteeism, in their real-life settings. In a case study, the
researcher seeks to obtain a thorough knowledge and present a clear picture of an individual, a program, or a situation (Range, 2019). The fundamental goal of the approach is to arrive at a description of the nature of the particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The descriptive nature of qualitative approaches allows the researcher to build a complex, holistic picture in a natural setting (Creswell, 2007). It is also effective in identifying intangible factors, such as social norms, socioeconomic status, gender roles, ethnicity, and religion, whose role in the research (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005).

With the goal of investigating a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, case studies may include observations, interviews, anecdotes, vignettes, direct quotes, audiovisual materials, psychological testing, documents and reports, analysis, and naturalistic summaries (Range, 2019). For this study, a purposeful sample of 10 elementary school teachers, in schools with elevated rates of absenteeism in the study school district, were interviewed to determine their perceptions of teacher absenteeism and the related factors of leadership behavior and teacher preparation. Patton (2002) asserts that purposeful sampling is one of the core distinguishing elements of qualitative inquiry. Qualitative inquiries typically focus in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases ( n = 1), selected purposefully.

Patton claims that the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance of the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). This approach to research facilitates exploration of a phenomenon using a variety of data sources. This ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood (Baxter & Jack, 2008).
Study Overview

This study introduces the reader to the topic of teacher absenteeism and the challenges it creates for students, teachers, schools, and districts. The author begins the chapter with a scenario depicting the successful, yet unpopular, options school administrators take to cover the classes of absent teachers. Even though these options succeed in providing coverage for absent teachers, they do not address the root causes of the teachers’ absences. Teacher absences can occur for many reasons; however, research states stress is one of the leading causes of employee absenteeism. The study’s intent is to address how teachers, in schools with high rates of absenteeism, perceive teacher absenteeism, their preparedness to handle the realities of teaching, principal leadership behaviors that influence teacher engagement and attendance, and the supports needed from school leaders to improve teacher attendance.

Research Questions

Given the emphasis on educational accountability, student academic achievement, and educational equity for all students, as well as the mandates created to hold schools accountable, how teachers perceive teacher attendance and the training they received to prepare them for teaching is critical. The following research questions address how teachers perceive teacher absenteeism and the related factors of leadership behavior and teacher preparation:

1. What are the perceptions of elementary teachers, in schools with high rates of teacher absenteeism, on teacher absenteeism?
2. What are elementary teachers’ perception of leadership practices or behaviors that affect teacher attendance behaviors?
3. How do elementary teachers perceive the training they received from their teacher preparation program to handle the stressors or realities of teaching, which may lead to teacher absenteeism?

4. What are elementary teachers perceptions of supports or interventions needed to improve teacher attendance?

Summary

Teacher absenteeism has been demonstrated to negatively impact student achievement (Miller, Murnane, & Willett, 2008). In their National Bureau of Economic Research Paper, Clotfelter et al. (2009) ask the question: “Are Teacher Absences Worth Worrying About in the U.S.?” The article concludes that teacher absences are worth being concerned about in the U.S. due to the questions of equity absenteeism raises. Its implications are wide-ranging, from inhibiting student achievement and attendance (Harris van Keuren, 2009) to draining school resources and increasing administrative time spent on replacing classroom instructors and managing attendance (Obeng-Denteh, Yeboah, Sam, & Monkah, 2011). Teachers are the most significant in-school factor for student success. Given the importance of teachers to student success, teacher absenteeism presents serious concerns for school systems.

This study will examine the teachers’ perception on teacher absenteeism and their preparedness to handle the realities of teaching. The study will also examine the teacher’s perception of leadership behaviors that impact teacher attendance, and supports needed by teachers to improve attendance. Teacher attendance remains a challenge for many schools and districts; however, limited studies eliciting the perspective of the teachers have been conducted. This study will add to the body of knowledge by soliciting the perspective of elementary school
teachers, who have first-hand knowledge of the issue. With this knowledge, district officials can implement policies, supports and interventions to address the issue of teacher attendance.
Chapter II

**Literature Review**

While school and district leadership have been directing considerable attention to teacher effectiveness, one basic aspect of effectiveness has received relatively little attention: teacher attendance. No matter how engaging or talented teachers may be, they can only have an impact on student learning and academic achievement if they are in the classroom. Teacher absenteeism presents serious concerns for schools and is a growing problem in the United States. Addressing this issue is complex and multifaceted, therefore this review of literature will examine the research on: The Social Cognitive Theory, factors related to teacher absenteeism, teacher stress and burnout, teacher engagement, impact of teacher absenteeism, teacher preparation programs, and leadership theories and styles.

**Social Cognitive Theory**

Social cognitive theory by Bandura, explains human behavior in terms of a three-way, dynamic, reciprocal model in which personal factors, environmental influences, and behavior continually interact. In this model of reciprocal causation, behavior, cognition and other personal factors, and environmental influences all operate as interacting determinants that influence each other bidirectionally (1989). According to Bandura (1989), reciprocal causation does not mean that the different sources of influences are of equal strength and occur simultaneously. Some may be stronger than others and it takes time for a causal factor to exert its influence and activate reciprocal influences (Bandura, 1989).

Bandura (1999) states that human behavior has often been explained in terms of one-sided determinism. In such modes of unidirectional causation, behavior is depicted as being shaped and controlled by environmental influences or driven by internal dispositions. Social
cognitive theory explains psychosocial functioning in terms of triadic reciprocal causation (Bandura, 1986). The term causation is used to mean functional dependence between events. In this model of reciprocal causality, internal personal factors in the form of cognitive, affective and biological events; behavioral patterns; and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants that influence one another bidirectionally (Bandura, 1999).

In triadic causation, according to Bandura (1999), there is no fixed pattern for reciprocal interaction. Rather, the relative contribution of each of the constituent classes of influences depends on the activities, situational circumstances, and socio-structural constraints and opportunities. According to Bandura (1999), to understand fully the interactive relation between behavior and social environment, the analysis must be extended temporally and broadened to include cognitive determinants operating in the triadic interlocking system. This requires tapping into what people are thinking as they perform actions and experience their effects. Counterresponses to antecedent acts are influenced not only by their immediate effects but also by people’s judgments of eventual outcomes should they stick to that course of action (Bandura, 1999).

The major interactional links between the different subsystems of the social cognitive theory include: personal characteristics and behavior (P↔B), environmental influences and personal characteristics (E↔P), behavior and environment (B↔E). The P↔B of reciprocal causation reflects the interaction between thought, affect and action. Expectations, beliefs, self-perceptions, goals and intentions give shape and direction to behavior. What people think, believe, and feel, affects how they behave (Bandura, 1986). The natural and extrinsic effects of their actions, in turn, partly determine their thought patterns and emotional reactions (Bandura, 1986).
The E↔P segment of reciprocal causation is concerned with the interactive relation between personal characteristics and environmental influences (Bandura, 1986). Human expectations, beliefs, emotional bents and cognitive competencies are developed and modified by social influences that convey information and activate emotional reactions through modeling, instruction and social persuasion (Bandura, 1986). People activate different social reactions depending on their socially conferred roles and status. Bandura claims that by their social status and observable characteristics people can affect their social environment before they say or do anything.

The B↔E segment of reciprocal causation in the triadic system represents the two-way influence between behavior and the environment (Bandura, 1986). According to Bandura (1986), in the transactions of everyday life, behavior alters environmental conditions and is, in turn, altered by the very conditions it creates. The environmental is not a fixed entity that inevitably impinges upon individuals (Bandura, 1986). When mobility is constrained, some aspects of the physical and social environment may encroach on individuals whether they like it or not, but most aspects of the environment do not operate as an influence until they are activated by appropriate behavior (Bandura, 1986). Bandura (1986) claim that because of the bidirectionality of influence between behavior and environmental circumstances, people are both products and producers of their environment. Bandura (1986) state that they affect the nature of their experienced environment through selection and creation of situations. Through their actions, people create as well as select environments (Bandura, 1986). Environmental influences, in turn partly determine which forms of behaviors are developed and activated (Bandura, 1989).
Factors Related to Teacher Attendance

Research shows a number of factors appear to influence the extent to which teachers are absent from school. Lee, Goodman, Dandapani, and Kekahio (2015) identified five factors that have some bearing upon the frequency and severity of poor teacher attendance: pay structure, management, working conditions and climate, community conditions, and social and cultural responsibilities. While variations exist based on different school and community contexts, this literature review generates a collection of key factors that can guide the exploration of root causes of teacher absenteeism. Research reviewed on the factors causing absenteeism is varied but can be categorized into four conceptual themes: organizational characteristics, teacher characteristics, organizational policies, and culture (Eagle & Glenn, 2018).

Conceptual Theme 1: Organizational Characteristics

Organizational characteristics of schools include the conditions and structures under which the school operates. Several organizational characteristics can impact the amount of leave that teachers use each year. Larger schools and districts tend to have more teacher absences (Miller, Murnane, & Willett, 2007; Rosenblatt & Shirom, 2006). Ost and Schiman (2017) suggest that teachers who teach larger classes tend to be absent less frequently than other teachers, and teacher absences are less frequent in high school (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007; Speas, 2010; Tingle, Schoeneberger, Wang, Algozzine, & Kerr, 2012). According to Clotfelter et al. (2007), Miller et al. (2007); Rosenblatt and Shirom (2006), the evidence is mixed regarding whether teacher absences occur more frequently in elementary or middle schools. However, according to Mader (2012) and Joseph et al. (2014), teachers in elementary schools tend to be absent more often than teachers in the K-12 system. Teachers employed at low SES schools tend to be absent more frequently than teachers at schools with students from higher income families.
(Clotfelter et al., 2007). Miller (2012) found the same results at schools with greater percentages of Black and/or Hispanic students. Miller (2008) found that higher student absenteeism is associated with higher teacher absenteeism.

**Conceptual Theme 2: Teacher Characteristics**

Several teacher characteristics may impact the amount of leave that teachers use each year (Eagle & Glenn, 2018). Clotfelter et al. (2007) found that teachers that had a master’s degree (Ost & Schiman, 2017), higher state examination scores, held National Board certification, or graduated from a very competitive college had fewer absences. Research also showed that teachers who recently acquired tenure tend to have higher absence rates than pre-tenured teachers and longer-term veteran teachers (Clotfelter et al., 2007; Miller et al., 2007; Speas, 2010). Female teachers missed more than males, both in terms of absence frequency and duration or number of days (Clotfelter et al., 2007; Miller, 2008; Tingle et al., 2012). Data also revealed that females, who have longer commutes, and with middle ranges of experience tend to miss work most frequently (Hanover Research, 2012).

According to Sezgin, Koşar, Çagatay, and Ogdem (2014), the primary individual factors leading to teacher absenteeism behaviors were health problems and family problems. (2014) asserts that teachers’ physical and mental health concerns, stress, and perspectives of self-efficacy contribute to teacher absenteeism as well. Nixon (2018) stated that excessive teacher absenteeism may be an early onset of a teacher’s loss of identity and commitment within a school. Teachers without commitment to their schools frequently showed up late to school or not at all Cohen (2014).

**Teacher Stress.** The American Institute of Stress states that in the United States, about one million people are absent from work each day because of stress (American Institute of
Stress, 2004). Stress can be defined as an imbalance between risk and protective factors. It is a common complaint in the workplace associated with a number of negative personal and professional consequences (Roeser et al., 2013; Shirom, Oliver, & Stein, 2009). Teacher stress is a specific form of stress within the school context (Von Der Embse, Ryan, Gibbs, & Mankin, 2019). Kyriacou (2001) and others have argued that teacher stress is better understood as resulting from a mismatch between the pressures and demands made on educators and their ability to cope with those demands. Teacher stress not only impacts teacher health and job satisfaction negatively, but it also figures prominently in the nation’s high teacher attrition rate (McCarthy, Lambert, & Reiser, 2014). Studies of teacher indicate that the main sources of stress facing teachers are: teaching pupils who lack motivation; maintaining discipline; time pressures and workload; coping with change; being evaluated by others; dealings with colleagues; self-esteem and status; administration and management; role conflict and ambiguity; poor working conditions (Kyriacou, 2001). Other studies, such as Fisher (2011) and Kokkinos (2007), as cited by Lever, Mathis, and Mayworm (2017), suggest that some of the most common sources of teacher stress include: high-stakes testing, large class sizes, student behavioral challenges, inadequate resources, poor physical space, bureaucracy, paperwork, high responsibility for others, perceived inadequate recognition or advancement, and the gap between preservice training expectations and actual work experiences (Lever et al., 2017).

In the 2019 Phi Delta Kappa (PDK) poll, half of teachers surveyed said they had considered leaving the profession within the last year (PDK International, 2019). The teachers indicated low pay and high stress as the most frequently cited reasons (PDK International, 2019). High levels of job-related stress affect more than 9 in 10 elementary school teachers, according to new research. According to the 2013 Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index, 46% of K-12
teachers reported high daily stress. More recently, the 2017 Educator Quality of Work Life Survey showed that nearly two-thirds of teachers and school staff find their work always or often stressful (American Federation of Teachers, 2017).

The two prevailing theories on stress suggest that working in “high strain” jobs (where there are high demands and low control), or jobs which require high efforts and offer few rewards, elicits sustained stress reactions with negative long-term consequences for physical and mental health (Shackleton et al., 2019). This is supported by a substantial body of evidence linking adverse psychosocial work environments with an increase in the incidence of cardiovascular disease, and work-stress-related anxiety and depressive illnesses (Shackleton, et al, 2019). Teacher stress is documented across the globe. It takes a measurable toll on the teaching workforce, as many teachers become burned out and decide to leave the profession (Von der Embse et al., 2016). Alongside depression and anxiety, stress is one of the leading causes of employee absenteeism (Childs & Stoeber, 2012).

When teachers are stressed and not coping well, the relationships they have with students are likely to suffer, leading to negative academic and behavioral outcomes for students (Wentzel, 2010). Recognizing that stress is a psychological process that results from how teachers appraise their own classroom context may provide avenues for intervention for teachers most vulnerable to stress. Von der Embse et al. (2016) state that no contemporary systematic review of teacher interventions has taken place to examine how administrators, school psychologists, or school-based personnel may intervene to reduce stress for teachers. Such a review may then inform school-based interventions such as teacher training or professional development around stress reduction (Von der Embse et al., 2016).
Teacher Burnout. One of the most significant consequences of teachers’ continuous exposure to stress is burnout. Teacher burnout is a long-term response to the experience of emotional and interpersonal occupational stressors (Bermejo-Toro, Prieto-Ursua, & Hernández, 2016). Characteristics of burnout are emotional exhaustion, cynicism or depersonalization, and low levels of self-efficacy (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Research proposes that stress and burnout occur when an individual has a negative appraisal between the demands placed upon them and their abilities to sufficiently cope with those demands (Herman, Hickmon-Rosa, & Reinke, 2018). The exposure of teachers to burnout is a highly prevalent phenomenon. Recent research shows that between 10 and 20% of teachers could be suffering from high burnout levels, and between 20 and 40% from moderate levels (Bermejo-Toro et al. 2016).

Teacher burnout has been linked to teacher turnover intentions and job absenteeism as well as irritability and diminished performance (Herman et al., 2018). Bruno (2002) purports that “when there is a high teacher absence, it tends to lower the morale of remaining teachers resulting in high teacher turnover”. In a study of 79 high school teachers measuring burnout, the perception of school demands and availability of resources, and irrational beliefs, correlational analyses indicated that burnout was positively related to school demands such as student disrespect and student lack of attentiveness. The study, which supported previous research findings, also found that these factors were negatively related to school resources, such as, support from the administration and colleagues (Huk, Terjesen, & Cherkasove, 2019).

Among teacher characteristics, burnout was negatively related to self-efficacy and positively related to irrational beliefs (Huk et al. 2019). Results from regression analyses indicated that, whereas irrational beliefs were predictive of teacher burnout, they did not moderate the relationship between demands and burnout (Huk et al. 2019). A vast number of
factors have been underpinned as teacher burnout determinants. These may include work
overload and lack of time, role ambiguity and conflict, pressures of the teacher’s role, inadequate
resources, poor working conditions, lack of professional recognition, lack of professional
autonomy, dissonance between school values and teacher values, low remuneration, lack of
involvement in decision-making, lack of effective communication, staff conflicts, or student
misbehavior (Bermejo-Toro et al. 2016).

Student behavior and teacher burnout. Substantial research exists to support student
misbehavior as a contributing factor of teacher burnout (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008; Hastings &
Bham, 2003; Klusmann, Kunter, Trautwein, Lüdtke, & Baumert, 2008). McCormick and Barnett
(2011) found that student misbehavior was the strongest type of stressor related to burnout. A
meta-analysis found that student misbehavior was significantly related to higher levels of
emotional exhaustion, higher levels of depersonalization, and lower levels of personal
accomplishment. Misbehavior can take many forms, and the type of behavior affects the teachers
differently (Hastings & Bham, 2003). Hastings and Bham (2003) proclaimed that disrespect
toward the teacher and a neglect to do homework can both be considered as misbehavior, yet the
teacher may experience the stress related to each misbehavior differently. According to Hastings
and Bham (2003), irrational beliefs held by a teacher may be the mediating variable of
experiencing stress related to student misbehavior differently.

Self-efficacy and teacher burnout. Bandura (1997) describes self-efficacy as “beliefs in
one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given
attainments”. Self-efficacy has consistently been shown to be a predictor of burnout among
teachers (Friedman 2003; Garcia-Ros et al. 2015). Educational research claim that teacher self-
efficacy is the teachers’ beliefs in their ability to influence valued student outcomes in areas such
as instructional ability, classroom management, or student engagement (Morris, Usher, & Chen, 2017). Schwarzer and Hallum (2008) conducted a study to determine whether self-efficacy predicted burnout or rather if burnout predicted self-efficacy in 498 teachers from Germany and Syria. At two time points during the study, less efficacious teachers reported higher levels of burnout. At least two studies show that teachers’ greater interpersonal self-efficacy, especially interpersonal self-efficacy to manage a classroom, is a relevant predictor of lower levels of burnout (Friedman 2003; Garcia-Ros et al., 2015).

**Conceptual Theme 3: Organizational Policies**

Eagle and Glenn (2018) made several interesting findings on how organizational policies influence the number of absences. They found that the larger the number of leave days permitted by the school district, the higher the number of leave days that were taken (Eagle & Glenn, 2018). Research also showed that teachers with job protection tend to be absent more frequently and tend to have a higher rate of chronic absenteeism (Jacob, 2013). Hubbell (2008) found that requiring teachers to provide proof of illness and report the absence directly to the school principal also reduces the number of absences—particularly Monday or Friday absences.

In a study conducted by the National Council on Teacher Quality, researchers compared teacher attendance rates in districts with incentive policies to those without them. In the districts studied, Joseph et al. (2014) found there was no relationship between any specific policy and increased or decreased rates of teacher absenteeism. Attendance rates did not differ among districts with or without formal policies designed to encourage attendance (Joseph et al., 2014). For example, according to Joseph et al. (2014), districts that allow teachers to carry over personal leave from year to year have almost the exact same teacher rate as districts that do not allow personal leave to accrue from year to year. However, in the same study, researchers found that
attendance policies may have some impact on the attendance rates of chronically absent teachers (Joseph et al., 2014). In districts that implemented policies to encourage good attendance, chronically absent teachers were out of school approximately two fewer days than chronically absent teachers in districts that did not implement such policies (Joseph et al., 2014).

**Conceptual Theme 4: Organizational Culture**

Organizational culture is described by Robbins and Coulter (2005) as the shared values, beliefs, or perceptions held by employees within an organization or organizational unit. Because organizational culture reflects the values, beliefs and behavioral norms that are used by employees in an organization to give meaning to the situations that they encounter, it can influence the attitudes and behavior of the staff (Scott-Findlay & Estabrooks, 2006). According to Turan and Betkas (2013), organizational culture holds its units together and shares values, norms, philosophies, perspectives, expectations, attitudes, myths, and trends that give it a distinctive identity. Based on its special environment and different inputs and processes, every organization produces a culture that separates itself from other organizations (Dimmock & Walker, 2005). Eagle and Glenn (2018) claim organizational culture plays an important role in absences.

A study from Finland showed that teachers who had lower levels of satisfaction at school were less likely to be absent due to sickness (Ervasti et al., 2012). Similarly, a general study of leadership behaviors and employee absences, also from Finland, found that workers in a relaxed and supportive atmosphere had fewer sick-related absences than those working in a tense environment (Piirainen, Räsänen, & Kivimäki, 2003). These findings make sense in the context of education because teachers have discretion over their absences, so a teacher who is satisfied with her job location is less likely to call in sick than a teacher who is not happy (Eagle & Glenn,
Though more research is needed, Hansen & Quintero (2020) suspect school-level attendance measures can flag problem spots for policymakers, indicating which schools’ climates or management practices may be contributing to mediocre outcomes.

**Employee Engagement.** Another theory of leadership is ethical leadership. Ethical leadership has been defined as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making” (Brown & Trevino, 2006). A fundamental underpinning of ethical leadership theory is that leaders are influential role models for normative and ethical behaviors in organizational settings (Zheng, Epitropaki, Graham, & Caveney, 2021). Ethical leaders engage in acts and behaviors that benefit others, and at the same time, they refrain from behaviors that can cause any harm to others. Yukl, Mahsad, Hassan, and Prussia, (2011) suggested that the combination of integrity, ethical standards, and fair treatment of employees are the cornerstones of ethical leadership. Ethical leadership, in its true sense, promotes ethical conduct by practicing as well as managing ethics and holding everyone accountable for it (Yukl et al., 2011).

The construct domain of ethical leadership is broad, and several different types of values may be relevant including altruism, compassion, honesty, fairness, and justice. Ethical leadership is also indicated by behaviors reflecting these values (Yukl et al., 2011). Examples include being very supportive and helpful when someone has a problem, being fair when distributing rewards and benefits, being open and honest when communicating to people, making sacrifices to benefit others, talking about the importance of values, and holding people accountable for ethical and unethical actions (Yukl et al., 2011). According to Den Hartog and Belschak (2012), the clarity
that ethical leaders maintain in their expectations, communication, and responsibilities is reciprocated with a more committed and engaged workforce within the organization.

According to Robbins and Judge (2012), the perception of organizational support is the extent of belief of workers that their organization appreciates their contributions and that it cares about their well-being. Perceived organizational support aspects include: fairness, supervisory support, and organizational rewards and job conditions. Saks (2006) stated that job characteristics, rewards, recognition, perceived organizational support, supervisory support, distributive and procedural justice are the factors that influence employee engagement.

**Negative Impact of Teacher Absenteeism**

The issue of teacher absences should be examined for several key reasons. First, the financial impact of teacher absence is significant. It has been estimated that the payroll for substitutes totals over $4 billion annually, which equates to roughly 1% of federal, state, and local spending on K-12 public education (Miller, 2008; United States Department of Education, 2007). Second, teacher absences negatively impact student achievement (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007; Herrmann & Rockoff, 2012; Miller, Murnane, & Willett, 2007; Tingle, Schoeneberger, Wang, & Algozzine, 2012). Third, teacher absences are not equitably distributed, but tend to occur more frequently in schools with lower student outcomes (Pitkoff, 1993; Roby, 2013), low-income families (Clotfelter et al., 2007; Pitkoff, 1993), and/or high percentages of students from racial/ethnic minority backgrounds (Miller, 2012).

**Financial impact of teacher absenteeism.** Schools spend more on the salary and benefits of teachers than any category of expenditure. With 5.3% of teachers absent on a given day, stipends for substitute teachers and associated administrative costs amount to a minimum of $4 billion annually (Miller, 2012). Additional financial costs tied to teacher absence include
payouts of accumulated, unused leave and annual awards to discourage unnecessary absences (Miller, 2012). Mercer and Kronos (2010) reported that employee absences accounted for over 36% of payroll expenses. According to Mercer and Kronos (2010), the costs can be split into direct costs, which are the wages paid to unproductive, absent employees, and indirect costs, which can be further sub-divided into the cost of replacement and the impact on productivity.

**Teacher Absenteeism and Student Achievement.** Many past studies (Bayard, 2003; Cantrell, 2003; Womble, 2001; Woods, 1990) have found a negative relationship between teacher absences and student achievement (Miller et al., 2008). Recent research also conclude that higher rates of teacher absences negatively affect student achievement (Hanover Researchers, 2012). Miller et al. (2008) and Clotfelter et al. (2009) estimated that 10 additional days of teacher absences reduced student achievement by 1-3% of a standard deviation (SD). More specifically, Hanover (2012) found that each 10 days of teacher absences reduces students’ mathematics achievement by 3.3 percent of a standard deviation. Teachers with absence rates lower than two percent of the total school year outperformed teachers with higher absence rates in every measured category (Hanover Researchers, 2012). Correspondingly, as absences increased, performance decreased (Hanover Researchers, 2012).

Bruno (2002) claims that students in a classroom eventually lose the desire to learn when the regular teacher is frequently absent and the delivery of the instructional content is by an array of substitute teachers. As a result, student achievement may be negatively impacted by teacher absenteeism, because students do not feel connected to the classroom (Jacobs & Kritsonis, 2007). A variety of other research investigations, including numerous doctoral dissertations, have documented relationships between teacher absences and student achievement in elementary, middle, and high schools (Tingle et al., 2012). Many studies have
found a negative relationship between teacher absences and student achievement; however, these studies do not provide compelling evidence of a causal link between teacher absence and student achievement (Miller, et al., 2008).

**Teacher Absenteeism and Equity.** Empirical evidence now presents a persuasive case that teachers impact a range of student outcomes beyond test scores, including student absences, suspension rates, noncognitive skills, and college attendance (Hansen & Quintero, 2020). Other researchers revealed that the incidence of teacher absences is regressive. When schools are ranked by the fraction of students receiving free or reduced price lunches, teachers in the lowest income quartile average almost one extra sick day per school year than teachers in the highest income quartile. In addition, Clotfelter et al. (2009) claims schools with persistently high rates of teacher absence were much more likely to serve low-income than high-income students.

**Teacher Preparation Programs**

Teacher preparation programs (TTP) are programs where prospective teachers gain a foundation of knowledge about pedagogy and subject matter, as well as early exposure to practical classroom experience (Feuer, Floden, Chudowsky, & Ahn, 2013). Traditional teacher preparation programs typically serve undergraduate students who have no prior teaching experience. These programs generally lead to a bachelor’s degree, although some programs may lead to a teaching credential, without a degree (Shuls & Trivitt 2015; DOE, 2013). Traditional teacher preparation generally refers to a four or five year undergraduate program at a postsecondary institution. A traditional program generally includes courses on pedagogy, subject content, and courses on teaching particular populations, such as English language learners and special education students (Jang & Horn, 2017). While teacher licensure
requirements and preparation programs vary across states, most traditional systems possess similar requirements (Jang & Horn, 2017). In general, teachers must have at least a bachelor’s degree, complete an approved, accredited education program, have a major in education or a minor in elementary education, and have a major in the subject area in which they plan to teach for middle and high school teaching. Teachers must also have a strong foundation in the liberal arts and pass a teacher licensure exam (DOE, 2013).

In contrast, alternative teacher preparation (ATP) programs primarily serve teachers already in classrooms as they participate in accelerated programs as outlined by individual states (Shuls & Trivitt, 2015; DOE, 2013). ATP programs include programs such as Teach for America (TFA), The New Teacher Project (TNTP) Teaching Fellows, and temporary or emergency certification. Alternative programs vary in time, format, and locale, though most are closely supervised by state agencies and are subject to federal reporting requirements (Jang & Horn, 2017). Some programs have relatively few requirements for content knowledge related to the subject matter and grade level taught (Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). However, nearly all states require that graduates of alternative as well as traditional programs pass a licensure exam, such as the Praxis developed by the Educational Testing Service or assessments developed by such organizations as Language Testing International, Pearson, the College Board, or the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence (DOE, 2013).

Further distinguishing ATP from TTP programs, according to Shuls and Trivitt (2015), is ATP programs provide in-service teachers with full access to teaching students, with minimal supervision, while TTP programs provide pre-service teachers with scheduled access to teaching students, with continuous supervision. ATP programs were created to diversify and increase the teaching force by allowing those without certification to switch careers and
expedite entry into K-12 classrooms (Shuls & Trivitt, 2015). Currently, every state and the District of Columbia have adopted alternative certification programs. In recent years as many as a third of new hires have used an alternative route to certification and have begun teaching before completing all certification requirements (Constantine et al., 2009). Those concerned about the quality of instruction in schools today question whether these fast-track alternative certification programs adequately prepare candidates for the challenging work of classroom teaching (Johnson, Birkeland, & Peske, 2015).

Currently, states use several mechanisms to hold teacher preparation programs accountable for the quality of teachers being produced. Most states have three levers for regulating program quality: approval, accreditation, and certification. A growing consensus also suggests that three aspects of program processes are important for program effectiveness: (1) candidate selection processes, (2) TTP program content or what is taught in the teacher preparation program, and (3) program structure, which includes the extent to which candidates have access to high-quality clinical experiences throughout their preservice experience (Coggshall et al., 2012). Research provides some limited evidence that clinical and student teaching experiences provide teacher candidates with opportunities to learn about teaching and help reduce anxiety among those entering the profession (Rice, 2003).

Educational researchers have examined the effect of traditional and alternate teacher preparation program on several teacher outcomes, including job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and the use of evidence-based instructional practices. Most studies indicated that traditional teacher preparation yield better instructional knowledge (Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002), self-efficacy (Zientek, 2007), and teacher retention (MacIver & Vaughn, 2007) relative to alternative preparation programs. Darling-Hammond et al. (2002) found that 2,956 beginning
teachers in New York City from traditional preparation programs showed significantly higher instructional knowledge of curriculum and teaching strategies, sense of efficacy, and confidence in teaching than those from alternative programs or those without preparation. Research examining the quality and the outcomes of teacher preparation programs suggests that simply having a degree from a teacher preparation program may not be sufficient to ensure high quality education, nor positive child outcomes (Coggshall et al., 2012).

Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2009) found that teacher preparation programs that required more oversight of student-teaching experiences or required students to complete a capstone report produced first year teachers who were significantly more effective at increasing student achievement (p. 434). In a similar study, Zientek (2007) found that traditionally prepared teachers showed a higher sense of self-efficacy and preparedness in communication, planning, and instructional strategies. Using data from the National Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), Ronfeldt, Schwartz, and Jacob (2014) found that almost half of teachers from alternative preparation programs did not complete practice teaching (pre-service student teaching), compared to only 8% of teachers from traditional programs. In addition, Ronfeldt et al. (2014) found that almost 70% of teachers from traditional programs completed the highest level of practice teaching, compared to less than 30% of teachers from alternative preparation. These differences were particularly consequential for teacher outcomes as the researchers also observed that teachers who had completed more practice teaching and coursework on pedagogy felt more prepared for teaching. These teachers also indicated a higher likelihood to stay in teaching Ronfeldt et al. (2014).

Other studies have revealed that alternative and traditional teacher preparation programs are equally effective in Texas (Hanushek, Kain, O’Brien, & Rivkin, 2005; Lincove, Osborne,
Mills, & Bellows, 2015) and New York (Kane et al., 2008). Kane et al. (2008) examined the relationship between teacher certification status and student achievement and found little difference in the effects of traditionally certified, uncertified, and alternatively certified teachers on students’ math and reading value-added achievement scores in both elementary and middle schools. In a more recent study, Lincove et al. (2015) examined the effectiveness of alternative and traditional teacher preparation programs in Texas and found no statistically significant difference in fourth- through tenth-grade students’ math achievement scores, after controlling for student and school covariates. Finally, research focusing on the highly selective Teach for America (TFA) program has demonstrated positive effects of TFA teachers on students’ math (Turner, Goodman, Adachi, Brite, & Decker, 2012) and science achievement (Xu, Hannaway, & Taylor, 2011). Although competence in teaching is shaped significantly by on-the-job experiences and continuous learning, Coggshall et al. (2012) state that the programs that prepare teachers to work in K-12 classrooms can be early and important contributors to the quality of instruction.

A summary of the findings of a report, published by the Education of Commission of the States (ECS) on effective strategies for educating and training U.S. teachers, found that there is a strong consensus that adequate subject knowledge is necessary for teachers to be successful; however exactly what adequate knowledge entails is not clear (Allen, 2003). According to Allen (2003), the research provides limited support for the conclusion that preparation in pedagogy can contribute significantly to effective teaching, particularly subject-specific courses and those designed to develop core skills, such as classroom management, student assessment and curriculum development. Less clear is how such knowledge and skills are best acquired, whether through coursework, field experience (especially student teaching) or on the job (Allen,
2003). Nor does the research provide much insight as to whether certain kinds of coursework might be particularly helpful for teaching racially or ethically diverse students or students in low-performing schools (Allen, 2003).

Research also concludes that while there is a broad consensus that practical experience is important in learning to teach, there is disagreement over the best way for prospective teachers to acquire such experience. The various descriptive studies suggest that solid field experience can have an influence on prospective teachers, but the influence is most often expressed in terms of changes in beliefs and attitudes that have no proven correlation with teaching effectiveness (Allen, 2003). The research provides limited support for the conclusion that there are alternative programs that produce cohorts of teachers who are ultimately as effective as traditionally trained teachers (Allen, 2003). Because of their limited preservice training, Allen (2003) states alternative route participants may experience more difficulties than traditionally prepared graduates at the beginning of their teaching assignment. While the research on teacher preparation is limited, it does provide some guidance for policy makers and others on a number of issues, including the value and impact of certain kinds of coursework, field experience and alternative approaches to teacher preparation (Allen, 2003).

**Leadership Styles**

Leadership is arguably one of the most observed, yet least understood phenomena on earth (Robbins, 2010). According to Oakleaf (2016), there are many ways to understand leadership. One thing common to all leadership theory is that leadership requires people who are willing to follow (Oakleaf, 2016). Northouse (2010) defines leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. Leadership, then, is the process of persuading others to follow (Northouse, 2019). It illuminates
the ways in which individuals influence others and persuade them to devote their utmost efforts to tasks that promote their goals. Researchers have proposed many different theories of leadership. The leadership theories discussed in this literature review are: Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Situational Leadership, Moral/Ethical Leadership Theory, and System Thinking.

**Transformational Leadership Theory.** Transformational leadership, according to Ross and Kendall (2016), is a style of leadership in which the leader identifies the needed change, creates a vision to guide change through inspiration, and executes the change with the commitment of the members of the group (Oakleaf, 2016). Transformational leaders motivate others to do more than they originally intended and often even more than they thought possible (Bass & Riggio, 2006). They set more challenging expectations and typically achieve higher performances (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Bass and Riggio (2006) assert that transformational leaders empower followers and pay attention to their individual needs and personal development, helping followers to develop their own leadership potential.

Green (2010) states transformational leaders lead with knowledge of individuals inside and outside the schoolhouse. They have a vision of the future of the organization, can effectively communicate that vision to followers, and are able to get them to understand the importance of its attainment (Green, 2010). In addition, transformational leaders are able to inspire followers to deeply commit to the vision and work in an interdependent manner towards its attainment (Green, 2010). They share their power, distribute leadership tasks, and inspire others to lead (Green, 2010). Transformational leadership is ideal when a leader wants to improve how an organization is run (Ross & Kendall, 2016). Ross and Kendall (2016) claim by utilizing this theory, the leader is able to make the most of their team’s efforts and capabilities,
increasing the overall efficiency of their company. Under a transformational leadership style, followers commit themselves to common purpose and are encouraged to challenge basic organizational or social assumptions (Eyal & Roth, 2011).

Bass and Riggio (2006) proclaim that factor analytic studies have identified the components of transformational leadership. These components are: Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration. According to Eyal and Roth (2011), transformational leaders exert idealized influence by considering their followers’ needs, acting according to the organization’s values and serving as a model to be emulated. They provide intellectual stimulation by soliciting creative thinking, challenging followers, and stimulating them to question, reframe problems, and approach old situations in innovative ways (Eyal & Roth, 2011). These leaders display individualized consideration by attending to individual needs and differences and by helping followers work toward higher levels of potential (Eyal & Roth, 2011). The leaders are admired, respected, and trusted, and they are endowed by their followers as having extraordinary capabilities, persistence, and determination (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Bass and Riggio (2006) claim that Inspirational Motivation happens when transformational leaders behave in ways that motivate and inspire those around them by providing meaning and challenge to their followers’ work. Team spirit is aroused, and enthusiasm and optimism are displayed (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Intellectual Stimulation means transformational leaders stimulate their followers’ efforts to be innovative and creative by questioning assumptions, reframing problems, and approaching old situations in new ways (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The last component, Individualized Consideration, occurs when
transformational leaders pay special attention to each individual follower’s needs for achievement and growth by acting as a coach or mentor (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Transactional Leadership Theory. Transformational leadership is often associated with another theory known as transactional leadership theory (Oakleaf, 2016). Transactional leadership is a common management style that involves a chain of command and defined structure in which subordinates relinquish authority to their supervisors (Flynn, 2017). According to Flynn (2017), in transactional leadership systems, subordinates are expected to do what their supervisor tells them to do. Bass et al. (2006) state that “transactional leadership occurs when the leader rewards or disciplines the follower, depending on the adequacy of the follower’s performance” (Bass et al., 2006, p. 8). People are motivated by reward and punishment, such as increased pay or termination (Flynn, 2017).

Transactional leadership depends on contingent reinforcement, either positive contingent reward (CR) or the more negative active or passive forms of management-by-exception (MBE-A or MBE-P) (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Bass and Riggio (2006) claim contingent Reward has been found to be reasonably effective in motivating others to achieve higher levels of development and performance, although not as much as any of the transformational components. Contingent reward leadership involves the leader assigning or obtaining follower agreement on what needs to be done with promised or actual rewards offered in exchange for satisfactorily carrying out the assignment (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Subordinates of transactional leaders are not necessarily expected to think innovatively and may be monitored on the basis of predetermined criteria (Eyal & Roth, 2011). The focus is on maintaining efficient management and complying with organizational rules and policies (Eyal & Roth, 2011).

In some instances, it is necessary for educational leaders to engage in transactions, even
though a transformational leadership style is preferred (Green, 2017). In essence, educational leaders must be able to balance transformational and transactional styles of leadership (Green, 2017). According to Lezotte and McKee (2006), as (cited by Green 2017), effectively utilizing the skills and attributes advocated by these two theories, leaders establish clear expectations and goals for stakeholders and bring predictability and order to the school’s program, ultimately facilitating a process for improvement in student achievement.

**Situational Leadership Theory.** Another theory that has application for educational leaders is Paul Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard’s (1996) Theory of Situational Leadership (Green, 2017). These researchers attempted to provide some understanding of the relationship between effective leadership styles and the maturity level of followers by adding the variable level of maturity to Fiedler’s (1967) contingency factors (Green, 2017). They argued that to be effective, leaders must take into account the maturity level of followers (Green, 2017). In their research, maturity level was defined as the extent to which a follower demonstrates the ability to perform a task (job maturity) and his or her willingness to accept responsibility (motivational level) for its completion (Green, 2017). They maintained that successful leaders must tailor their approach to the maturity of the followers and the situation, or details and environment of the assignment (Campbell, 2018). To achieve the goals, Campbell (2018) claims that leaders must evaluate the specifics of the work involved and the emotional or relational support the followers seem to require.

Situational leadership theory is one of the contingency theories of leadership that depends upon both the situation and the team or followers (Campbell, 2018). Using this type of leadership style, a successful leader must analyze many factors, including the motivation and ability of followers (Campbell, 2018). Depending on the condition of the relationship among
the leader, the follower, and the situation, the leader may elect to use one of the four styles: directing, coaching, supporting, or delegating (Green, 2017). According to Hanson (2002,) as cited by Green (2017), the major factor to be considered in achieving success with Situational Leadership Theory or Contingency Theory is selecting the leadership style that is appropriate for the specific situation and the individuals involved (Green, 2017).

**Ethical Leadership Theory.** Another theory of leadership is ethical leadership. Ethical leadership has been defined as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making” (Brown & Treviño, 2006). A fundamental underpinning of ethical leadership theory is that leaders are influential role models for normative and ethical behavior in organizational settings (Zheng et al., 2021).

Ethical leaders engage in acts and behaviors that benefit others, and at the same time, they refrain from behaviors that can cause any harm to others. Yukl et al. (2011) suggested that the combination of integrity, ethical standards, and fair treatment of employees are the cornerstones of ethical leadership. The researchers also suggested that several different types of values may be relevant including altruism, compassion, honesty, fairness, and justice. Ethical leadership is also indicated by behaviors reflecting these values. Examples include being very supportive and helpful when someone has a problem, being fair when distributing rewards and benefits, being open and honest when communicating to people, making sacrifices to benefit others, talking about the importance of values, setting clear ethical standards for the work, keeping actions consistent with espoused values, and holding people accountable for ethical and unethical actions (Yukl et al., 2011). Den Hortog and Belscak (2012) claim that the clarity in
which ethical leaders maintain in their expectations, communication, and responsibilities is reciprocated with a more committed and engaged workforce within the organization.

**System Thinking.** Systems thinking has become increasingly popular and important because it provides a “new way of thinking” to understand and manage complex problems (Camelia, Ferris & Cropley, 2018). Frank, Shaked, and Koral-Kordova (2016) state that systems thinking is the ability to grasp and understand a whole system at once, conceptually and functionally, without understanding all its minutiae and details. System thinking is considered to be an effective means of managing organizations since it facilitates group learning, shared decision-making and improved and improved organizational resilience (Jaaron & Backhouse, 2014).

According to Camelia et al. (2018), systems thinking should be viewed as a mental construct for thinking and learning about a system. The researchers assert that when learning about a systems phenomenon, a systems thinker recursively applies systems thinking rules to change, eliminate or create new constructs until an internally consistent construct is reached as the conclusion to the particular investigation (Camelia et al., 2018). The rules include questioning the system boundary; system structure (parts, hierarchy, and whole); interrelationships within the system; interdisciplinary points of view; system processes; holism and big picture thinking (Camelia et al., 2018). The application of these rules helps people to understand how the system works and how people interact with the system more effectively and efficiently. It increases coordination between authorities and agencies, assists managers in dealing with environmental conflicts and allows effective planning and resource mobilization (Bentley, Cao, & Lehaney, 2013). System thinking has been proposed as an approach for ameliorating managers’ coping with contemporary challenges, which often do not have a single
solution but a variety of options, each with a wide range of advantages, disadvantages and consequences (Jolly, 2015).

**Summary**

Warm, caring, supportive student-teacher relationships, are vital to better school performance and engagement. Such relationships help develop the emotional, social, behavioral and cognitive competencies foundational to learning; however, these relationships can only be formed if the teacher attends school regularly. A paper by Hansen & Quintero (2020), agrees that chronically absent teachers can cause their classes to stagnate and potentially compel colleagues to work harder to pick up the slack.

The issue of teacher absences should be examined for several key reasons. First, the financial impact of teacher absence is significant. It has been estimated that the payroll for substitutes totals over $4 billion annually, which equates to roughly 1% of federal, state, and local spending on K-12 public education (Miller, 2008; DOE, 2007). Second, teacher absences negatively impact student achievement (Herrmann & Rockoff, 2012; Miller, Murnane, & Willett, 2008; Tingle et al., 2012). Third, teacher absences are not equitably distributed, but tend to occur more frequently in schools with lower student outcomes (Roby, 2013), low-income families (Clotfelter et al., 2009), and/or high percentages of students from racial/ethnic minority backgrounds (Miller, 2012).

Not only do excessive absences cause rapidly escalating school costs owing to additional fiscal expenditure on substitute teacher salaries, but absenteeism in the teaching workforce carries other educational consequences as well (Gaziel, 2004). According to research, student achievement, student attendance and student misbehavior are directly affected by the teacher’s presence or lack thereof in the classroom (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2009; Miller, Murname,
Willett, 2008). When a teacher is absent, valuable instruction time is lost which may cause student achievement to suffer as a result (Gaziel, 2004). Public education is a cornerstone of our democracy, a prerequisite for economic recovery, and a key lever in achieving our national commitment to equal opportunity for all (Clifford, Behrstock-Sherratt & Fetters, 2012).

Absenteeism poses a significant obstacle to positive student outcomes and achievement, creating instability which can permeate entire school systems (Harris van Keuren, 2009).
CHAPTER III

Methodology

This study, which was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, examined the phenomenon of teacher absenteeism through the experiences and perspectives of elementary teachers in the West Tennessee study school district. The study analyzed the elementary teachers’ perceptions of the effectiveness of their teacher preparation programs in preparing them for the realities of teaching and leadership behaviors that impacted teacher attendance behavior. Teacher absenteeism remains a challenge in the study district that is discussed frequently in district principals’ meetings and school faculty meetings. Educators, policy makers, and the general public have a longstanding interest in teacher absenteeism and its relationship to student achievement (Tingle et al., 2012). This chapter provides an outline of the methodology used in this study. Following a brief statement of the purpose and research questions, the researcher provided a detailed description of data collection procedures and data analysis methods. In addition, this chapter described the participants and research design.

Purpose Overview

The purpose of this study was to examine teacher absenteeism and the related factors of leadership behaviors and teacher preparation program from the viewpoint of the elementary school teacher. The goal was to solicit the teachers’ perspective to gain an understanding of what can be done to improve teacher attendance. The damaging effect of teacher absenteeism on students, schools, and, by extension, communities suggest a need to understand the causes of high teacher absenteeism and to identify systemic and policy-oriented solutions that mitigate absenteeism (Lee et al., 2015). This study addressed the following research questions: a) What are the perceptions of elementary teachers, in schools with high rates of teacher absenteeism, on
teacher absenteeism? (b) What are elementary teachers’ perception of leadership practices or behaviors that affect teacher attendance behaviors? (c) How do elementary teachers’ perceive the training they receive from their teacher preparation program to handle the stressors or realities of teaching, which may lead to teacher absenteeism? (d) What are elementary teachers perceptions of supports or interventions needed to improve teacher attendance?

**Participants and Selection Process**

Typical for case study research is nonrandom sampling; there is no sample that represents a larger population (Ridder, 2017). This approach is valuable for research to develop theory, evaluate programs, and develop interventions because of its flexibility and rigor (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The case data can lead to the identification of patterns and relationships, creating, extending, or testing a theory (Ridder, 2017.) Participants in this study were certified teachers in the West Tennessee study school district. The participants were selected because they were a convenient sample of teachers in the study district. All participants were purposefully selected after the researcher verified that the schools in which the teachers were employed had high rates of absenteeism, according to past teacher absenteeism data. In choosing the schools, the researcher obtained teacher absenteeism data per school for the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school year to determine the schools with elevated rates of teacher absenteeism. Ten potential participants from these schools were emailed and invited to participate in the study. Two teachers did not respond to the email invitation, so the researcher randomly selected and emailed two additional potential teachers. These two teachers agreed to participate in the study. The participants in the study met the following criteria:

1. The participants were employed as teachers by the West Tennessee study school district at the time of the study.
2. The participants were employed as teachers in schools with past elevated rates of teacher absenteeism according to teacher absenteeism data from the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school year.

**District Population.** The West Tennessee study district is comprised of 883 classroom teachers, 11,813 students, and 56 administrators. According to the Tennessee Department of Education (2021) student enrollment data, 41.6% of students in the district are economically disadvantaged, 5.3% are English learners, and 14.3% are students with disabilities. According to the Tennessee Department of Education Report Card (2021), the success rate for the West Tennessee study district was 20.1% for the 2018 school year, 20.7% for the 2019 school year, and 13.9% for the 2021 school year. The district is comprised of various racial and ethnic student groups (See Table 1).

Table 1

**Racial/Ethnic Student Groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Racial/Ethnic Groups</th>
<th>2020-2021 Percent of Student Subgroups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>60.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American or Alaskan</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data taken from the Tennessee Department of Education Report Card (2021)*

Purposeful sampling was utilized in this study since the research was bounded to one school district. Purposive sampling, one of the most common sampling strategies, groups participants according to preselected criteria relevant to a particular research question (Mack et
al., 2005). For this study, 10 elementary teachers were interviewed. The teachers were employees of the study district and they taught in schools that had high rates of absenteeism.

**The Elementary School Teacher.** Hanover Research (2012) reports that teachers in elementary schools tend to be absent more often than other teachers in the K-12 system. Therefore, this study will attempt to gain insight into teacher absenteeism from the perspective and experiences of elementary teachers. To understand teacher absenteeism from the perspective of the elementary school teacher, one must be familiar with the public-school elementary school teacher. In the 2017-18 school year, there were 1.8 million elementary school teachers in the public school system in the United States (Hussar et al., 2020). About 89% of public elementary school teachers were female and 11% were male (Hussar et al., 2020). In the same year, approximately 79% of public school teachers were White, 9% were Hispanic, 7% were Black, 2% were Asian, 2% were of two or more races, and 1% were American Indian/Alaska Native. Additionally, those who were Pacific Islander made up less than 1% of public school teachers (Hussar et al., 2020).

In 2017-2018, approximately 9% of public school teachers had less than 3 years of teaching experience, 28% had 3 to 9 years of experience, 40% had 10 to 20 years of experience, and 23% had more than 20 years of experience (Hussar et al., 2020). Fifty five percent of public school elementary teachers held a post-baccalaureate degree in 2017-2018. A post-baccalaureate degree is a master’s, education specialist, or doctor’s degree. In this same year, 90% of public school teachers held a regular or standard state teaching certificate or advanced professional certificate, 4% held a provisional or temporary certificate, 3% held a probationary certificate, 2% held no certification, and 1 percent held a waiver or emergency certificate (Hussar et al., 2020).
Research Design

This study utilized the qualitative research method. More specifically, this study utilized the case study research design. Qualitative case study methodology enables researchers to conduct an in-depth exploration of intricate phenomena within some specific context. Qualitative case studies afford researchers opportunities to explore or describe a phenomenon using a variety of data sources, and it undertakes the exploration through a variety of lenses in order to reveal multiple facets of the phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In the case study, a real-time phenomenon is explored within its naturally occurring context.

Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2007). Creswell asserted that this process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant’s setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. Those who engage in this form of inquiry support a way of looking at research that honors an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation (Creswell, 2007).

Qualitative approaches to research value depth of meaning and people’s subjective experiences and their meaning-making processes (Leavy, 2017). Additionally, it seeks to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspectives of the local population it involves. According to Mack et al. (2005), qualitative research is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of particular populations. Qualitative research has the ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. Leavy (2017, p. 19) claimed that
the major advantage of this approach is that you could collect rich data with descriptions and examples, and the participants’ language and concerns would be at the forefront. Qualitative methods include three kinds of data collection: (1) in-depth, open-ended interviews; (2) direct observation; (3) written documents (Patton, 2002).

The qualitative data for this study was collected through in-depth interviews of teachers in the study district. In-depth interviews are optimal for collecting data on individuals’ personal histories, perspectives, and experiences, particularly when sensitive topics are being explored (Mack et al., 2005). According to Mack et al. (2005), interviews are conducted with a group of individuals who have first-hand knowledge of an event, situation or experience. For this study, 10 elementary teachers in the study district were utilized to collect data. These teachers are familiar with teacher absences and have been directly affected by teacher absenteeism in their building.

A thematic analysis of the teachers’ responses was conducted to gain a better understanding of teacher preparedness to handle the realities of teaching and the impact of teacher absenteeism on students and overall school effectiveness. Thematic analysis is a process for encoding qualitative information. According to Braun and Clark (2006), thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It enables scholars, observers, or practitioners to use a wide variety of types of information in a systematic manner that increases their accuracy or sensitivity in understanding and interpreting observations about people, events, situations, and organizations. The thematic analysis of the data occurred in six phases: the researcher became familiar with the data, generated initial codes, searched for themes, reviewed themes, defined and named themes and produced the report.
Positionality Statement

A positionality statement provides readers the opportunity to consider the researcher’s stance in relation to the findings (Clark & Veale, 2018). Through reflection, researchers are better able to explain the topic under inquiry by minimizing or disclosing their own assumptions and biases while collecting, coding, and sorting qualitative data (Clark & Veale, 2018). Padilla-Diaz (2015) asserts that the researcher who places him or herself within the qualitative paradigm must set aside all preconceptions, judgements or prejudices towards a particular topic in order to make an objective analysis of the information participants bring to an investigation. This often serves to inform a research study rather than to invalidate it as bias or contaminated by personal perspectives and social or political viewpoints (Bourke, 2014; Bowlin, 2016).

Teacher absenteeism is a challenge in the study school district. My research is aimed at understanding the perceptions of teachers on teacher absenteeism and the related factors of leadership behaviors and teacher preparation. I seek to identify the supports teachers need to reduce teacher absence behaviors in the West Tennessee school district. While my knowledge as a principal provides insight into the challenges of teacher absenteeism, I realize that teachers are absent for many reasons. Whether for professional development, sickness or personal reasons, teachers will be absent from school sometimes. Therefore, school leader must acknowledge this certainty, while keeping student learning as the focus.

My goal is not to eliminate teacher absences, but to shed light on supports that can be implemented to reduce absences. My goal is to provide school leaders with knowledge that will assist them in supporting teachers to improve teacher attendance behaviors. Reducing teacher absences to zero is unrealistic and is not the objective of this study; however, designing interventions to discourage the overuse of leave and providing teachers with the support they need to be in class can be a means to improve student outcomes.
Limitations

This study, which was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, was limited to a single West Tennessee public school system. The school system consists of these schools: one Pre-K-3 school, six Pre-K-5 schools, two K-5 schools, one K-6 elementary school, one 4-8 school, one Pre-K-8 school, one K-8 Montessori school, one cyber school, three 6-8 middle schools, and five 9-12 high schools. The researcher sought to gain the perceptions of educators in the West Tennessee school system on teacher absenteeism and the related factors of leadership behavior and teacher preparation in order to reduce teacher absences.

Another limitation to the study was the small sample size. The interviews were limited to 10 elementary school teachers in the study district. No other teachers, inside or outside the district, in middle or high school, were interviewed for the study. The participants were selected because they were a convenient sample of teachers in the study district. All participants were purposefully selected after the researcher verified that the teachers were employed in schools with high rates of absenteeism, according to 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 district teacher absenteeism data.

The third limitation of the study pertained to the results of the study. The qualitative results may be characteristic of districts with similar demographics throughout the state. However, it is not known just how generalizable the results will be to other districts. Although findings from qualitative data can often be extended to people with characteristics similar to those in the study population, gaining a rich and complex understanding of a specific social context or phenomenon typically takes precedence over eliciting data that can be generalized to other geographical areas or populations (Mack et al., 2005).
**Data Collection Procedures**

A literature analysis on factors that may relate to teacher absenteeism was conducted to collect data on teacher absenteeism; however, the data collection for this study were the interviews of the West Tennessee study school district’s 10 elementary school teachers. The interview is a commonly used research genre across disciplines in which conversation is used as a data generation tool (Leavy, 2017). There are numerous interview methods, such as in-depth, semi-structured, oral history or life history, biographic minimalist, and focus groups (Leavy, 2017). This study focused on in-depth interviews, which occurred between the researcher and one participant at a time. In-depth interviews are optimal for collecting data on individuals’ personal histories, perspectives, and experiences, particularly when sensitive topics are being explored (Mack et al., 2005).

**Interviews.** The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes, depending on the depth of the participants' response. The teachers answered open-ended questions about teacher attendance, leadership behaviors and teacher preparation programs that did not have a predetermined set of acceptable responses. Open-ended questions and probes yield in-depth responses about people’s experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings, and knowledge (Patton, 2002). Data consist of verbatim quotations with sufficient context to be interpretable (Patton, 2002). According to Leavy (2017), the advantage of using open-ended questions is that it allows participants to use their own language, provide long and detailed responses if they choose, and go in any direction they want to respond to the question.

**Data Analysis**

The qualitative data for this study was gathered from the interviews of 10 elementary teachers in the West Tennessee study school district, and a qualitative literature review on the
topics of teacher attendance and teacher absenteeism. The teachers’ interview questions focused on teacher attendance, teacher attendance policies, challenges of teacher absenteeism, effectiveness of teacher preparation programs, impact of leadership behaviors and suggestions for reducing teacher absenteeism. The questions were designed to determine how teacher absences are perceived by teachers in relation to the effect these absences have on the overall effectiveness of their schools. The questions were also designed to determine how teachers perceive the role of teacher preparation programs in preparing them to handle the realities of teaching and their perception of leadership behaviors that impact teacher attendance behaviors.

To analyze the data collected, thematic analysis was conducted. Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules (2017) states thematic analysis occurs in six phases. The six phases require that the researcher: become familiar with the data, generate initial codes, search for themes, review themes, define and name themes and produce the report.

**Six Phases of Thematic Analysis**

**Phase 1: Become Familiar with Data.** In the first phase of thematic analysis, the researcher became familiar with the qualitative data collected for the study. The comprehensive analysis required the researcher to become immersed in the data by repeatedly reading each transcript searching for meanings and patterns. Braun and Clarke (2006) recommended that researchers read through the entire data set at least once before beginning the coding process. Braun and Clark (2006) also claimed that ideas and identification of possible patterns may be shaped as researchers become familiar with all aspects of the data.

**Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes.** The second phase of thematic analysis is coding. Coding, which can be done by hand or using computer-assisted software (CAQDAS), is the process of assigning a word or phrase to segments of data (Saldana, 2013; Leavy, 2017). This
study utilized in vivo coding, which relies on using participants’ exact language to generate codes. Leavy (2017) states that in vivo coding is favored by many qualitative researchers because it prioritizes and maintains participants’ language (p. 151).

During coding, the researcher simplified and clarified the data generated from the interviews by identifying important sections or segments of text as they related to a theme in the data. The researcher also identified interesting aspects in the data items that possibly formed the basis of themes across the data set. Braun and Clark (2006) recommended that researchers work systematically through the entire data set, giving full and equal attention to each data item.

**Phase 3: Searching for Themes.** Once all data was coded, the researcher sorted and organized all the potentially relevant coded data into themes. According to Saldana (2014) and Leavy (2017), a theme may be an extended phrase or sentence that signals the larger meaning behind a code or group of codes. Once identified, the themes appeared to be significant concepts that link substantial portions of the data together.

**Phase 4: Reviewing Themes.** The fourth phase began once a set of themes were devised, and required refinement. During this phase, the researcher reviewed the coded data to determine whether the themes formed a pattern. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), the validity of individual themes should be considered to determine whether the themes accurately reflect the meanings evident in the data set as a whole. King (2004) asserts that inadequacies in the initial coding and themes will be revealed and may require various changes. If the researcher identified a relevant issue in the text not covered by an existing code, a new code was inserted. If the researcher found no need to use a code or if it substantially overlapped with other codes, it was deleted. At the end of this phase, the researcher had developed an awareness of the different themes, how they fit together, and the overall story they told about the data.
**Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes.** During the fifth phase, the researcher wrote a detailed analysis describing each individual theme. The researcher then considered how each theme fits into the overall story of the entire data set in relation to the research questions. King (2004) suggested that themes should not be considered final until all of the data have been read through and the coding scrutinized at least twice.

**Phase 6: Producing the Product.** Once themes were established, the researcher began the final analysis and write-up of the report. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested that the write-up of a thematic analysis provide a concise, coherent, logical, nonrepetitive, and interesting account of the data within and across themes. Extracts of raw data need to be embedded within the analytic narrative to illustrate the complex story of the data, going beyond a description of the data and convincing the reader of the validity and merit of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher used direct quotes from the participants as a major component of the final report. The researcher also used more extensive passages of quotation.

**Summary**

Chapter one of the study contains the statement of the problem, definition of terms, and the overview of the research design. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the teacher’s perspective of teacher absenteeism and the training received during teacher preparation to equip them to handle the realities or stressors of teaching. Since the study is to interview elementary teachers, a description of the elementary school teacher is also included. The Social Cognitive Theory will serve as the structure and support for understanding the literature on teacher absenteeism.

Chapter two of this proposal contains the review of the literature. Addressing the issue of teacher absenteeism is complex and multifaceted. Therefore, this review of literature examines
the research on: The Social Cognitive Theory, negative impact of teacher absenteeism, teacher stress and burnout, factors related to teacher absenteeism and teacher preparation programs. Examining the literature will give a broader perspective of the issue.

Chapter three of this study describes the methodology of the study. This qualitative study will utilize the case study methodology to examine teacher absenteeism. The chapter also describes the population of the study. The population used in the purposeful sampling will be 10 elementary school teachers, in schools with high percentages of teacher absenteeism. The research design, data analysis, and summary are also included.

Teachers are the single most important school-based determinant of student success, and this study seeks to understand teacher absenteeism from their perspective. This study proposes that the voices of elementary teachers from the West Tennessee study district be heard to assess their need for support in improving attendance. Teacher absenteeism is a challenge in the study school district and I would like to conduct this research to gain knowledge on how to best support teachers in the district. The results of this study will be used to make recommendations to improve teacher attendance in the study school district. The findings will also be used to design supports and interventions aimed at the reduction of teacher absences.

The U.S. Department of Education calls teacher attendance a “leading indicator” of school improvement and educational equity (ED, 2013). However, no matter the professional development opportunities or classroom experience a teacher may have, these factors will have little or no effect if a teacher is absent from school. If a student is absent, his or her absence affects one person; but, if a teacher is absent, multiple classrooms of students can be affected. The results of this study will be used to assist the study school district in improving teacher
attendance. A decrease in teacher absenteeism will lead to an increase in student achievement and positive school culture and climate.

Results of this study can be used by all stakeholders in the field of education to develop supports, interventions, and professional development opportunities aimed at reducing teacher absenteeism. This study has professional significance because it expands the knowledge on the impact of teacher absenteeism. The findings of this study could also have implications for educational leadership programs as they prepare leaders to lead schools and teacher preparation programs as they prepare teachers to apply the knowledge and theory learning into the real classroom. Superintendents, school administrators and classroom teachers should understand that student performance, whether academic, social, or emotional, is the primary objective of the teaching profession. Therefore, all stakeholders should be aware of the impact teacher absences have on student learning and the overall climate and culture of a school.
CHAPTER IV

Report of Data

The purpose of this study was to determine the participants’ perceptions of teacher absenteeism and the related factors of leadership behaviors and teacher preparation. In addition, the goal of the study was to examine perceived teacher supports, interventions, and professional development opportunities needed to reduce teacher absenteeism in the study school district.

The participants in the study were ten elementary school teachers, employed by four different schools in the district. Based on 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school teacher attendance data, the schools in which the teachers were employed had elevated rates of teacher absenteeism.

Participants and Site Demographics

Participants. The participants were elementary teachers employed by the study school district in schools with elevated teacher absenteeism based on teacher attendance data from the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years. Ten potential teacher participants were initially invited to participate in the study; however, two teachers did not respond to the invitation. An additional two teachers were selected and sent invitations. Prior to participating in the study, the participants were asked to read and sign the informed consent statement. The researcher then arranged a time and date that would be convenient for the teachers to participate in the one-on-one interview. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes. The interviews were audio and video recorded via Zoom to ensure accuracy of data collected. The table below provides the pseudonyms used for the participants and the schools they are employed. It also provides detailed information about each teacher who participated in the interviews.
Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Teacher Preparation Program</th>
<th>School Employed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Bishop</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Brightside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Carson</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Chalkland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Sanders</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Bellview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Wilson</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Brightside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Mills</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Deanwood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Ervin</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Deanwood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Mitchell</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Bellview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Barnes</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Brightside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Benton</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Deanwood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Williams</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Bellview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Site Demographics.** Teachers interviewed for the study were employed in four schools in the West Tennessee study school district. The schools, based on 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 teacher attendance data, had elevated rates of teacher absenteeism. The teachers selected were included in the study to obtain a sample of teachers from these different schools. The table below provides demographic information about each school. To maintain confidentiality of the teachers and schools in the study, pseudonyms have been used to identify each school. The table also contains the percentages of each racial/ethnic group, the percentages of teachers absent for the 2018 school year per school, the success rate for each school, and the number of students and teachers at each school.
Table 3

*Site Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number of Teachers/Students</th>
<th>% Students Black/African American</th>
<th>% Students White</th>
<th>% Students Hispanic</th>
<th>% Students Asian</th>
<th>% Teachers Absent 2018</th>
<th>% Success Rate 2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brightside (K-5)</td>
<td>49/711</td>
<td>49.9</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalkland (PreK-5)</td>
<td>24/303</td>
<td>84.5</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>68.1</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bellview (PreK-5)</td>
<td>40/496</td>
<td>81.3</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>&lt; 5</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deanwood (PreK-5)</td>
<td>40/380</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>&lt; 5</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with each participant. Each Zoom interview lasted approximately 45 minutes each. To help protect participant confidentiality, real names of the participants have not been used. The interviews were video and audio recorded in order to allow for accurate transcription of the data. Once the interviews were transcribed through Rev.com, the researcher analyzed the interview responses of the participants and identified common themes.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of elementary teachers, in schools with high rates of teacher absenteeism, on teacher absenteeism?
2. What are elementary teachers’ perception of leadership practices or behaviors that affect teacher attendance behaviors?
3. How do elementary teachers perceive the training they received from their teacher preparation program to handle the stressors or realities of teaching, which may lead to teacher absenteeism?

4. What are elementary teachers perceptions of supports or interventions needed to improve teacher attendance?

Findings

The following data represents the findings from the Zoom interviews. The interview findings reveal elementary teachers’ perception of teacher absenteeism and the related factors of leadership behaviors and teacher preparation. The findings also reveal teachers’ perceptions of the supports or interventions needed to improve teacher attendance in the district. Ten teachers were interviewed using semi-structured interview questions. The questions were designed to elicit in-depth answers regarding teacher absenteeism, leadership behaviors that impact teacher attendance behaviors, and their preparedness to handle the realities of teaching.

Contextual Findings

During the interview process, data emerged that revealed whether teachers believe that teacher absenteeism is a problem in their school. The researcher also gained insight into whether the participants were aware of teacher attendance expectations for their school and whether these expectations were shared with teachers by their school leaders. The information below builds context prior to sharing data that directly address the research questions of the study.

Teacher Attendance Problem. Six teachers indicted that teacher absenteeism is a problem in their school. Ms. Benton, employed at Deanwood Elementary, acknowledged that teacher absenteeism is an issue in her school, yet she pointed out, “I know everybody's got to miss school sometimes I get that. But you know, like if somebody went to the dentist today, I'm
thinking, well, we were just out of school nine days. Why didn't you go to the dentist when you were out of school? And then, you take the whole day off.”

Ms. Benton recalled attending a dentist appointment afterschool so that she would not have to miss school. She continued by saying she thinks absenteeism is a problem because of the caliber of teachers being hired to teach because of the teacher shortage. She said:

I'm just not that type of person. I mean, I went to the dentist Monday, but I went after school. That's just the kind of person I am. I think that has a lot to do with your work ethic though and how you were brought up and what kind of person you are. I also think... I just think that we're hiring people that don't have a license ... And I know they're having to do that, I guess, because, you know, there's a teacher shortage, but I just think we're not getting the same caliber of teachers that we were getting at one time.

Ms. Mills, also employed at Deanwood Elementary, echoed Ms. Benton’s perception that teacher absenteeism is an issue and she added that it is the same coworkers who are absent at her school. She stated,

“ I hate to say it this way, but it’s the same coworkers that it becomes an issue with, and I don’t know if it’s due to health problems or stress involved at school, but it is a problem. My perception is it’s a huge inconvenience when teachers have to be absent for not just one or two people. It affects a lot of people.”

Four other teachers reverberated that teacher attendance is an issue and expressed the impact it has on their school. Ms. Bishop stated that teacher absenteeism leaves a burden for the teachers who are present and it has a ripple effect in her school. She said:
It definitely leaves a burden. I have known of teachers, not the ones that I’m close with, that have taken a sick day, but it's not really because they’re sick, or an extended. There's one right now I'm aware of that's on an extended leave, an eight-week FMLA that I'm really surprised even got approved for FMLA. I just know it’s definitely placing a hardship on that team. Which is the other big deal with teacher absenteeism, especially is not having subs. And so then having to pull teacher assistants, and then you don’t get your push in support, and the ripple effect of that can be very frustrating. And then you don’t have teacher assistants covering lunch duty either, which is a huge problem right now. So, if I’m out, I know the ripple effect is a big deal on not just one or two people, but the building.

**Teacher Attendance Not a Problem.** Four teachers indicated that either teacher absenteeism was not an issue at their school, or they were not sure if teacher absenteeism was a problem due to teachers being somewhat isolated and staying in their own grade level teams. Ms. Sanders and Ms. Williams, both employed at Bellview Elementary, admitted that they did not know if teacher absenteeism is a problem, because they only see the absences on their hallway. They did, however, acknowledged that there are times when teachers are absent. Ms. Sanders shared, “There are the few here and there that come about where I could be like, this probably wasn't the best day for this or things like that. Yeah. And then I’m just thinking about just, I don't really venture too much off of the upper grade hallways.”

Ms. Williams added:

I know on my hallway we have high attendance rates, but really that's all I see. I know when there are absences, it's very difficult to get a sub. So, I know we have assistants covering
classes. I know that there are teachers that are absent. Now, I'm not sure if they're actually sick or if they're just taking a day or what that is.”

Ms. Carson, employed at Chalkland Elementary, also could not say if teacher attendance is a problem at her school. She could however, recall the reasons teachers have been absent, such as a hip replacement and COVID. She stated teachers in her building have been committed. She said:

I can’t say that teacher absenteeism is an issue. I can honestly say, based on the teachers at my school, most of them who, I can honestly say, most of them who have been off, it's been because of sickness. Now, mind you, normally, the absenteeism, a lot of times, was just not, I mean, it really has been, I can say, it has been due to some sickness, like a teacher had a hip replacement and had to be off. Several times, teachers have had COVID and had to be off, and I really can't say, because the teachers there, they've really been committed.

**Teacher Attendance Expectations.** Several of the teachers acknowledged that teacher attendance expectations are communicated to them by their principal. Ms. Mitchell and Ms. Williams, both employed at Bellview, shared that even though teacher attendance expectations are communicated to teachers in their school, there are some teachers who continue to do what they want when it comes to school attendance. Ms. Mitchell specifically pointed out that attendance expectations are shared with them at the beginning of the school year. She said:

We talk about attendance at the beginning of the year when we go over our handbook rules and procedures. And most people, they are on board, but you still have that little few here, that will say, "I’m going to do what I want to do. I don't care." But yeah, for the most part, I'll say we're all onboard with what he expects.”
Like Ms. Mitchell, Ms. Williams also shared that even though her principal’s expectation is that teachers are at school, there are some teachers who feel that their sick days belong to them and they can take them when they want. She said:

We know that our principal's expectation obviously is that we're at work on time and that you don't miss more than you have to, but then there's that gray area because you have sick days and people are like, well, they're my sick days. Whether I take them because I'm sick or I take them because I need mental health days, but I do believe that he expects us to be there... I know, on time. And as often as we possibly can, and then if we can't be there, he said, make sure you have A, B and C in place or you've done these three things or four things, do as much as we can before we take off.

Ms. Mills agreed with Ms. Williams that certain protocols must be followed in her school if they are absent. Ms. Mills stated, “We are aware if we're going to be absent, the expectations are to have a sub plan in place and to communicate with administration. We are aware of what we're supposed to do in case of an absence.”

Ms. Mills continued by providing background to her perspective of teacher absenteeism by revealing that teaching is her second career. She described the professionalism, as it relates to attendance and the impact it has on others, she learned from working at a furniture store that she feels a lot of new teachers may not realize. She said:

I'll kind of give you a little background. I worked at a furniture store for 17 years.

Teaching is a second career for me. And so, a lot of the professionalism that maybe I learned from that setting kind of came with me into teaching. So, a lot of brand-new teachers may not realize that... how it does affect other people to be absent.
Ms. Ervin, employed at Deanwood Elementary, admitted that she didn’t know if teacher attendance expectations were verbally communicated to teachers at Deanwood; however, she knows that teachers are expected to be at school. She said:

I don't know if it's actually a spoken thing. We feel like we're expected to be there whenever possible. We know and we feel like our administration knows that there are days that we are going to have to be absent. But there is an expectation. I don't know if it's written out in a policy, it may be, but there is an expectation of your regular attendance. But even sometimes in school-supported events, like fall festivals and things like that. I mean, attendance is expected in a lot of those, but it's definitely expected at school during regular teaching hours. Even if it's not directly communicated, everybody knows that they don't need to use their days carelessly. Most people I know don't. They don't take advantage of that and they're out when they need to be.

**Research Question 1 Findings:** What are the perceptions of elementary teachers, in schools with high rates of absenteeism, on teacher absenteeism?

Four major themes emerged during the teacher interviews relating to the first research question. The themes that emerged pertaining to teacher absenteeism include: perceived as inevitable and unavoidable, perceived as last resort, negatively effects student learning and teaching, and teacher absences are the result of burnout.

**Perceived as Inevitable and Unavoidable.** When asked to share their perspective on teacher absenteeism, six teachers revealed that they believe teacher absences are inevitable and unavoidable. These teachers indicated that during the school year, there are times when teachers have to be absent from school because of sickness, and times when they choose to be absent
because they have the days to be absent. Three of these teachers shared their thoughts on why teachers are absent and why they believe teacher absences are inevitable and unavoidable.

Ms. Sanders said:

I think some of them feel like, "Well, it's just one day, it's just my classroom there's no way that it should bother anybody else." And then there are some that really are like, "I have to do this for my own sake and for my own peace of mind and they are my own personal days." So, I think that it's a mix. You have the few that think that it's just contained in their classroom, that it doesn't affect anybody else. And then you have the ones that know that them taking these days affect the whole school, but they need to take those days.

Ms. Mills stated that some teachers may need to be absent from school for various reasons, including mental health, but for her, it’s more stressful to be absent. She said:

Well, for me personally, it's more stressful to be absent because then I worry, do things go like they were planned? Will there be any issues I come back to? So, I think for me personally, it's more stressful to be out of the classroom, but I do think that sometimes teachers get to the point where it's like, I just can't come to work tomorrow. It's been a stressful week. I've seen it affect other teachers that way, that for mental health purposes, they just need a breather day.

Ms. Mills continued by pointing out that doctor’s offices are only open during the weekday and during school hours, so being absent from school for mental health purposes or doctor visits is unavoidable.

We're living in a time in our culture where doctors' offices are only open Monday through Friday during the day. So, if you do need to schedule an appointment, you have to leave
work. And my husband says that schools are like a germ factory, that we do get sick more than some other professions. Teachers typically have small children. I mean, you think of teachers and most of them have kids and at some point those kids were small and small kids get sick and have to go get shots. And there's a lot of reasons you would have to be out for that reason.

Even though Ms. Ervin thinks most of the people she works with try to be at school, she explained, however, that when something special is going on in teachers’ lives, they don’t hesitate to take off. She said:

I think that most of the people that I work with are professional and they do try to be there some days when they really wish that they could be elsewhere. I think that most of the time they do try to be there and care about what's happening when they're not there. I do however know that, and this is as I've gotten older, that teachers, when there's something special going on in their lives, like I was mentioning earlier with my son or something like that, a lot of times we say to each other, "I'm going to take a day. That's what my days are for." And it is because you do have a life. We expect our parents of our children that come in to be good parents. We need to be good parents to our children and good spouses and everything else too. So, we need to occasionally, not too often, but take the time to deal with things in your life or enjoy things that are happening in your life.

She continued to justify why teachers choose to be absent from school and how taking a day can actually help them be a better teacher. She explains:

I think most of our teachers, when it comes down to some special time like that, they are pretty willing to take off but not to the point where it's going to be a detriment to their classroom. But we do feel like it's important. It's important for us. It's important for our
families and things like that. Here and there we don't hesitate too much to be absent. We do try to, or I know I try to prepare it in advance so things will go as smoothly as possible whenever I'm gone. But yeah, we do know that we have those days. As long as we don't abuse them, they're there for us. It can actually help you be a better teacher, honestly. If you have things, if you are just worried all the time about what you are missing with your family, or you're getting super stressed at school and you just feel like you have to be there every hour. Sometimes you just need personal times.

**Perceived as Last Resort.** Four teachers felt that most teachers were absent from school as a last resort. Ms. Mitchell and Ms. Bishop expressed that if they are absent, it is because either their children are sick or they are sick. These teachers claim they make every effort to be at school, and if they are absent, they have no other choice. Ms. Mitchell stated, “I feel teachers, most, if that's their true love, they're going to be there regardless. Take it from me for instance. I, unless it's dealing with something with my kids, or if I'm just downright sick that I can't come in, I'm going to be there. So, you got to have that attitude that, "Hey, I want to be there. That's what I love to do. That's what I want to do."

Ms. Bishop echoed Ms. Mitchell’s sentiments about being absent as a last resort. She said:

Speaking personally, if I'm absent, it's because I have no options. With two little boys, either I'm sick or more likely, one of them is sick, and I've got to stay home and take care of them. And I feel like the people that I work with, that's on my immediate team, that's pretty well the staple too. Either they're sick, or a family member is sick, and they have got to stay home. Outside of my team, I know other teachers are sometimes more willing to take personal days and things like that. For me, it's more stress if I'm not there, I want to be there.
Ms. Benton and Ms. Williams revealed that not only is being absent the last resort, but its easier for them to not miss school. Ms. Williams said, “I try not to be absent personally. It's just... it's too much of a headache and I know the kids. I'm a special ed teacher, so anything that gets them out of their routine is very difficult for them. And so, I try not to miss.”

Ms. Benton echoed these views about being absent. Even though she shared that there are teachers who do not think twice about missing school, she thinks there are teachers like her who believe they should be at school every day doing their best. Ms. Benton acknowledged that its easier for her to be at school than to miss, because she worries if things are alright and she does not want to prepare assignments for students when she’s absent. She said:

I think some people are like me and think they should be there every day, pretty much doing their best. And I think for some people, it's just, it's more about them than the kids. And if they want to take a day off, they don't think twice about it. They take a day off. To me, it's easier for me to be at school than to miss, because I don't want to have to get all that work together and...you know? That takes you an hour or so to get that together, if you've got to figure out what they're going to do with them. And then, I'll be at home thinking, gosh, I hope everything's okay. But, again, I think some people, that's just their work ethic. They're going to be there, and some people, they're more worried about themselves than other people.

**Negative Effect on Teaching and Student Learning.** Seven teachers expressed that teacher absenteeism negatively effects teaching and student learning. Ms. Wilson and Ms. Barnes, both employed by Brightside Elementary, expressed their belief students learn best if the teacher’s present. Ms. Barnes said,
I think students learn best if the teacher’s here. Yes, I can leave out lesson plans, and I can have a sub, but the children are going to learn best if I'm here. It's not that we're not replaceable. Somebody could come in here and take over my job in a heartbeat, but in the end, what they learn is on my shoulders. No one else's. If I'm not here, then they're not going to learn. If my test scores come back and stink, that's my fault. That's on me. In order for me to be able to teach them, I need to be here. If a teacher is absent, then it requires them to pull an assistant or something else. Your special ed services might be hindered, because that assistant wasn't here. ”

Ms. Wilson shared her concerns about assistants being asked to teach standards when covering classes of absent teachers, and about student learning loss when teachers are not at school. She said:

If the teacher's not there, I'm sorry, nobody can do the job like the teacher, nobody. So that really concerns me. I love my teacher assistants. They're not teachers. And they don't know all the... This is just what the standard has, but then it might mean this, they haven't studied standards. They don't know that. They might just teach what the other teachers have tried to help them teach, show them what to do, but you know everything as a teacher that affects the kids learning. So, we already have, COVID learning loss, but we're getting learning loss from teachers not being present. And I think that really hurts our students. No one's been able to solve it. No one's been able to solve it because what is the real accountability to a teacher being absent? You can't say don't be there if they say they're sick.

Ms. Benton agreed that learning is affected when teacher absent, and pulling assistants to cover is not the answer. Ms. Benton stated:
If the teacher's not there, what needs to be going on, can't be going on. I don't think... I just don't know of any assistant that can walk in the morning, they don't really know where they're going in the morning, and then, there's just no way. I mean, I've been teaching 25 years, and every afternoon, I have to look over what I'm going to teach the next day. You know, I have to know. A lot of times, the girls I work with, we all talk about, especially when we had that new curriculum, we had to meet every afternoon and go over it. But that's just... Again, that's the kind of person, I want to be prepared every day. That's just the kind of person I am. It affects because if you're not there to teach their curriculum... And we're about to take the TCAP. So, I guess we're about to see, we're about to see how it affected them.

**Result of Burnout and Stress.** When asked about reasons for teacher absences, nine teachers expressed that stress and burnout are the root causes of teacher absences. Ms. Wilson spoke candidly about the many demands placed on teachers and the lack of support and trust given by principals. She said:

I really think that the reason why teacher absenteeism is so high, the main reason is teacher burnout. There's so many demands, so much stuff to do. I always say, when I start the school year, I'm never finished to the last day. There's never a day that I can say, oh, I finished every day. It's oh, I'll do the rest tomorrow. Oh, I'll take this home. It's the number one reason, is just the burnout, the load. Having to check off every time you teach a standard. But I do a whole grade lesson plan and every week my standards are there, but then now I have to go back and check when I taught this one, when I taught this and how many times I taught it and like, do you not trust me to teach the standard. Just that checking off. It's like, well, here's my plan book. And when you walk in my room,
I'm teaching the standards. And so why do I have to create this other evidence where my plan books should be the evidence that I'm teaching the standards.

Ms. Carson voiced similar concerns as Ms. Wilson about lack of support from principals; however, she also expressed concerns about student behavior and pay. She said:

In this district, I think that, or I believe that absenteeism may be contributed to teacher burnout, teacher stress, teachers feeling like they aren't supported, the behavior of students or the literal, physical attacks by students onto teachers. I think it's just a combination of some of those things. Oh, and not to mention, pay. Parent ... I mean, not parents, but teachers come to school and it's more than just teaching standards now. It's everything else that students bring from home to school that teachers cannot fix. I think that this comprises a tremendous, a tremendous amount of stress for teachers, and it seems like nothing is being done about it. So, I think it's a combination of several of those, a combination of those elements that I just mentioned.

Three teachers commented on being stressed and tired from the demands and needing a day off. Ms. Benton said, “I think a lot of people take off just for stress and just being tired, and just want to take a day off. I think that happens a lot. Of course, they don't probably say that. They really say they're sick.”

When asked to share why teachers are absent, Ms. Barnes and Ms. Williams blamed burnout. Williams frankly stated, “Absolutely mental burnout. I think for me personally, it feels like you're on a hamster wheel. You're constantly going... you're working, but you're not getting anywhere. Like the expectations still pile up. And now we have phenomenal administration and
they back us 100%. So, this is not a knock towards administration in our building, but just the demands from the state level and the federal level, all the paper work that we have to do.

Ms. Barnes said:

I think burnout, just getting tired. I think teachers get tired. They might take a day off or something like that. I do think that teachers are getting burned out quicker. I do. I've been amazed at the number of spots that are available each year, and you have to hire new teachers, and then some of them just don't stick it out. They quit after year three or year four. I just know that whenever I applied for a job, a long time ago, it was hard to get a teaching position. But I do think that teachers are getting burned out, and I will say more is put on teacher's plates every year, more jobs, more roles, so I know that makes it difficult too. I think all that plays into, "I need a mental health day," instead of coming into work, but I think all those are factors.

**Summary of Research Question 1**

The majority of the teachers interviewed for this study perceive teacher absences as being inevitable and unavoidable. They acknowledged that teachers will miss school for a variety of reason, including sickness of their children or themselves. Several teachers also mentioned student behavior, work load, low morale, and pay as causes of stress and burnout which influence the attendance of teachers. Even though they acknowledged that teachers will be absent during the year, a few teachers also stated that teacher absences create burdens and hardships for the teachers and staff who are present because they have to pick up the slack.

Even though the majority of the teachers perceived teacher absences as inevitable and unavoidable, several teachers felt that many teachers were absent from school as a last resort.
For these teachers, absences only occurred if they did not have any other option. They preferred to be at school, because being absent created more stress for them.

The teachers also mentioned the negative effect that teacher absences have on teaching and learning. Many of the teachers stated that students do not receive adequate instruction when the teacher is not present. They shared that assistants are asked to cover classes of absent teachers, leaving students with special needs without the additional support required for them to be successful.

**Research Question 2 Findings:** What are elementary teachers’ perception of leadership practices or behaviors that affect teacher attendance behaviors?

When discussing leadership practices and behaviors that might influence a teacher’s decision to be present, teachers shared very frank responses. Teachers expressed their thoughts about principals modeling attendance expectations, principals showing support for teachers, and principals fostering a sense of community among staff. Four themes emerged from the interviews pertaining to research question 2. The themes included: leadership attendance behaviors, leaders appreciation of staff, leaders fostering sense of community among staff, and leaders holding staff accountable for attendance.

**Leadership Attendance Behaviors.** Six teachers mentioned that the attendance behaviors of the principal affect the attendance behaviors of the teachers. These teachers voiced the importance of principals modeling good attendance behaviors and communicating attendance expectations to teachers. When asked to share her perspective on the leadership behaviors or practices that positively impacts teacher absence behaviors, Ms. Wilson frankly said:
Principal expectations. I've been at Brightside for a long time, and I've noticed with different leaderships, there's different absenteeism. Just being honest about it. If it's not modeled, teachers are like children. They're going to do what they see is being done, and if they can get away with it, just like children, they're going take full advantage of it. But, when I've seen this is what I expect, these are my expectations. You'd be here at this time, you'd be on your post, punctual, present. I feel attendance was way better. Then I see when the principal is not there, the principal leaves early, then I see teachers go, well, if they can do it, I can do it too. And that becomes the attitude. So, you have to practice what you preach.

Ms. Williams and Ms. Bishop agreed with Ms. Wilson that it starts with the principal. Ms. Bishop mentioned that leadership being present and communicating attendance expectations to the teachers are the two major factors influencing teacher attendance. She said, “I think the big two things that come to my mind is being present themselves, and communicate that. Being present, being there, being in the hallways, being seen. And then you feel more noticed if you're not there.” Ms. Williams shared that her administrators come to school on days when they do not feel like it, which makes her want to attend school so she doesn’t disappoint them. She said:

It starts at the top. So, I feel like if our administration... and ours is, we have phenomenal administration, but if the administration is present, if we know... even if we don't know it's none of our business, but I know that our administration comes to school and pushes on days when they don't feel like it. I know that he's come to school feeling like he's on his death bed and sometimes we wouldn't find out until later, but they are there, they are present every day and they're not just in their offices. They are present in the hallways. They're present in our classrooms and they always have our backs. So, I don't want to
disappoint them. I don't want to be the one that stays home because I have a headache because I know they'll do anything for me, so I want to do anything for them.

Ms. Mills and Ms. Barnes added that leaders should lead by example and set the tone for attendance expectations in the building. Ms. Mills said, “I am a huge fan of leading by example. And when you have administrators that are there early, they stay late. Every time you see them, they are engaged with students in some way. I think that kind of sets the tone. So, them leading by example and kind of setting that this is the expectations in this building. I think that's a good way for them to kind of set that for us.”

Ms. Barnes pointed out that teachers models for students and administrators should model for teachers. She said:

I think if your administrator is absent, then I think that says, "It's okay for me to be absent." I think they need to be here. Overall, I just think presence. They should model to us just like we model to the students, and I think that's, I don't know. I just think that basically just practice what you preach. They model for us. We model for the students, and it's a chain. I think that the best things would be for them to model exactly what we need to be doing. I think, like I said, I've had excellent administrators. I definitely think that's something that they've all modeled for us.

**Leaders Appreciation of Staff.** Six teachers expressed that leadership should show that they appreciate and value teachers to improve teacher attendance. These teachers shared that making teachers feel valued and appreciated can influence teacher absence behavior. Ms. Bishop stated, “I really do believe overall, at least most of the ones I know, we do want to be there. And we don't want to miss, and it really would be nice to be recognized, to be rewarded. Not
necessarily for perfection, but for being close to it, or if someone else had to be out, "Hey, thank you for stepping up, and helping with that," and things like that. I think that would be well received."

Ms. Barnes recounted how her former principal showed appreciation and influenced her to be present when she wanted to take a day. She said:

He had the little notes in our box, "Thank you for..." I think all of that helps with absenteeism. We did those monthly things for teachers being here, and there would be times where I would think, "I could really use just even a half-day, mental health day. I'd be like, "Oh, I have not been absent this whole month. I'm not going to do it." So, I think just anything like that is an encouragement and it promotes attendance, because it even affected me. I would be like, "I really need to...", and I'm like, "No. I've got perfect attendance this month. I'm not going to". I still have the little notes and the little words of encouragement that he wrote and put in my box. Anything like that, I think, helps build morale and help with teachers being present.

Ms. Carson agreed with Ms. Barnes, and she added strategies she thought principals should use to reward or appreciate teachers. She said:

I think maybe even just checking in on teachers every once in a while, I think sharing a nice word. Making teachers feeling valued, that's a strategy. Make them just feel valued. Even if you're the superintendent or one of the powers that be, if you come to the school, "How are you doing today? What's going on. I am so glad that you're here." Just being positive towards teachers. That is a strategy. I don't think teachers always want to operate on negativity all the time because that's what they're experiencing in the classroom.
I think uplifting, uplifting teachers, that's a strategy. Uplifting, praising them, and I know people, "Thanks for all you do," people say that, I'll understand that, but it's more than thanks for all you do. Show me with more than just words. Show me with actions. Show me that you care. Show me with some visibility.

Ms. Mitchell mentioned the jeans pass for teachers as an incentive, and she added that during meetings, they voice their opinion on being appreciated and feeling valued by their leaders. She said:

For the most part, I know a lot of them like to have the jean day, but we talk a lot and he'll say, "Okay, well, what do you think needs to happen because of this or within our leadership team?" When we have our monthly meetings, we talk and we voice our opinions for those. And we'll say, okay, can we just sometimes know that we are appreciated. And so, for them just to hear it sometimes we love you. We appreciate you. We value you. It makes a whole lot of difference too, because sometimes you could not have a good day. And just to hear that sometimes be like, "Hey, that made me want to be here a little bit more just to know that you're voicing it and saying, Hey, you do care."

**Leaders Holding Staff Accountable.** Four teachers shared that holding teachers accountable for absences can affect teacher absenteeism. Ms. Bishop and Ms. Wilson, both employed at Brightside Elementary, stated that principals should communicate teacher attendance expectations and hold teachers accountable for following those expectations. Ms. Wilson said, “What you expect of your teachers is what you get from them, and there has to be consequences if expectations aren't met. Because, we are in a sense like kids at time. It's true. You're going to do what you can get away with.”
Ms. Bishop agreed with Ms. Wilson and added that expectations should be communicated to teachers, so teachers can take absences more seriously. She said:

But then also communicating those expectations. And we all know what's going to happen if someone's out, but just communicating to everybody what your expectations are. If you are sick, what you should do. Try your best to be here because here's what happens if you don't. And there may even be more things in that ripple effect. And if that is just communicated to us, and just ... Can't think of the right word, explained, I guess, for everyone to know. So, they could take it more seriously. I guess that's what I'm getting to so that teachers realize, "They're taking this seriously. I should too. If I can be there, I should be there."

Two other teachers, Ms. Benton and Ms. Mitchell, echoed these sentiments and expressed the importance of holding teachers accountable for absenteeism. Ms. Mitchell mentioned her principal empowering staff to hold each other accountable. She said:

But we do have those talks periodically, if it is a issue or you might see that, "Hey, I've noticed quite a few people being out. Let's try to fix this and make it better," because you being out, you are affecting your kids and your scores and your classroom in a sense when you're out. So, we have those real conversations and it makes a difference. And sometime he'll even put it on the leadership team and say, "Hey, I need you to step up. If you see it, address it and then go from there," because sometimes you will accept something better from a peer then you would coming from admin and say, "Hey, oh, they're fussing at me. Things like that." So, if you call out another person or if you have that relationship with your colleague and say, "Hey, so-and-so I noticed this, what can we do differently to fix it, to make it better?" And we are kind of getting to where I think
we're at a good place on that part now making more people open up and step up to where, hey, everybody can hold each other accountable for their actions.

**Leaders Fostering a Sense of Family or Community.** Seven teachers shared that the leader’s ability to build relationships and foster a sense of family or community positively influence a teacher’s decision to be present. Ms. Mitchell, employed at Bellview, advises leaders to build relationships. She said, “Build the relationship with the teachers, because if you don't have a good relationship and I'm not saying you got to be best friends or anything like that, but just to have that good open relationship with whomever throughout your building would make a difference in them wanting to be there or not. If you take the time to flourish what you have, if you want to blossom into the right thing, you got to put in the work with those that you have to build those relationships and make it to where your staff would want to be there.”

Ms. Williams echoed these sentiments. She shared that trust is also important in building relationships with staff. She said:

I think having that relationship and that trust is very big because I have seen a lot of administrators come through our building in the past 11 years. And the last principal we had and the one we have right now, who is our assistant principal last year have just laid the groundwork. I mean, they have done so much for us by building that culture and that climate, and I think he also holds us to high expectations.

Ms. Williams continued by sharing that it is all about relationships. She states that she does not want to disappoint her principal or let her coworkers down. She stated, “He has an open-door policy, and anytime I’ve had a problem or anytime we have a problem with a parent, he's there to back us and support us. She continued by saying, “And so, I don't want to disappoint
him. I think having that relationship with your admin and your coworkers is important. I don't want to let my coworkers down because I know when I'm out, it's a heavier load on them. So, I would say it's all about... for me, relationships.”

Ms. Sanders expressed the need for leaders to create a culture and climate that is focused on family. She said:

We've all been incredibly forgiving and understanding, and I think that just has a lot to do with admins focus on wanting to create a family there. I think that, and again, it goes back to admin they are a huge determining factor in these instances. If they don't create a culture and climate of you wanting to be there, you're not going to want to be there.

She further explains that if principals do not build a culture that is focused on family, then staff will be negatively impacted. She said:

If they don't create that family feeling, then you're going to be mad that your coworkers are missing or that you have to pick up the slack. But, if your admin has created that comforting feeling and that culture and climate that you want to be in that family, that you want to be a part of, I think that it's easier to be like, "I get it. I get it. You need a day. I got you." So, I think that's been my admins team ability to create that feeling within the building has helped a lot with teachers being upset that other teachers are absent.

Leadership Behaviors with Negative Impact

Three other teachers voiced that building or fostering a sense of family and support can help improve teacher attendance. After sharing their perspectives on leadership behaviors that positively impact a teachers decision to be at school, teachers were asked to share what they believed were leadership behaviors and practices that negatively impacted a teachers’ decision to
be present. The themes that were identified included: poor leadership attendance, poor role model, and lack of appreciation.

**Poor Leadership Attendance:** Ms. Mills said:

Well, if administration took off, if they took off repeatedly, they would set the groundwork for that. Now again, this year has been kind of the exception because my principal normally is never out, but with COVID this year, she's had to be out. But even when she wasn't in the building, we could tell she was working from home and it was really bothering her not to be in the building. So, I do think that responsibility to set the example for the teachers in the building is important.

Ms. Wilson echoed the sentiments of Ms. Mills who shared that principals set the tone for attendance. When asked what leadership practices or behaviors influenced a teacher decision to be absent, Ms. Wilson said:

When you have principals that are out a lot or not visible. When principals aren't visible in the building. When you don't see them, when it feels no one really cares whether you're there or not. And colleagues. I'm sorry. Just that peer that, unfortunately, influences of others. Just take a day off. It's bad.

**Poor Role Model.** When asked to share their perspective on leadership behaviors and practices that negatively influence teacher attendance, four teachers voiced that when leaders are poor role models teachers are negatively impacted. Ms. Ervin, Carson and Mitchell described behaviors of leaders that negatively influences teacher absence behavior. Ms. Mitchell said:

Just not being a good role model in a sense, or you're always nitpicking little stuff. Or you just, I'm not going to say a bad person, but you just negative all the time. And if
you're negative all the time, hey, ain't nobody going to want to come talk to you. They're not going to want to come and be a part of that environment. And they'll say, "Well, I'm going to remove myself from the situation I'm going to go elsewhere." So, it's about being positive and having that good example before you to make somebody want to come and be a part of that environment.

Ms. Ervin and Ms. Carson agreed and stated that the attitude and demeanor of the principal influences teachers’ decisions to be present. Ms. Carson talked about unprofessional behaviors that leaders could display that impacts attendance. When ask to share her perspective on leadership behaviors that negatively influences a teacher’s decision to be present, she said:

I think when leadership behaviors include, or they exude the attitude, "This is all about me. I'm not going to allow you to do this because it's going to be a bad reflection on me," or, "I'm not going to ..." or, "You are not going to make me look bad because I'm trying to impress somebody else," let's say, at the central office. You know what I mean? Or if you are being negative about teachers to other people on staff. If you are being unprofessional and you're talking to a click of people that you're surrounded by, when you're talking negatively about your teachers in your click at school, I don't think that's a good leadership quality because it does not promote ...

Ms. Carson also mentioned specific leadership practices she felt had a negative impact. She continued by saying:

It's just not good practice, and when you, over the intercom when you're making announcements and you ... you may not mention names, but you say something that's directed at one person, whether it's over the intercom or in an email, you say something
that's directed at one person and everybody knows who it is, and you embarrass a person.

No, when you on a person's list, if you're on somebody's list that you consider your bad list or whatever, or just being negative towards staff members, period, I think.

Ms. Ervin further explained behaviors of leaders she felt were not good leadership behaviors. She suggests that teachers who have leaders who let their emotions override judgment are likely to not want to be at work. She said:

Of course, somebody who is unpredictable or who you don't feel like you can depend on to react the same way every time. Somebody who places too much value on their emotions or let their emotions override their judgment sometimes. Those kind of people are not, you're not as likely to want to be at work with those people, so you're more likely to not come in if you have a choice. If you're trying to make that decision, that kind of person is not as easy to come into work for. I would say that. Those kind of people you don't tend to want to support and be at work for as much. Obviously if there was a morale problem that principal was a big part of it. If I had a choice and I was teetering on whether to come to school one day or something, I might not want to come in.

Ms. Ervin continued by describing the type of leader she feels makes her want to attend school. She expressed that she prefers a principal who displays professionalism and treats her fairly. She said:

I think I have worked for female principals, male principals, all sorts. But the thing that I think I respond to the most as far as wanting to be at school is someone who is professional, even keeled, somebody who is predictable that's not going to be this way one day and this way the next day. Somebody who's even keeled, professional yet
realizes you are a person and that's a hard balance. It's a real hard balance for a principal. I've seen some who do it better than others. But if you feel like they are treating you professionally fairly without too much emotion, without getting angry or anything like that. Not that I provoke my principals or anything like that. I'm just saying, you have seen principals that overreact to things and get very upset. Then you've seen those who just stay even, stay professional and neutral.

**Lack of Appreciation or Support.** Several teachers expressed that when there is a lack of appreciation and support, teachers are more likely to be absent from school. Ms. Ervin stated, “I think that in a school where the morale is not good or where you are extremely stressed or you feel underappreciated, you are more likely to take a day off. She continued by saying, “You're more likely to take off if you are very unhappy or feeling very overwhelmed or underappreciated.”

Ms. Wilson commented on the lack of support and teachers having to prove that they are teaching. She also mentioned teachers feeling let down by their administrators. She said:

The promises of making the load lighter and things get taken off and you're like, woo. And then you have a meeting and then something gets added. And so then we feel sort of betrayed, well, you took something away, but you added something. So, the support's not there. If you keep adding something and some of the things that are added to us just seem like busy work or not trusting us to do our job. Teachers just feel they're let down by their administration and they're like, I'm going to take some time for myself.
Research Question 3 Findings: How do elementary teachers’ perceive the training they receive from their teacher preparation program to handle the stressors or realities of teaching, which may lead to teacher absenteeism?

Because stress is considered a major factor in teacher absenteeism, participants were asked to share their perspective on if they believe that the teacher preparation program they attended prepared them to handle the stressors or realities of teaching. Three themes relating to teacher preparedness emerged during the teacher interviews. The themes that emerged for research question 3 include: year-long student teaching, actual classroom experience, and teacher mentors.

Prepared by Year Long Student Teaching. When asked if the teacher preparation program they attended prepared them to handle the stressors or realities of teaching, seven teachers expressed that they were prepared by their programs. Four teachers stated that the year-long student teaching requirement prepared them even more to handle the realities of the classroom. When asked if she believed she was prepared, Ms. Sanders, who attended a traditional preparation program said:

I do, and I can say that because I have worked closely with several teachers that have gone an alternative route, and I can see the difference in where I was my first year going through the traditional through University of Lampton and through their teacher program, versus the teachers that, I mean, even if they went a traditional route.

I think that the University of Lampton, well, when I went there, they were one of only two of the universities here that did the full year of student teaching and all the others only did a half a year of student teaching. And I look back and I'm like, there would've
been no way I would've understood the full effect of what was required of a teacher if they had not given me that full year of student teaching. I have one teacher now that I'm helping that is going on an alternate route and I feel so bad for her because I'm like, I don't even know. I would've been terrified to step into a class, had I not had that preparation and that experience beforehand and know what to expect.

Ms. Barnes shared that she doesn’t feel she was prepared by her teacher preparation program to handle the realities of the classroom; however, she is a proponent of the year-long student teaching requirement of two universities. She describes the benefits of the year-long student teaching requirement. She said:

I love the year-long program. I love that part. I've had Winston, and I've had Lampton interns. They come before school starts. They see what it's like to set up a classroom. That whole first week of school is like no other chaos you've ever experienced. They're here. They're seeing it firsthand, and I think that right there prepares them for what they're actually going to see. They actually get to experience everything from day one to the end of the year. Now, it's a lot. It's a lot for those young 20, 21-year-olds, but mine, this year, that first week of school, she'd just sit down like, "Oh my gosh. This is what it's like."

Yes, it is. But I think that is probably one of the most beneficial tools that they have changed to where that they're now doing the year long, because I think that lets them see exactly what it's like to start the school year, how it progresses, how it ends. I only saw a little snippet of a school year where I did my student teaching, so I really think that's beneficial.
**Prepared by Actual Classroom Experience.** Most of the teachers expressed they felt prepared by their teacher preparation programs to teach; however, four teachers disclosed that actual classroom experience prepared them to handle the realities of teaching. Ms. Carson declared that practicum experience is different from your own classroom. She said, “Teaching is always on-the-job training. No matter when you go to school, if you go to a ... if you went to college for 20 years, I don't think it's the same thing. It's just, literally, when you get to your own classroom, it's different from going to your practicum classes and all of that because you set your own environment, you set your tone, the ambiance of the classroom. You are the teacher who's taken this entire responsibility on, and when it comes to the behaviors, that's a whole ... I mean, that's a beast within itself, so to speak.”

Ms. Ervin echoed these sentiments and acknowledged that some things are only learned through actual classroom experience. She said:

Once you actually get in the classroom, of course your eyes are opened in so many ways. There's some things that only experience can prepare you for and that's where student teaching does come in. Then when you get your own classroom, you still have some eye openers.

Ms. Bishop admitted that she subbed for two years to get classroom experience after she got her degree because she was scared and did not want to go into the classroom. When asked if the teacher preparation program prepared her, she said:

They did as far as just the basics, but not the reality of it. I don't feel like where I went to school gave you enough practicums where you were in the classroom. I only had one semester of student teaching, and that was in two different classrooms, six weeks and six
weeks. That was the only student teaching that I had. That was not enough. Some of the
other universities I know have an entire year in the same classroom, and that's so much
more real, and gives you an idea.

Ms. Bishop repeated that she was not prepared to handle the realities of teaching. She
recalled how she felt about initially going into the classroom. She said:

I was definitely not prepared. But also, for me, I've always struggled with self-
confidence, and I was just scared, and actually subbed for two years after I got my
degree. I didn't go right into a classroom. Part of that is we were moving around from my
husband's job, and we weren't sure where we were going to be. And I was a December
graduate, and then we ended up moving again. And so, anyway, it was partly that, but
also partly, "Oh, I didn't get that job at that interview. Okay, I'm glad." I just, I wasn't
ready. And subbing, oh my gosh, that helped me. That prepared me so much more. It
made it a more realistic ... Helped me open my eyes to what I was getting into.

**Prepared by Mentor Teacher.** Four teachers stated having a mentor teacher helped
them handle the realities of teaching. Ms. Barnes, employed at Brightside admits that she was
lost her first year of teaching and her mentor teacher helped her. She said, “I'm going to tell you,
my first year I was as lost as a goose. If it had not been for my mentor teacher that was beside
me, and she would come in and say, "Okay. Ms. Barnes, this is what you're going to teach this
week. This is what I want you to study. This is what you're going to teach. Here's all your
copies". If it had not been for that lady, yes, they prepare you, but it's not until you step foot in
that classroom. I still learn stuff, and I learn stuff every day.
Ms. Wilson, also employed at Brightside, agreed with Ms. Barnes. When asked if her teacher preparation program prepared her for the realities of teaching, said:

No, but my cooperating teacher did. To be honest, I just had some really old school mentors and I had a supervisor, that was a retired principal. And they took me to the side and it was, look, this is how to do this. Because I just did the four months.

Ms. Wilson continued by sharing her thoughts on the year-long student teaching requirement for some schools. She recalled the experiences with some of the interns placed at her school. She said:

I didn't have to do the year long, but I'm really glad that these teachers now, have to do the year long. Because since I've seen it's going on, I've had two student teachers. One, she burnt out. She didn't finish the program. And this one this year, I might have had her for a month and she just couldn't do it.

One of my colleagues had one till Christmas. And yeah, so this is needed. Because if you can't do this you need to find out early. Switch that to social worker or switch it to something else you can do. Mine was good because I was just blessed to have some very old school teachers that said, look, I'm going to prepare you and make sure you are ready. Because if I wasn't, my first year, I would've quit.

Two teachers, Ms. Benton and Ms. Mills, both employed at Deanwood Elementary, shared they were prepared by it all; actual classroom experience, a good mentor, and the teacher preparation program they attended. Ms. Benton said:

I mean, I think with anywhere, some of it, you're just going to have to get in that classroom, and hopefully, you have a really good mentor teacher like I did. Because some
of it, you just... It's hard to prepare for until you're there. I do think it's better now that student teachers, a lot of them have went to full year student teaching. And, I think that because it, because, you know, the beginning of school is different than the end of school.

Ms. Mills states she was prepared, but there is no substitute for being in the classroom and having a mentor. She said:

I do think it prepared me as much as you can be prepared. There's nothing like sink or swim moments, but I do feel like they did a thorough job and laying out what it was going to look like when we got into the classroom. Student teaching. There's no substitute for that. Being in the classroom, hands on with a mentor teacher that can kind of guide you.

**Summary Research Question 3**

Although none of the participants attended an alternative teacher preparation program, they were asked to share their thoughts on whether the program they attended prepared them to handle the stressors or realities of teaching. Five teachers felt they were prepared by their teacher preparation program to teach; however, they expressed that actual classroom experience prepared them to handle the realities of teaching. These teaches shared that classroom experience helped them to understand what teaching was really about.

Two teachers stated they were more prepared by their teacher mentors to handle the realities of teaching, than their teacher preparation programs. These teachers shared that their mentors helped them to navigate the daily demands of teaching. Three teachers stated they were prepared, but they suggest a year-long student teaching experience to give new teachers the real experience of the classroom, from the start of the school year to the end of the school year.
**Research Question 4 Findings:** What are elementary teachers’ perceived supports needed to improve teacher attendance behaviors?

When asked about the supports or interventions they perceived should be implemented to reduce teacher absenteeism, teachers’ responses produced 4 major themes. The themes that emerged centered on staff appreciation and systems of support. The themes include: staff appreciation, leadership support and staff support of each other.

**Staff Appreciation.** Six teachers expressed that the principal’s appreciation of staff could possibly reduce teacher absenteeism. These teachers shared principals can show appreciation for their staff by using rewards, recognition, and incentives. Ms. Sanders, employed at Bellview Elementary, candidly stated, “I mean, everybody likes to be recognized for what they do and their hard work even if it's something like just showing up. A lot of the times, a lot of the teachers that are doing these outlandishly, amazing things in their classrooms get recognized. But then you have those ones that are like, "Well, I'm showing up and I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing," but nothing is being said. We're just kids. We're just big kids. We want to know that we're doing good, that we're doing right. And that you appreciate that."

Ms. Mitchell asserts that principals can give small tokens to show their support and recognition. But first she advises the school leader to find out what the teachers like. She said:

Find out, and that goes back to communication, what your teachers like ahead of time. Just the small tokens here and there to show that you care, it goes a long way for some of them. Having the relationships in place will help out too. I'd say the little gift card maybe, or you get an hour out of class for that time being to just go relax. So, it doesn't have to be nothing big, just like I say, a little gift card, a hour out of class, or go home early, or
some type of flowers, an edible arrangement, just say, hey, something sweet, a little small token. And they do go a long way.

Ms. Mills compared how she incentivize the students in her class to how leaders should incentivize teachers to show appreciation. She said:

In my classroom, I'm all about, I will incentivize the behavior that I'm looking for or reward that positive behavior. And I think as a district, I think we are probably in the position to do the same thing. And I know there are exceptions to the rule. Like there are people that get COVID and they have to miss two weeks. But I think for those that don't, I think incentives are a good reinforcement of, "Hey, you showed up and we appreciate it." And, "Hey, here's some extra money," or here's some kind of an activity, maybe like a luncheon or something, just to recognize that, I think that would, we do a lot for incentives.

Three teachers, Ms. Mills, Ms. Bishop and Ms. Carson mentioned pay as an incentive for teacher attendance; however, Ms. Barnes disagreed by saying that the incentive does not have to be money for her. She said:

It doesn't have to be monetary amounts. It could be just something as simple as, "Hey, I'm going to watch your kids today. You take an hour lunch and go somewhere off campus." Just something like that, and the kids would love to have the principal as their teacher for that hour.

**Leadership Support.** Five teachers mentioned the importance of having the support of leadership as a factor in a teacher’s decision to be present at school. Ms. Carson and Ms. Mitchell spoke about the importance of teachers knowing that leaders are concerned about them
and are there to help them. Ms. Mitchell also mentioned the importance of leaders supporting teachers and having an open door where teachers are never afraid to go talk. She said:

> Well, I think, for me, in terms of leadership, I think support. That sentiment from leadership saying, "I have your back." Quote-unquote, I have your back. I think, for a teacher to know that the principal is truly and sincerely concerned about me as a teacher makes a whole lot of difference, or even for me to know that you, as a leader, are taking care of me. I can come to school and say ... I can come to you and say, "So and so is doing this. Now, I tried this and tried that." "Well, okay, well, let's try this and I'll jump in and I'll help and I'm with you," and that type thing. Yeah. The support would have to be showing that you truly are for teachers. I think putting into place the practice of if you're verbalizing supporting your teachers, then that's what you do. You support them.

> Teachers are precious resources too, just like children are.

Ms. Sanders and Ms. Barnes mentioned the leader’s relationship with teachers. Ms. Sanders said that her administrative team does a really good job of letting people know that they care about them. She stated that her leaders want to present, and they want teachers to be present as well. Ms. Barnes also expressed the need for leaders to build relationships with teachers. She mentioned how her former principal built relationships and was visible. This influenced how she felt about herself and her principal. She said:

> When you get to know them, and you build those relationships, I think that speaks volume. I want to do my best in here, because I want my principal to shine. I think building those relationships, I think I have had some very good administrators here at Brightside, but I think that their presence is important. My former principal would come down the hallway, stick his head in every morning, "Good morning." Did he want to do
that every day? Probably not. There are probably some days he wanted to go in that office and just sit down, but he always was seen. I think that speaks volume, but I think that just building those relationships to where, not only do I want to succeed, but I want to make sure that my principal succeeds also.

Ms. Sanders and Ms. Williams stated that leaders can also show support by reducing classroom sizes for teachers. Ms. Sanders said:

Creating smaller classrooms would definitely be one that would limit some stressors. I think that limiting class sizes or the amount of kids you put into a class would relieve a lot of stress on the teachers and ultimately drop down teacher absenteeism for stress related personal days.

**Staff Support of Each Other.** When asked about perceived supports needed, three teachers mentioned staff support of each other as a factor in teacher attendance. Ms. Sanders stated that her principals have created a culture of family where staff support and help each other. She stated that if principals don’t create that family feeling, then teachers will be mad when coworkers are missing or that they have to pick up the slack. Ms. Wilson shared how her peers support and encourage each other. She said:

I just know that my grade level really supports each other. That's what we do for each other. We are sounding boards. I would say we have some of the fewest absents in my team and that's because when it's that bad, we are there for each other. So, I don't know what other grade levels do, but I do know if you create a tight-knit system, it helps because I just know some of us could have went down. And I have two new teachers on my team. And just the support we've had been for them has really kept there. They're like,
I need time off. We got you. Stay, we'll walk you through this. Your students need you. I know you need your mental health, but it's not that bad yet. We'll let you know when it's that bad. This is normal.

Ms. Ervin also mentioned staff, specifically mentors, supporting other teachers as a support needed to improve teacher attendance. She said:

Training those mentors in just giving teachers support on days when it's just going to be difficult. I don't know I'm just thinking, maybe the new teacher could reach out to the mentor the day before and say, "Hey, look, I don't know if I'm going to come in tomorrow. I don't feel very well, I'm stressed," and the mentor could help them out, talk them through it, and be there for them the next day. I guess, I mean, you could do the same with even teachers like me. But just somebody, I guess, that you're accountable to that is your person who checks with you during the day when they know you're having a bad day or something like that. Just support, support of some kind. Because that always makes you feel more able to do things if you feel you're supported in some way.

**Culture and Climate of Support.** Several teachers shared the importance of having a school culture and climate that is conducive to the support of teachers. Three teachers asserted that the leader is responsible for creating a climate and culture in the building that makes teachers want to be present. Ms. Sanders said:

As much as a lot of people don't want to say that leadership plays such a huge role, like they want to be like, "Well..." But they create the climate and culture of the building. If they are chronically absent or they're not visible or they don't have the positivity to...
How am I trying to say this? It ripples through the building. I don't know how else to say it, that's going to drag others down.

I think people feed off of energy and feed off of the people that are around them. And if you have a leadership team or an admin team that is negative and doesn't create a climate and culture worthy of wanting to be there, then it's going to be easier for teachers to be like, "I'm not going in today."

Ms. Mitchell agreed with Ms. Carson, and added that when teachers know leadership cares about them and supports them, it makes them want to be at school. She said:

We know they care about us and we hear it often and we just know that they have our back. So, it's a good thing where you can go and talk to whoever's an admin to say, "Look, I got this issue going on. Can we get it taken care of, call a meeting, whatever we need to do." So those things are big for me, the support system in place.

**Summary Research Question 4**

Supports and interventions are important in creating an environment in which teachers feel empowered to thrive. Teachers’ responses produced 4 themes when asked about the supports or interventions they perceived should be implemented to reduce teacher absenteeism. The identified themes included: staff appreciation, leadership support, and staff support of each other. Six teachers expressed that the principal’s appreciation of staff could possibly reduce teacher absenteeism. These teachers shared that principals can show appreciation for their staff by using rewards, recognition, and incentives. Five teachers mentioned the importance of having the support of school leadership as a factor in a teacher’s decision to be present at school. Three teachers mentioned staff support of each other as a factor in teacher attendance. Teachers shared
the importance of having a school culture and climate that is conducive to the support of teachers, and that the leader is responsible for creating a climate and culture that makes teachers want to be present.
CHAPTER V

Summary, Implications, and Recommendations

This chapter presents the summary, conclusions, implications, and recommendations based on the results of the research project. The chapter begins with an overview of the methodology and is followed by a discussion section that explains the findings by addressing how they connect to the previous literature on teacher absenteeism and its related factors of leadership behaviors and teacher preparation. The discussion section also emphasizes how components of the Social Cognitive Theory can be seen within the findings. Finally, this chapter develops recommendations for school and district leaders, along with suggestions for future research on this topic.

Overview of the Research Methodology

This qualitative study was conducted to assess the supports needed by teachers in a West Tennessee School District to improve teacher attendance. The participants were selected because they were a convenient sample of teachers in the study district. All participants were purposefully selected after the researcher verified that the teachers were employed in school which had high rates of absenteeism, according to 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 teacher absenteeism data. Participants in the study were certified teachers with varying years of experience. The researcher used a case study design to conduct the one-on-one semi-structured interviews with each participant. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the perceptions of elementary teachers, in schools with high rates of teacher absenteeism, on teacher absenteeism?

2. What are elementary teachers’ perception of leadership practices or behaviors that affect teacher attendance behaviors?
3. How do elementary teachers perceive the training they received from their teacher preparation program to handle the stressors or realities of teaching, which may lead to teacher absenteeism?
4. What are elementary teachers' perceptions of supports or interventions needed to improve teacher attendance?

Findings

This section interprets and analyzes the results of this research study. Throughout the study, the researcher found emerging themes that address the purpose of the study using components of the Social Cognitive Theory. The qualitative data exposed insightful descriptions into the teachers’ thoughts concerning teacher attendance and the related factors of leadership behavior and teacher preparation. Due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, data was identified that allowed the researcher to build context on the participants. Data was also identified that explained whether participants perceived teacher absenteeism as a problem in their school, and whether teacher attendance expectations were shared with them by the school principal. A discussion of this data precedes the data which addresses the research questions.

Context of Teacher Absenteeism

During the interview process, teachers revealed that teacher absenteeism is a problem in their school. Six teachers admitted that teacher absenteeism is an issue, which affects many people and causes a ripple effect in their school. Research claims that higher rates of teacher absenteeism are correlated with inhibited student academic performance (Lee et al., 2015) and decreased rates of student attendance (Black, Seder, & Kekahio, 2014). Even though the teachers shared their concerns about the negative impact teacher absenteeism has on students and
learning, they also expressed that teachers may have to miss school sometimes due to circumstances they cannot control.

When questioned as to why they believed teacher absenteeism is an issue, three teachers blamed teacher quality. One teacher specifically mentioned the caliber of teachers being hired due to the teacher shortage as a reason for teacher absenteeism. The research findings also revealed that participants were aware of teacher attendance expectations for their school and their school leaders communicated these expectations to teachers.

Summary of Findings

Research Question 1 Summary: What are the perceptions of elementary teachers, in schools with high rates of teacher absenteeism, on teacher absenteeism?

Four themes emerged based on the perceptions of elementary teachers on teacher absenteeism. Teachers viewed absenteeism as being inevitable and unavoidable, a last resort, a negative effect on student learning and teaching, and the result of burnout. Six teachers indicated that teacher absences are inevitable and unavoidable, and four teachers felt that most teachers are absent as a last resort. Frontline Education (2016), in agreement with these teachers, claim whether for professional development, illness or personal reasons, teachers need to be out of the classroom from time to time; however, each absence can chip away at student learning.

Seven teachers shared that teacher absenteeism negatively affected teaching and learning in their school. Teachers shared that teacher absenteeism not only causes student learning to suffer, but it also creates a burden on other staff. Teachers revealed the ripple effect when assistant teachers are pulled from their normal duties to cover classes of absent teachers and other duties such as cafeteria monitoring and support for students with special needs are left
uncovered. Green (2014) found that teacher absenteeism place burdens on schools, undermining the ability of education agencies to provide quality and consistent instruction to students.

Nine teachers expressed that stress and burnout are the root causes of teacher absences. Childs and Stoeber (2012) agreed with these teachers and asserted that in the educator sector, stress alongside depression and anxiety is the leading cause of employee absenteeism and school teachers have been shown to experience particularly high levels of stress on the job. They claimed that stress is a significant occupational hazard that can impair employees’ physical health, psychological wellbeing, and performance. Childs and Stoeber (2012) also claim that burnout has been associated with higher levels of physical ill-health, negative perceptions of job characteristics, lower levels of work morale, turnover and absenteeism.

Several teachers expressed that the demands of teaching are often overwhelming. They shared that lack of support and trust given by principals, student behavior, work load and pay are causes of stress that may lead to absences. Childs and Stoeber (2012) stated that teachers are among those professionals with the highest levels of burnout on the job, and many teachers retire early due to burnout.

**Research Question 2 Summary:** What are elementary teachers’ perception of leadership practices or behaviors that affect teacher attendance behaviors?

Four themes were identified from the interviews pertaining to research question 2. The themes included: leaders modeling good attendance behaviors, leaders showing appreciation of staff, leaders holding staff accountable for attendance, and leaders fostering a sense of community among staff.
Six teachers shared that the attendance behaviors of the principal impact the attendance behavior of the teachers. Teachers shared that if principals are chronically absent, then teachers may have the mindset that teacher attendance is not a priority and they may be more prone to miss school. They mentioned that principals should not only model the attendance behaviors they expect from teachers, but they should communicate those expectations as well.

Six teachers expressed that leadership’s appreciation for teachers can affect teacher attendance. Studies have also found that in certain cases teacher absences decline when districts implement incentive provisions such as bonuses or buy-back programs. One study of a New York district found that absenteeism declined by an average of two sick days per teacher in the first year of a program that provided monetary incentives for good attendance. Some suggest that immediate end-of-year rewards work better than post-retirement benefits and that rewards should be reasonably attainable by all teachers rather than one large award for a few teachers. In addition, non-monetary awards such as recognition may provide incentives as well as monetary rewards.

Seven teachers shared that leaders should build relationships with teachers in order to foster a sense of community to improve teacher attendance behavior. According to Frontline Education (2016), attendance trends can be a telling sign of morale and engagement. A stressful or high-pressure culture, unclean school buildings, overcrowded classrooms or a lack of respect can all lead to excessive absenteeism. Also, if teachers in one school are often absent, their colleagues are more likely to take time off too. The same holds true for school leadership, who set the example for how absences are viewed. When a principal is often out, teachers may follow suit. So, it’s important for principals to lead by example and only take off when truly necessary (Frontline Education, 2016).
Four teachers shared that holding teachers accountable for absences can influence absence behaviors. The teachers seem to suggest that a lack of principal attention to teacher absences may create a culture that does not value good attendance and may contribute to more teacher absences. Research shows that school leaders can influence teacher absences by taking proactive actions to manage leave. While teachers admit that some leave is unavoidable, studies have shown that principals can reduce teacher absence rates through a variety of different methods. For example, requiring teachers to report their absence directly to their principal may help reduce teacher absences. Teachers in one study indicated that they would be less likely to call their principal if they were not actually sick.

Teachers at Bellview Elementary expressed that their administrator shares leadership with staff; therefore, they have the responsibility of holding each other accountable for being present at school. Research agrees with these teachers. Many of the perspectives on principal leadership assume that the principal is responsible for leading a school, but new conceptions of principal leadership recognize the importance of teachers and other staff in leading a school (Clifford et al., 2012). According to The Wallace Foundation (2006), the role of the school principal is moving away from “superheroes or virtuoso soloists” and toward an “orchestra conductor” who shares leadership and distributes it across the building (The Wallace Foundation, 2006). This reconceptualization of the principalship parallels broader conceptualizations of leadership as contingent upon the task and organizational situation at hand (Spillane et al., 2004).

**Research Question 3 Summary:** How do elementary teachers’ perceive the training they receive from their teacher preparation program to handle the stressors or realities of teaching, which may lead to teacher absenteeism?
According to research, stress is a major factor in teacher absenteeism. Participants were asked to share their perspective on if they believe that the teacher preparation program they attended prepared them to handle the stressors or realities of teaching. Seven teachers expressed that they were prepared to handle the stressors or realities of teaching; however, they expressed that other factors influenced the extent to which they were prepared. Three themes for research question 3 were identified. The themes include: year-long student teaching, actual classroom experience, and teacher mentors. Eight teachers stated the year-long student teaching or the actual classroom experience prepared them to better handle the stressors of teaching.

Mumthas (2018) confirmed the sentiments of these eight teachers by stating that teacher education programs must ensure that student teachers not only have subject competency, but also possess the skills necessary to create a safe learning environment that promotes academic achievement. He claims that teacher candidates should be trained in a coherent classroom management approach focusing on maximizing the potential for learning and strategies to handle disruptive behavior. The eight teachers shared that being in an actual classroom helped them gain more insight into the realities of teaching.

Two teachers stated having a mentor prepared them to handle the realities of teaching. Both teachers shared that they felt lost when they entered the profession and would have quit if it had not been for their mentor teachers. Vesely, Saklofske, and Leschied (2013) stated that teachers feel confident and are more likely to remain in their chosen profession when they have the support of fellow teachers and work with them closely, collaboratively, and as valued team members.
**Research Question 4 Summary:** What are elementary teachers' perceptions of supports or interventions needed to improve teacher attendance?

When analyzing the perspectives of the teachers in this section, it was apparent that the four themes centered on systems of support. The themes include: culture and climate of support, leadership support, staff support of each other and staff appreciation.

When asked about supports or interventions needed to improve teacher attendance, several teachers stated that principals should show their support for staff. Teachers shared that school leaders are responsible for creating a culture of support in schools where teachers will want to come to work. Rentsch and Steel (2003) agreed with these teachers and suggests that group and organizational level factors, such as organizational culture, may influence absenteeism rates. The development of culture is an important issue because school culture has been seen by many researchers as the missing link to school improvement (Rentsch & Steel, 2003).

Three teachers mentioned staff support of each other as a factor in teacher attendance. These teachers expressed the need for teacher mentors to support teachers as they navigate the realities of teaching. They also shared that the support of their fellow teachers made them more accountable. Research agrees with these teachers about the importance of collaboration and teachers supporting each other. (Schleifer et al., 2017) schools that are more collaborative have been shown to have stronger student academic outcomes than schools that are less collaborative. Collaboration appears to be one of several factors that can help make teachers feel more committed to their school and to teaching as a profession, according to a review of several studies of teacher collegiality (Schleifer et al., 2017).

Five teachers mentioned the importance of having the support of leadership as a factor in a teacher’s decision to be present at school. Teachers often look to their principals for
encouragement, respect, and resources for professional growth (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2011). According to Handford and Leithwood (2013), teachers’ perceptions of principal trustworthiness, openness, and competence play an important part in how they view their work and environment. Principals play a significant part in supporting teacher’s decisions to remain in the classroom (Boyd, et al., 2011; Hughes, Matt, & O’Reilly, 2014).

Six teachers expressed that the principal’s appreciation of staff could possibly reduce teacher absenteeism. Miller (2012) claim that the professional culture of a school— the norms, formal and informal, that guide teachers’ behavior— has a facet related to absence. One study found collusive behavior among teachers in one school as an explanation for its consistently high absence rates relative to rates found in neighboring schools. Researchers in Australia found that an increase in the average absence rate of a teacher’s colleagues increased the teacher’s own absence tally (Miller, 2012).

Implications for Theory

This study presents a perspective of teacher absenteeism based on the social cognitive theory. The Social Cognitive Theory is a psychological perspective on functioning that emphasizes the critical role played by the social environment on motivation, learning, and self-regulation (Schunk & Usher, 2019). Social learning theory is increasingly cited as an essential component of sustainable natural resource management and the promotion of desirable behavioral change (Muro & Jeffrey, 2008). This theory is based on the idea that we learn from our interactions with others in a social context. Separately, by observing the behaviors of others, people develop similar behaviors. After observing the behaviors of others, people assimilate and imitate that behavior, especially if their observational experiences are positive ones or include rewards related to the to the observed behavior (Nabavi, 2012).
Bandura theorized that human performance results from reciprocal interactions between three factors or triadic reciprocal determinism: personal factors, behavioral factors, and environmental factors (Cook & Artino, 2016). In this dynamic conceptualization, motivational processes are personal influences that are ever changing, affect behaviors and environments, and are affected by them (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2019). Each set of influences on human functioning affects the others and is in turn affected by them. According to Schunk and DiBenedetto (2019), what people think can affect their actions and environments, actions can alter their thoughts and environments, and environments can influence individuals’ thoughts and actions.

Stajkovic and Sergent (2019) assert that in conceptualizations presented in social cognitive theory, humans are not passive objects shaped and shepherded by contingent consequences of an environment. People are agentic; they proactively make their way through the intricacies and dualities of life (Stajkovic & Sergent, 2019). According to Stajkovic & Sergent (2019), to attain desired outcomes, people make judgements about the interplay among environment, personal factors, and consequences of their behavior. Bandura (2001) claim people are sentient, purposive beings, and when faced with prescribed task demands, they act mindfully to make desired things happen rather than simply undergoing happenings in which situational forces activate their sub-personal structures that generate solutions.

Bandura (2001) further claims that in experimental situations, participants try to figure out what is wanted of them. They construct hypotheses and reflectively test their adequacy by evaluating the results of their actions, and they set personal goals and otherwise motivate themselves to perform in ways that please or impress others or bring self-satisfaction (Bandura, 2001). Bandura (2001) asserts that when people run into trouble they engage in self-enabling or
self-debilitating self-talk. According to Bandura (2001), if people construe their failures as presenting surmountable challenges they redouble their efforts, but they drive themselves to despondency if they read their failures as indicants of personal deficiencies. If people believe they are being exploited, coerced, disrespected, or manipulated, they respond apathetically, oppositional, or hostilely (Bandura, 2001). Frayne and Latham (1987) assert that teachers apply the Social Cognitive Theory when they weigh in their minds the choice to be absent or to report to work. Seibert (2013) claim teachers pondered their longevity at a school and continuation as a teacher as well as their perception of their school leader and the curriculum. Social Cognitive Theory conceptualizes these cognitive appraisals in terms of triadic, reciprocal, and asymmetric influences among the environment, person, and behavior (Stajkovic & Sergent, 2019).

Triadic causation is the functional dependence among the environment, person, and behavior (Stajkovic & Sergent, 2019). The bidirectional influence connects a recursive influence among the three factors or between any pair them, and the asymmetric causation denotes the strength of influence between and among the factors (Stajkovic & Sergent, 2019). Triadic reciprocal determinism is often utilized as a conceptual and analytical model in studies using social cognitive theory as a theoretical framework, representing bidirectional relationships among an individual’s behavior, personal factors, and the environment (Schiavo, Prinari, Saito, Shoji, & Benight, 2018). Triadic reciprocal determinism describes how a person regulates relative to changing environmental circumstances in order to gain desired outcomes (Schiavo et al., 2018).

**Implications for Principal Leadership Behaviors**

Research on principal leadership behaviors confirms that effective principals can encourage a positive school culture by providing supportive resources that buffer the stressor effect of job demands (Boyd et al., 2011; Manna, 2015; Price, 2012). Perceived quality of
working conditions can play a more significant role in teachers’ job satisfaction and decisions to leave than school demographics, student achievement, or salary (Kraft et al., 2016). Teachers who hold a positive view of leadership quality often feel better resourced, experience higher levels of job satisfaction, and are more suited to meet the requirements of job demands (Lambersky, 2016; Burkhauser, 2017). Similarly, positive perceptions of leadership may also contribute to reduced attrition (Urick, 2016). Recent research literature confirms the finding that principals can impact teacher perceptions of the work environment through supportive leadership behaviors (Ferner et al., 2015; Shaw & Newton, 2014). In the school setting, teachers who feel more ownership and empowerment feel less impacted by job demands and hold greater job satisfaction (Lee & Nie, 2014).

The researchers also noted that as teachers build trust in the principal, they also perceived their colleagues to be more collegial, committed, and proficient (Forrest & Thompson, 2021). Building trust involves present, accessibility, support and retention. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) reported that teachers had high levels of trust in principals they perceive as approachable, collaborative, and present in the instructional program. Bolden-Barrett (2018) stated that based on a MetLife survey, which focused on the role of companies, 93% of respondents claimed that trustworthy leadership was found to be the most critical factor in creating the alignment between the employee and the organization. Statistics show that leaders play crucial roles in aligning employees with the values of the company. Which if not executed well, could result in crippling effects on the organization (Bolden-Barrett, 2018).

Studies have also found that a principal’s leadership style is associated with teachers’ decisions to leave the school or profession. Brown and Wynn (2009) claim that principals who do not “view themselves as traditional, omnipotent, ‘top-down’ administrators have been
associated with low teacher attrition rates. Instead, these principals generally describe their leadership responsibilities as facilitators, collaborators, team leaders, or leaders of leaders (Brown & Wynn, 2009). To foster collaboration and create a broader sense of ownership, Brown and Wynn (2009) assert that these principals often employ leadership teams, interview teams, or site-based management teams to make school-based decisions, with the new teacher’s opinion just as important as the person who has been there 25 years.

The use of effective leadership practices in school is crucial in order to provide students with an environment that is conducive to learning. There is no one best leadership style in education. Each of the different leadership methods may be employed in different situations based on what is needed at the time.

**Recommendations for School Leadership**

Even though teachers viewed teacher absenteeism as being inevitable and unavoidable, a last resort, a negative effect on student learning and teaching, and the result of burnout, recommendations for school leaders were identified from the data collected. Some of the recommendations or strategies offer proven results; however, some of the recommendations offered by the teachers are hindered by factors out of the school leader’s control. Recommendations such as creating smaller class sizes, and offering pay incentives are hindered by budget cuts and financial shortages. Recommendations of reducing the workload and principals allowing teachers an hour for lunch may also not be feasible. Principals are responsible for ensuring high quality instruction is occurring for all students. Quality instruction is essential for improving student achievement, and teachers must be present in order for this to take place. Effective principals are also effective managers. They protect and prioritize
instructional time and their vision of teaching and learning at the forefront of the school’s purpose.

The other recommendations suggested by teachers centered around positive school culture that fosters systems of support teachers perceived should be in place to reduce or improve teacher absenteeism. Research confirms that when principals understand the specific job demands that cause stress and burnout, they can provide buffering resources to help shape positive teacher perceptions of the work environment (Burkhauser, 2017). To foster a culture and climate of support, school leaders should: create opportunities for on-going teacher collaboration, create teacher-mentoring programs, build positive relationships with staff, communicate attendance expectations to teachers, model good attendance behaviors, and show appreciation for staff. These supports can be divided into two categories, social supports and personal supports.

**Develop Social supports**

Lin, Chieh-Peng (2020) assert that social support is a source-specific social variable, representing the support provided to an employee from a particular social entity or circle. Examples of social supports in the workplace include colleagues, coworkers, mentors, leaders, and career counselors. Lin, Chieh-Peng (2020) states that social support can enable employees to better deal with demanding career situations, and as a consequence they feel more likely to remain in the organization. In other words, employees with supportive coworkers are more attached to their career and are less likely to quit their job (Van der Heijden et al., 2009; Zhou, Long, & Wang, 2009). Through the social support provided by their coworkers (such as instrumental help, information and solutions to problems, and psychological comfort),
employees are encouraged to commit to their career and be bound to the organization, thereby negatively affecting the turnover decision (Van derHeijden et al., 2009).

**Create Opportunities for On-going Teacher Collaboration.** Teachers expressed the need for teachers to support each other as a strategy to reduce absences. Teachers stated that being able to share experiences with their colleagues helped them handle the realities of teachers. Collaborative peer relationships were found to reduce stress by enhancing a sense of belonging and advocacy (Forrest & Thompson, 2021). Teachers who routinely participated in professional conversations with others exhibited a greater feeling of shared responsibility and peer accountability (Forrest & Thompson, 2021). Van Droogenbroeck et al. (2014) claim positive peer relationships can improve job satisfaction and reduce stress by reducing the emotional drain of job demands.

To foster a collaborative environment, Schleifer et al. (2017) assert principals can set aside time and allocate resources that better enable teachers to work collaboratively. Principals can also develop systems by which teachers can collaborate and interact in meaningful ways. Whether through formal team meetings or more informal campus culture, principal should understand the importance of developing an internal network of support where peers were able to mitigate stress by sharing emotional or physical workload burdens (Forrest & Thompson, 2021). Research states that schools with lower teacher turnover tend to be more collaborative. Strong social connections among teachers may benefit students. Teachers have been found to value collaboration for a variety of reasons, including moral support. (Schleifer et al., 2017)

**Create Teacher Mentor Program.** Teachers also shared that having teacher mentors helped them to handle the stressors of the classroom. According to Bowman (2014), mentoring within schools promotes teacher retention and consistency among educators. Mentoring
programs not only increase job satisfaction and help teachers to emerge as leaders within their schools, but also have a positive effect on student achievement and engagement (Bowman, 2014). Teachers work collaboratively with each other as valued team members, which not only benefits teachers, but students as well.

When schools implement mentoring programs effectively, the sharing of knowledge between teachers becomes an inherent quality whereby students, teachers, and the school climate benefits (Bowman, 2014). Forrest and Thompson (2021) claim that principals can layer in multiple mentors, whether instruction coach, team lead, or grade-level peer, depending on individual needs. In addition to directly supporting the teacher, mentors can provide valuable feedback to the principal about common supports teachers need (Forrest & Thompson, 2021). Empowering faculty to take a mentorship role create a pathway for further professional growth for more veteran staff (Forrest & Thompson, 2021). Brown and Wynn (2007) find that principals who retain teachers at higher rates offer proactive supports to new teachers and are committed to the success of both novice and veteran teachers. Similarly, Jacobsen et al. (2007) document the importance of principals in creating and maintaining safe and nurturing environments for everyone in the school.

**Develop Personal Supports**

Management and administration can also play a significant role in contributing to teacher absenteeism, both in terms of the types of relationships between teachers and administration (Lee, Goodman, Dandapani & Kekahio, 2015) and school or district-initiated activities that remove teachers from the classroom (e.g., professional conferences, meetings, workshops, etc.) (Hanover Research, 2012). The teachers interviewed for this study provided valuable insight into teacher absenteeism and possible strategies to reduce teacher absences.
Build Relationships with Teachers. Teachers expressed the need for principals to build relationships with staff as a means to reduce teacher absences. An important aspect of school leadership is relationship development. Relationships are the cornerstone of many aspects of educational leadership. According to Northouse (2015), every situation involving school leaders requires some degree of relational behavior. Lasater (2016) claim that there are three important aspects of relationships: rapport, trust, and communication. Though these qualities are presented individually, they should be considered concurrently, as rapport, trust, and communication are inextricably connected and interdependent (Lasater, 2016).

Relational supports are noted in the literature as contributing to increased organizational ownership (Hughes, et al., 2014). When teachers felt trust in their supervision, they became more open to sharing their needs and concerns (Forrest & Thompson, 2021). These relationships allow teachers and administrators to learn from each other, gain interdependence, and hold each other mutually accountable for shared decisions (Beltman, et al., 2011). By building these relationships, principals can create a circle of care where developing relationships became a shared responsibility.

Researchers note that principal’s ability to both develop and demonstrate a sense of caring for the teaches in the building can be a factor in positive relationship development. According to Louis et al. (2016), caring principal leadership is associated with increased student support and teachers’ sense of collective responsibility. Research by Slaalvik and Slaalvik (2011) suggest that when administrators pay attention to teachers’ sense of belonging, they can mediate leaving decisions.

Clearly Communicate Attendance Expectations. Several teachers asserted that school leaders should communicate attendance expectations to teachers. Teachers shared that if
expectations for teacher attendance are clearly communicated, teachers may decide to attend school more often. Lasater (2016) stated communication, in its many forms (e.g., verbal, nonverbal, face-to-face, written text, etc.), is involved in every aspect of school leader relationships. When leaders communicate, they must remember that people appreciate clarity and will respect honesty (Brown, 2018).

**Model Good Attendance Behavior.** The pivotal role of the school leaders as a factor in effective schools has been corroborated by findings of school effectiveness research (Leithwood et al., 2007). The research results show that schools classified as successful possess a competent and sound school leadership. School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions (Leithwood et al., 2007). While school leaders ‘made modest direct contributions to staff capacities, they had quite strong and positive influences on staff members’ motivations, commitment and beliefs about the supportiveness of their working conditions (Leithwood et al., 2007). Further, school leaders can develop rapport by increasing their visibility and accessibility. Visibility refers to school leaders’ presence both within the school and the community (Lasater, 2016).

Lasater (2016) claims that visibility is an extremely important characteristic of a strong leader and it positively influences job satisfaction and the culture of a school. A principal’s consistent routine of high visibility provides a feeling among the school stakeholders of reliability from their leader. According to research, principals found time spent being visible and present helped create a bridge to more open and honest conversation (Forrest & Thompson, 2021). Prominent daily presence reminds stakeholders of the leader’s expectations, along with developing respect for the leader.
**Show Appreciation for Staff.** Appreciation of staff was also recommended by teachers to improve teacher absenteeism. Several teachers stated that principals should show that they appreciate their staff to make them want to come to work. Gallup research shows that consistent recognition for doing good work has a direct influence on the key performance measures that we use to evaluate our schools (Hodges, 2017). Teachers who receive regular recognition and praise are: more productive, more engaged at work, stay with their school, and are more likely to receive higher scores from students and parents (Hodges, 2017). Employee recognition has been identified to be a highly effective motivational instrument, that can have significant positive impact on employee job satisfaction and performance as well as overall organizational performance (Rahim & Duad, 2013).

**Summary**

As front-line leaders in schools, principals play an important role in developing the culture of a school. Student success in learning and staff success in teaching can be hindered or aided by the culture that is developed by school leaders. According to Barth (2002), the tone of school leadership helps to determine whether the culture is toxic, indifferent, or focused on growth. The level of collaboration a school leader fosters among staff in a school is a major determinant of whether the culture of that school is positive or negative. Schools that have high levels of collaboration among staff tend to promote higher behavioral and academic standards (Bettini, Crockett, Brownell, & Merrill, 2016). Many principals have implemented professional learning communities (PLCs) to create a collaborative culture that improves teaching and learning (DuFour & Mattos, 2013).

Teachers shared that school leaders should encourage positive and professional relationships among school staff and ensure that teachers feel supported by school leadership.
They also expressed that school leaders should create a culture where teachers feel supported by both each other and their school leaders. Such support systems can potentially promote a stronger presence of teachers in schools and reduce teacher absenteeism. Research states that teachers are more likely to remain in the classroom when they feel supported by administrators, and they are more likely to improve their efficacy when they work with others who are experts in the same subject area. In fact, research suggests that principal support can matter more than even teacher workload when it comes to decisions to stay at or leave a school. This support can take many forms, including providing emotional and instructional support (Learning Policy Institute, 2017).

Every school has a culture within which its stakeholders operate. The tone of school leadership helps to determine whether the culture is toxic, indifferent, or focused on growth (Barth, 2002). Keeping classrooms staffed with high quality teachers has been shown as one of the most significant school-level predictors for positive student outcomes (Podolsky et al., 2016). Forrest & Thompson (2021) assert that principals support retention through systematic means including resource allocation, safe environments, clear organizational goals, and allotting adequate time for professional learning and collegial relationships.
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Appendix A

Informed Consent for Research Participation

Title

PRO-FY2020-412: Voices from the Classroom: Perspectives of Elementary Teachers on Teacher Absenteeism and Related Factors

Researcher

Amanda Brabham, University of Memphis

Researcher Contact Information

(731) 394-4148, abrham16@aol.com

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The box below highlights key information for you to consider when deciding if you want to participate. More detailed information is provided below the box. Please ask the researcher any questions about the study before you make your decision. If you volunteer, you will be one of 10 people to do so.

Key Information for You to Consider

Voluntary Consent: You are being asked to volunteer for a research study. You are eligible to be in this study because you are currently employed as a teacher in the study district. You are being recruited to participate because you are employed in a school with high rates of teacher absenteeism based on teacher absenteeism data. It is up to you whether you choose to participate or not. There will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate or discontinue participation.

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to understand and define the problem of teacher absenteeism through the experiences and perspectives of elementary teachers in schools with high percentages of teacher absenteeism. The study will explore the elementary teachers’ perceptions of specific leadership behaviors that promote teacher commitment and engagement and their preparedness in handling the realities of teaching. This study has the potential to drive conversation around teacher attendance at the elementary level, and provide school leaders and teachers with strategies to become more effective professionals.

Duration: It is expected that your participation will last 45 minutes.

Procedures and Activities: You will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview, to share your perception and experiences on the impact of teacher absenteeism. Prior to participating in the study, you should read the informed consent statement and decide if you want to participate. The informed consent must be signed in order for you to engage in the study. This document can be signed via Abode DocuSign and returned to the researcher, or signed and scanned back to the researcher. Once you have agreed to participate, an interview will be scheduled. The interview will be conducted one on one, at a time that is suitable for you. The interviews will last approximately 45 minutes. The interview will be audio and video recorded via Zoom to ensure accuracy of data collected.
The teachers’ interview questions will focus on teacher attendance and related factors such as, teacher attendance policies, leadership styles and behaviors, teacher preparation, and suggestions for reducing teacher absenteeism. The questions will be designed to determine how teacher absences are perceived by teachers in relation to the effect these absences have on the overall effectiveness of their schools. All data obtained for this study will be de-identified. To maintain anonymity, pseudonyms will be used. All transcripts will be anonymized and stored electronically as interview transcripts, in which only the researcher will have access. To reduce and clarify the data generated from the interviews, the interview transcripts will be coded. Individual transcripts will not be shared with participants however the researcher may reach out to you again, if needed, to ensure that your thoughts and experiences have been accurately and adequately captured.

The researcher’s intent is to (a) explore the perceptions of elementary teachers in schools with high percentages of absenteeism, on teacher absenteeism and factors related to teacher absenteeism, (b) examine elementary teachers’ perceptions of their preparation to handle the realities of teaching, (c) examine the perceptions and beliefs of teachers, in high absenteeism schools, on leadership behaviors that promote teacher commitment and engagement behaviors, (d) identify potentially effective approaches or interventions for reducing teacher absence behavior.

Teachers, who are employed at the same school as the researcher will be excluded from this study. These teachers are excluded to eliminate the risk of being overly influenced by the researcher. Teachers in schools with low rates of teacher absenteeism will also be excluded from the study. These teachers may not be affected by teacher absenteeism.

**Risk:** Some of the foreseeable risk or discomforts of your participation may include anxiety about sharing perspectives, time management in finding the time for the interview session, and identification.

**Benefits:** There are no direct benefits to the subject. The goal of the study is to create potential teacher supports, interventions, and professional development opportunities aimed at reducing teacher absenteeism in the study district. The findings of this study could also have implications for educational leadership programs as they prepare leaders to lead schools and teacher preparation programs as they prepare teachers to apply the knowledge and theory learning into the real classroom.

**Alternatives:** Participation is voluntary, and the only alternative is to not participate.

Who is conducting this research?
Amanda Brabham of the University of Memphis, Department of Educational Leadership is in charge of the study. She is being guided by Dr. Stephen Nelson, Faculty Advisor. There are no other research team members.

Why is this research being done?
This research is being done to explore the perceptions of elementary teachers in schools with high percentages of absenteeism, on teacher absenteeism and the related factors of teacher preparation and leadership behaviors that promote teacher commitment and engagement behaviors. The goal is to identify potentially effective approaches or interventions for reducing teacher absence behavior in the study district. Additionally, the researcher seeks to add to the evidence for improving teacher attendance behavior by finding solutions to support a much stronger presence in schools by all teachers.

What happens if I agree to participate in this Research?
IRB Informed Consent for Research Participation
IRB Protocol Number: PRO-FY2020-412
If you agree, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview about teacher absenteeism and the impact it has on students and staff. You will be asked to share your perspective on leadership behaviors that affect teacher engagement and commitment and your preparedness to handle the realities of teaching. You will also be asked to share your views on interventions and professional development opportunities that can potentially reduce teacher absences. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes, and will be conducted virtually at a time and location convenient for you. The interview will be audio and video recorded.

During the interview, you may skip any question that makes you uncomfortable and you may stop at any time. The interview will be audio and video recorded to ensure accuracy of transcription.

**What happens to the information collected for this research?**

Information collected for this research will provide the data to complete my dissertation entitled, *Voices from the Classroom: Perspectives of Elementary Teachers on Teacher Absenteeism and the Related Factors of Leadership Behaviors and Teacher Preparation*. Your name will not be used in this dissertation. The dissertation may be published and the results presented. However, your name and other identifying information will remain confidential. This information could be used for future research or distributed to another investigator for future research without obtaining additional consent.

All research data and identifiable information collected during the study will be destroyed after 3 years. This includes, emails, audio/video recordings, subject contact information, and transcriptions.

**How will my privacy and data confidentiality be protected?**

We promise to protect your privacy and security of your personal information as best we can. Although you need to know about some limits to this promise. Measures we will take include: de-identifying all data collected, no names will be included, pseudonyms will be assigned to identifiable information, interviews will be conducted one-on-one virtually or by phone, and in a location that is convenient for you. Data will be collected and stored electronically on the researcher’s personal computer, in which only the researcher knows the password. Data will be analyzed and coded, and only the researcher will have access to the data.

Individuals and organization that monitor this research may be permitted access to inspect the research records. This monitoring may include access to your private information. These individuals and organization include Institutional Review Board and the University of Memphis dissertation committee.

**What if I want to stop participating in this research?**

It is up to you to decide whether you want to volunteer for this study. It is also ok to decide to end your participation at any time. There is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you decided to withdraw your participation. Your decision about participating will not affect your relationship with the researcher or the University of Memphis. If you decide to stop participating, please send the researcher an email stating you no longer want to participate in this study.

**Will it cost me money to take part in this research?**

There are no costs associated with participation in this research study.

**Will I receive any compensation for participating in this research?**

You will not be compensated for taking part in this research.

**Who can answer my question about this research?**

IRB Informed Consent for Research Participation
IRB Protocol Number: PRO-FY2020-412
Before you decide to volunteer for this study, please ask any questions that might come to mind. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the investigator, Amanda Brabham at (731) 394-4148 or email at abrabham@memphis.edu or faculty advisor, Dr. Steven Nelson at snelson3@memphis.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the Institutional Review Board staff at the University of Memphis at 901-678-2705 or email irb@memphis.edu. We will give you a signed copy of this consent to take with you.
STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have had the opportunity to consider the information in this document. I have asked any questions needed for me to decide about my participation. I understand that I can ask additional questions through the study.

By signing below, I volunteer to participate in this research. I understand that I am not waiving any legal rights. I have been given a copy of this consent document. I understand that if my ability to consent for myself changes, my legal representative or I may be asked to consent again prior to my continued participation.

As described above, you will be audio/video recorded while performing the activities described above. The audio/video recording will be used for transcription purposes only. Initial the space below if you consent to the use of audio/video recording as described.

_____ I agree to the use of audio/video recording

__________________________________  ______________________________  ________________
Name of Adult Participant Signature of Adult Participant Date

Researcher Signature (To be completed at the time of Informed Consent)

I have explained the research to the participant and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understand the information described in this consent and freely consent to participate.

__________________________________  ______________________________  ________________
Name of Research Team Member Signature of Research Team Member Date
Appendix B

Good evening! I hope you are having a great school year. I am a graduate student at the University of Memphis, pursuing a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership. I am sending this email to invite you to participate in my research study on teacher absenteeism. The focus of my study is on the lived experiences of teachers in this school district. I would like to interview you, via Zoom, to gain your perspective on teacher absenteeism and related factors. I also want to gain an understanding of the supports needed by teachers to promote a stronger presence in school. Data collected during the interview process will be de-identified, and no names will be associated with any data resulting from this study. The interview will last 45 minutes, and will be held at a time that is convenient for you.

If you would like to participate in my research study, please reply, "Yes, I will participate." to this email. Once you reply "Yes, I will participate." I will send you an email with the consent to participate attached. When you get the consent, please read the form, sign it, and return it to me. If you have any questions, please call me at 731-394-4148. Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Amanda F. Brabham
Appendix C

Institutional Review Board
Division of Research and Innovation
Office of Research Compliance
University of Memphis
315 Admin Bldg
Memphis, TN 38152-3370

March 7, 2022

PI Name: Amanda Brabham
Co-Investigators:
Advisor and/or Co-PI: Steven Nelson
Submission Type: Initial
Title: Voices from the Classroom: Perspectives of Elementary Teachers on Teacher Absenteeism and the Related Factors of Leadership Behaviors and Teacher Preparation
IRB ID: #PRO-FY2020-412

Expedited Approval: March 2, 2022

The University of Memphis Institutional Review Board, FWA00006815, has reviewed your submission in accordance with all applicable statuses and regulations as well as ethical principles.

Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:

1. When the project is finished a completion submission is required
2. Any changes to the approved protocol requires board approval prior to implementation
3. When necessary submit an incident/adverse events for board review
4. Human subjects training is required every 2 years and is to be kept current at citiprogram.org.

For additional questions or concerns please contact us at irb@memphis.edu or 901.6783.2705

Thank you,
James P. Whelan, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair
The University of Memphis.
RETURN TO:
Jackson-Madison County Schools
C/o Leader of Assessment & Accountability
210 N. Parkway
Jackson, TN 38305

Permission to Conduct Research in
Jackson-Madison County Schools Leader of
Assessment & Accountability Approval Form

☑ Approved
☐ Needs More Information
☐ Denied

[Signature: Catherne Kath]
5/31/19

(Leader of Assessment & Accountability/Designee) hereby give permission for the above researcher to conduct research in Jackson-Madison County Schools. Pursuant to the above criteria and all board policies and or administrative procedures that may apply. As stated above, all consent forms must be completed before any person(s) may participate in said study. Please note, this form does not grant blanket permission to conduct research. It must be attached with the Building level principal form and/or the teacher approval form when applicable.