

Improving Teacher Retention with Focused Professional Development on the Texas Teacher
Evaluation and Support System

by

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Abstract

Teacher retention is a significant issue that needs to be addressed. Creating an environment where teachers feel supported and valued is crucial in retaining them. One way to do this is through the T-TESS appraisal system, which requires educating teachers about the process and setting clear expectations. A study was conducted with Rural High School Teachers to determine their knowledge and comfort level with the T-TESS system and the effect of professional development on teacher retention. The study revealed four themes, including the need for teachers to feel comfortable with observers in the classroom and the importance of a teacher's relationship with their appraiser. The study emphasizes the need to support teachers to retain them, so they can provide quality education for students. Teacher appraisal systems, like T-TESS, should encourage growth and development, not create anxiety.

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Chapter I

Introduction to the Study

Schools have faced the challenge of finding and retaining great teachers since the education system originated. Since the country's creation, having people supporting, raising, and educating its children has been necessary. The nation's current teacher shortage has become a significant concern because research tells us that education is a necessary element of humanity and is crucial for the development of a nation (Hafeez, 2021). With that noted, the nation is now facing a teacher shortage unlike any in the country's history (Garcia and Weiss, 2020). Teachers are retiring early, changing districts, or leaving the profession at a rate that has never occurred before.

Because of this teacher crisis, one of the primary duties of an administrator is to create a way to recruit and retain the teaching talent they have in their district. Finding a way to incentivize teachers to stay is a challenge even the Texas Education Agency (TEA) is trying to take on. With the creation of the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA), the TEA shows that it is willing to pay the state's best teachers to stay in the profession. This necessary move shows that it takes all stakeholders to solve the teacher shortage crisis.

One way to encourage the best teachers is to support them in and out of the classroom. Research has shown that keeping the campus' administrative staff is consistently one of the most critical factors in a teacher's decision to return (Ladd, 2011). Having a supportive leader is essential for retention in any profession, but it is more important now than ever in education.

Teachers must believe they will be backed by their administrative team and help them succeed in the challenging teaching profession.

Another way to support a teaching staff is to give them meaningful and collaborative professional development and feedback. One way to provide this development and feedback in Texas is through the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS). The state's appraisal system is built with professional development in mind. Providing professional development on the T-TESS appraisal system and clear expectations on its rubric will allow the teachers to develop trust with the design and potentially provide them with the comfort and security they seek throughout the process.

Organizational Context of the Action Research Insider Study

This study occurred in Rural High School, which is a pseudonym name used to mask the identity of the actual school district. Rural High School is the only high school in the Rural Independent School District (ISD). Rural High School was a public school located in the South Plains of Texas, twenty miles outside an urban hub for the region. The high school was comprised of 298, 9th-12th grade students that were 34.6 percent Hispanic and 63.8 percent White. Additionally, 21.8 percent of the student body is economically disadvantaged, 29.9 percent are considered at risk of not graduating, and 10.1 percent are identified as Special Education.

The staff at the campus was made up of 34 teachers where 19 percent of the team had less than five years of experience, 23.6 percent had 6-10 years of experience, 26.3 percent had 11-20 years of experience, and 27.6 percent had 21-30 years of experience. The staff had a high, more than double the state average, number of teachers with 21+ years of experience, which meant

that a high level of turnover was expected soon, with a group of teachers looking to retire in the next five years.

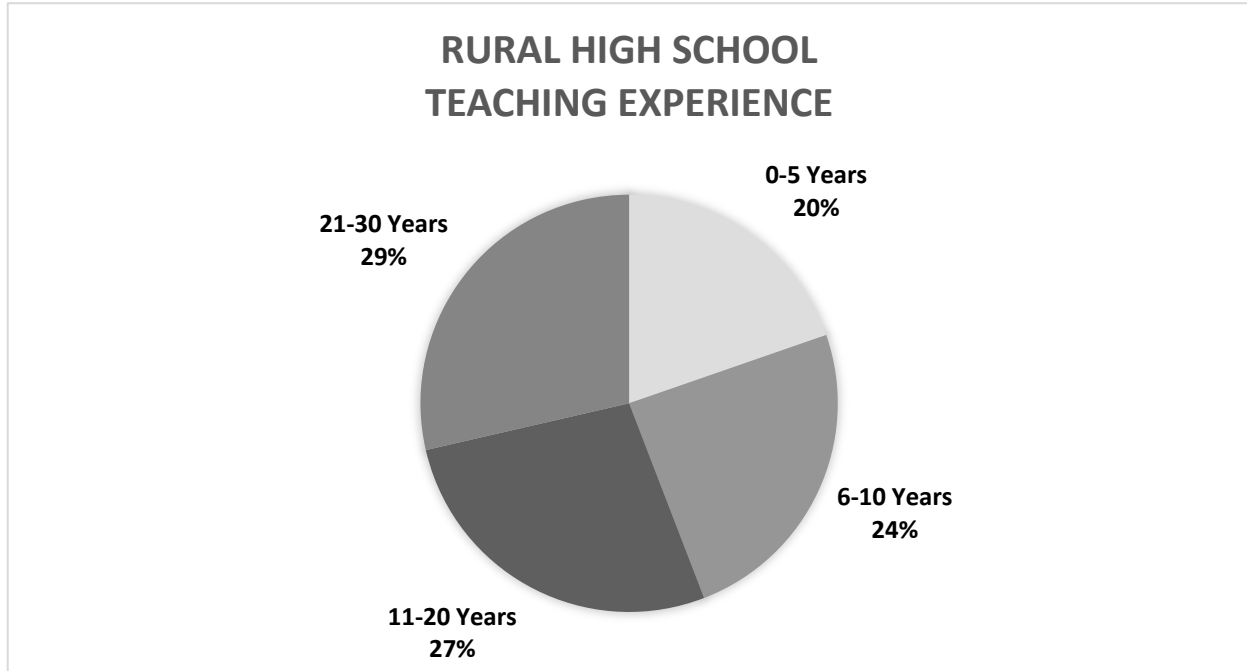


Figure 1.1. Rural High School Teaching Experience

Positionality of the Insider Action Research

The insider-action researcher was in his first year as assistant principal at Rural High School. He has been an educator for 14 years and spent the previous nine years working in a neighboring district as an assistant principal. Most of his experience has been working with smaller, rural communities with a different student demographic than Rural High School but similar in size. At his previous school, the campus had to replace all but one of the teachers on the original staff team during his nine years there. This includes eight of the nine campus teacher of the year winners. The researcher understood that teacher retention is an issue regardless of what district he works in. He was passionate about fighting for small and rural schools and discovering ways to keep and recruit the best teachers in those districts. The researcher was

familiar with the demographics of the students and the staff at the school but was in the stages of building relationships with the current teaching staff at Rural High School.

Background of the Problem of Practice

Recent studies have shown that a third of all teachers will leave within their first five years of starting the profession (Frahm & Cianca, 2021). With stats like that, teacher retention was one of education's most significant issues. A district's ability to keep its teachers yearly was the key to creating an environment where students are set up to learn the best. It takes the district and campus administration teams to create a system of support at each campus that keeps teachers returning year after year.

From the end of the 2021-2022 school year, the campus had 7 of the 34 teachers leave the district. Consequently, the district was tasked with replacing more than 20 percent of its teaching staff from the year before. If you look at the teaching staff from 5 years ago, less than 50 percent are still working for the district. Of thirty-five teachers five years ago, only sixteen still work there. The district had found a way to support these teachers in a way that makes Rural ISD a place they want to stay at.

Regarding hiring teachers, Rural ISD competed with the neighboring schools and higher pay scales when hiring and recruiting the region's best teaching candidates. Rural ISD pay schedule was considerably lower than the larger, urban district 20 miles away. A first-year teacher in Rural ISD will make \$34,660 for the school year, and the same teacher in a neighboring school district will earn \$47,200. Rural ISD can offer smaller class sizes and be one of the top-performing districts, but the \$12,450 difference in salary leads to teachers deciding to change districts for financial incentives. Rural ISD, which had 75 percent of its staff with 5+

years of experience, does shrink the pay gap with teachers with more experience. A teacher with ten years of experience would make \$51,850 in the neighboring school district and \$46,630 in Rural ISD. That brought the gap down to \$5,200. While this helped bring in teachers with experience and rewarded those for staying in the district, most teachers looking for positions would have little experience when recruiting teachers. Therefore, Rural ISD needed to keep its teachers within the district and not be forced to compete with new teachers starting their careers.

Statement of the Problem of Practice

The researcher's high inference problem of practice (PoP) was that districts, especially those in smaller rural areas, could not recruit and retain quality teaching staff effectively. Instead, these district's teachers either moved to more prominent neighboring districts with better pay, sought early retirement, or left the profession altogether. These districts were not doing what it took to create an environment that kept their best teachers. The administrative staff at these districts must encourage their teachers and give them the support they desire to stay.

According to Mintrop (2016), low-inference problems of practice are evaluations that occur at observing behaviors and observations without any influence by the researcher's actions. Data and culture reflect the need to create distinct professional development in the teacher appraisal system to increase the staff's comfort level and teaching practices. Teachers need open and honest professional feedback to improve their abilities and grow more comfortable with their role as a teacher. The low-inference theory of action was that if the district could train and educate the staff on the appraisal process via non-punitive feedback cycles, the teachers would be placed in a culture of success and openness that encourages them to stay in the district while improving their craft.

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to engage teachers in a shared collaborative environment to identify and determine ways to enhance the school culture and climate that promotes teacher recruitment and retention for the school district. The purpose of this study was to determine what level of knowledge and comfort Rural High School teachers had on the T-TESS appraisal system and does having professional development with the intention of increasing their understanding of the system has any effect on teacher retention for the district. The insider action researcher provided targeted professional development focusing on improving teachers' knowledge, skills, and mindset on T-TESS appraisal system. This professional development experience aimed to enhance the teachers' comfort level and performance on their T-TESS appraisal. This type of professional development within this action research study focused on the needs of the teachers by the leadership team (i.e., administrators), providing evidence-based strategies in supporting all teachers. This research has become even more critical for the district as it began the phases of introducing the Teacher Incentive Allotment for its staff. For teachers to receive a distinction in TIA, they must receive a minimum score on their T-TESS evaluation each year. This made a teacher's understanding and performance of the appraisal system more valuable than ever.

Design Parameters of the Study

The design of this study was based on methods adapted from the works of both Coghlan & Brannick (2014) and Mintrop's (2016) design-based school improvement model. Coghlan and Brannick (2014) tell us that research is action rather than research about action. They provide a four-step process: (1) planning, (2) taking action, (3) evaluating action, and (4) continual further planning. Mintrop's (2016) is similar but only consists of three phases: (1) Phase One: Program

Intervention Design and Development, (2) Phase Two: Professional Pilot Implementation, and (3) Phase Three: Evaluation and Impact Analysis.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was trifold. The first purpose of this study was to create a positive and productive school culture on the existing campus. Teachers are leaving schools in record numbers; the key to keeping them is creating a culture they want to stay in. For this to occur, teachers must feel heard, challenged, and understood throughout the feedback cycle process. Meeting these needs would allow the teaching staff to seek growth and desire feedback from the T-TESS appraisal system. Employees are always anxious about being observed and appraised, but educating them on the appraisal processes and giving them clearly defined expectations will ease their minds throughout the process. They would be able to see real growth and improve their teaching skillset, encouraging them to stay in their positions.

The second purpose of the study was to show administrators the importance of having meaningful, targeted professional development for their staff. Teachers desire to improve and need their professional development time to be practical and worthwhile (Manner & Rodriguez, 2012). A focused approach to helping teachers better understand the T-TESS appraisal system and their expectations would allow them to feel more comfortable being appraised in their classroom. This open and honest line of communication during professional development would provide teachers with the desired training and create a culture of transparency.

The last purpose of this study was to create a unique culture of comfort between teachers and campus administrators that only smaller districts can typically offer. This potential comfort level is one advantage the small and rural schools can offer compared to the larger neighboring

districts. This cultural advantage could then be used to help combat the teacher retention issue that schools face nationwide.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the teachers' knowledge, skills, and mindset on the T-TESS appraisal system?
2. In what ways does a targeted professional development on Domain II (i.e., instructional leadership) of the T-TESS evaluation instrument encourage staff to remain in the district?
3. How does a continuous feedback cycle improve teachers' teaching practices aligned to Domain II of the T-TESS rubric?

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

It is assumed that all persons who participated in the study answered questions honestly and could identify their comfort level with the T-TESS appraisal system. The study benefits from the researcher having a necessary relationship between the ones involved in the study and all feedback given. Lastly, the research assumes that the researcher would be able to accurately observe and rate the teacher participants objectively throughout the research process.

The delimitations of this study would be that it takes place over a shortened period of time in the Spring semester of 2023. Due to the condensed nature of the study, a specific domain of the T-TESS rubric had to be selected that could be the most effective for the problem of practice identified by the researcher. Given the time constraints of the study, only domain two of the T-TESS rubric will be used during the professional development and observation cycles.

The study's limitations included the relationship between campus leadership and study participants. It had to be considered as the same organization employs them and had a command structure under the current researcher. While districts must have an appraisal system in place for their teaching staff, the small sample size of the participants in the research project allowed the feedback cycles to be very individualized compared to a complete teaching staff, especially in a larger district.

Study Design Framework

The behavior of a school's leadership was one of the most important influencing factors in the innovation process. Educational leaders can encourage their teachers to innovate by creating the right environment, promoting knowledge integration, and setting specific goals (Meng, 2022). One of the most researched styles of leadership, transformational leadership, has been shown to have a beneficial impact on the achievement of organizational goals.

It takes a qualified leader who is willing to make difficult decisions on a day-to-day basis to lead any organization effectively. Transformational leadership is highly associated with job satisfaction and positive work attitudes. A school leader who operates as a transformational leader can produce better job outcomes through the teacher's job satisfaction (Kouni et al., 2018). It is the role of the administrators to be the transformational leader that allows their staff to find a quality of life in their role that will keep them working in the district.

The design of this study was based on the works of Coghlan & Brannick (2014) and Mintrop's (2016) design-based school improvement model. Coghlan and Brannick's (2014) research action plan is broken down into four steps: planning, taking action, evaluating the action, and future planning. Mintrop (2016) consists of the steps: program intervention design

and development, professional pilot implementation, and evaluation and analysis. This study would also include an observation-feedback cycle based on Bambrick-Santoyo's (2012) coaching framework when looking at teachers' observations.

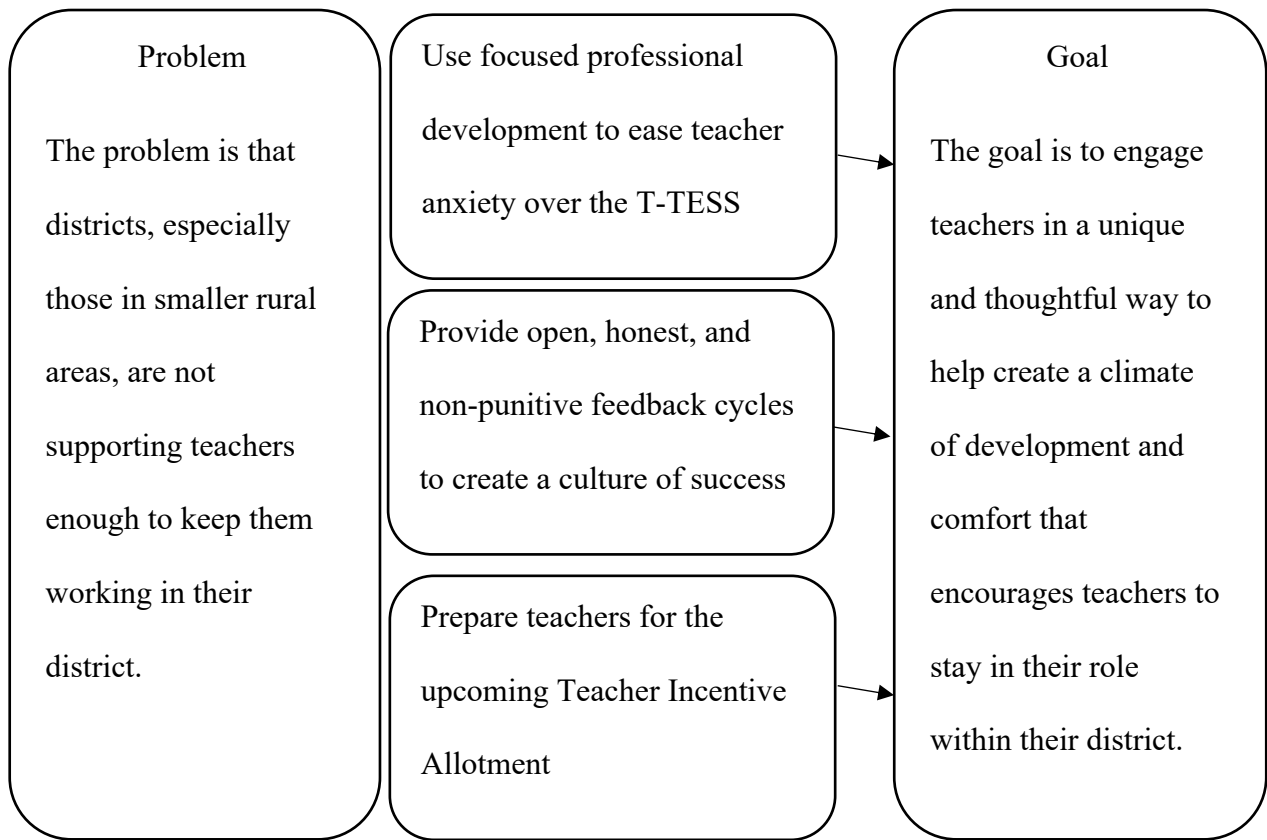


Figure 2.1. Change Drivers Diagram

As mentioned earlier, the problem of practice was that teachers are leaving the profession in alarming numbers each year. This is forcing schools to constantly look for new teachers year after year to replace the teachers that are exiting the district. With teacher shortages continuing to grow each year, recruiting and retaining teachers allows a school to provide the best education possible for its students. The key to providing this quality education is to keep highly qualified and effective teachers wanting to stay in the district.

Schools across the county constantly look for strategies to keep their staff fulfilled and engaged to keep them working in their classrooms. School systems supporting a school's teaching staff allow districts to retain their teachers every year. Teachers must feel supported; it takes quality leadership to create this supportive environment. Support can look different to many teachers, but it is the leadership's responsibility to meet the needs of their teaching staff. Providing the opportunity for teachers to feel comfortable in their organization and can improve their craft is what districts must do to retain their best teachers.

How Rural ISD planned to solve this problem of practice is to ease teachers' anxiety about the evaluation process by giving them specific training on the T-TESS appraisal system and feedback cycles over its rubric. These observation cycles would be done in a non-punitive manner to help the school's teachers better prepare for the upcoming Teacher Incentive Allotment. This would remove any pressure from the teacher's perspective while going through the T-TESS observation and feedback process, ultimately improving T-TESS scores to increase the likelihood of teachers being eligible for the Teacher Incentive Allotment.

Chapter I Summary

The exodus of teachers from schools is reaching unprecedented levels, and the solution comes from creating an environment that makes them want to stay. For schools to achieve this, it is important to ensure that teachers feel acknowledged, simulated, and heard during their feedback cycles. One way to provide this feedback is with the T-TESS appraisal system. Although employees tend to be anxious about being evaluated, educating them about the appraisal process and setting clear expectations will alleviate some of the concerns throughout

the process. This all comes to encourage genuine growth in their teaching abilities, thereby motivating them to remain in the district.

Chapter II

Review of Relevant Literature

The literature review clarifies that school districts at the national and state level struggle to hire and retain quality teachers. While there are several reasons for the nation's teacher shortage, teachers often leave because of the stress of the position and the lack of support and sense of community they are receiving from the district's administration. The teacher shortage issue is vital because of the importance of quality instruction to students in the classroom. One way to circumvent the teacher shortage is for district leaders to create a culture of collaboration and support for teaching staff. Keeping a fully staffed campus and having top-tier instructional practices is crucial.

The literature review was completed using empirical research on peer-reviewed articles, databases, and online reports. These sources were discovered using the Texas Tech University online library and searching the state's databases.

National

While teacher shortages are a growing concern across the country, it is nothing new for American education. You can find articles over the past century that show that finding good teachers has been a problem for the United States for a long time (Sherratt, 2016). Specific subject areas, like math and science, have been an issue since the 1950s, and special education has been a problem since the 1960s (Sutcher et al., 2019). In 1983, the seminal report, *A Nation at Risk*, explained that the nation was experiencing a shortage in mathematics, science, foreign language, gifted and talented, language learners, and special education (Gardner, 1983). Many states in the late 1990s struggled to fill their classrooms with teachers. Researchers have tried to

measure the severity of teacher shortages at the national level. Still, data limitations at that scope have often kept precise estimates of the severity of the shortages (Sutcher et al., 2019).

In Garcia and Weiss' 2020 research on the United State's teacher shortage, they determined that the teacher shortage is large, growing, and worse than they had originally thought. They determined that the teacher shortage is a complex problem driven by multiple factors which makes solving the problem even more complicated to resolve. They were also able to determine that the current teacher shortage in the country undermines the education system's mandate to provide quality education to all students, regardless of their socioeconomic status or demographic data.

State

Texas has seen teacher retention and recruitment grow into a key for long-term district success. According to the Employed Teacher Attrition and New Hires report from the Texas Education Agency, in the 2021-2022 school year, 11.57% of teachers in the state of Texas left the profession. This is a 1.99 percent increase, or 12,860 teachers, more than the 2007-2008 number (Landa, 2022). This report shows the disturbing trend that, now more than ever, Texas teachers are leaving the classroom. This is a problem that is plaguing districts across the state.

The Texas Education Agency has shown teacher recruitment and retention as a top concern by making it Strategic Priority I in its Strategic Plan for the next five years. In this plan, the states will use a mentor program, a redesigned teacher certification framework, teacher and principal residencies, a designation framework to attract and retain high-performing teachers, and grants to help recruit teachers to be small and rural districts (Texas Education Agency,

2022). The state understands that students receiving a quality education comes from recruiting and retaining, and they have made keeping and recruiting the state's best teachers its top priority.

One way the state is looking to tackle its teacher retention issue is with the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA). The TIA was made possible with the passing of House Bill 3 in 2019. It was designed to address two areas of concern: declining interest in the teaching profession because of a lack of compensation and increased numbers of high-needs students served by inexperienced teachers (Texas Education Agency, 2022). This allotment allows teachers to be designated at three levels: recognized, exemplary, and master. Using performance standards and teacher observations, teachers can use these designations to receive a salary increase based on their district's plan.

Another way the State of Texas is looking to solve its teacher shortage is with a Grow Your Own (GYO) grant. This grant aims to recruit the community's top prospects, including current students, to help fill the gaps being left behind when teachers leave to pursue different options. This grant offers two pathways for districts to recruit community members to become their next classroom teachers. One pathway uses high-quality education and training courses for high school students to increase student interest and preparation for a teaching career. The second pathway is to support current non-certified district employees in getting their teaching certificates. It encourages long-term substitutes and paraprofessionals to become highly qualified classroom teachers.

Teacher Retention Issues

Teacher retention is becoming one of the biggest obstacles that schools face yearly. In fact, according to Greiner and Smith's (2006) research, 9.3% of public-school teachers leave

before they complete their first year, and over 20% of teachers leave their position within their first three years of teaching. Fraham and Cianca (2021) also state that almost a third of all new teachers will leave the profession within their first five years of teaching. With teachers leaving schools at such a high rate, this is troubling for schools looking for qualified instructors.

It is a constant cycle of recruiting great teachers to come to your district and then battling to retain them. This problem is compounded by rural schools struggling to recruit teachers compared to their nonrural counterparts. In Lazarev et al.'s study, they also found that in each year of their research, a lower percentage of teachers were recruited in rural districts than in nonrural districts (2017). According to this research, school districts in rural communities struggle to keep their teachers and recruit replacements.

The issue with teacher retention is hitting a moving target. School size, location, wealth, student composition, school grade level, and school type all have a role in teacher recruitment and retention issues (Brown & Wynn, 2009). Currently, teacher retention is one of the biggest challenges the education profession has ever seen.

The Importance of Quality Instruction on Student Learning

Throughout the history of education, teachers have always been crucial to student success. More than any other factor, research has shown that skilled educators dramatically increase their students' academic achievement levels and can influence their long-term earning potential (Fraham & Cianca, 2021). Research has also shown that high teacher turnover directly relates to quality instruction deficits (Brown & Wynn, 2009). The classroom teacher has a significant impact on the day-to-day learning process for their students, and a school's ability to keep quality teachers in its classroom is now as crucial as ever.

Teacher quality is the most important school-related factor affecting student learning (Brown & Wynn, 2009). Research has shown that it takes time for teachers to develop and refine their teaching practices. In Laura Can Zandt Allen's (2013) research, she found that some research showed a threshold of two years as a good predictor for teachers to gain in effectiveness and other research concluded that it takes four to five years for teachers to see a gain in academic achievement. Regardless of the timeframe, teachers leave the profession right when they become the most effective in their classroom. The Texas Education Agency states, "strong classroom instruction, supported by effective instructional leaders, makes a tremendous difference in ensuring that students are progressing to achieve the state's vision" (Texas Education Agency, 2022, p. 5). The research is simple, keeping quality teachers is vital for the success or failure of the educational system (Shahzad & Naureen, 2017). The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future stated, "The most serious long-term consequence of high teacher turnover is the erosion of teaching quality and student achievement" (citation, 2002, p. 13).

The Importance of Teachers Being Supported by Their Administration

School principals play a significant role in a school's overall success. They are considered the academic leaders for their campus and lead the school to achieve its desired goals. The most influential factor in improving the quality and standard of the school is its leader (Kaleem, Din, and Reham, 2021).

Teacher retention and overcoming its obstacles start with the school's administration. All principals have significantly impacted student achievement, especially those in low-achieving and high-poverty districts (Holmes, Parker & Gibson, 2019). Clark, Martorell, and Rockoff (2009) say that teachers are the main influences regarding student achievement, but principals

play a vital role as supporters of their professional growth, development, and retention. This means that teachers have the job of teaching our students, but principals make those teachers continue to grow and want to stay. Ndoye, Imig, and Parker's (2010) research on charter schools in North Carolina has found that "teachers need to feel there is a support system they can rely on and that solving problems at their school is based on a collective approach with identifiable steps" (p. 194). Ndoye, Imig, and Parker also state that leadership is a stronger predictor of teachers' intention to stay in their current school than empowerment.

The principal's primary responsibility once was managing student behavior and attending to the daily operations of school buildings; modern principals are required to engage in culture building, vision, budgeting, improving instructional practices, and recruiting and retaining teachers (Mendels & Mitgang, 2013). Researchers have found many factors that impact teacher turnover, and administrative support has consistently been recognized as a critical component in retaining effective educators (Ladd, 2011).

Research has also shown that teachers base their future teaching careers on their first position in the field. These first-year teachers enter the teaching profession vulnerable to the culture, expectations, and working conditions on their newly hired campuses. More than any education or training, they use this first-year experience to determine rather or not they want to stay as an educator (Allen, 2013). An administrator should keep these young teachers happy and feel supported during their first year to retain them in the profession.

Teachers being supported by their administration is also part of their overall well-being. Teacher well-being can be seen as a teacher's "individual sense of personal, professional fulfillment, satisfaction, purposefulness, and happiness, constructed in a collaborative process with colleagues and students" (Acton & Glasgow, 2015, p. 101).

The Role of Teacher Appraisals

While the evaluation of teachers has been typical since the beginning of the 20th century, in a world that seeks accountability, teacher appraisals have seen a dramatic change over the past several decades (Anderson et al., 2019). Teachers have been subjected to high-stakes accountability policies and practices in their classrooms that rely on calculating tools and punitive actions that have fundamentally changed how teachers are appraised (Holloway, 2019). With federal, state, and local accountability, teachers must meet expectations from multiple sources, which can overwhelm the teacher.

With the heavy emphasis on teacher accountability, many appraisal systems have gone towards a value-added measure to measure a teacher's job performance. In Texas, many schools have adopted the Teacher Incentive Allotment to financially entice teachers to their district. This allotment program increases the value of a teacher's appraisal and student performance on state assessments.

The teacher appraisal process has two distinct roles for the appraiser (i.e., the principal or assistant principal(s)) and the teacher. Research has shown that appraisals should be used to increase teachers' job satisfaction and motivation and improve their performance to improve students' learning achievements (Khan, 2015). Administrators play an essential role in guiding their teachers in using the evaluation process to guide them through the evaluation process. The teacher's role during this process is to reflect on their pedagogy and seek individualized professional growth and development (Willey, 2019).

The Importance of Teacher Development

Professional development is a valuable practice for teachers to improve their teaching skills. Students are asked to learn complex and analytical skills necessary for the 21st century, so education systems must provide more effective professional learning than what has been available in the past (Telse, 2012). A trained teacher has more skills and techniques that can be used to create better academic achievements for students in their classroom (Haffez, 2021). For professional development to be worthwhile, it must provide coherent and sustained support and be collaborative work that focuses on concepts and practices that address the actual needs of the teacher (McConnell et al., 2013). Teachers need relevant training that is collaborative and sustained throughout the school year.

The only problem with most teachers' professional development is that it needs to meet their needs (Nelson & Bohanon, 2019). School districts are forced to cover a wide variety of topics in a short time period; therefore, allowing meaningful professional development that meets the needs of all the teachers is almost impossible. Professional development planners should use their precious time wisely and provide the staff with the most appropriate and meaningful training possible to help meet their teacher's needs and improve the classroom's instructional practices (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

History of the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System

The Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) is a teacher appraisal system developed by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) in collaboration with educators and stakeholders across the state of Texas. T-TESS was implemented starting with the 2016-2017

school year and replaced the previous teacher appraisal system known as PDAS (Professional Development and Appraisal System).

The development of T-TESS began in 2014 when the Texas Legislature passed House Bill 2548, which required the TEA to develop a new teacher appraisal system that emphasized student growth and focused on providing feedback and support for teachers. The TEA formed a steering committee consisting of educators, administrators, and other stakeholders to guide the development of T-TESS. T-TESS is based on four domains: planning, instruction, learning environment, and professional practices and responsibilities. Within each domain, there are multiple dimensions that describe specific teacher behavior and practices. Teachers are rated based on evidence from observations and walkthroughs using a rubric (Texas Education Agency, 2022).

One of the features of T-TESS is the emphasis placed on ongoing, formative feedback and support of teachers. Unlike many appraisal systems, T-TESS requires ongoing observation and feedback throughout the entire school year. T-TESS was created to encourage the engagement of teachers and evaluators in regular conversations about best teaching strategies and practices for improving student learning. By emphasizing ongoing feedback and support, T-TESS seeks to create a culture of continuous improvement and collaboration among teachers and their appraisers (Texas Education Agency, 2022).

Literature Review Summary, Findings, and Conclusion.

The following are the findings from the literature review performed. These are summary and bulleted notes.

Literature Review Summary and Findings

1. Teacher retention and recruitment are problems that school districts face across the country. Each year, more teachers are either retiring or leaving the profession early than ever before.
2. Research has constantly shown that top-tier instruction from highly effective teachers has the most significant impact on student learning. While other factors may help contribute to a student's academic success, quality teaching is the most crucial aspect of a student's education.
3. While a campus administrator has many duties, the administrator's role in retaining teaching staff is most important. Supporting teachers with instructional leadership, student behavior support, and campus culture makes a teacher determine whether or not they will remain at a school year-to-year.
4. Teacher appraisals have become more and more critical in the education community. With federal, state, and local requirements being placed, the value of a teacher appraisal and showing their value in the classroom is at an all-time high.
5. Teacher development is what ties all the above findings together. Finding meaningful professional development can help instructional practices while providing the support teachers need to stay in their current positions.

Literature Review Summary & Conclusion

The literature review clarifies that school districts struggle to hire and retain quality teachers. Teachers are leaving because of the stress of the position and the lack of support and community they are receiving from the district's administration. The teacher shortage issue is vital because of the importance of quality instruction to students in the classroom. Creating a

culture of collaboration and support for teaching staff is crucial to keeping a fully staffed campus and having top-tier instructional practices.

Chapter III

Methods and Procedures

Study Design

This study utilized insider action research as the person who participated held an administrative position with the district and was the researcher. This study was collaborative as part of the focus is on teacher growth with T-TESS performance-focused professional development. The intervention was designed and driven by three phases: Collaboratively identifying the problem of practice, designing and implementing an intervention, and evaluating the impact of the intervention (Mintrop, 2016). Understanding a recognized problem of practice begins with understanding the organization's context and problem. Gaining an in-depth understanding of the staff members, school climate, and the issues facing the current nationwide teacher shortage helped properly frame the identified area that needs improvement. The implementation followed the cycle of constructing an action research plan, planning action, acting, and evaluating action (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). The focus was on helping teachers feel more comfortable with the teacher evaluation process and creating a culture where teachers want to stay in their position. This provided a plan to support the problem of practice through collaborative meetings, feedback cycles, adjustments in behaviors, and best practices. The goal was to increase the willingness of staff members to stay in their roles for the district.

Problem of Practice Recap

The problem of practice has been identified through an exploratory needs assessment (ENA) conducted in September 2021. This assessment reflected that teacher retention is an issue nationwide, especially in rural communities like the town that Rural ISD is located. Additionally, upon receiving a new position in Rural ISD, the researcher discovered that the high school had lost 20% of its staff from the previous year. After further discussion with the district's superintendent, the district was pursuing various measures to prioritize teacher retention. During the 2022-2023 school year, the district was looking into the planning phases of entering the Teacher Incentive Allotment. This state-funded program emphasized teacher performance on T-TESS as a measure to gain extra pay to reward teachers for staying.

Methods

This insider action research aimed to support a teaching staff through their appraisal process strategically. Performance appraisals can be challenging to navigate regardless of profession, but in this case, T-TESS, teacher appraisals were often seen as a checkbox that must be met. This research plan wanted to be intentional with the process and help teachers feel more comfortable with something that may have created anxiety in the past. The methodology of the second person, or researcher, was about engaging with others, making collaborative decisions, and building trust (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). The role-duality was a large part of the research methodology; since the campus administrator was also the primary researcher, it was necessary to consider the impact the roles would have on the study's outcomes. Role-duality can create a bridge between the researcher's role and the functional role of the administrator (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014); however, this opportunity allowed the action researcher to gain insight into the inner working of the campus. However, role duality came with challenges as the researcher is

responsible for seeing multiple perspectives throughout the study. This was especially true in this research because the observation and feedback cycles were viewed through the lens of the teacher's appraisal system. The researcher was aware of the impact their position could have on the study's outcomes. Their powerful influence must be removed and accounted for not to change the study's findings to protect the participants in the study.

Action research should be a collaborative process to solve an identified problem. It involves multiple parties making decisions and creating action to correct the identified problem through investigation. The researcher must ensure that their decisions impact the problem, and it is crucial to ensure that the research benefits those involved. As Mintrop (2016) states about action researchers, “[i]n the design space, designers want to make robust connections between their intentions and their actions. They want to be certain that it was the intervention that led to the intended outcomes” (pg.154).

A school district is an organization with complex people and problems; therefore, understanding how to find and address a problem of practice is a difficult challenge. Action research provides the ability to act and see the effect it can have on the problems within the organization. Mintrop (2016) states, “Design development research, like all research, is as much about technical detail as it is about lively drama” (pg. 182). Action research lends itself to identifying complex problems and finding solutions that make the organization better in the end.

Participants and Selections

This researcher looked to invite 34 high school teachers (N = 34), from Rural High School to participate in this study. Because of its smaller size, participants were invited via email by a third party and asked to volunteer at the beginning of a six-weeks grading period. All participants' names were protected using pseudonyms. Any volunteer was also removed from the researcher's duties as the instructional leader for the campus. Any participants were removed from the researcher's formal observation list. This means that the researcher did not formally evaluate them for employment purposes. All feedback was kept confidential from other district personnel and only observed for research purposes. Once again, this was where the researcher's dual role was made abundantly clear to all parties involved. The researcher was fully transparent and separated the two roles whenever required by the study. The potential reward for the participants would be a better understanding of Domain II of the T-TESS appraisal tool and rubric. The participants could use this better understanding to improve their future appraisals, improving their likelihood of receiving a designation under the newly adopted TIA system in the district.

The teachers that decided to participate in this study were all current teachers at Rural High School, and the only requirement was for them to be certified teachers. Once the participants volunteered and consented to participate, the researcher gave more in-depth information on the purpose of the study and expectations moving forward. Furthermore, the participants were notified that they would be excluded from the researcher's official T-TESS observations and teacher formal appraisal. If the teacher needed a formal observation, the campus principal would conduct it to remove any potential professional repercussions of participating in the study. All participants were notified that, if necessary, they could exit the

study at any time. Again, it is by volunteers and not mandatory and did not affect their current position or any evaluations during the study or moving forward.

Data Collection

Data collection was done in multiple formats. All volunteers participating in the study were sent informational questionnaires to gain information on teaching experiences, certification, year of service, and current teaching assignments.

Pre and Post-Survey

For this study, all volunteers participated in a pre-survey to determine their comfort level with the teacher evaluation process. The participants also received an identical post-survey to determine if the training over the T-TESS rubric, observations, and feedback cycles helped the teachers feel more comfortable with the evaluation process. These surveys were sent out via Survey Monkey and sent to the participant's school email address unless a desired personal email address is given in the questionnaire.

Observation and Feedback Cycles

The researcher was a T-TESS certified evaluator and has received training in Advancing Educational Leadership and Instructional Leadership Development. The researcher had been an evaluator for the T-TESS in two different districts and has six years of experience performing evaluations under the T-TESS rubric. The researcher had also completed multiple observation calibration training to ensure the proper evaluation with the T-TESS rubric.

Teachers went through two announced classroom observations with feedback cycles to improve their teacher evaluation scores on domain two of the T-TESS appraisal system. Each observation took 30 minutes in length, and the feedback cycle was completed within 3 days of

the observation. The teachers could pick what time and course they wanted to be observed. The official T-TESS rubric, which the professional development was focused on, was used to evaluate teachers' effectiveness in the classroom. The researcher rated each participant as distinguished, accomplished, proficient, developing, or improvement needed on the five dimensions in Domain 2 of the T-TESS rubric.

The feedback was based on teaching techniques and strategies to improve the effectiveness of instruction. The researcher and volunteer went through the T-TESS rubric and scripted observations from the lesson to discuss why they were rated according to the rubric and various ways to improve their score. Their previous T-TESS scores and observation scores from the research will be used to determine any growth in performance due to the professional development and feedback cycles.

Reflexive Journaling

Throughout the research process, the researcher participated in reflexive journaling. This allowed the researcher to document the research process and monitor any issues with being an insider-action researcher. The researcher journaled electronically in their office immediately after each professional development, observation, and feedback cycle. This limited any evaluator bias the researcher may have had during the process and ensure proper documentation of the research process.

Data Analysis

This research project used Braun and Clarke's (2006) definition of thematic analysis to take a closer look at the data. All data were analyzed for patterns to interpret various aspects of

the research topic and discover possible themes. These analyses determined the research's effectiveness and other potential research prospects in solving the teacher shortage issue.

The data were collected from two areas. A pre and post-survey were given to the teachers via email to determine the teacher's comfort level with the teacher appraisal system. The second form of data were collected from their observation scores according to the T-TESS rubric and rating system. These ratings came from the teacher's historical performance before the professional development and post-development. These two data sources were used to determine if the teachers feel more comfortable with the appraisal system after the training and feedback cycles and see if there is any growth in the performance within the appraisal rubric.

Procedures

Overview of design, development, and implementation

The current study utilized design-based research to support the problem of practice identified by the researcher: Teachers need to receive the support they need to return to the district year after year. Teachers are either leaving the district to pursue a job in a neighboring district or leaving the career field altogether.

Professional Learning Program Intervention Design: Work Plan and Timeline:

Phase One: Program Intervention and Design

The study's design is created through three ideas outlined by Mintrop (2016) that all plans are designed to change the behaviors of adults by retaining quality teachers, which will in turn, lead to improved student performance. It was important to remember that trial and error are vital in research design, and data is collected through the most reliable methods possible.

Phase Two:

There was an understood problem with retaining highly qualified teachers in rural school districts. Determining what steps could be taken to keep these teachers was vital in providing the best education possible for students. Developing a plan of action, or an intervention design, to find these solutions was the next step in action research. Mintrop (2016) states, “An intervention design consists of a sequence of activities that together or in combination intervene in existing knowledge, beliefs, dispositions, or routines to prompt new learning that leads to new practices (p. 133).” As the action researcher, having a well-constructed plan of action would help the process go smoothly for all participants and hopefully find a solution to the problem of practice.

Table 3.1

Outline of Research

Time Frame	Objective	Data Point	Research Question
Week One	Identify Participants		
Week Two	Retrieve Staff Data	Based on teacher volunteer results, email Teacher Information Questionnaire and retrieve T-TESS Historical Data	What are the teachers’ knowledge, skills, and mindset on the T-TESS appraisal system?
Week Three	Conduct T-TESS Rubric Training and Pre-Survey	Teacher Pre-Survey	What are the teachers’ knowledge, skills, and mindset on the T-TESS appraisal system?

Table 3.1, Continued

Time Frame	Objective	Data Point	Research Question
Week Four	Perform First Round of Walkthrough/Feedback Cycles	Walkthrough evaluation based on T-TESS Rubric	
Week Five	Perform Second Round of Walkthrough/Feedback Cycles	Walkthrough evaluation based on T-TESS Rubric	How does a continuous feedback cycle improve teachers' teaching practices aligned to Domain II of the T-TESS rubric?
Week Six	Finish missing Walkthrough/Feedback Cycles and conduct email post survey	Walkthrough evaluation based on T-TESS Rubric	<p>What are the teachers' knowledge, skills, and mindset on the T-TESS appraisal system?</p> <p>How does a continuous feedback cycle improve teachers' teaching practices aligned to Domain II of the T-TESS rubric?</p> <p>Does intentional professional development over the T-TESS rubric and appraisal process provide increased comfort for the teaching staff?</p>

Table 3.1, Continued

Time Frame	Objective	Data Point	Research Question
Week Seven	Analyze data collected from pre and post surveys, feedback cycles, and reflective journal		<p>What are the teachers’ knowledge, skills, and mindset on the T-TESS appraisal system?</p> <p>How does a continuous feedback cycle improve teachers’ teaching practices aligned to Domain II of the T-TESS rubric?</p> <p>Does intentional professional development over the T-TESS rubric and appraisal process provide increased comfort for the teaching staff?</p>

Phase Three:

The final phase of the research was to determine the impact of the study by analyzing the data. To determine whether an intervention worked as planned and why, we must look at the data and determine if it addressed the problem of practice (Mintrop, 2016.). Looking at the

historical teacher T-TESS data, pre and post-surveys, T-TESS rubric scores from walkthrough and feedback cycles, and reflective journaling allowed the researcher to determine if the study successfully found solutions to the problem of practice.

Limitations

One limitation was the need for more available participants included in the study. Teachers can have anxiety when it comes to being evaluated under any circumstance, let alone being a participant in the research project. This lack of available participants was also compounded by the overall small staff size of Rural High School. As mentioned before, it is a small campus with only 35 teachers on campus. Given the natural anxiety of the evaluation process and the small sample of teachers to select from, could lead to less than the desired number of participants.

Another limitation is the duality of the researcher doing action research. While the researcher had only worked in the district for one semester, relationships have developed with the staff team. When it comes to something as personal as evaluations, it was difficult for the researcher to remove the previous and future relationship building that comes with working with a staff team every day.

Triangulation

Coghlan and Brannick (2014) propose that triangulation in research involves using multiple sources, methods, and perspectives to understand a research problem comprehensively and accurately. Triangulation helps to increase the credibility and reliability of research findings and can be achieved by combining different data collection techniques, comparing results from

multiple sources, and using multiple researchers or research teams. They also state that triangulation should be used strategically and not simply to confirm a researcher's hypothesis.

For this study, the researcher had met the requirements that Coghlan and Brannick defined as an insider researcher. Using several sources (multiple teachers, literature review, and other educators' perspectives) and multiple methods (pre and post-surveys, feedback cycle discussions, and conversations with teachers), the researcher took steps to triangulate his research. This triangulation aims to ensure that the data and findings from the research project would have the highest level of credibility and reliability possible.

Summary

The observation and feedback cycle were used along with professional development to improve the teacher's ability to achieve better performance on the T-TESS rubric. A teacher's ability to perform on the T-TESS appraisal is more important moving forward because of the pending TIA designation process. Teachers want to understand and improve their scores to secure a designation and receive a potential financial reward in the upcoming school years.

The researcher's goal was to protect the participants who volunteered for the research project and maintain the integrity of the research to the greatest extent possible despite the researcher's dual role. Making teachers feel comfortable throughout the process and keeping a good working relationship after the process was essential to encourage teacher retention. Maintaining anonymity and protecting the participants' identities was paramount throughout the process.

Chapter IV

Results

Problem of Practice

The researcher's high inference problem of practice (PoP) is that districts, especially those in smaller rural areas, cannot effectively recruit and retain quality teaching staff. Instead, these district's teachers are either moving to more prominent neighboring districts with better pay, seeking early retirement, or leaving the profession altogether. These districts are not doing what it takes to create an environment that keeps their best teachers. The administrative staff at these districts must encourage their teachers and give them the support they desire to stay.

Description of Participants

All teachers involved with the study are current teachers at Rural High School. The volunteers consist of five female teachers and one male. They have teaching experience that ranges from 2 years to 28 years with an average experience of over 15 years. The participants include two math teachers, a special education teacher, a band director, a family consumer science teacher, and an English teacher. They are all certified teachers and are currently teaching content that is covered by their certificates.

Action Researcher

The insider-action researcher is in his first year as assistant principal at Rural High School. He has been an educator for 14 years and spent the previous nine years working in a neighboring district as an assistant principal. Most of his experience has been working with smaller, rural communities with a different student demographic than Rural High School but

similar in size. His role in the research is to have intentional conversations and professional development with the participants on the T-TESS rubric. This is done for two reasons. To improve the participants' understanding of the system and hopefully ease any anxiety that comes with being formally observed and appraised and to improve each teacher's instruction in the classroom.

Participant 1

Mrs. A is the district's Family Consumer Sciences (FCS) teacher and has had that position for seventeen years. She is a leader on the campus and one of the best teachers in the region. She also serves as the district's FCCLA sponsor, TAFE sponsor, numerous class sponsors, senior trip organizer, and many other positions. She has a significant influence on what the campus looks like, and while she is a phenomenal teacher, is always looking to get better.

One thing that makes Mrs. A unique is that she is one of the region's most recognized FCS teachers and is constantly being observed by educators from around the region. Rather it is student teachers and professors from the neighboring city's university, other FCS teachers from various area schools, or Career and Technical Education leaders from within the region, she is used to having people observe her teaching. In the various interviews throughout the research process, Mrs. A mentioned several times that she is comfortable having people in her classroom and evaluating her teaching skills.

Another benefit that Mrs. A provides is her expertise in the classroom. As she said in one of our discussions, "I've been teaching this thing for 17 years now. I should know what it needs to look like." Her lessons are always exceptional, and any observer can tell that she has

complete control of her classroom. She also mentioned that having the systems that help her do well on her evaluations is the only way to survive having five different preps.

Mrs. A also maintains an evidence binder full of different strategies and techniques that she uses in her lessons. The binder is filled with different strategies that she uses in every lesson, unit, and class that she teaches. Inside this evidence binder, Mrs. A keeps a dissected copy of the T-TESS rubric that she has studied. She has highlighted the verbs, underlined the differences, and made notes over all the free space on the rubric of how she can make the top rating possible. She may not use it to help plan her instruction daily, but she is well equipped on what it takes to be evaluated well.

Participant 2

Mr. B has been the high school band director at Rural High School for the last six years and has been in education for 27 years. He has spent time as a history teacher as well as band director. He is one of the most experienced teachers on staff and has a long history of teaching experience from across the state. He oversees all band students starting in the fifth grade. He has an assistant band director that works closely with the high school band and is the middle school band director.

The band director is one of the only positions I have never researched, and I discovered many things in my conversations and walk-throughs in his classroom. Being a band director and leading a high-performing band takes a unique skill set that most people cannot comprehend. So much of what he does in the classroom is listen to his students play a piece and make adjustments that only a gifted music educator can do. He can hear things and make adjustments that I, as the appraiser, would never notice.

The difficulty in appraising Mr. B is the fact that the evaluation of a band director goes beyond their teaching ability. Mr. B mentioned in one of his feedback cycles that he won't get fired for what happens in his class but for his inability to run a program. It is communicating with parents, running a budget, and developing a program that is what is really evaluated. While his classroom time is essential, it is only a tiny portion of what he oversees and his job duties. This makes him unlike any of the other teachers in the study. While everyone gets evaluated on their classroom instruction for growth and documentation purposes, his primary duties go far beyond the classroom.

Participant 3

Mrs. C is the youngest and one of the least experienced teachers on the Rural High School staff. She is currently in her third year of teaching and her first year at Rural High School. She started this year after previously working at another small rural district in the region and quickly made an impact on the campus. She teaches English to all the district's sophomores and even helps teach a section of 8th-grade honors English.

As mentioned earlier, Mrs. C comes from a district in the region that has created since of anxiety when it comes to observations and walkthroughs. In our conversations about the appraisal process, Mrs. C mentioned that her previous district would use walkthroughs and the appraisal system to catch teachers not meeting their expectations. The lack of trust and communication about the process has led to Mrs. C having a jaded view of the system and making any use of the system to grow her abilities a struggle.

Similarly to Mrs. A and Mr. B, so much of what Mrs. C brings to the district cannot be measured in an appraisal. She can connect with students and build relationships that are

unmatched. While she has only been on campus for less than a year, she has created a rapport with the students that take teachers multiple years to obtain. Students can confide in her, and she can help guide them in areas outside of the English curriculum that she teaches. She can also provide valuable insight to the administrators into what the students in her classrooms are going through to help provide potential solutions to any social-emotional issues that might be happening.

Participant 4

Mrs. D is one of the district's most veteran teachers who is in her 29th year of teaching math and her 9th with the district. She teaches Geometry and Advanced Quantitative Reasoning. Mrs. D is a teacher that would be a great addition to any campus and is always looking for ways to improve her instruction even after teaching for nearly three decades.

Like many teachers in a small rural district, Mrs. D helps the school out by being part of so many extracurricular activities. You can see her keeping books for our volleyball and basketball teams and cheering on our other teams from the stands. While being a great instructor for our students, she is also always willing to help the district in any way that she can.

Participant 5

Mrs. E is another math teacher for Rural High School. Mrs. E will tell you that she got into teaching later in life but still has eighteen years of teaching experience. She is the district's Algebra I teacher and had 100 percent of her students pass the State's end-of-course assessment that is required for graduation. Like the other teachers involved in the study, while Mrs. E has a lot of valuable teaching experience, she is always looking to improve her teaching ability.

Recently, Mrs. E made a drastic teaching style change to make her classroom more student-focused.

Mrs. E always wants her appraiser to see her classroom working at its best. She wants to make sure that the lesson that her appraiser walks into matches the style that best meets her teaching ability and is weary of being evaluated on a day that she thinks is not up to a self-set standard. In our discussions on scheduling her walkthroughs, Mrs. E was focused on picking a lesson that would be a helpful walkthrough for me to observe. My job was to remind her that she was a phenomenal teacher and that her less-than-engaging lessons were still impressive and quality for her students.

Participant 6

Mrs. F is Rural High School's Special Education teacher. While she has only taught for the past two years, Mrs. F has had experience as being a teacher aide in special education classrooms. She was able to earn her teaching certificate and transitioned to overseeing the special education teacher aides and helping our teachers meet the needs of some of the campus's most challenging students.

Mrs. F teaches one resource English class a day and spends most of her day in other teacher's classrooms working with her special education students. In that one resource English class, Mrs. F serves students on all learning levels. Each student in that class is well below the reading level they should be on and even has two non-verbal life-skills students.

Analysis of Data

Emerging Themes

Theme 1: Teachers Need To Feel Comfortable with Observers Being in Their Classrooms

The teachers that performed the best on their walkthroughs have a comfort level with having someone observe their classroom. This theme was made clear by the opposite feelings of Mrs. A and Mrs. C and E. All three teachers are gifted in the classroom and should have the utmost confidence in working in front of their administrator and appraiser.

Mrs. A is consistently observed by educators, administrators from other schools, and student teachers, so she is entirely comfortable having people in her classroom. She mentioned that she starts the school year with an expectation conversation with her students about having guests in the classroom. She explains to them that she will have other people visiting her classroom throughout the year and that it shouldn't change anything about how the classroom is run daily. She has created an expectation for herself and a system that allows her students to see outside observers as normal and to be comfortable when they are there.

When you look at Mrs. C, she has had such a negative experience with appraisers and administrators being in her classroom. This impacts her comfort level with anyone in her classroom that is not one of her students. She does a great job of teaching every day and is a very gifted teacher. However, she started the school year off with anxiety about being “caught” by an administrator looking to use a walkthrough or appraisal against her.

Mrs. E is the final example of always wanting to have the “perfect” lesson for an administrator to see. She is hesitant to welcome an administrator or observer to see inside her classroom because she wants to make sure it is worth observing. Once again, she is an excellent

teacher, but there is still a vulnerability with being observed. She mentioned in her feedback cycles that one of her best walkthroughs the previous year came on a day that she thought was a less-than-perfect lesson and even told the principal that it might be a waste of his time to observe. She went on to discover that lesson was perfect for observing because of the questioning that happened naturally with the lesson. The principal could see the students perform at a high level because of her instruction, even on a boring day of class.

Theme 2: A Teacher's Relationship with Their Appraiser Matters

A teacher's trust in their appraiser became an essential piece for teachers to feel comfortable about the appraisal system. The teachers that had taught in the district for several years had a positive relationship with their appraiser in the past, making them feel at ease about being observed and evaluated. They were able to know the appraiser's intent and believe that it would not be used in any punitive manner. Rather it is Mrs. A, who has worked in the district for 17 years and has had multiple appraisers, or Mrs. F, who has only been a teacher for a couple of years, they both mentioned that they felt comfortable about being appraised by their current administrator and that helped eased their anxiety about the process.

The exact opposite would be true about Mrs. C. She is new to the district this year but was in a previous district where she felt that appraisals were used to catch teachers doing something wrong. This ruined her relationship with her appraiser at her previous school and it has taken a lot of work to build a confidence and trust with her administrators this year to get her to understand what the appraisal process should look like as a tool instead of a punishment.

Theme 3: Pre and Post-Conferences Matter in the T-TESS System

Great teachers can naturally create systems in place without even being noticeable. Years of practice creates little routines that are never placed in lesson plans or outlines for administrators to see. They simply happen because that is the way the teacher has learned to be best practices. Since these little pieces of teaching excellence or not documented, it is difficult or impossible for the appraiser to notice or give as evidence for the evaluation.

During the training over the rubric all the teachers mentioned that they are doing certain procedures and practices in their classroom, but it never gets mentioned in their lesson plans or during their evaluation process. These systems and techniques that they are doing are what would help them score higher according to the T-TESS rubric. This made me realize that I needed to stress the importance of communicating all of these things during their pre and post conferences. The strategic placement of students within groups, the way a teacher will hover around a certain couple of students when they work independently, having a make-up work folder for students to get caught up on their assignments from being out, all are details that make their classrooms run effectively that they don't think to document in any lesson plan. But these are the strategies that would help give evidence for higher scoring on the rubric.

Theme 4: What a Teacher Provides to a District Cannot Be Evaluated in the T-TESS System

Like many teachers in small-rural districts, Rural High School teachers do so much outside the classroom. Every teacher that volunteered for the study has some form of responsibility that has nothing to do with the curriculum that they are required to teach. For example, Mr. B, as band director, is not only required to teach his students how to play pieces of

music and the theory behind the pieces, but he is also in charge of the band program. This means scheduling competitions and practices, communicating with parents and community members, arranging travel, maintaining a budget, and several other tasks that it takes to run a band program successfully. While his classroom instruction is essential, his job duties go well beyond what happens in his classroom time.

The same can be said for Mrs. F. Her job as the campus's special education teacher places her in several different roles daily. Again, her one period of Resource English is crucial and worth evaluating her on but, it is scheduling Annual Review and Dismissal (ARD) meetings, communicating information with teachers and parents about the special education students, supporting teachers with intervention, and even navigating the logistics of our teacher-aides is what makes her so valuable to the campus. For a nine-hour workday, she is being evaluated on what she does for 45 minutes.

What a teacher does in their classroom every day is valuable for a school district. This is where our students can learn and develop the knowledge and skills we aim to teach them, but being a teacher is much more than instruction. For some of the district's most valuable teachers, what they do in their classroom is only a fraction of what they do, but it is the only way they are being evaluated under the T-TESS appraisal system.

Summary

This study used six participants with varying years of experience across multiple teaching fields. From these teachers' responses to a pre and post-survey and conversations from their professional development and feedback cycles, this study provided four emerging themes: teachers need to feel comfortable with observers being in their classrooms, a teacher's

relationship with their appraiser matters, pre and post-conferences matter in the T-TESS System, what a teacher provides to a district cannot be evaluated in the T-TESS System.

Chapter V

Conclusions, Discussion, and Implications

Overview of the Study

Phase One

The study's design is created through three ideas outlined by Mintrop (2016) that all plans are designed to change the behaviors of adults by retaining quality teachers, which will lead to improved student performance. Remembering that trial and error is vital in research design, and data is collected through the most reliable methods possible.

Phase Two

There is an understood problem with retaining highly qualified teachers in rural school districts. Determining what steps can be taken to keep these teachers is critical to providing the best education possible for students. Developing a plan of action, or an intervention design, to find these solutions is the next step in action research. Mintrop (2016) states, “An intervention design consists of a sequence of activities that together or in combination intervene in existing knowledge, beliefs, dispositions, or routines in order to prompt new learning that leads to new practices (p. 133).” As the action researcher, having a well-constructed plan of action will help the process go smoothly for all participants and hopefully find a solution to the problem of practice.

Phase Three

The final phase of the research is to determine the impact of the study by analyzing the data. To determine whether an intervention worked as planned and why, we must look at the

data and determine if it addressed the problem of practice (Mintrop, 2016.). Looking at the historical teacher T-TESS data, pre and post-surveys, T-TESS rubric scores from walkthrough and feedback cycles, and reflective journaling will allow the researcher to determine if the study successfully found solutions to the problem of practice.

Major Findings and Conclusions

Research Question 1

What is the teachers' knowledge, skills, and mindset on the T-TESS appraisal system?

Statement of Findings: Teachers need better training on the T-TESS appraisal system to ensure their understanding.

This question aims to see teachers' general opinions about the T-TESS appraisal system and determine if they think it is beneficial to their professional development. With TIA starting the following year and relying on teacher performance under T-TESS, knowing how comfortable teachers are with the system can help determine what professional development is necessary moving forward. It is more critical now for teachers to better understand the system and how to improve their performance on it.

All new teachers must receive in-depth training on the T-TESS system and an annual refresher training at the beginning of each school year. That said, the quality and intentionality of this training can have a noticeable impact on a teacher's understanding of the appraisal system. From the research's pre-survey, 4 of the 6 teachers agreed, and the other 2 said they had a neutral feeling when asked if they had a good understanding of the system. This baseline understanding is to be expected because of the lack of intentionality most districts take to provide quality training for the T-TESS appraisal system. Most districts do the required training

to check the box, but nothing more than that. It is an important piece of a teacher’s formal appraisal, professional development, and instructional growth, but most schools do not want to waste time leading up to a school year.

I have a good understanding of the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) appraisal system.

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0

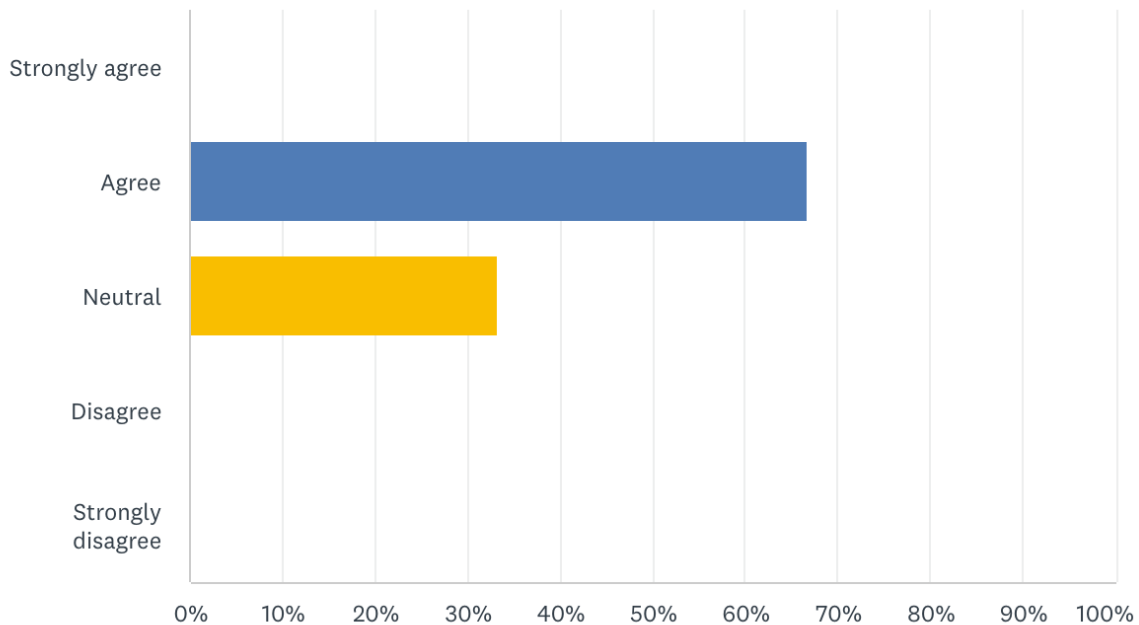


Figure 5.1: Teacher Pre-Survey Question 4 Results

This understanding changed from the research process. The many conversations and intentional discussions over the rubric changed the answer from the pre-survey to the post-survey to be 3 teachers saying they strongly agree and three teachers saying they agree to understanding

the T-TESS appraisal system. Five of the six teachers involved in the research project increased their level of understanding by at least one level, from neutral to agree or agree to strongly agree, and one teacher stayed at agreeing.

I have a good understanding of the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) appraisal system.

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0

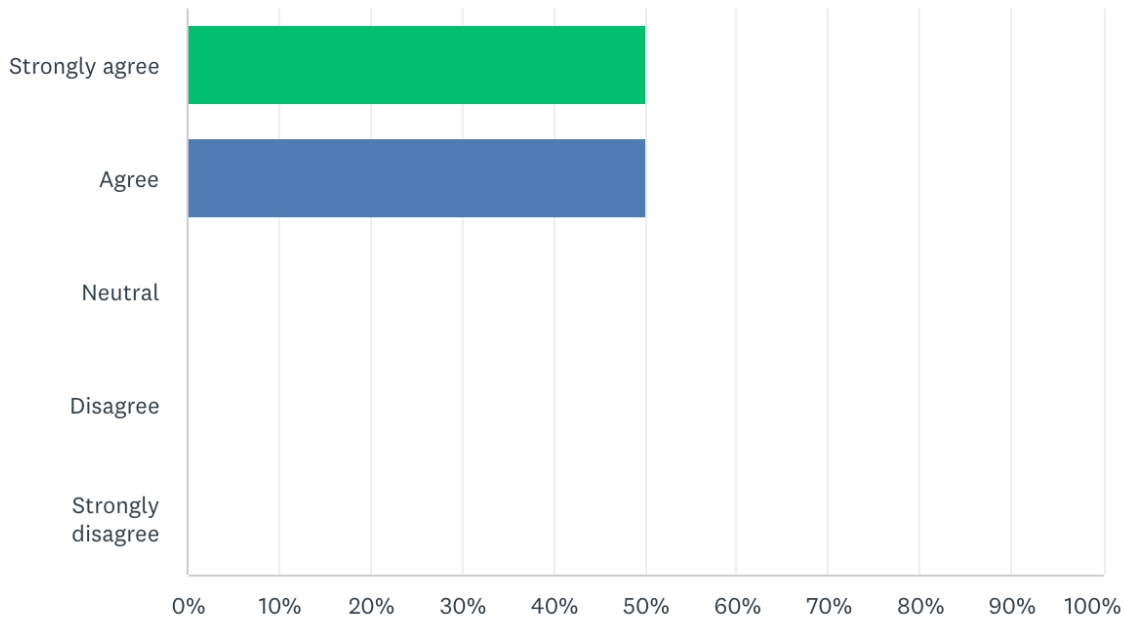


Figure 5.2 Teacher Post-Survey Question 4 Results

One way to increase this understanding is to give better training. From the pre-survey, one teacher disagreed, three teachers agreed, and two teachers were neutral with the district doing a good job of training the teaching staff on the appraisal teacher system. This is where the school district must improve. With the incoming Teacher Incentive Allotment, the district's

teachers must have an improved understanding of the system. Their ease and comfort level are important for teachers to feel their best while performing for the appraisers.

My school district has done a good job of training me on the T-TESS appraisal system

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0

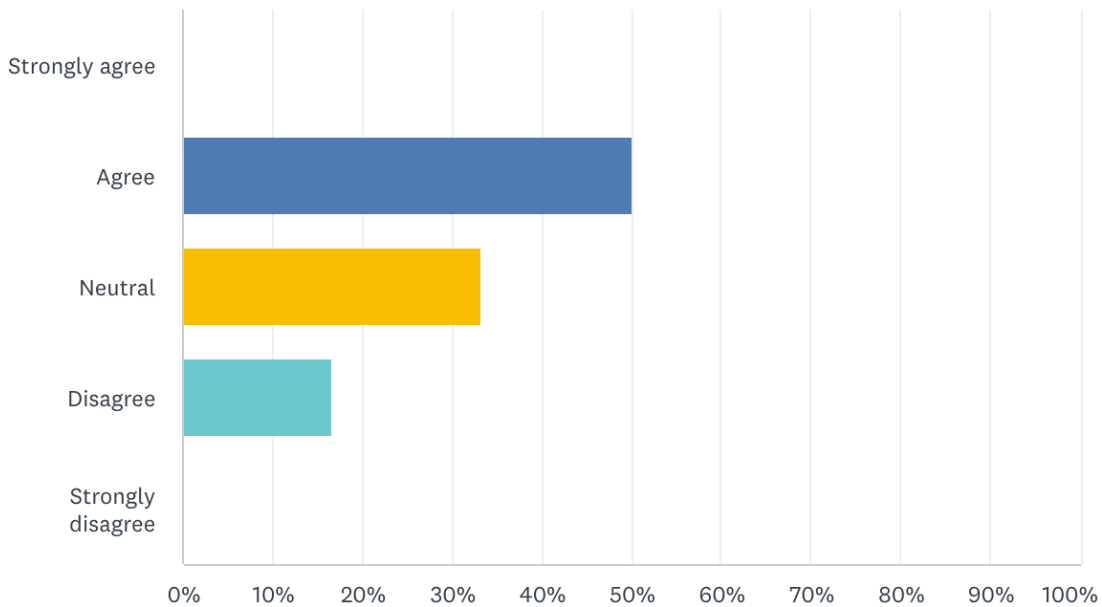


Figure 5.3 Teacher Pre-Survey Question 5 Results

From the many conversations during the research process, our teachers have a good baseline understanding of the T-TESS appraisal system. They know its role as the formal observation piece, but do not use it in their daily planning. The teaching staff did not understand the value of their pre-conference and post-conference meetings with their appraiser. This is the time that the teachers can give their appraiser inside information about their lesson and strategies that they are using every day. This gives them the chance to provide the necessary evidence to rate higher according to the T-TESS rubric. Explaining this to the teachers during our many

conversations gave the teacher's a better feeling of being trained on the process. This training caused them to increase their feelings about their training to one teacher strongly agreeing, three teachers agreeing, and two teachers disagreeing with the district doing a good job of training its teachers. The one change in answers that is noticeable is the increase in teachers responding with disagree. It is my assumption that they changed their answer based on their new-found understanding of the system which made them realize they were not properly changed during their formal training in the past.

My school district has done a good job of training me on the T-TESS appraisal system

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0

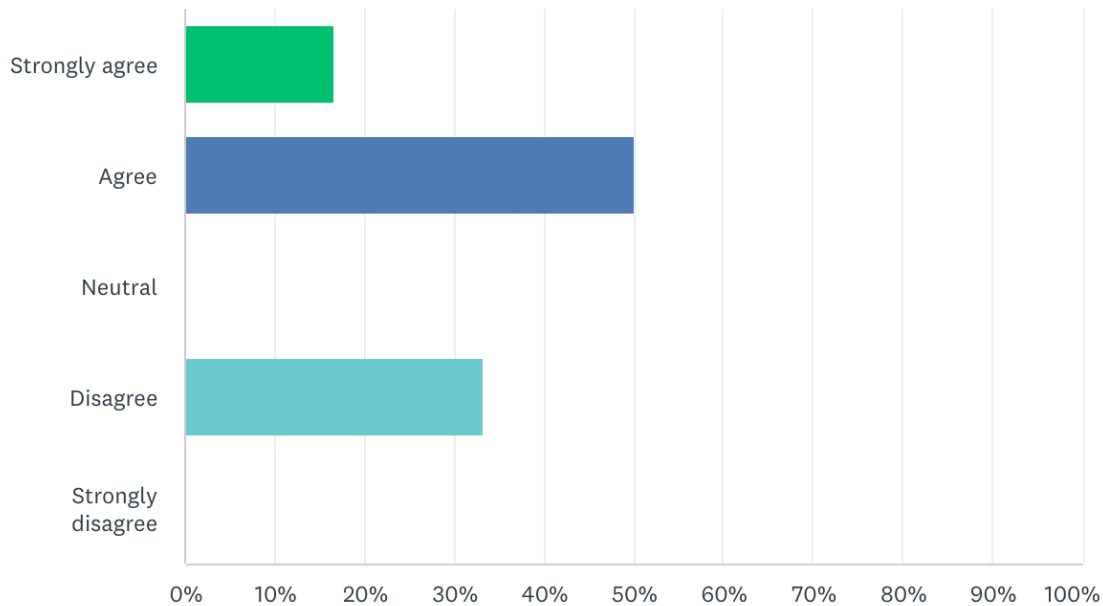


Figure 5.4 Teacher Post-Survey Question 5 Results

Summary of Findings:

The teachers at Rural High School have a basic understanding of the T-TESS appraisal system but need intentional professional development. Mrs. E sums up this point when she stated,

“I feel like I have a better understanding of the rubric now. Specifically, seeing how the bullet points on each level of the rubric look in a classroom. Because of the way we were initially trained on T-TESS, I haven't looked at the top two levels very much and when I did, I felt they were not realistically attainable. I feel like I understand better what they mean and how I can achieve those higher levels on my evaluations.”

Given the implementation of TIA, the district's teachers need to know how to score their best evaluations possible. Giving everyone the proper skills to help their performance will allow more teachers to be eligible for more money. This increase in observation performance and salary will hopefully allow more teachers to stay within the district longer.

Research Question 2

In what ways does a targeted professional development on Domain II (i.e. instructional leadership) of the T-TESS evaluation instrument encourage staff to remain in the district?

Statement of Finding: It is difficult to determine if T-TESS, or any other appraisal tool, will lead to higher teacher retention rates.

This question aims to see if there is a direct link to providing the needed professional development that would lead to teachers remaining in the district longer. The hope is that

teachers will use the professional development to have greater performance under the T-TESS rubric, which will lead to better pay under TIA and ultimately remain in the district longer.

Findings

As the literature review stated, determining the reasons for teacher turnover is a complex task due to several factors, including the varying definitions of turnover, the lack of comprehensive data collection methods, the use of different measurement techniques, and varying data across multiple states (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). A teacher leaving a school district is a complex issue with multiple factors playing into the difficult decision (Brown & Wynn, 2009).

Most of the district's teachers have stayed there for a long time. This means the teachers are finding reasons to make them want to stay year after year, and it is difficult to attach that to their current appraisal system. One thing that does stick out, is Mrs. C seeing a difference in how Rural ISD uses the T-TESS system versus her previous district. She stated,

“My thoughts about T-TESS have changed since working at this district. My previous district influenced me to believe that the T-TESS is more of a ‘gotcha’ tool than anything helpful to me as a teacher. To be frank, the T-TESS at my previous district made me believe that I was an inadequate teacher and should quit education. However, I have learned that it is not the T-TESS, but instead the person who is administering it.”

Mrs. C is the example that shows it may be difficult to use T-TESS as a primary reason for a teacher remaining in your district, but it can be a reason for a teacher to leave your district. Mrs. C has found a new home in Rural ISD and unlike her previous district, T-TESS will not be the reason she leaves.

Summary of Findings:

Research has shown repeatedly that teacher retention is a complicated issue that has many factors in play. Teachers are leaving the classroom at an alarming rate across the country, and it is difficult to determine a way to keep our best teachers in the classroom. That makes it very difficult to determine if a professional development-based appraisal system is one of the solutions to this problem. It does show that inappropriate use of this tool will encourage teachers to leave. Using it as a system to “catch” teachers is not how it was designed to be used, and it will ruin a staff’s morale and confidence in the classroom, which is a way to lose a teaching staff.

Research Question 3

How does a continuous feedback cycle improve teachers’ teaching practices aligned to Domain II of the T-TESS rubric?

Statement of Finding: When used correctly, T-TESS can improve a teacher’s ability in the classroom.

The literature review shows teachers long for excellent feedback and professional development (Nelson & Bohanon, 2019). Feedback cycles from an appraiser can significantly improve instruction in a teacher’s classroom by providing intentional and actionable feedback on areas of improvement. Hattie and Timperley (2007) tell us that feedback is one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement—the timelier and more specific the feedback, the more significant the impact on student outcomes. When looking at teacher appraisals, the feedback can be used to support the teacher in developing their own instructional practices, identifying areas of strengths and areas of needed growth. With regular feedback, teachers can

receive ongoing guidance and support to improve their instructional strategies which will lead to improved student learning outcomes (Lindahl & Uusitalo-Malmivaara, 2019).

The research can show that feedback cycles and observations can improve instruction, the challenge becomes getting teachers to understand this. As Mrs. B states about the T-TESS process, “I feel like it was designed and planned without input from teachers as to what they want/need. I know some of it is mandated so I understand that, but other things, especially those that have been required for STAAR-tested subjects, have not been useful to me.” There is an apparent disconnect between some teachers and the feedback cycle process that should be attached to the T-TESS appraisal system. If the teacher does not value the process or the feedback it gives, it will not lead to a fundamental change in the classroom.

It is on the district, and its appraisers, to make sure that this process has a positive impact on its teachers. Mrs. B, the teacher that originally stated that T-TESS is not useful to her, stated this after the professional development and feedback cycles from participating in the research project,

“I feel like I have a better understanding of the rubric now. Specifically, seeing how the bullet points on each level of the rubric look in a classroom. Because of the way we were initially trained on T-TESS, I haven't looked at the top two levels very much and when I did, I felt they were not realistically attainable. I feel like I understand better what they mean and how I can achieve those higher levels on my evaluations.”

Mrs. B may not see the T-TESS appraisal system in a perfect light, but she now is able to understand its value for her classroom. Since she has had several targeted pieces of training and

discussions on the rubric, she has newfound confidence in her ability to achieve at a high level and will hopefully be open to feedback moving forward.

The same can be said about Mrs. F, who is a new teacher that hasn't had a lot of experience with the appraisal system. She stated,

“I think it is very helpful in accessing what I am doing well in my classroom and what I need to work on. The feedback that I have gotten has been extremely helpful to understand what I can work on. I feel like it has helped. I have learned so many strategies for my classroom.”

This shows that intentional feedback and training can improve a teacher's ability. New teachers like Mrs. F need tools and strategies that can be taught from the feedback cycles and observations that an appraisal system like T-TESS offers. Having an experienced appraiser come in and share their knowledge and abilities is the professional development they need.

Summary of Findings

Teachers want to improve, but it is up to the district's administrators to find a way to make professional development one that helps them increase their abilities in the classroom. If done correctly, having intentional training and feedback cycles using the T-TESS appraisal system can be that for districts. Using the rubric as a tool that navigates teachers towards a more student-focused classroom increases our teacher and student success.

Conclusion of Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to determine if using strategic and intentional professional development over T-TESS could help with teacher retention. As the researcher for this study, I have discovered that teacher retention is a difficult problem to grasp. There are so many factors

that go into a teacher deciding to leave their school, and because of that, it is difficult to find a solution to our nation's teacher retention issue. This is especially true for determining if a teacher is wanting to stay at a district or school because of the appraisal system that they use. A teacher appraisal system may not ever be a reason for a teacher to stay in a district, but it not being used effectively can cause a teacher to leave.

Appraisals are important for the development and growth of a teacher and are often a requirement that needs to be met. It is important for teachers to understand this system well and be given adequate training on how to be successful within that system. Teachers want to improve their skills in the classroom but need to have the proper relationship with their appraiser that wants to help their teacher grow within that system.

Discussion

District Level Considerations

The district is entering its first year of TIA, which has placed a new focus on teacher evaluations. Since a teacher's evaluation and their student's ability to show growth are the only two factors that play into a teacher receiving an end-of-the-year bonus, everyone must be on the same page with what T-TESS looks like in our district. The campus administrators must provide meaningful training and help teachers score their best possible scores. These trainings over T-TESS may not be why a teacher remains in the district, but their ability to perform well based on the rubric, which will lead them to a financial incentive, might.

The literature review coincides with the district's teachers needing and wanting quality professional development. Nelson & Bohanon (2019) tell us that the biggest issue with teachers' professional development is that it does not fit their needs. For Rural ISD, this study

has shown that quality and intentional professional development over the T-TESS appraisal system is needed and wanted. The teachers involved in the study felt that they were not properly trained over T-TESS, which is the perfect time to fix that. Starting this summer and beginning the next school year, the district needs to fill this void in teacher understanding of the T-TESS system. As professional development planners, the administrators in the district should use their precious time wisely and provide the staff with the most appropriate and meaningful training possible to help meet their teacher's needs and improve the classroom's instructional practices (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Another issue that the district is currently facing is the need to replace one of the most experienced teaching staff in the state. While the district hopes that TIA might keep some of these teachers in the district, many teachers are at the point of retirement which means a significant portion of the teaching staff will be replaced in the next five to ten years. These experienced teachers who have worked through several forms of appraisal systems will, more than likely, be replaced with a much younger inexperienced group of teachers. The district needs to see this as a positive note, provide them with the proper training, and give them comfort throughout the process that allows them to see it as a growth tool and not something that creates anxiety every time an administrator comes into their classroom.

Campus Level Considerations

Campus principals must create a culture on their campus that is welcoming to the idea of growth and feedback. Having a teaching staff that has no issues with having appraisers come in, observe, and provide meaningful feedback can help teachers reach their full potential which will ultimately affect student learning. Creating this growth mindset culture needs to be the priority for campus leaders. Based on the conversations with the staff during the research process, they

believed they needed to be adequately trained about the T-TESS system. While most teachers understand its role, they must understand how to perform better based on its rubric. It starts with doing campus-wide professional development and having intentional conversations with each teacher to ensure their success moving forward.

As leaders on the campus, this study has also shown the value of building relationships with the staff as their appraisers. All the teachers involved in the study felt at ease with their current appraisers. Research has shown that the role of an administrator and their support of the staff is important (Ndoye, Imig, and Parker, 2010). Building trust among the teaching staff can be a victory for staff morale and teacher performance. Explaining to them the overwhelming benefits of understanding the T-TESS rubric better and the administrator's desire to improve their performance can allow them to perform better during their appraisal and walkthroughs. The non-punitive discussions that come with performing the necessary walkthroughs and appraisals can continue to build that trust within the staff and further encourage teacher retention.

Ethical Considerations

One data set that would have benefited the study is the teacher's years of experience in the district. Knowing how long someone has been a teacher is valuable, but for this study, how long they were working in the district would have also provided more insight into the participants' thoughts and opinions. Since this data was not public information and was not approved by the Institutional Review Board at Texas Tech, the researcher decided not to include this information for ethical reasons.

Implications

Confirming Literature Review

Teacher retention is a very complex and genuine issue. It is a challenging problem to understand and track because many factors influence a person's decision to continue in a classroom (Fraham and Cianca, 2021; Larazev et al., 2017; Brown & Wynn, 2009). This project verified this complexity. During the discussions with the participants, each teacher had a unique perspective of what matters to them and what aspects of the job they enjoy. This makes a teacher's decision to stay or leave difficult to track because each teacher's situation is unique, and this was true at Rural High School. With the varying previous experiences with different systems and appraisers, it is clear that the appraisal process can be one factor affecting a teacher's decision to stay in the classroom.

The study also coincided with the research showing teacher appraisals' importance. With the increased expectations placed on teachers and the wanted transparency from community members, appraisals are becoming increasingly valuable each year (Anderson et al., 2019). With the state of Texas implementing the Teacher Incentive Allotment and Rural High School currently enrolling in the next year's cohort, this makes their appraisals more valuable than ever. A teacher's ability to perform well according to the T-TESS rubric is now a difference in receiving a significant financial bonus and providing the opportunity to show the community that the teachers are meeting those high expectations being placed on them.

As mentioned in the literature review, research has shown that appraisals should increase teachers' job satisfaction and motivation and improve their performance to improve students' learning achievements (Khan, 2015). This study has shown that a teacher's comfort level with

the system is increased with proper training and discussion throughout the appraisal process. The administrators play an essential role in guiding their teachers in using the evaluation process to guide them through the evaluation process. If a school's administrative staff can successfully do this, it may lead to an increase in staff morale and a decrease in teacher retention issues.

This research also showed the administrator's value regarding teacher retention. Each teacher mentioned their comfort level with their current administrators' ability to evaluate them. This allows them the highest level of confidence and comfort in the appraisal process. This is another example of transformational leadership. The administrator should be centered on inspiring and motivating their teachers to reach their full potential in the classroom. Principals who utilize transformational leadership have been found to significantly impact their school's academic performance, teacher retention, and student outcomes (Bass & Riggio, 2006). If administrators use the T-TESS rubric correctly, they can encourage their staff to take risks, providing them with the necessary support and resources to achieve their goals.

National Implications

Teacher retention is an issue that is affecting school districts across the country. A school district's ability to support its teachers is crucial to having teachers remain in the classroom and serving their students. To do this, school leaders need to find a way to create this climate and culture of growth and professional development. Other states may not use T-TESS but they will use some form of observation and evaluation tool, and their ability to provide worthwhile training will help create a school that teachers want to remain in. Research has shown that teachers desire this meaningful training (Kumar & Stroulia, 2017) and it is up to the country's administrators to provide it.

State Implications

One out of nine teachers left the classroom in Texas last year. That is an incredibly alarming stat that needs everyone's attention. We are facing a teacher retention problem unlike any in the history of Texas. Like the teacher retention problem facing the whole nation, it is the State's responsibility to create a solution to this problem. It has created the Teacher Incentive Allotment to help slow down teacher atrophy, but it also needs to ensure that administrators do what they can to use the tool effectively. It has already created in-depth training for appraisers under T-TESS, but it needs to do updated and specific training on how to use the system for TIA. Teachers want to perform their best with T-TESS, and with TIA, they want to do that more than ever.

One challenge for the state is determining how to provide the necessary training done in the research project across the state. Rural High School has a relatively small teacher group, but other schools across the state have very large and diverse teaching staff. This research showed that intentional and private professional development could improve teachers' understanding of the T-TESS rubric. Still, it would only be possible to do at a campus that has a teaching staff of 100+ teachers with a very strategic plan. This could include training academic coaches, department chairs, specialists, and other administrators to do professional development like the one that occurred in this project. Instead of providing training for a staff of 100+, it would be broken into multiple people training much smaller groups. This would allow these other staff members to train in smaller professional learning communities (PLC) that would provide the intimacy necessary to build the desired comfort level.

Local Implications

Similarly to the implications for the state, Rural ISD needs to implement targeted professional development for its teaching staff. The district's ability to make teachers feel comfortable through the appraisal process and help them score as high as possible will encourage teachers to remain in the district and be eligible for TIA. The school district is also at a crucial point with a group of teachers reaching retirement age and needing to be replaced by a new group of younger teachers. The district must create a climate that embraces growth with the T-TESS system. Having a group of teachers that feel comfortable with appraisers in their classroom and welcome the opportunity for development will allow our teachers to perform at their best.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendation for Research on Best Practices for Appraisal Systems

With state and national officials looking to increase accountability in the classroom, appraisal systems for educators are here to stay. This means more time is needed to make and develop the best possible system for our teachers. It is time to examine how the most successful businesses evaluate their essential staff members and duplicate those processes in our schools.

School districts across the country have had to lower their standards to fill teaching vacancies (Baker, 2020), which means these teachers need intentional feedback and training that can be provided with effective appraisal systems. Learning how to improve teaching as quickly as possible is what our students need and what our schools need to find. Thinking outside of the box and finding a quality solution from other professions can be precisely what education needs. It just takes someone passionate about finding this solution searching.

Recommendation for Research on How T-TESS Affects Teacher Incentive Allotment

The Teacher Incentive Allotment is a new teacher retention measure created by the State, and it would be valuable for schools to understand how T-TESS plays a role in teachers obtaining their level of designation. According to the T-TESS rubric, what percentage of teachers could have obtained a different designation level if they had received a higher rating? How do teachers feel about their rating from T-TESS, and has a lower rating created a dislike of TIA?

Administrators in the state need to know how to use TIA as a recruiting and retention tool and T-TESS is such an important piece of that. Administrators need to be able to effectively communicate what they want to see in the classroom and could grow them to meet that expectation. This is what T-TESS was designed to do, and their ability to use it as an aide in the TIA process can allow districts to keep their best teachers happy and hopefully in the classroom of their schools.

Recommendation for Research on What Type of Professional Development is Valuable for Teachers

Quality professional development is a critical factor in teacher retention, as it can provide teachers with the skills and resources they need to feel confident and effective in their jobs. Teachers who can receive high-quality professional development are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs, have higher levels of commitment to their school and students, and be more likely to stay in the teaching profession (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). In contrast, teachers who do not receive quality professional development can feel unsupported, leading to higher turnover rates.

It is more valuable than ever for districts and their administrators to create, develop, and support professional development that teachers find relevant. Research needs to be done to look at what this looks like from a teacher's perspective. This can be done at a local level within a single campus or district, at the state level, and even at the national level. By investing in professional development programs that are relevant, engaging, and tailored to teachers' needs, schools and districts can demonstrate their commitment to teacher growth and development, which can lead to increased teacher retention.

Reflection

Reflection as an Insider Researcher

This research project has been a fantastic experience as an insider researcher. Having honest, intentional, and non-punitive discussions with some of our excellent teachers has benefited me as an administrator. The stories the teachers shared will always be itched in my mind and will remind me why I wanted to be an administrator. I hope that they were able to grow as much as I did.

This was also the perfect example of what an observation and feedback cycle could look like. Having these open and honest conversations with the teachers with the only purpose of improving their skills in the classroom is what T-TESS, and many other appraisal tools, was created to be. It was good for our teachers to experience this and for me as an appraiser. With TIA coming in the next school year, the practice I could have and the knowledge I received will make me a better appraiser moving forward. I hope that I will use these to create the type of climate that the research shows to encourage teachers to stay in the classroom and change our students' lives for the better.

Reflection as an Educational Leader

This research has been a completely eye-opening experience for me. Being able to sit and have focused and intentional discussions with our teachers is something that gets lost in the chaos of a normal school day. The required time to have these discussions will make any administrator reprioritize their daily agendas. This is what the job of an instructional leader is but it is too easy for us to get lost in the grind of running a successful school. Taking the time to reinvest in your teaching staff to show them the support they desperately need will ultimately be the best use of time. It is my goal to remember that for the rest of my career.

Closing Statement

Teacher retention is becoming, if not already, the biggest priority for educators nationwide. A school's ability to support its teaching staff and create a culture of openness and constant growth will allow a district to succeed. Our students desperately need quality teachers working with them every day, and we are losing those teachers more and more each year. If you care about quality education, you must care about taking care of your teachers. It is our job as educational leaders to help and support them and put them in situations to be successful. We must take the time to have intentional discussions and find ways to support each teacher individually. This is the only way to keep our schools running effectively and providing for our students.

A teacher's appraisal plays into this. Finding ways to encourage our teaching staff that having observers in the classroom is only a good thing because it develops them into better teachers is what the appraisal system should be based on. Teachers who are constantly looking over their shoulders for the next "got you" moment are filled with anxiety and are leaving their

schools. Educational leaders must create a culture of a growth mindset where everyone is on the same page with the purpose of feedback cycles. We need to allow teachers to be vulnerable and feel safe when it comes to their development. Our profession and our students depend on our ability to do this.

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