

ABSTRACT

SWARTZ, JENNIFER WISEMAN. *Bad Teacher: The Impact of Negative Media on Today's Educators*. (Under the direction of Dr. Lance D. Fusarelli, Co-Chair, and Dr. Michael E. Ward, Co-Chair)

Waning public support for education and educators has been an issue of concern for public education for many years. My study addressed how the decline in support for public education and educators observed in news and social media has resulted in diminished job satisfaction and attrition among educators in the Peartree School District. I concluded that such research was needed because of the general decline of the public's faith in institutions observed in public polls that reflected lowered respect for the work of establishments such as schools. This public loss of faith was illustrated in literature that profiled the rise of anti-establishment candidates in the 2016 elections and the concerted efforts of local and national groups across the United States to manipulate disagreements over COVID mandates and lessons on race and gender as political fodder used to further divide communities for their own political purposes (Graham, 2021; McGrath, 2017).

Feelings of public distrust in American institutions appeared to have crept into public attitudes exhibited in the Peartree District, the site that I chose for my study. Antagonistic public sentiments had been displayed in negative media and online comments that did not reflect that education and educators were being held in high regard. My study participants included 14 educators, including seven teachers and seven principals, whose professional experiences ranged from one year to 30+ years of work in the district. My research design was a phenomenological case study that used individual participant interviews to address how study members viewed news stories, articles, social media posts, and online comments about education and how these posts influenced educator job satisfaction and attrition.

I gathered archival data via the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey site. Data available through the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey revealed that the perceptions of educators in the Peartree School District regarding support from parents, guardians, and community members had diminished across the three administrations of the survey from 2018 to 2022. Teacher and principal participants in my study expressed diminished feelings of job satisfaction that resulted from their perceptions of negative media directed at educators in the Peartree School District. The study revealed that both the teacher and principal participants felt the need for greater support of educators and public education as they expressed dissatisfaction with the way in which they were presented in news and social media. Both the teacher and principal participant groups addressed the challenges they faced as educators. These challenges included lack of support, negative perception in the media, low pay, personal mental health needs, political battles surrounding public education, and the loss of educators who have left the district or the profession. Recommendations for policy and practice indicated that specific changes could be made to create a more positive and supportive environment for educators and encourage their job persistence while ensuring that the media coverage is more balanced and fair. I provided suggestions for future research that can support the study of educator job satisfaction and retention with a focus on educator sub-groups or through the replication of this study in other districts, states, or regions as other researchers address the importance of valuing and respecting teachers, principals, and school staff, and highlighting the positive aspects of education.

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Bad Teacher: The Impact of Negative Media on Today's Educators

by
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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to all educators and school staff who work to serve their students and their school communities every day. When you feel discouraged or defeated, there are many who know the lengths you go to in order to create a nurturing learning environment to support the learning and growth of your students. To my own teachers and colleagues, keep the fires burning. You make a difference. There is no greater work than that which you do for our children and our world.

BIOGRAPHY

Jennifer Swartz earned her Bachelor of Arts in English with a concentration in English Education from NC State University. She taught English at South Johnston High School for seven years as a teacher and cheer coach, then at West Johnston High School for six more. She earned her National Board Certification in English before re-enrolling at NC State University to earn a Master of School Administration. Jennifer moved into the role of instructional coach before being named an assistant principal at West Johnston, where she served seven years as a member of the administrative team with duties focused on professional development of staff and curriculum and instruction. She received the Johnston County Assistant Principal of the Year award and has served as president of the Alpha Beta Chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma Society International. She served one year as an assistant principal at McGee's Crossroads Middle School before returning to West Johnston High School as Principal where she has led her Wildcat community for the past seven years. She resides in Clayton with husband, Chip, and daughter, MacKenzie.

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To my family, thank you for your love and support. Thank you for being understanding when I sat at the computer for long hours and encouraged you to “go on without me” so I could work. I am blessed to have your love and support. Thank you to my friends for your encouragement. Thank you to my administrative team for accepting the bulk of evening games while I attended late afternoon classes. Dr. Ward, your feedback, check-ins, and encouragement were critical components to this work that helped keep me going when running a school presented itself as the priority. You provided consistent support and served as my thought-partner throughout the entire process. Dr. Fusarelli, your candid advice helped to create my focus for the study and set me on a path that permitted me to explore an issue that is of concern to me. Dr. Drake, thank you for your feedback and suggestions that demonstrate your attention to detail and provided me with improvements to the work. Dr. Riddick, you and I go back many years. Thank you for serving on my committee and providing important cultural sensitivity in addition to serving as a skilled reader for my drafts. That you all found my study interesting and engaging was the greatest compliment.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Chapter Introduction

The Great Resignation is the title that news stories have given to the movement observed across the United States as employees have left their current jobs in order to obtain positions that provide them with greater benefits, higher wages, and fewer stressors (Chinni, 2021; Grossman, 2022; Liu, 2022). Educators are among those seeking improved working conditions after transitions to online teaching, mask mandate controversies, classroom health concerns, and additional job duties added stress to their daily professional responsibilities. Schools across the United States are reporting a shortage of qualified staff in every area of education as the number of teachers and school employees who are leaving school-based positions has increased since March of 2020 (Martin, 2022; Walker, 2022). Job satisfaction among those in public education was a topic of media attention prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the burden of unreasonable expectations for educators' work and the proliferation of harsh criticism, and even threats, from difficult stakeholders are being cited by many educators who are leaving the profession before retirement.

This dissertation addressed the issue of whether there is a relationship between educator job satisfaction and attrition of K-12 educators and negative media stories and public comments that reflect a lack of respect and support for public education. Improving job satisfaction among educators is an issue important to retaining educators in schools to support a strong public education system. To increase job satisfaction and retain high quality staff for the benefit of students, leaders need to regard a number of variables, but Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) state that "a problem with the research on teacher job satisfaction is that there is no agreement about how to measure the construct" (p. 1030). This study focused on one district's experiences with

negative media, job satisfaction, and educator attrition. This research supports the need to bring greater awareness of the variables that impact educators' job satisfaction to assist school leaders, community members, and policy makers with information to inform effective practices that retain high quality teachers and administrators for the benefit of student success.

Statement of the Problem

While serving as an educator is both one of the most rewarding and challenging careers a person can pursue, the COVID-19 pandemic introduced societal changes that added novel and profound pressures to the critical role educators play in American society (Martin, 2022; Walker, 2022). The pandemic that pushed many schools across the country to shut down in March 2020 added multiple stressors to daily life for most people. The opinions expressed by some parents and community members, both online and face-to-face, escalated to threats in some instances. Concerns about these messages were such that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) provided a tip line and website in October 2021 where individuals could report “threats of violence against school board members, officials, and workers in our nation’s public schools” at the FBI’s National Threat Operations Center (U.S. Department of Justice, 2021). American life changed in many ways due to the restrictions associated with the need to protect public health during the COVID-19 pandemic, but educators have been among those who have been frequently targeted in news and in online comments by an angry public in search of someone to blame for these changes. Social media platforms have been venues for disrespectful comments, criticism, vitriol, and threats as schools continued to navigate closures, social distancing guidelines, mask mandates, and quarantines (Graham, 2021). As a result of waning public support, educators are leaving the profession and citing a lack of respect and negative comments

rather than face the negative sentiments presented by an unsupportive and disrespectful public (Goldberg, 2021; Horton, 2022).

The social and political division that grew during the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated already heightened discord that had been portrayed in mainstream media since 2017 when Betsy DeVos assumed the role of Secretary of Education and favored religious and private schools over public education (Turner, 2020). Strident conservative criticism of education and an evolution of societal norms has resulted in increased negative reflections on schools and educators in the form of various complaints. Other issues were likewise generating stories of significant concern. Student disengagement demonstrated during the pandemic gave rise to increased concerns over the social-emotional well-being of students who were separated from many social opportunities. The world witnessed news stories and social media focused on voices raised in outrage at the killing of several African Americans (Johnson, 2020). The polarized political climate of the country over recent years drove complaints that have been demonstrated in challenges to equity policies in schools. Some of these challenges assert that Critical Race Theory is being taught in schools. Other challenges related to books in school libraries that feature marginalized groups (Graham, 2021).

Much of the current literature surrounding educator attrition focuses on the shortage of teachers, bus drivers, and administrators due to the pressures staff feel as a result of the implementation of COVID-19 measures on top of already-difficult job responsibilities (Granados, 2021; Heyward, 2021; Lieberman, 2021; Schofield, 2021). However, I was unable to find any research in the context of the pandemic that is devoted to the negative portrayal of educators in news and social media. Shine (2020) studied overall job dissatisfaction and attrition of educators in rural communities due to comments in online news forums. Conley and Woosley

(2000) studied stress among teachers and the impact such stress has on the organization. Conley and You (2009) studied teacher role stress, satisfaction, commitment, and intentions to leave their schools. Wang et al. (2018) studied job satisfaction among school administrators but did not examine the impact that social media and online news stories and comments had on staff in their roles related to the running of effective schools for the benefit of their students.

Such issues, if not addressed, have profound implications for public education. Shortages will likely continue as educators, in general, do not perceive that their service matters. Universities have already witnessed diminished enrollment in programs for educators in recent years (*Fact Sheet*, 2022; Goldberg, 2021; Will, 2022a). Such programs are likely to continue to see smaller numbers of students enrolling to train as educators as a result of continued marginalization of educators who have struggled through budget cuts, difficult working conditions, and little recognition for the work in which they engage to benefit their students (Coe & Kuttner, 2018; Richards et al., 2019; Shine, 2020). Diminished enrollment in education programs will continue to add strain to public schools that need highly qualified and fully trained educators leading instruction for all students.

Research that provides insights into these problems and that offers useful solutions is important. Counteracting the forces that demoralize educators and educator candidates positively impacts recruitment and retention (Graham, 2021). When provided with manageable schedules, cooperative students, a supportive environment, and recognition for a job well done, educators have reported a higher rate of satisfaction in their jobs (De Jong et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2018). Researchers have found that job satisfaction can help to improve conditions for educators and strengthen their role productivity and career longevity (Richards et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2018).

Due to the turbulence of the times, educators are no longer trusted to be in control of what is taught or how it is taught inside their classrooms (Day, 2012; Goldstein, 2015; Graham, 2021). In-person and online attacks on school staff leave educators feeling dejected and impact the ability of schools to hire and retain high-quality staff to serve students (Day, 2012; Goldstein, 2015; Horton, 2022). Goldstein (2015) said:

Teachers and schools alone cannot solve our crisis of inequality and long-term unemployment... We must focus less on how to rank and fire teachers and more on how to make day-to-day teaching an attractive, challenging job that intelligent, creative, and ambitious people will gravitate toward. We must quiet the teacher wars and support teachers in improving their skills and the profession. (p. 43)

Goldstein's statement deserves attention. Local communities and political leaders can demonstrate support for teachers in order to improve working conditions and retain high quality educators for all students and in society (Galley, 2016; Goldstein, 2015). As schools across the United States have seen students and staff return to face-to-face instruction following the unprecedented school closures associated with the pandemic, many educators have faced challenges in the form of negative media attention toward educators. During the periods of school closure, teachers, counselors, and administrators were frequently celebrated for sacrificially applying their skills and resources to engage students in various ways while face-to-face education was not possible. Mask mandates, vaccine concerns, and other policy controversies have, however, prompted many overworked educators to explore career options beyond the school campus (Goldberg, 2021; Horton, 2022; Will, 2022a). News stories and social media posts feature the stories of educators who have turned in their school identification badges and lanyards and are announcing their departure from their roles as educators due to the stress

they have felt and the lack of support they have experienced (Martin, 2022; Walker, 2022).

While educators are leaving their roles in large numbers, schools continue to experience staff shortages in every personnel sector, from custodians and child nutrition workers to teachers and administrators.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how negative news stories, articles, social media posts, and online comments about education and educators influence educator job satisfaction and attrition. Job satisfaction has been an area of concern for public school leaders and communities and has been explored in research; however, the stress of the demands placed on educators and school staff throughout the COVID-19 pandemic increased the number of educators who are resigning from their school roles. As shown in Figure 1.1, some educators have shared accounts of their resignations through social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok, while districts and school leaders work to staff classrooms and school roles with highly qualified personnel.



Figure 1.1

Former School Counselor Shares Factors that Led to Her Resignation

Note. Anna Sutter is a former school counselor who posted to Twitter that negative rhetoric from her Indiana legislators contributed to her resignation from her school role (Sutter, 2022).

This study examined the perceptions of teachers and administrators when faced with negative media stories and public comments that reflect a lack of respect and support for public education. Educators manage adverse circumstances as they support their students but are limited

in their ability to buffer all issues their students may face. Especially through the COVID-19 pandemic, educators suffered under an intense workload and a loss of public confidence (Goldberg, 2021; Graham, 2021). School communities experienced teacher shortages prior to the pandemic but the strain of expectations on educators during the pandemic has pushed many educators to reevaluate their career choices and leave teaching altogether (Heyward, 2021; Horton, 2022; Will, 2022a).

This study was a qualitative exploration of educators' perceptions of community support in which reflections have been collected from educators through interviews. Responses from the interviews were examined for relevant themes; the results expand the body of literature related to educator job satisfaction and retention. Research questions focused on how participants viewed news stories, articles, social media posts, and online comments about education, such as the Twitter post in Figure 1.2, and how these posts influence educator job satisfaction.

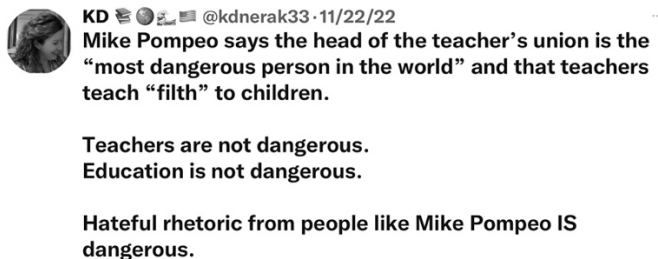


Figure 1.2

Mike Pompeo Quote Concerns Education Advocates

Note. Former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency and former United States Secretary of State called Teachers' Union President Randi Weingarten the "most dangerous person in the world" in an interview with a reporter in November 2022 (KD [@kdnerak33], 2022). The quote drew criticism from education advocates.

For this study, I used a phenomenological case study approach to explore the perceptions of educators in a large district in North Carolina regarding their experiences related to news stories, social media accounts, and online remarks posted about education and educators. In the

chapters that follow, I provide a detailed account of the research process. Next, I analyze the themes from these interviews that became apparent through the coding process. Finally, I share my conclusions regarding my findings from the phenomenological case study and address implications for future research, policy, and practice.

I was motivated to complete this study due to my professional role in serving as a principal of a comprehensive high school in North Carolina through the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Preliminary research revealed a focus on a relationship to educator attrition in several studies that examined teacher job satisfaction studied in rural communities and a study conducted with a focus on job dissatisfaction among building principals. This study aimed to capture the experiences of educators in a large district with negative media that focused on educators and education. This study also sought to assess the degree to which the perceptions of educators regarding education-focused media impact one's job satisfaction and desire to remain in their current school role. Through interviews with educators, the study documented their reactions to negative news stories, social media posts, and public comments about educators and education.

Research Questions

This inquiry into the perspectives of educators regarding the portrayal of educators and education was guided by one central research question and three sub-questions:

Central Research Question: What are teachers' and administrators' perceptions about the impact of how they and public education are portrayed in the media?

Research Sub-Questions

1. How do educators working in a large district describe their experiences with mainstream and online media that focuses on educators and education?

2. How do news stories, articles, social media posts, and online comments about education and educators impact educator job satisfaction?
3. How do educators describe the impact of negative media and public commentary about education and educators on educator attrition?

Definition of Terms

Following is a list of terms essential to understanding this research. The terms are defined by the researcher or by others who are noted in the citations.

Attrition rate –According to Madumere-Obike et al., (2018) “[t]eacher attrition rate is the percentage of teachers exiting the educational profession in a given school year. In calculating this, the number of leavers is estimated by subtracting the number of teachers in year t from those in year t-1 and adding the number of new entrants to the teaching force in year t. Attrition rate is the number of leavers expressed as percentage of the total number of teachers in year t” (p. 48).

Career longevity – This term refers to the length of time an employee remains with an employer at each job (*How to Create Career Longevity*, 2016).

Closures – This term was operationalized for this study and refers to the closure of schools that was mandated by state and local governments across the United States due to the COVID-19 pandemic. When schools were closed and did not allow in-person learning, instruction shifted to a remote model that directed students to access lessons online (Hood, 2022).

Face-to-face instruction – This term was operationalized for this study as the teaching model that places students in the classroom with the teacher for in-person instruction.

Face-to-Face Learning Definition and Meaning (n.d.) defines face-to-face learning as “an instructional method where course content and learning material are taught in person to a group of students. This allows for a live interaction between a learner and an instructor. It is the most traditional type of learning instruction” (n.p.).

Highly qualified teacher– The federal government’s No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law defines a highly qualified teacher as “one who [meets] three criteria: 1) holds at least a bachelor’s degree from a four-year institution; 2) holds full state certification; and 3) demonstrates competence in each core academic subject in which a teacher teaches” (*Every Student Succeeds Act*, 2016, para. 3).

Job satisfaction – This term was operationalized for this study as the level of contentment and support educators feel with their jobs.

Mask mandates – Mask mandates require students, school staff, and visitors to school campuses to wear a protective face covering as recommended by the Department of Health and Human Services. Requirements that individuals wear masks to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 were enforced at schools as staff and students returned to face-to-face instruction during the pandemic (Gee & Gupta, 2020).

Media – This term was operationalized for this study to refer to the platforms that share news and provide social networking. The Law Dictionary (2012) identifies media as “news, entertainment, education, data, and promotional messages [that] are sent world-wide through this type of communication channels. Every broadcasting and narrow casting medium, like newspapers, magazines, TV, radio, billboards, direct mail, telephone, fax, and internet are part of what is the Media” (n.p.). Consistent with this definition, The Oxford English Dictionary (2022) defines media as “the main means of mass communication, esp. newspapers, radio, and

television, and (from the later 20th century) content accessed via the internet, regarded collectively; the reporters, journalists, etc., working for organizations engaged in such communication” (n.p.). It also cites media as “a particular means of mass communication” (n.p.).

News stories – News stories refer to articles published to mainstream and online platforms. These articles may include news written for the specific online platform as well as articles that draw from television and print sources, summarizing their content and publishing to the platform. Definitions of news from the Oxford English Dictionary (2022) include “new things;” “the report or account of recent (esp. important or interesting) events or occurrences” (n.p.). The definitions also include “a radio or television broadcast in which news is announced and sometimes discussed” (n.p.).

Online comments – This activity includes comments written and posted to online platforms following news stories and social media sites. This term may also include the term public comments. Social media platform Hootsuite identifies a comment as a “form of engagement in which a user replies to your social media post” and states that the comments can “offer praise, ask a question, express disagreement, and otherwise contribute to the online conversation about [the] social content” (2022, n.p.). The definition also notes that “comments can include text, hashtags, @mentions, and emojis” (n.p.).

Persistence – Specifically, “job persistence” is a term associated with one’s continued work to do a thing even when faced with difficulties or opposition (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). It is a widely accepted antonym for resignation or attrition.

Public confidence – The term was operationalized for this study to describe the feeling demonstrated by the content of news stories and social media platform posts to characterize the community’s trust in the degree to which schools and educators provide satisfactory services to

public education students. Cowell et al. (2012) defined public confidence as “a belief that (local) government is acting in accordance with the best interests of the public” (p. 2).

Quarantine – During the COVID-19 pandemic students and staff were removed from taking part in face-to-face instruction and had to remain at home for several varying days due to their own infection or contact with a COVID-positive person. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website states that “isolation and quarantine help protect the public by preventing exposure to people who have or may have a contagious disease” (*Quarantine and Isolation*, 2021, n.p.). The information also states that “quarantine separates and restricts the movement of people who were exposed to a contagious disease to see if they become sick (n.p.).

Shortages – This term refers to a lack of applicants needed to serve in educational positions.

Social media – This term refers to numerous online platforms accessed by persons to interact and engage on various topics. It includes “forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos)” (Merriam-Webster, 2023, n.p.). Such platforms are informally referred to as applications, or “apps,” and include social platforms such as Facebook, Snapchat, and Twitter, renamed X.

Stakeholders – This term refers to those who are involved in or affected by a course of action. “Stakeholders in education include students, parents, educators, policymakers, and the business community. Each of these groups has a vested interest in ensuring that our educational system is effective and meets the needs of all learners” (Drew, 2022, n.p.).

Teacher Working Conditions Survey – This survey, which is distributed by the state of North Carolina to school faculty members, is an opportunity for certified educators in North

Carolina to provide perception data regarding their working conditions to school and district leaders to highlight positive and negative trends. Additionally, the North Carolina Department of Public and the North Carolina State Board of Education review data presented through the biannual survey of certified educators to increase awareness of what is and what is not working in schools across the state to improve working conditions for teachers (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2023b).

Working conditions – The environment of one’s employment that addresses safety, professionalism, and support. “Working conditions are the demands, environment and terms of a job that influence the satisfaction of employees” (Spacey, 2018, para. 1).

Vaccination—First used in 1891, this term refers to “a preparation that is administered (as by injection) to stimulate the body’s immune response against a specific infectious agent or disease” (*Merriam-Webster*, 2023). During the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccination of the COVID-19 disease became a highly politicized issue for families as schools worked to protect staff and students while providing face-to-face instruction and opportunities for school-based activities such as sports. Some school boards across 14 states mandated vaccination while others did not (Zalaznick, 2021a).

Significance of the Study

The results and concluding thoughts that highlight my findings from this phenomenological case study have implications for policy, practice, and future research. This proposed study was intended to be responsive to the deficits in existing research on educators’ perceptions regarding how they have been portrayed in mainstream and online media by journalists, parents, community members, and political figures in contemporary political, social, and professional contexts. Of primary interest in this research were educator perceptions of the

degree to which levels of negative portrayals in the media impact teacher satisfaction and retention.

This study is significant for policymakers and district and school leaders who are working to retain highly qualified educators and staff in public schools. Leaders who focus on improving working conditions for educators can use this research to inform their work within their communities in order to help promote positive news regarding education. Future researchers can use this study as it adds to the body of knowledge regarding educator retention and the related impact of negative media portrayals of educators. This study provided recommendations for additional inquiry. Other researchers can continue to explore factors related to public support of educators and how that support impacts healthy school communities and student achievement.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the study, including the identification of the problem that gives rise to the study, the purpose of the study, and the justification for the study. The chapter also presents definitions of key terms and an overview of the dissertation document. Chapter 2 opens with a section on the background for the study and the contemporary policy context in which the study is occurring. The chapter provides a comprehensive review of relevant research and professional perspectives regarding perceptions of teachers and administrators about negative media stories and public comments that reflect a lack of respect and support for public education. The chapter also includes a theoretical framework for the study. Chapter 3 presents information regarding the methodological approach for the study. The chapter provides a detailed description of the study's research questions, processes of sampling, data collection, and data analysis. The interview procedures are also outlined.

Chapter 4 provides the detailed results of the study. The chapter addresses findings related to the degree to which educator perceptions are impacted by negative media. These findings include results from the research questions that were constructed to guide this inquiry. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the findings within the context of existing research. The chapter further describes the implications of the research for policy, practice, and future research.

Summary

This chapter discussed the importance of educators' perceptions of the level of support in their school communities for education and educators and how that support can impact teacher satisfaction and retention. The chapter described the heightened criticisms of schools and school personnel that have arisen during and in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Support for public education and educators is critical to ensure that schools are served by and can retain high quality educators. Literature surrounding this topic was presented and long-range implications for the field of education were mentioned. Information was also presented to indicate the importance of the study due to the need for highly qualified teachers to serve in schools to promote student success and growth for the students of North Carolina.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Introduction

This chapter reviews literature that was relevant to my study purposes. The review begins with a focus on 21st century educators who have been teaching through a pandemic and how support for educators shifted as schools faced issues related to health concerns and other controversial public issues. In the background section, I compare the current lack of support for educators and schools to public and media support demonstrated during the epidemic in the early 1900s as schools closed when the nation faced concerns of public health due to the flu virus and polio. The literature review also addresses the shift in instructional expectations for schools over the last 30 years and the introduction of national measurement tools that assess student performance. These assessment tools were developed to provide parents with information that helps them determine the level of rigor their children are receiving and their proficiency levels in relation to other students their age across the nation. Developed to establish benchmarks in educational progress, these same measurement tools were used following the pandemic to present public education in a negative light as educators worked to support their students.

Social constructivism is the theoretical framework that was used in this study and is described as an interpretive framework in which individuals seek to understand their world, their reality, and develop meaning that corresponds to their experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study was also guided by role socialization theory, which explains that “persons are members of social positions and hold expectations for their own behavior and those of other persons” (Biddle, 1986, p. 67). More specifically, role socialization theory was used to examine the relationship of job satisfaction that educators have with regard to their perceptions of “perceived mattering, role stress, emotional exhaustion, and job satisfaction” (Richards et al., 2019, p. 390).

Thornton's 1993 description (as cited in of Merriam & Tisdale, 2016) of the significance of utilizing a theory to examine a phenomenon was that "theory allows seeing what we would otherwise miss; it helps us anticipate and make sense of events" (p. 68). The examination of extant research continues with a focus on news media, education in the media, implications for a struggling system, and the loss of educator applicants as colleges and universities welcome fewer applicants to teacher education programs across the country. Schools need effective teachers and administrators. It is imperative that enthusiastic, caring, and knowledgeable people choose education as an intended career path so public education can maintain strong academic programs that benefit all students.

Background and Contemporary Context

In March 2020, schools across the United States shut their doors to both staff and students in an effort to protect public health. Schools responded to the mandated building closures by shifting instruction of students using paper packets and computer-based lessons. While administrators and central office staff members met in online Google Meets and Zoom calls to discuss and collaborate on the adjustments and resources needed for teachers and students to support continued instruction, social-emotional well-being, and needed meals, teachers greeted students online from the safety of their homes. Educators who may have used the camera feature of their computer laptops infrequently found themselves in front of the small lens daily as they worked to welcome and engage students in a virtual format.

As school staff members handed out electronic devices like Chromebooks and mobile hotspots to families to support students' access to online tools and instruction, students, parents, and media celebrated educator efforts to pivot their normal practices in favor of online lessons that students could access from home. Educators and school staff were essential in helping

students maintain a sense of connection to the world outside their homes by providing routine opportunities in the face of the pandemic (Lieberman, 2021). Still, one of the most difficult problems teachers and educators addressed throughout the pandemic was maintaining contact with and engagement of the students in their classes (Barnum & Bryan, 2020). To further complicate matters, they had little control in helping students establish an educational environment which is key to support learning (Keser Aschenberger et al., 2022). With students logging in for lessons from their homes, teachers did not have the ability to establish a setting for every child that suppressed distractions, maintained consistent Internet connections, and provided teacher proximity to gently encourage any needed re-focusing back to the lesson (Editorial Projects in Education, 2021; Keser Aschenberger et al., 2022). The celebratory reviews of teachers who had shifted their delivery and adjusted lesson plans to aid their students in achieving academic success dwindled when student engagement decreased, and the media focus turned to how the work of schools was not enough to prevent students from losing educational ground (Barnum & Bryan, 2020).

The Influenza Pandemic of 1918-1919

The COVID-19 pandemic was not the first time that schools in America shut their doors to protect public health. Ager et al. (2022) explored the effect school closures had on children's educational attainment as a result of the influenza pandemic of 1918. The decision to close schools was deemed a non-pharmaceutical intervention that local community leaders could employ to curb the spread of an H1N1 virus. Their research revealed that the average "closure length was 36 days, and some cities decided to make up for missed school days by extending the school year" (Ager et al., 2022, p. 5). Other non-pharmaceutical inventions available to community leaders in 1918 and 1919 included many of the same health measures used to address

the recent COVID-19 pandemic: “isolation/quarantine, bans on public gatherings, staggered business hours, ventilation of public venues and streetcars, mandated face masking, and school closures” (Ager et al., 2022, p. 6). Similar to the conflicting interests that plagued societal decisions throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, historical records from North Carolina’s 1918 influenza pandemic mention that while the Durham County Board of Health did not re-open schools when pressed by community interests, they did succumb to pressure from local businessmen to briefly open trade at the tobacco warehouse (Austin, 2018).

Austin’s (2018) research reveals that some North Carolina communities expressed frustration and fatigue at on-going school closures in the face of the influenza pandemic. North Carolina’s Lenoir district went so far as to bring the issue to court and stated that the trustees of the school were covering the failings of the school district with the pandemic. The greatest concern reported from the parents’ case was that students would have to repeat their current grades since the students and schools lost an entire year due to the 1918-1919 pandemic. Much like the swing in public sentiment experienced from the first days of the COVID-19 pandemic (Martin, 2022), citizens experiencing the influenza pandemic initially embraced the health measures but later “came to resent any effort of state or local involvement in matters relating to the epidemic” (Austin, 2018, p. 203).

The 1937 Polio Epidemic

A polio epidemic in 1937 prompted Chicago schools to delay school openings and remain closed for three weeks for elementary students when an outbreak occurred (Fitzgerald, 2021). Family structures more easily accommodated a shift to learning from home for families than the recent COVID-19 shutdown (Rich, 2020). However, Fitzgerald also notes that parents were still needed to fill in the gaps when students struggled with radio-delivered lessons. In the

2020 work, *Unprecedented*, Stanford education scholar Michael Hines provided an overview of the collaboration among Chicago's school leaders, radio stations, and newspapers to provide instruction to the 325,000 elementary-aged children of the district. Images of students grouped around radios to hear lessons delivered by remote teachers are a part of the American history archive.

While the literature does not include accounts of negativity and resentment during the polio school closures like those experienced during the prolonged school closures related to the 1918-19 H1N1 virus and the recent COVID-19 pandemic, some students and families still struggled with the 15-minute lessons and “students and parents found flaws with the radio experience, despite news outlets from the time reporting on it fairly positively” (Fitzgerald, 2021, para. 11). For the time, it was an effective way for educators to deliver information to students when Americans needed to socially distance themselves from one another as the polio epidemic struck down person after person. Jones (2020) shared that parents utilized the opportunity provided by the board of education to call in to a hotline number with questions or comments in order to help their children. In order to support the demand for access to educators who could help address their needs, Jones stated that the district was responsive and five additional teachers were added to the telephone hotline to address questions to support student success.

Response to COVID-19 School Closures

Accounts of the COVID-19 pandemic context portray a significantly different public discourse about educators and school policymakers. Educators heralded as heroes at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic became the target of negative news as the pandemic continued to disrupt daily life. Former Florida teacher Ryan Haczynski told “All Things Considered” journalist Michel Martin, “You know, in the spring of 2020, when everybody was, oh, teachers,

how do you do it? And then by - it's summer 2020, get back to work. Go in the schools. You know, take care of our kids” (Martin, 2022, para. 17). In Martin’s interview, Haczynski and two other former educators shared concerns at not being treated professionally nor paid as professionals which impacted their overall job satisfaction and decision to leave education.

Negative media and public commentary directed toward education and educators is a phenomenon of significant concern and it is recognized not only by educators, but by others as well. As recently as mid-November 2021, a whistleblower disclosed internal government documents that highlighted that the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) had created a threat tag of EDUOFFICIALS to track instances of threats related to “intimidation, threats of violence against school administrators, board members, teachers, and staff” (Zalaznick, 2021b, para. 3). Zalaznick’s article cites an FBI memo avowing that the “threat tag [allows] federal authorities to gauge the scope of the problem, determine the motivation for threats against educators and plan enforcement” (para. 3). Attorney General Merrick Garland noted in the FBI memo that threats against public servants are illegal. He also stated a commitment to ensure that individuals must be able to perform their jobs “without threats of violence or fear for their safety” (U.S. Department of Justice, 2021, para. 2).

The literature about the issues facing contemporary educators discloses that most available publications center on difficulties facing educators and schools in the COVID-19 pandemic. The additional stress felt by educators teaching and leading in schools during the pandemic was a widespread and significant concern (Graham, 2021; Martin, 2022; Walker, 2022; Will, 2022c). New challenges arose routinely due to the impact of the virus. Working in a school under ordinary circumstances is difficult, but many educators can shoulder the weight of difficult days if they have the support of the parents and communities around them (Goldstein,

2015; Graham, 2021; Smethem, 2007; Wang et al., 2018). Some educators reported that, not only have they felt a lack of support by the parents of their students and by their local school communities in the current environment, they have felt targeted by news and social media posts that cast educators in a negative light (Christopher, 2022; Martin, 2022). That said, my review disclosed a gap in the literature. Much of the current research focuses on educator stress as it relates to the pandemic, and there are news accounts that profile such concerns, but there was not much current research focused on the specific treatment of educators in news and in social media posts.

Changes in Public Perception

The public perception of educators has evolved over many decades. In previous decades, parents trusted schools and educators to instruct their children—and even dole out corporal punishment—contemporary parents are taking issue with teachers’ lesson plans and seeking increasing oversight of the content of their children’s daily school lessons. The early 2000s saw a shift in teaching practices that moved teachers from isolated classroom roles to collaborative teams with the introduction of professional learning communities (Schonewise & Weichel, 2007). This instructional practice was met with very little skepticism. However, recent practices have not been greeted with such a benevolent posture. The district of interest in this study has experienced public conflict as parents have brought forth concerns that Critical Race Theory (CRT) was being taught to students in grades kindergarten through high school (Childress, 2021; Editorial Board, 2021; Hui, 2021). Parents have also raised concerns about and pushed to remove books that are included in public school libraries that address the perspectives of marginalized groups (Childress, 2022; Graham, 2021). Some parents have conveyed concerns that survey platforms such as Panorama, which are constructed to provide educators with a student’s data

points to address the needs of the “whole child,” are actually mining personal information on their children (Gonzalez, 2021; Graham, 2021). North Carolina legislators even introduced House Bill 755 in 2021 in order to require that teachers post each of their lessons on their school websites in advance so that parents might review them prior to classroom delivery. House leaders who supported this action defended it as “transparency” and an opportunity for parents to review all materials used by their children’s teachers (Granados, 2021). The North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE) urged participation from public education allies to ban the “Busywork Bill” (Granados, 2021). While the bill did not pass initially, its introduction highlighted the level of skepticism that parents and lawmakers have directed at the professionalism of educators and education.

The legislative energy around the idea that educators were not being transparent with parents continued. North Carolina legislators passed The Parents’ Bill of Rights in August 2023 with an override to the Governor’s veto of the legislation. Senator Natasha Marcus, a Democrat, expressed disappointment in the bill’s passing when she voiced that of the persons with whom she had spoken. She stated, “most parents care more about school funding, teacher and school staff vacancies, and support for students' mental health and safety than about the contents of this bill” (Schlemmer, 2023, para. 11). Legislators’ distrust of educators, on the other hand, was reflected in comments of Republican Senator Amy Galey, who sponsored the bill. Schlemmer (2023) quoted Galey, who stated, “Parents have the right to know what is going on with their children, period.” She went on to assert that school employees cannot be permitted to “just conspire against parents to hide [the] truth about their children” (Schlemmer, 2023, para. 8). Marcus stated concerns that these legislative changes would discourage teachers and make them less likely to remain in education (Schlemmer, 2023). Hui and Lu (2023) reported similar

sentiments when they interviewed a literacy coach in Wake County who stated that the law would “intimidate some educators” because legislative intention was to “bully teachers so [they would] fear reprisal” when trying to support LGBTQ youth (para. 4). Such measures, along with the related discourse about them, made clear that some policymakers mistrusted teachers. Such policies also indicate that educators have reason to be fearful of persistent policy changes that could result in parents bringing suit against them for their teaching practices.

Alexander (2018) contends that many of these changes in public perception can be traced back to President George H. W. Bush’s push to see national education standards in place across the country. Following Bush’s momentum, President Bill Clinton sought greater oversight of public education from the federal government in the form of measurement tools that highlighted student performance and success (Cooper et al., 2015). The George W. Bush administration significantly advanced test-based accountability and other performance metrics in schools through No Child Left Behind, the 2002 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Alexander, 2018). While the use of such data to highlight concerns about public education are not new, when the pandemic hit in March 2020, critics of public education augmented the use of the data from such metrics to highlight the failings of teachers and students (Christopher, 2022; O’Brien, 2022). Media sources used these same data to craft negative news stories that aimed to grab the attention of all public school stakeholders. In this way, the general public and media fed a synergistic cycle of negative news through the pandemic in stories and comments that kept educators in the press and presented them as failing their students.

21st Century Educators and Public Trust

The job of contemporary educators is different from the expectations of many experienced educators who began their professional careers in the 1990s. In the mid-1990s North

Carolina's colleges and universities were still graduating large numbers of individuals with teacher licenses. With encouragement from Governor Jim Hunt's initiatives to make teaching an attractive profession, highly qualified teaching applicants were applying for positions as career educators (Berry, 2017). In North Carolina, with a highly qualified teaching force and strong building and district leaders, student achievement was improving and the Tar Heel state was leading the country with the academic progress of its students (Grissmer & Flanagan, 1998; Hunt & First in America Foundation, 2001). A community that values education will inherently support public schools. This cultural aspect creates an environment where education is seen as a collective responsibility and a shared benefit.

North Carolina schools continued to see educational initiatives that strengthened the success of its students at the turn of the 21st century. An education consortium in the Research Triangle area of the state brought together five large school districts over a span of five years with the financial support of five large companies to strengthen educational outcomes for students (Forcella, 2015). The group sponsored educational leaders such as Rick DuFour and Daniel Pink to address educators, directing them to reflect on their instruction and spur them to success with their students. The group also worked together to lobby the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction to update curriculum and educational pathways to graduation (Forcella, 2015). Educators were supported by this initiative and collaboration. Patterned after the work of Rick and Becky DuFour in Illinois, teachers and district leaders were coached to work "smarter" as a community to their students' benefit. Instead of one teacher feeling solely responsible for the academic achievement of their students, the DuFours' message focused on the power of a small team of teachers working collaboratively for the benefit of all students. As principal, DuFour increased the academic performance of his Illinois students by building on the

collective strengths of his staff (DuFour, 2004). While this collaborative instructional model was a departure from the classroom practices parents knew as students themselves, mothers and fathers saw educators working together to the benefit of their children. Parents largely left classroom matters to the schools. Educators led their classrooms as respected professionals with support from community and industry leaders and with little oversight from parents (Christopher, 2022; Gonzalez, 2021; McLester, 2012). However, the support of community and industry leaders did not last.

Distrust in American Institutions

The shift in public trust toward educators and schools is indicative of a greater loss of faith in American institutions in general. McGrath (2017) presented information from a September 2015 report from the Pew Research Center that focused on “public trust in government institutions” (p. 46). His article states that other polls “suggest that this lack of trust is not confined to public attitudes about government,” but covers “most important national institutions” of which the military was “the chief exception” (p. 46). The result of a general decline over many years, the loss of faith reported in public polls includes institutions that are a part of daily life: schools, houses of worship, banks, the U.S. Congress, and the news media. In response to this general loss of faith in the institutions that are in place to educate the nation’s children, provide spiritual guidance, protect one’s earnings, represent the nation’s interests, and keep Americans informed, the 2016 elections saw a rise in candidates who were not of the establishment. Furthermore, many American voters have supported measures, such as No Child Left Behind, that have redirected ultimate authority and oversight back to the federal government and away from that of individual states and local boards of education.

Changes in Standards Shape Public Sentiment

As noted earlier, the executive administrations of Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush brought an increased national focus to education and ushered in measurement tools to gauge student success. During President Barack Obama's presidency, states began to submit grant proposals to the Obama administration in 2012 in order to compete for federal dollars, via the Race to the Top executive orders, to support student achievement (Cooper et al., 2015). States that were early recipients of the sought-after Race to the Top grant money packed their winning proposals with multiple accountability measures through which the funds could be reviewed to demonstrate that the funding was impactful in the hands of state and local districts. North Carolina's application focused on how the funds would be used to provide greater access to high quality teachers, especially in low-performing districts and schools (Boser, 2012). States had the opportunity to design systems that supported their needs (Ayscue et al., 2023). As students, teachers, administrators, and districts worked to understand and meet the expectations established when states accepted this federal funding, news media focused on and reported how states were measuring up. With the increased focus upon such results, those charged with student progress, educators, and schools, underwent heightened scrutiny (Carnoy & Rothstein, 2013).

In 2015, when the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaced No Child Left Behind (NCLB), it gave greater autonomy back to the individual states to determine the needs of their students. Student performance data provided supporters and critics of public education with figures that could be presented to shape perspectives on the successes and failures of public schools and educators (Ujifusa, 2020). One indicator tied to student success was student attendance. Many state ESSA plans included language that addressed chronic absenteeism among students as an indicator of poor performance (Fusarelli & Ayscue, 2019). Ultimately,

Ujifusa (2020) said, “the law might have played a key precursory role in schools’ work to address student absenteeism and attendance, even though it’s not driving attention to those issues the way the coronavirus has” (para. 18).

Pandemic Era Erosion of the Public Trust

Ten years after states implemented new systems of measurement using federal grants in the form of Race to the Top funds, state and national student performance data were used to support various views on the state of education when the COVID-19 pandemic displaced students and staff and relegated instruction to students’ homes. Students and parents struggled along with teachers, and student data gave testimony to their experiences (McClain et al., 2021; Schoenherr, 2022). Specifically, the COVID-19 pandemic created an opportunity for education to make the news when a stressed-out nation sheltered in place and parents were challenged with supporting their children’s school needs in ways that were unfamiliar to most families. While parents were learning how to shift their professional duties and work from home, they had the added responsibility and stress of directing their children’s schoolwork in the same setting. Parents were navigating their own shifts regarding their professional responsibilities while caring for their school-age children and helping accommodate their children’s school resources and workload (Kerr et al., 2021; McClain et al., 2021; Schoenherr, 2022; Vogelbacher & Attig, 2022). Remaining inside their homes, families found themselves spending greater amounts of time together with fewer breaks from one another inside the pandemic’s homeschool hybrid (Barnum & Bryan, 2020; Will, 2021). Christopher (2022) shared that the initial appreciation expressed for educators at the start of the pandemic devolved into disgruntled social media posts by caregivers. Parents expressed frustration at having to carry the responsibilities of educators as they monitored their children’s online platforms and virtual learning environments during the

stay-at-home order (Will, 2021). As their social media posts and online comments gained momentum, online parent complaints provided fodder for a competitive media-saturated market in search of news stories (Harcup & O’Neill, 2017). Armed with numbers and percentages from accountability measures, reporters could grab public attention with negative news stories that were easily shared on social media platforms. The narrative shared in news and through social media increasingly asserted that public education was failing their students (Hickey, 2021; Schwalbach, 2022) Without the support of their communities, educator job satisfaction decreased and led to an increase in attrition, with many educators citing their negative portrayal in media.

Interpretive Framework: Social Constructivism

Creswell and Poth (2018) include a definition of qualitative research from Denzin and Lincoln that highlights the qualities of qualitative research as “material practices that make the world visible” in the form of artifacts that capture the surrounding world (p. 7). This study employed social constructivism to frame the experiences of educators in a large rural district. It is an interpretive framework in which individuals seek to understand their world, their reality, and develop meaning that corresponds to their experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study also made use of role socialization theory which was adapted from role theory and states that “when individuals hold incongruent expectations for the performance of social roles, challenges arise in the form of stress,” which negatively impacts job satisfaction (Richards et al., 2019, p. 392). Employing a social constructivist approach to the study, I reviewed mainstream and online news stories, read comments that follow the stories, and view social media posts that present content and feelings towards educators and schools.

While phenomenology seeks to understand the “essence of the lived experience of [the] phenomenon for [a] person or group of people,” the questions of social constructivism ask “how

have the people in this setting constructed their reality? What is perceived as real and what are the consequences of what is perceived as real?” (Patton, 2015, p. 98). Patton (2015) cited Guba and Lincoln from 1990 in asserting that “social constructivism begins with the premise that the human world is different from the natural, physical world and therefore must be studied differently” (p. 121). Further including information from Guba and Lincoln from 1989, Patton (2015) notes that “truth” is generated by informed constructors, “facts” do not have meaning outside the framework, cause and effect is perceived only through the lens of the being, context provides the only appropriate setting to understand the phenomena, and data do not support the experience as they represent a separate construction from the phenomena being studied. Aided by their feelings, human beings construct their reality based on interpretations they make as they interact with the world. The phenomenon is a reality socially constructed through experiences of real people (Patton, 2015) and that reality is created through human activity (Kim, 2001). With a focus on educators and their perceptions of media depictions of education and educators, social constructivism helped to frame the interview questions that I directed to participants.

Using the lens of role socialization theory, my interview questions enabled me to understand the perceptions of educators to determine if they perceived stress that they believe arose from negative mainstream news and social media posts on teachers and administrators in their professional roles. Role socialization theory examines the ways individuals are socialized to understand what it means to be an educator (Richards, 2015). By soliciting the perspectives of educators, the interview questions enabled me to understand if negative media impacted the job satisfaction of educators in the district, whether the educators perceived that there were consequences of the impact of such media on satisfaction, and what the consequences were. The

elements of social constructivism are provided in question form below, and each is followed by the interview questions that were informed by the particular dimension of the theory:

Social constructivist element: How have the people in this setting constructed their reality?

- What is your general experience with news media and social media?

Social constructivist element: What is perceived as real?

- During the pandemic, educators have been dealing with a lot of attention in the press and on social media. What is your perception of how educators are being portrayed in the press and on social media?
- What do you observe being stated in the online comments sections of online news and on social media about education and educators?
- How do you engage with online comments?

Social constructivist element: What are the consequences of what is perceived as real?

- Describe the effect that social media and online comments section have had on you personally?
- How do these perceptions influence your feelings about the field of education and your job as an educator?
- What are your thoughts about the degree to which the negativity they experience in the media may prompt educators to leave the field of education?
- Have you considered leaving the field of education due to negative media attention surround education and educators?

Pertinent Research and Expert Perspectives

The purpose of this section is to examine available research and to explore expert perspectives pertinent to the issue of educator attrition related to negative media and online comments that demonstrate a lack of public confidence in the services provided by public school educators. The section begins with a focus on factors that impact job satisfaction, followed by a review of the use of the NCTWCS as one mechanism for assessing educator satisfaction. The section then examines the difficult experiences of educators as school closures pushed instruction to virtual settings during the COVID-19 pandemic. The section continues with a look at the role of media in contemporary culture and how it can be a useful tool for communication, but also an instrument of discord in a time when educators cited intensified levels of negative news and criticism directed toward them.

Factors that Impact Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is a concern for most organizations as job dissatisfaction often leads to decreased performance in one's duties and an increase in workplace turnover (Aziri, 2011; Dinham & Scott, 1998; Oshagbemi, 1997). Decreased performance in schools leads to low teacher moral, dissatisfaction, and educator attrition. In 2011, Skaalvik and Skaalvik focused on Norwegian teachers in elementary and middle school to identify key factors that impact job satisfaction to address attrition in the field of education. Their study revealed that the attrition rate followed a U-shaped curve with the greatest numbers of educators leaving before retirement in both the beginning and end of their careers (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). Skaalvik and Skaalvik's work focused on the domains of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction identified by Dinham and Scott in 1998, which included "(a) intrinsic rewards of teaching, (b) factors extrinsic to the school, and (c) school-based factors" (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, p. 1030). Ultimately, Skaalvik

and Skaalvik found that a diminished sense of belonging—dubbed “perceived mattering” by Richards et al. (2019)—and emotional exhaustion impacted educators’ motivation to leave their jobs. Other variables impacting job satisfaction included value consonance, supervisory support, relations with colleagues, relations with parents, time pressure, and discipline problems.

Contemporary News Media Audience Attraction Tools

Contemporary news outlets have heightened capacities to publish stories that grab the attention of a broad audience (Winter, 2022). The purpose of news is to inform and, in many cases, to entertain. Viewers, readers, and listeners want valuable, relevant content that is presented in an interesting and attractive manner (Lee & Chyi, 2014). News coverage is influential, yet many consumers believe that the coverage demonstrated in today’s social media and from news agencies is unbalanced (Shine, 2020). Many of the current values that tend to dominate news and media today are timeliness, relevance, conflict, sensation, and exclusivity. These values are used to attract audiences, particularly online audiences, to stories and opinion pieces in an age when there is an unprecedented amount of information available to the consumer (Harcup & O’Neill, 2017; Lee & Chyi, 2014). Social media algorithms provide consumers with news items that are “important” based on the user’s viewing history as opposed to an audience presented with top news stories selected by a news editor. Coe and Kuttner (2018) reported that what viewers see presented as news shapes their understanding of various issues. Education is a topic that is of interest to many and appears in news and social media posts often, yet many educators perceive they are frequently portrayed as failing their students and their communities (Christopher, 2022).

Education in the Media

Because education is primarily a publicly funded entity in the United States, with a great deal of responsibility residing with state and local governments, taxpayers are interested in how schools are performing as evidenced by state-reported accountability measures (Coe & Kuttner, 2018; Richards et al., 2019; Shine, 2020). The problem with taxpayers receiving their news about school proficiency scores from news stories is that few journalists demonstrate in their articles that they fully understand accountability and testing systems (Bellah, 2020). Coe and Kuttner (2018) reminded readers that when news reports generate stories based on test scores without a full understanding of the bigger picture, they may leave their audiences with an understanding that today's education system is a system in crisis with only pockets of excellence. Journalists are correct in that news agencies have the responsibility to present information to their audience members as well as to expose issues that need to be brought to light, but, often, the reporting of school accountability results presents educators as not well educated or trained and as marginally effective (Bellah, 2020; Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Goldstein, 2015). School-related stories often describe student performance as lackluster and assert that this is the result of caring but ineffective educators who deserve the blame (Coe & Kuttner, 2018; Shine, 2020).

News coverage that identifies educators and education as failing has made education an increasingly controversial career. American educators are disheartened by negative portrayals of them and their profession. *A Nation at Risk*, one of the most widely cited works that reports on the decline in American education, was published in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (Park, 2004). A *Washington Post* article followed this negative theme in 1990 when its author called American kids “dumb” and cited grade inflation, personal fulfillment, and fun as school practices that were allowing American students to fall behind those

in other countries with more rigorous practices (Cohen, 1990). The negative critique of education is not solely due to the 1983 report. Goldstein's (2015) book *The Teacher Wars* outlines many attempts to undermine the job of educators that reach back to public education's earliest days in America. The concern is that the push to undermine education persists. Berliner and Biddle (1995) co-authored *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud, and the Attack on America's Public Schools* that sought to counter the negativity in *A Nation at Risk* and to highlight the good that schools were doing. They further asserted that the George H. W. Bush administration was not interested in promoting good news about schools. An example of continued negative reporting could be seen when news journalist Cortney O'Brien (2022) addressed school closures and the learning loss experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic as a political issue and blamed teachers for their role in failing to support their students. This negative portrayal of educators and schools is not new, but the fact remains that it continues and has arguably intensified.

The propensity to portray education and educators negatively is not exclusively an American phenomenon. Thus, educators in the United States are not the only ones who are dissatisfied with the perceptions being promoted through online news and social media. Shine (2020) surveyed Australian educators who described the current portrayal of them as inaccurate and superficial. Feeling scrutiny and pressure (Shine, 2020), educators are experiencing stress which is turning to burnout and exhaustion (Gonzalez, 2021). Educators are watching colleagues leave the profession, citing job dissatisfaction because they feel attacked, while buckling beneath heavy workloads (Shine, 2020). With the scrutiny placed on educators as those largely responsible for declines in testing and standards, many school staff are not satisfied with the reporting of education (Graham, 2021; Shine, 2020).

An assumption that media are engaged in a calculated attempt to paint public education in a negative light seems plausible when news stories are published with a slant that focuses on the poor quality of public education. Shine (2020) stated that policymakers interpret issues in ways that serve their agendas, while Coe and Kuttner (2018) noted that policymakers' calls for privatization and school choice are more easily supported by the public when schools are presented as failing. Journalists provide details that justify the stories they are writing and maintain an unbalanced perspective of education that is critical of schooling and educators (Bellah, 2020; Shine, 2020). Shine's research noted, however, that local media attention to educational issues revealed more positive stories than did the content of national news stories. According to Bellah (2020), "only 1.4 percent of news coverage of topics is related to education" (para. 3). Bellah further noted that when not reporting sensational stories, a news outlet's attention to educational topics tended to be limited and was typically focused on notable educational milestones such as the anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education* and *Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972* (Coe & Kuttner, 2018). While education reporting by media is limited, because the majority of educational news coverage tends to focus on sensational stories that involve incidents of school violence, finance, student performance, school board struggles, and political issues, the bulk of education news that is reported is negative (Baker, 1994; Bellah, 2020; Shine, 2018, 2020).

Social media platforms such as X, formerly Twitter, provide some hard news content, while Facebook is seen as driving a great deal of social media traffic through "shared" posts that resonate with its audience (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017). With the rise of more Internet platforms, newspapers report that readers who favor print news are dwindling while younger consumers are gravitating to soft news stories tailored to their tastes (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017; Lee & Chyi,

2014). Media, whether presented as news, entertainment, or social media platforms, directly impacts the perception of educators and schools today. Teaching is difficult work, and few professions endure the public and political attention that is directed at 21st century educators (Goldstein, 2015). Educators invest themselves in their work as they model character qualities such as care, courage, fairness, kindness, honesty, and perseverance (Day, 2012). Research, however, demonstrates that educators are shown to be both admired and reviled, expected to close socioeconomic gaps, and solve social problems like racism and poverty that are often out of their control (Galley, 2016). Educators can manage adverse circumstances as they support their students, but they cannot continue to be expected to suffer under an intense workload and a loss of public confidence (Day, 2012; Galley, 2016; Horton, 2022; Walker, 2022). Schools and educators are a convenient group to target for blame in an increasingly heterogeneous society as empathy is diminishing and conflicts are rising throughout society (Christopher, 2022; Day, 2012; O'Brien, 2022).

Teaching in a Pandemic

In the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, which began for many American students and their families in mid-March of 2020, educators were initially celebrated for their adaptability and perseverance as the majority of the country's schools pivoted from face-to-face instruction to virtual platforms to provide instruction to students (Barnum & Bryan, 2020; Will, 2021). The shift that took place in instructional delivery placed a great deal of stress on educators who were unprepared to engage students in virtual classroom settings (Barnum & Bryan, 2020; Horton, 2022; Martin, 2022). Still, educators established accounts on new platforms to record themselves and led their classrooms from home (Aguilera et al., 2021; Will, 2021). They piloted virtual tools

and coached their students through new software when face-to-face work was not an option with the COVID-19 virus moving through communities.

Time magazine ran an edition that focused on specific instances of school staff as heroes in the pandemic year (Aguilera et al., 2021). However, with limitations on the ability to control the classroom environment, educators saw some students disengage from virtual classes in which they participated from at-home desks (Barnum & Bryan, 2020; Christopher, 2022; Kuhfeld et al., 2022). When students underperformed in this new learning environment educators were again spotlighted, but this time for their failure to maintain student growth and proficiency (Kuhfeld et al., 2022). Instead of addressing the level of support that was and was not available through the student's family and local community, vitriol was directed at educators through news stories and comments published on online sites and social media, targeting educators as the reason students were not successful (Christopher, 2022; Hickey, 2021; Will, 2022b). In an essay written for *Time*, First Lady Dr. Jill Biden supported the work of educators when she voiced to readers that, "We must remember that the virus is our enemy, not one another" (Biden, 2021, para. 4).

Implications for a Struggling System

Educator perseverance has been a topic of research and concern for many years (Goldstein, 2015). The phenomenon of the COVID-19 pandemic has only brought greater attention to the loss of educators. These professionals are needed to serve as highly trained teachers and administrators to help students recover skills and content lost during the shift to virtual instruction. While studies of job satisfaction and attrition surrounding educators over the years does not settle on one specific idea, several themes are reflected in the research. Educators have long fought for higher salaries that reflect the professionalism of their career but there are non-salary issues that feed educator dissatisfaction. Among these are increased workloads, poor

student behavior, lack of administrative support, insufficient induction and mentoring programs, and expanded testing, and student accountability (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Woods & Weasmer, 2004). Brown and Schinker (2008) addressed how school leaders can do what they believe to be all the “right” things to retain teachers but still lose staff members. Because attracting and retaining highly qualified educators is important to providing rigorous instruction to promote successful educational outcomes, North Carolina tracks attrition and mobility of its educators through an annual report directed by General Statute 115C-229.5. The report for the 2020-2021 year cites among its key findings that 44.6% of educators who left their positions named “personal reasons” as their justification for leaving (Truitt, 2022).

The analysis of factors that impact educator satisfaction and educator decisions about persisting in the profession invites the question of how the above-mentioned trends in the portrayal of schools and their staff members affect the system. Darling-Hammond et al. (2022) reported that the number of credentialed teachers dropped in North Carolina 30% between 2010-2011 and 2015-2016. Teacher working conditions were cited among the three top factors influencing educator “supply, quality, and turnover” for both teachers and school administrators (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022, para. 28). Shortages will likely continue as educators, in general, do not perceive that they are important (Horton, 2022).

Universities will likely continue to see reduced numbers of students enrolling in colleges of education to learn and train to serve as educators; this trend will be exacerbated by the continued marginalization of educators who have struggled through budget cuts, difficult working conditions, and little recognition for the work they engage in daily to benefit their students (Coe & Kuttner, 2018; Richards et al., 2019; Shine, 2020; Walker, 2022; Will, 2022b). However, it is important to note that when provided with manageable schedules, cooperative and

engaged students, a supportive environment, and recognition for a job well done, educators have reported a higher rate of satisfaction in their jobs (Christopher, 2022; De Jong et al., 2017; Richards, 2015; Richardson, 2017). Researchers also identified that the benefits to job satisfaction are role productivity and career longevity that could help improve conditions for educators and education (Richards et al., 2019).

Summary

The focus of this qualitative study was to hear the stories of individuals to learn about their experiences regarding the role that media plays in educator perceptions and how those experiences impact job satisfaction and attrition in a large school district in North Carolina. Previous research has been dedicated to the stress created for educators faced with teaching in a pandemic. This study examined the role that media plays in how educators feel about their jobs from the educator's perspective through individual case studies.

The literature review highlighted similarities and differences in how the public supported educators and school during the influenza pandemic in 1918-1919 and polio epidemic in 1937 compared to the support demonstrated toward educators during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The literature also explored the shift that occurred in academic expectations of students and the introduction of scholastic measurement tools that compare student performance across the nation. News stories and social media posts demonstrate how trust and support of education and educators waned throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and how that lack of support threatens the job outlook for schools and districts in need of good teachers and administrators to serve their students.

The current study used a social constructivism framework and was supported by social role theory as this research sought to understand educator perceptions about the impact of how

they and public education are portrayed in the media. Qualitative research was important in capturing the experiences of the interview participants who all work in the school district as they shared their perceptions of the role media plays in their job satisfaction. For the purposes of this study, *media* was generally defined as news stories, comments, and social media posts.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Chapter Introduction

This phenomenological case study analyzed how educators in a large district in North Carolina perceive the portrayal of education and educators in the media. The purpose of this study was to examine how negative news stories, articles, social media posts, and online comments about public schools, teachers, and administrators influence educator job satisfaction and attrition. Educator attrition is an area of concern for public school leaders and communities and is a topic that has been explored in research prior to the pandemic (Berry & Shields, 2017; Brill & McCartney, 2008; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). However, the stress from the demands placed on educators and school staff throughout the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to the number of educators who are resigning from their school roles (Horton, 2022; Martin, 2022). Many of these educators are sharing their resignation status through social media platforms such as X, formerly known as Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok, while districts and school leaders work to fill staff vacancies and school roles with highly qualified and effective personnel.

This qualitative study focused on the perceptions of educators in elementary, middle, and high school settings, including both classroom teachers and administrators, to understand how their perceptions of such media stories influence educator job satisfaction and their desire to continue working at their respective school sites. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology associated with this inquiry. The research design, questions, participation sampling, and research procedures are explained in the following sections. This chapter closes with delimitations and a chapter summary.

Research Design

The research design was a phenomenological case study. Responses from the participant interviews were examined for relevant themes and add to the body of literature related to educator satisfaction and retention. Research questions focused on how participants viewed news stories, articles, social media posts, and online comments about education and how these posts influenced educator job satisfaction.

While Patton (2015) identified qualitative research as “personal,” in that the researcher brings their background, skills, and experiences to the research, and imparts them in the findings, Jacob and Furgerson (2015) focus on qualitative research and its ability to provide people with the opportunity to tell their stories. They present qualitative research as a way to nurture others through the storytelling process that is a part of the human condition. Qualitative research calls on the researcher to observe and listen. Creswell says that the researcher should let the story do the work (Hargreave, 2019).

Through interviews with public school educators in a large school district with a history of media conflict surrounding education issues, I examined how perceptions of negative media attention impact educator job satisfaction. Teachers and administrators at elementary, middle, and high school settings were included in the purposive sampling to identify trends and patterns of this phenomenon across the three school levels. This study used semi-structured interviews to investigate educator perceptions about how school staff and leaders have been portrayed in the media and how these perceptions influence their feelings about their jobs, the field of education, and educator retention.

To understand the experiences of the interview participants, I approached the research using a phenomenological method. Phenomenologists seek to understand an experience by

researching a specific situation through the perspectives of those who are living it (Neubauer et al., 2019). Smith (2018) stated that utilizing a qualitative phenomenological research method provides participants with the opportunity to share their stories and experiences.

Phenomenological research “describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 13). With this guidance in mind, a phenomenological design was an appropriate method for my study. Participants had the opportunity to explain how they view the news stories, comments, and social media posts that characterize the job of educators in contemporary public discourse. Creswell and Poth (2018) identified phenomenological research as common meaning for multiple participants of their lived experiences of a particular phenomenon. Responding to open-ended questions creates space for interview participants to share their experiences and reveal information that would not have been uncovered in a quantitative research questionnaire (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Research Questions

This section introduces the research questions that guided this study. The purpose of this study was to research and to explore expert perspectives pertinent to the issue of educator job satisfaction and attrition related to negative media and online comments that demonstrate a lack of public confidence in the services provided by public school educators. This inquiry into the perspectives of educators regarding the portrayal of educators and education was guided by one central research question and three sub-questions:

Central Research Question: What are educators’ perceptions about the impact of how they and public education are portrayed in the media?

Research Sub-Questions:

1. How do educators working in a large district describe their experiences with mainstream and online media that focuses on educators and education?
2. How do educators describe the impact of news stories, articles, social media posts, and online comments about education and educators on educator job satisfaction?
3. How do educators describe the impact of negative media and public commentary about education and educators on educator attrition?

Participants

To capture the perceptions of educators regarding media attention focused on education and educators, I included 14 teachers and administrators from a large district in North Carolina in the study. The school district is comprised of nearly 50 elementary, middle, and high schools and employs approximately 2,600 teachers and close to 150 school administrators. The district received significant media attention prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and throughout the pandemic. Much of the pandemic-related news addressed mask mandates and fears that Critical Race Theory was being taught in its public school classrooms across all grade bands.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommend that the sample size in a phenomenological study include a range of 3-10 research participants. I interviewed 14 educators serving in the school district to better understand how educators in various roles view media attention toward educators and the degree to which they perceived that news and social media depictions of educators and education are a factor in job satisfaction and in decisions made by staff to remain in schools or to leave the profession. Including 3-5 participants at each school level provided data highlighting the various perspectives regarding the perception of media attention on educators and provided me with the opportunity to determine if different themes are reflected at

the varying school levels. The participants were teachers and administrators in elementary, middle, and high school settings. By including the experiences and voices of educators at each of the three school levels, I expected consistent and divergent themes to be revealed across educator perceptions of media portrayals of education and educators, including negative media attention, and examine how negative portrayals impact job satisfaction and educator attrition.

In selecting interview participants for this case study, I ensured that the participants represented various levels of public education, years of experience, gender, and ethnic diversity to ensure a variety of views and experiences. It was also important that both teachers and principals were included as participants since their roles can provide them with different perspectives. Purposive sampling provided the study with an appropriate pool of interview participants who have experienced the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After securing permission to conduct the study from North Carolina State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), I obtained the superintendent's permission to conduct the study in the district (Appendix A). The superintendent consent form is in Appendix B. I solicited participants by sending an email request to every administrator and teacher through the district's email network to request participation from them in this study.

Purposive sampling was an appropriate choice because the goal of this study was to hear the voices of educators regarding their experiences related to news stories, social media accounts, and online remarks posted about education and educators. Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that identifying specific characteristics of the sample result in stratification of the population. This study involved stratification of the population as the research sought to include educators at each of the three school levels representing different experience levels, races, and genders to reflect the population of educators experiencing the phenomenon in the district. While

the sample size is small relative to the number of educators in the district, qualitative interviews provided in-depth responses that capture the participants' perceptions of media depictions of educators and education, and how negative media impacts their job satisfaction and relates to their plans to continue working in their schools. By providing participants with pseudonyms and assurances of confidentiality, I encouraged candid responses to the interview questions and diminished any fear of retribution for their responses.

The interview protocol and questions established a consistent design to present each participant with the same questions to maintain an intentional focus on their responses to the questions as they revealed their lived experiences and how the phenomenon had affected them. Educators who worked in the selected district from 2018 to 2022 were interviewed. They were asked to share their perspectives relative to the phenomenon.

Much of the limited research literature regarding educator satisfaction centers on job satisfaction in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. While educators voiced their personal concerns over social distancing and mask mandates when school boards voted to return to in-person learning, they faced public scrutiny as parents, school board leaders, and politicians focused increased attention on what was taking place inside America's classrooms. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, many institutions of higher education saw a drop in their teacher preparation program numbers which diminished the number of quality certified teachers entering the profession (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022). Since the COVID-19 pandemic, more stories of educators leaving the profession have come to the forefront of media attention while universities are continuing to report fewer applicants entering their institutions with the goal of obtaining a degree in education (Will, 2022a).

Due to the significant role that job satisfaction plays in an educator’s desire to remain in their current school setting, the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards Commission (NCPTSC) developed a teacher working conditions survey in 2000 and piloted it in 60 schools as a paper-and-pencil survey. The survey, which is entitled the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey, addresses several school conditions related to teacher outcomes, including “the allocation of time in schools, the provision of professional development for teachers, the quality of school leadership, the input of teachers into school decision-making, and the adequacy of school facilities/resources” (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2023b, para. 3). In 2002, the NCTWCS became the first statewide survey of teaching conditions in the nation and “North Carolina became the first state in the nation to study teacher working conditions by surveying those whose opinion matters most on these issues—teachers themselves” (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2023b, para. 3). The NCTWCS is designed to be completed in approximately 20 minutes, is anonymous, and captures the perceptions of working conditions of teachers and licensed educators to help inform leaders at the school, district, and state level (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2023b). Together, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the North Carolina State Board of Education have carried out the biannual survey for 20 years with a purpose listed on the organization’s website “to ensure that every educator has the supportive environment necessary to help students achieve at the highest level” (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2023a, para. 2). The survey’s results are a resource and are expected to be used at the school, district, and state levels to address needs that are tied to student achievement and teacher retention. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the North Carolina State Board of Education sought feedback from educators across the state in the fall of 2023 in order to update the state’s survey

by reducing the number of items while improving the validity and reliability of the survey. It was the first time that certified staff were asked to provide input into the state’s working conditions survey.

Because the teaching conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic brought challenges in addition to those previously assessed by the NCTWCS, the 2022 NCTWCS included new questions to provide educators with an opportunity to share perceptions about the COVID-19 pandemic. It was administered in spring 2022 and was responsive to the need of educational leaders to capture timely feedback specific to teaching conditions during the pandemic period. Figure 3.1 displays the questions that were added to the 2022 survey to capture teacher perceptions of the impact of the dramatic changes in school environments during the pandemic.

Figure 3.1

Pandemic Impact Questions Added to the NCTWC Survey in 2022 (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2022)

PANDEMIC IMPACT								
				25%	50%	75%	100%	Not Sure
Q16.1	What percent of your instruction this year has been spent on <i>reteaching</i> prior grade academic standards?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
		Much less than before	Somewhat less than before	About the same	Somewhat more than before	Much more than before		Not Sure
Q16.2	At this point in the 2021-22 school year, how do your students’ needs for <i>social/emotional/mental health support</i> compare to the same time in a typical school year?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
		1 year behind	6 months behind	3 months behind	About the same	3 months ahead	6 months ahead	1 year ahead
Q16.3	Please estimate how your <i>students’ current academic progress</i> compares to past academic progress the same time in a typical school year?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q16.4	At this point in the 2021-22 school year, please <i>select the top five</i> issues of MOST concern:							
	Addressing disparities in student learning							Planning for future school closures
	Assessing student performance and needs							Reteaching students prior grade standards
	Health and safety of students							Social/emotional support for students
	Health and safety of teachers and staff							School staffing shortages
	Non-academic needs of students (e.g., food, safe environment)							Transitioning between remote and in-person learning

Maintaining a sense of job satisfaction is important to assist leaders in addressing workplace issues. The final pandemic-focused question in Figure 3.1 asked respondents to identify their areas of greatest concern; this question demonstrates that their experiences matter. Richards et al. (2019), in a study of job satisfaction among physical education teachers, found that the educators experienced stress, burnout, and marginalization of their roles in school. The perspective of an individual's "perceived mattering" in their job fits with the understanding of role socialization theory in that the lack of support and importance presented to them created the role stress they experienced. This stress led to emotional exhaustion and diminished job satisfaction for the participants in the 2017 Richardson et al. study. Wang et al. (2018) studied the job satisfaction of school administrators and found that factors such as recognition from one's employer, relationships with teachers and school leaders, and stress from daily work challenges impacted one's perception of their job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. In terms of both teachers and administrators, research reveals that job satisfaction with employment can be supported with smaller schools, a sense of control and autonomy, access to adequate and quality resources, recognition for quality job performance, a manageable schedule, time for instructional leadership, and a cooperative professional community (Richards et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2018).

As a part of my research, I examined trends in data from the 2022 administration of the NCTWCS. I provided perception data from educators across the state of North Carolina to illustrate "current teaching conditions and the impact those conditions have on a teacher's career" (James, 2022). Survey results were accessed through an online platform and provided information that addressed teacher perceptions of their working conditions. Two domains of particular interest to this study were community support and retention. I focused on NCTWCS responses from the focus district that highlighted job satisfaction and levels of support found in

questions relating to community and retention (see Figures 3.2 and 3.3). I compared district data to that of the state. Additionally, I compared data from the 2018, 2020, and 2022 administrations of the NCTWCS to assess trends in job satisfaction ratings across the multi-year period that included the COVID-19 pandemic. This comparison was useful because the 2018 survey was administered prior to the pandemic, the 2020 survey was carried out at the beginning of the pandemic, and the 2022 survey was deployed immediately following the pandemic. Through an analysis of the data from these three specific administrations of the survey, I identified patterns that provided insights about increased job demands and negative media attention that educators experienced after mid-March of 2020.

Figure 3.2

Community Support and Involvement Questions from the 2022 NCTWCS (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2022)

COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND INVOLVEMENT					
Q4.1 Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about community support and involvement in your school.					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
a. Parents/guardians are influential decision makers in this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. This school maintains clear, two-way communication with the community ^[1] .	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. This school does a good job of encouraging parent/guardian involvement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Teachers ^[2] provide parents/guardians with useful information about student learning.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. Parents/guardians know what is going on in this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. Parents/guardians support teachers, contributing to their success with students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g. Community members support teachers, contributing to their success with students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h. The community we serve is supportive of this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[1] Community means individuals, groups, organizations, government departments, businesses, and anyone sharing vested interest in public schools.
[2] "Teachers" means a "majority of teachers in your school."

Figure 3.3

Retention Questions from the 2022 NCTWCS (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2022)

RETENTION
Q10.1 Which of the following best describes your immediate professional plans?
<input type="checkbox"/> Continue teaching at my current school
<input type="checkbox"/> Continue teaching in this district but leave this school
<input type="checkbox"/> Continue teaching in this state but leave this district
<input type="checkbox"/> Continue teaching in a state other than North Carolina
<input type="checkbox"/> Continue working in education but pursue an administrative position
<input type="checkbox"/> Continue working in education but pursue a non-administrative position
<input type="checkbox"/> Leave education entirely

Responses reported in the three administrations of the NCTWCS provide trend data showing that while teachers and administrators across North Carolina reported an average agreement across the 2018, 2020, and 2022 administrations of the survey, teachers and administrators in the Peartree District responded with a decreasing level of agreement across these administrations. These declines in teacher and administrator agreement ratings for community support and involvement, as well as declines in staff interest in remaining in the district, supported my interest in understanding the perceptions of educators in the Peartree District to understand how negative news stories, articles, social media posts, and online comments influenced job satisfaction and attrition in the district.

Research Constructs

This section describes the variables associated with the research questions and how these were operationalized throughout the study. This study consisted of one central research question that addressed educators' perceptions about the impact of how they and public education are portrayed in the media. The three sub-questions addressed how these perceptions impact job satisfaction and how participants perceived that the influence of negative media ultimately affects educator attrition.

The central research question read as follows: What are educators' perceptions about the impact of how they and public education are portrayed in the media? Research Sub-question 1 read as follows: How do educators working in a large district describe their experiences with mainstream and online media that focuses on educators and education? The construct in this question is educator perceptions about the impact of how they and public education are portrayed in the media. Research Sub-question 2 read as follows: How do educators describe the impact of news stories, articles, social media posts, and online comments about education and educators on

educator job satisfaction? The constructs in this question are the perspectives of educators regarding the impact of news stories, articles, social media posts, and online comments about education and educators. Research Sub-question 3 read as follows: How do educators describe the influence of negative media and public commentary about education and educators on educator attrition? The constructs in this question are the perspectives of educators regarding the influence of negative media and public commentary on educator attrition. All the constructs in the research questions were operationalized through participant responses to related interview questions.

Instrumentation

A phenomenological case study was the appropriate approach to explore the perceptions of educators in a large district in North Carolina regarding their experiences related to news stories, social media accounts, and online remarks posted about education and educators. This study aimed to capture the experiences of educators in a large district with online media that focus on educators and education. This study also sought to assess the degree to which the perceptions of educators regarding education-focused media impacts one's job satisfaction. Through interviews, the study documented educators' reactions to negative news stories and public comments about educators and education. By analyzing my interviews with teachers and administrators in elementary, middle, and high schools, I identified themes regarding educator perceptions of negative media accounts and how these sources impact educator job satisfaction and intentions to persist in the field of education. I shared my conclusions regarding my findings from the phenomenological study and addressed implications for future research, policy, and practice.

I designed a set of interview questions to present to educators (Appendix C). These questions were designed to elicit the perspectives of participants regarding the portrayal of educators and education in media and how these portrayals impact educator job satisfaction and attrition. Their responses to these items provide data that enabled me to answer the central research question and related sub-questions.

The interview protocol included researcher-developed interview questions that asked participants to identify how news stories and social media posts affect educators and influence their feelings about their jobs, the field of education, job satisfaction, and teacher attrition. I developed these interview questions to align with my theoretical framework. The questions were also informed by articles from local and state news agencies and comments that appeared on online social media and news platforms regarding education and educators. The development of these questions was informed by the theoretical framework that included social constructivism, social role theory, and the review of pertinent literature. Table 3.1, which follows, describes the research sub-questions and the interview items that provided data to answer each.

Table 3.1

Matrix of Research Questions and Participant Interview Questions

Research Sub-Questions	Interview Questions
1. How do educators working in a large district describe their experiences with mainstream and online media that focuses on educators and education?	Q3. What is your general experience with news and social media? Q4. How do you access news and social media? How often?
2. How do educators describe the impact of news stories, articles, social media posts, and online comments about education and educators on educator job satisfaction?	Q5. During the pandemic educators have been dealing with a lot of attention in the press and on social media. What is your perception of how educators are being portrayed in the press and on social media? Q6. What do you observe being stated in the online comments sections of online news and on social media about education and educators? Q7. How do you engage with online comments? Q8. Describe the effect social media and online comments sections have had on you personally? Q9. How do these perceptions influence your feelings about the field of education and your job as an educator?
3. How do educators describe the impact of negative media and public commentary about education and educators on educator attrition?	Q10. What are your thoughts about educators leaving the field of education due to the negativity they experience in the media? Q11. Have you considered leaving the field of education due to negative media attention surrounding education and educators?

To ensure survey instrument validity, I consulted with an expert panel that consists of college professors who specialize in qualitative research and others who have expertise in news and social media. I also included an expert in news and social media. My expert panel included

a former state superintendent of education, a university professor who specializes in qualitative research, a school district public information officer, and an educator whose responsibilities include managing a school's social media platforms. I adjusted interview questions using feedback and recommendations from the expert panel members. Appendix D contains instructions and the feedback form for the expert panel.

Data Collection

After I secured the approval of the North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board (IRB), I contacted the district superintendent for approval to conduct the study in the district. Once permission was granted, I proceeded with the collection of interview data.

My primary data collection mechanism was a structured interview. A research interview is an opportunity to hear another person's perspective. For this research, I employed semi-structured interviews. Open-ended questions provided participants with room to share their encounters while removing the researcher's reactions. Using structured questions with each of the educator participants allowed space for their individual experiences with the phenomenon.

Prospective interview participants received an invitation to participate in the survey through their district email addresses. The email explained the purpose of the study, the confidentiality provided to participants, and the right of prospective participants in the research study. When educators agreed to participate, they were asked to click a link in the email to a Google form which took the prospective participant to information explaining informed consent. Participants read information that explained that participation was voluntary. After reviewing informed consent information, participants completed a pre-screening form to help me identify volunteer participants who could assist me with accessing a diverse group of educators to address the purpose of the study. When I needed participants for the desired 12-15 interviews, I utilized a

snowball sampling technique to reach other educators who would share their perceptions about how they and public education had been portrayed in the media.

I interviewed 14 educators from the sample of educators who responded positively to my request to take part in the study. Participants were selected based on my stratification technique regarding years of experience, racial diversity, gender, and grade level; the sample of interview participants included teachers and administrators who represent various backgrounds and the three main school levels: elementary, middle, and high school.

After winnowing the prospective participants to those who provide a diverse representation of educators for the study, I established meeting times with each participant for their interview. Before beginning each interview, I solicited participant consent and reminded each of the purpose of the study, the research procedures, the expectations, their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and the confidentiality that would be provided to them as participants. No teachers, administrators, or schools were identified in the research findings and the school system was referenced only by a pseudonym. The educator's pseudonym was used during data analysis and reporting. With participant approval, I video recorded each 30–40-minute semi-structured interview using the Zoom online platform, which also provided a transcript of the interview. I followed the Zoom protocols provided by the university to maintain the security of the interview and the confidentiality of the participant. I took handwritten notes during each interview to identify key points to revisit and to highlight ideas of particular interest or importance.

I informed participants that all responses would be kept confidential and that there were minimal risks and no benefits for participating in the interview. The interviews were conducted virtually at a time convenient for the interviewee, but outside of his/her work hours and via a

private internet connection. Recording each interview through the Zoom platform allowed for convenience in meeting with participants and provided me with the ability to pay attention to non-verbal responses during our time together. Reviewing non-verbal responses provided me with the opportunity to use emotion coding as a part of my qualitative analysis of participant responses. I informed participants that they could choose to end their participation in the interview at any time.

Each participant who agreed to an interview received an email outlining the purpose of the study and noting that participation was voluntary. Each received an advance copy of an informed consent document and signed it electronically before proceeding with the interview. Participants were informed that there were minimal risks and no benefits for participating in the survey and that they could choose to stop their participation at any time. All responses were maintained in a confidential manner. All recordings were destroyed once they had been transcribed and the study was completed based on the timeline identified by my dissertation chair and committee.

At the time of the interview, each participant was provided a reminder of the time expectations and the promise of confidentiality. I confirmed that the participant had signed the consent document. They responded to questions in a semi-structured interview format. Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes, depending on the responses of the participants. After beginning each interview with an open-ended opportunity for the participant to share their professional experience, I asked each to share their general experiences with online news and social media (Appendix C). Participants were provided with a copy of the questions to view during the interview. Participants followed their responses with their perceptions of how educators are portrayed in news and social media. Each participant explained how their

perceptions influenced their feelings about the field of education and their jobs as educators. Participants also responded with their thoughts surrounding those who are choosing to leave the classroom due to the current social climate around education and educators in the news and on social media. Information derived from these sources was coded for themes and patterns.

Paramount to conducting a good qualitative research interview is establishing a script to begin and end the interview (Appendix C). If an interview participant is going to open up to the researcher, one must create a safe and comfortable environment that supports the opportunity to listen to the participant's experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Providing the participant with a full understanding of their rights of consent and addressing questions of confidentiality are also a large part of creating a safe environment for the interview participant. The protocols delineated above were critical to demonstrate the author's focus on setting the stage to uncover as much of the participant's story as possible to have a full understanding of their experience (Jacob & Furgerson, 2015). Using phenomenology as my research methodology, I participated in candid conversations with educators. Listening to their stories, I was able to capture the rich and personal experiences of the participants related to their treatment by those outside of education.

Data Analysis

Using the guidance of Creswell and Creswell (2018), I sought to make sense of the study's interview data. Qualitative analytic practices were used to interpret data collected through the participant interviews. Using a phenomenological approach, I sought to understand the essence of the lived experience of the phenomenon for the educators in the study (Schwandt, 2001). In order to analyze the information gained through the interviews, responses were transcribed using the online qualitative platform Atlas.ti. The transcripts were read the first time to gain a sense of their content before reviewing them to create codes, and then data were

organized into smaller units using in vivo coding, emotion coding, values coding, and then sub-coding the data as needed. By reviewing the information revealed through the coding process, the study continued to evolve. I looked for common and divergent themes based on additional characteristics of participants representing various categories such as teachers and principals, male and female, minority and non-minority, etc. As information was organized and coded, the findings were summarized to address the research questions regarding educator perceptions of how they have been addressed in news and social media, how their perceptions impact job satisfaction, and how the phenomenon leads to educator attrition.

Units were coded and organized using a master list of codes created and maintained throughout the study. I organized the information collected, read and reviewed all participant information, coded the data with attention to what was expected, surprising, and unusual, generated themes from the coded data, and summarized my findings. To understand each participant's experience, I first utilized holistic coding to review all data before making use of more detailed coding methods. I employed in vivo coding using words and phrases of the participant's language. Words that I saw repeated initially among interview transcripts included appreciation, negativity, challenges, support, difficult, and Facebook. As I identified patterns in the repeated words and phrases of the participants, I developed second cycle coding to assist me in analyzing lived experiences related to the phenomenon (Miles et al., 2020). I reviewed participant responses to identify themes related to the theoretical framework of social constructivism and role socialization theory.

Due to the nature of the phenomenon, I employed emotion coding to label the emotions participants recalled in their interviews as well as the emotions displayed in social media posts. Miles et al., (2020) state that "emotion coding is particularly appropriate for studies that explore

intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions” (p. 67). In addition to the use of emotion coding, I determined that values coding would be helpful to my analysis of participants’ experiences with the phenomenon as it “reflects a participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview” (Miles et al., 2020, p. 67). Exploring the perceptions of educators regarding how they have been portrayed in the media lent itself to the use of values coding. Sub-coding was also included as a coding strategy as I continued to review and analyze participant interviews and social media posts. I did not begin my data collection and analysis with “a priori” codes. Instead, I allowed the participants to reveal their experiences through the interviews and did not predispose myself to identifying negative experiences in their reflections of the phenomenon by generating a list of codes I expected to use. I was prepared to revise codes as data were collected and reviewed. The inclusion of emotion coding led to the themes identified in response to Research Question 2 as participant experiences included feelings of praise, hurt, negativity, and a lack of respect with regard to their overall job satisfaction. The inclusion of values coding led to the themes found in responses to Research Question 3. Participants repeatedly shared information that focused on their disappointment in the treatment to which they were subjected by their greater communities and the media while engaging in an important and difficult job that deserved respect.

When I constructed interview questions, I concluded that it was important to note that the social constructivism theoretical framework of the study “both reveals and conceals meaning and understanding” as the framework directs the researcher regarding which information to include and/or not include as a part of the research study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 88). All research activities employed the filter of social constructivism and relied on role socialization theory to guide the research and interpret data from the literature, the participants, and the review of media

regarding education and educators. Ultimately, the participants' experiences came together when I organized the coded responses against the structure of the research questions using the lens of both social constructivism and role socialization theory. In this way I was able to determine the information that was/was not helpful as I sought to address the research questions of my study.

I maintained strict adherence relative to the confidentiality of participants. The raw data and corresponding notes were maintained in a locked file cabinet in my home and on my password-protected computer.

Ethical Considerations

Human participants were used in this study. Participants were asked to share their experiences and perceptions of the treatment of educators and education in news and in social media. To maintain adherence to the professional standards and guidelines established to protect the individuals participating in this study, each interviewee was identified by a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. The interviews were conducted virtually at a time convenient for the interviewee using the Zoom online platform designed to capture and transcribe the participant's responses. The use of this platform took place on a private internet connection. Each participant who agreed to an interview received information outlining the purpose of the study and noting that participation was voluntary. Each participant signed an informed consent document electronically before proceeding with the interview (Appendix B). Participants were informed that there were minimal risks and no benefits for participating in the survey, and that they could choose to stop their participation at any time. All responses were secured on a password-protected computer; all information has been kept confidential, and recordings were destroyed once the study was completed based on the timeline established by the committee.

Subjectivity Statement

In my experience as an English teacher, mentor teacher, school mentor coordinator, instructional coach, assistant principal, professional development leader, and principal, I have worked with educators who left the district seeking additional support that they indicated could be found in other districts or organizations. Schools, like other organizations, build programs around people. To attract, retain, and grow talented educators to staff my school and lead rigorous instruction, I need to work to provide inviting and pleasant working conditions in my school and throughout my school community because teacher working conditions are student learning conditions. When there is staff turnover, the momentum of the program or team is disrupted, and such delays may negatively impact student performance.

Among my roles as a principal is the duty to advocate for my school community and serve as an ambassador for public education, especially as the United States has seen harsh critiques of educators intensify since the COVID-19 pandemic. I have seen negative attention focused on school districts from the state's top leaders.

Because I am also an educator who has a lived experience of the phenomenon of reading negative news and social media attention toward educators and education, I employed bracketing to suspend judgment, set aside my biases, and focus on the experiences of the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I am sensitive to information that presents public education in a negative light in my role as a school administrator who is working to staff a large comprehensive high school with highly qualified teachers and staff members for my students. Safeguards that I employed to prevent bias from affecting my analysis and reporting of the results included bracketing and triangulation. I used bracketing to separate my personal experiences with the phenomenon and attempted to set them aside as I interviewed individuals to actively listen to

their experiences with the phenomenon. Edward Husserl referred to this bracketing as “epoche” as the researcher approaches the world with an open mind and suspends judgment about what is real (van Manen, 1990). Using triangulation, I video recorded participants, with their permission, to acquire detailed data. I also collected information by interviewing educators at different grade levels and positions. By making use of perception data found in the NCTWC survey, information gained through phenomenological educator interviews, and artifacts found in public media, I worked to ensure validity in my study and eliminate inconsistencies in the data (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). As a qualitative researcher, I acknowledge that I am aware of my own biases, and I collected a variety of data to ensure that the results of my research are valid.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study were related to the constraints and applications to practice that were accepted prior to implementation of the study. They are described below:

1. The study was limited to a single school district. The district used for this study was identified due to its location, size, and recent experience with negative media surrounding educators and education.
2. I relied on administrators and teachers to accept my invitation to participate in interviews for the study. This could skew the results by leaving out certain voices or by over-representing certain groups of educators.

Limitations

Limitations of this study include that the participants represented one single school district. The participants from the district were selected because they held certified positions at the elementary, middle, and high school levels and represent various years of experience, gender, and racial diversity. Despite the promise of confidentiality, my role in the district as a principal

may have caused some interview participants to be less candid when providing information during individual interviews.

Assumptions

During the completion of this study, I made the following assumptions about the teachers and administrators who participated:

1. I assumed participants understood the questions asked of them and answered truthfully.
2. I assumed that participants responded to interview questions without fear of retribution for their responses.
3. I assumed that the perspectives of the survey sample were representative of the perspectives of the district population.
4. I assumed that participants were sincere in participating and their motives for being a part of this research were honorable.

Summary

Teachers are leaving the profession in significant numbers (Dill, 2022). This qualitative study with quasi-quantitative elements reviewed educators' perceptions of news stories, articles, social media posts, and online comments about education and educators to understand how this relatively new phenomenon influences educator job satisfaction for educators in a large school district in North Carolina. A qualitative study design was selected as the appropriate format to hear educator perspectives. Research questions were answered using semi-structured interview data. I believe that research that provides greater understanding of the perceptions of educators about the ways that they are portrayed in the media will better enable local, state, and national leaders to identify actionable steps that can be taken to improve media coverage. Such changes in

the press about education may strengthen support for educators and help grow, encourage, support, and retain high quality educators for all students.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Chapter Introduction

Chapter 4 provides the results from the study that focused on one district's experiences with negative media, job satisfaction, and educator attrition. The following sections address the results from the qualitative elements of the study that were included in Research Questions 1–3. The sections include the responses of each group of participants relative to each research question.

Summary of Methods

The purpose of this study was to examine how negative news stories, articles, social media posts, and online comments about public schools, teachers, and administrators influence educator job satisfaction and attrition in one large North Carolina school district. For this study, I compared data from multiple administrations of the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey (NCTWCS) in the focus district. The survey items of interest were those that addressed teacher perceptions of community support and teacher retention. I also contrasted the district's data with state-level data.

I used semi-structured interviews to investigate educator perceptions about how school staff and leaders have been portrayed in the media and how these perceptions influence their feelings about their jobs, the field of education, and educator retention. These insights were gained from the perspectives and beliefs of teachers and school administrators working in one large district in North Carolina that had experienced a significant amount of media attention in recent years. A phenomenological case study guided the research investigation to answer the following research questions:

1. How do educators working in a large district describe their experiences with mainstream and online media that focuses on educators and education?
2. How do educators describe the impact of news stories, articles, social media posts, and online comments about education and educators on educator job satisfaction?
3. How do educators describe the impact of negative media and public commentary about education and educators on educator attrition?

Qualitative research provides people with the opportunity to tell their stories. Jacob and Furgerson (2015) present qualitative research as a way to nurture others through the storytelling process that is a part of the human condition. Observing and listening, I followed Creswell's directive to allow each story to do the work (Hargreave, 2019). My role as researcher was to nurture each participant through the storytelling process as I provided them with the opportunity to share their stories and lived experiences. Teachers and administrators explained how they viewed the news stories, comments, and social media posts that characterize the job of educators in contemporary public discourse. By asking open-ended questions, I created space for the interview participants to share their experiences and reveal information that would not have been uncovered in a quantitative research questionnaire (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Study results were based on the qualitative data obtained from interviews completed with teachers and school administrators in one large North Carolina district that experienced a significant amount of education-focused media attention in the years preceding the study. Responses from these sources were analyzed using ATLAS.ti, a qualitative software program that assists in data organization and analysis. I also examined trends in data from the NCTWCS in areas of community involvement and retention for 2018, 2020, and 2022 in order to provide some additional contextual perspectives for both the district and the state. These survey years

were appropriate to my study's purpose since staff responses to this survey include educator responses provided to the state two years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the year the pandemic struck, and two years following the pandemic. These data disclosed that the state's respondents maintained consistent ratings over the three survey administrations. However, the responses provided by educators in the Peartree District trended negatively in their rate of agreement in the areas of community support and retention between 2018 and 2022.

North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey

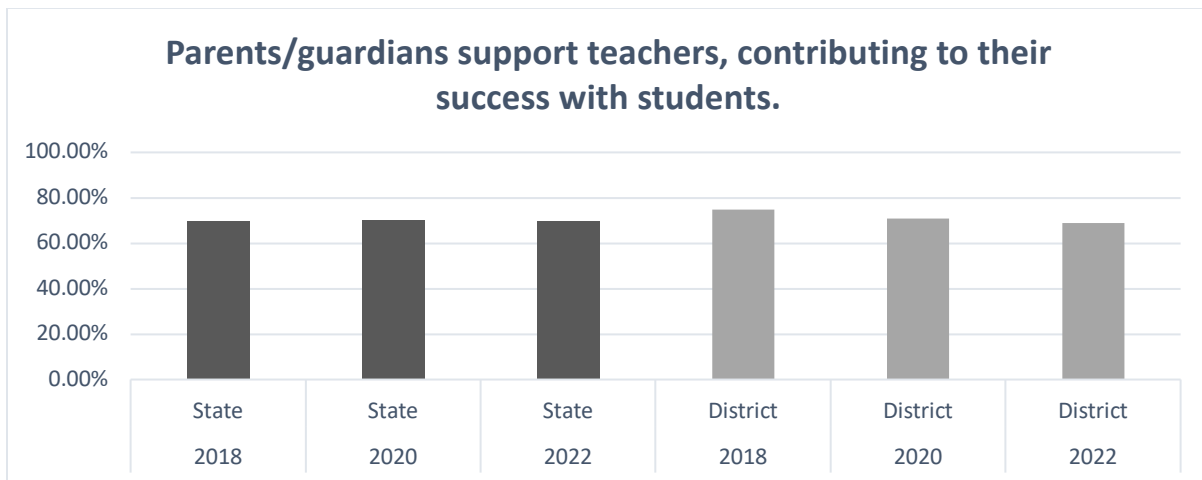
Survey results from the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey (NCTWCS) reported approximately 70% agreement from teachers and administrators across the state that they felt support from parents and guardians in the spring of 2018. Demonstrating a higher level of agreement than those focused on parents and guardians, educator responses across the state from 2018 reflected an 80% agreement when reporting that they felt support from community members, which contributed to their success with students. Educators in North Carolina also agreed at a rate of 80% that the community in which they served was supportive of their schools.

Figures 4.1 – 4.9 are depicted without their exact percentages in order to maintain the confidentiality of the district. Data displayed in Figure 4.1 from the Peartree District reflected an average agreement level that was 5% higher than the state average of 70% in 2018 for educators reporting that they viewed parent and guardian support as a contributing factor in the success they were able to achieve with their students. The levels of agreement are represented in the bars. The survey agreement averages of educators reported in state data in 2018, 2020, and 2022 remained around 70% agreement for parent/guardian support. The Peartree District data showed 5% above the state average in 2018 at 75%, on par with the state average at 70% in 2020, and

close to the state average again with an approximately 70% agreement level in 2022. The figure demonstrates that educator perception of parent and guardian support of their schools that contributed to student success was greater in the Peartree District than that reported in the state in 2018 but decreased in 2020 and again in 2022. Important to note is that the Peartree District’s levels of agreement dropped substantially over the three survey cycles. Over three administrations of the NCTWCS, the Peartree District declined from a position in which it surpassed the state in terms of educator perceptions of parent/guardian support to a position in which the district mean was lower than the state mean.

Figure 4.1

Educator Perception Data of Parent/Guardian Support 2018-2022



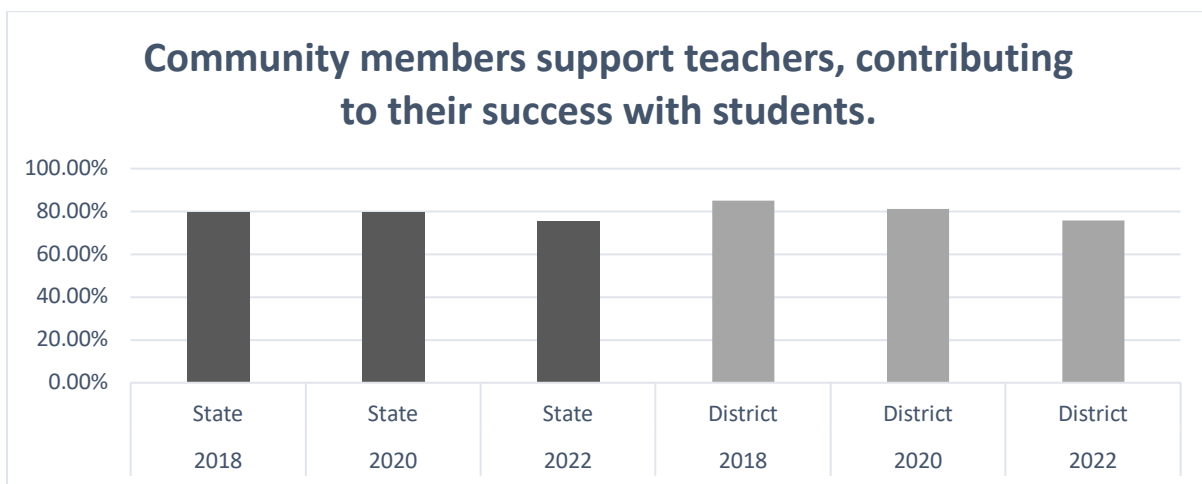
Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2022)

Peartree District educator responses in 2018 reflected a pattern similar to that shown in Figure 4.1 in survey responses related to community member support. Figure 4.2 shows that the Peartree District reflected 85% agreement by educators who felt supported by community members in 2018, 5% over the state’s 80% agreement level. While the state mean remained steady at 80% in the results of the 2020 survey, Peartree District educators reported a decline in

their feelings of support at just above 80%. Their feelings of community support dropped again to 75% when the survey was administered in 2022 in the Peartree District. The state mean also dropped to 75% in 2022. The decline in perceptions of community support among Peartree District’s educators is noteworthy as this negative trend was more precipitous across the three survey administrations.

Figure 4.2

Educator Perception Data of Community Member Support 2018-2022



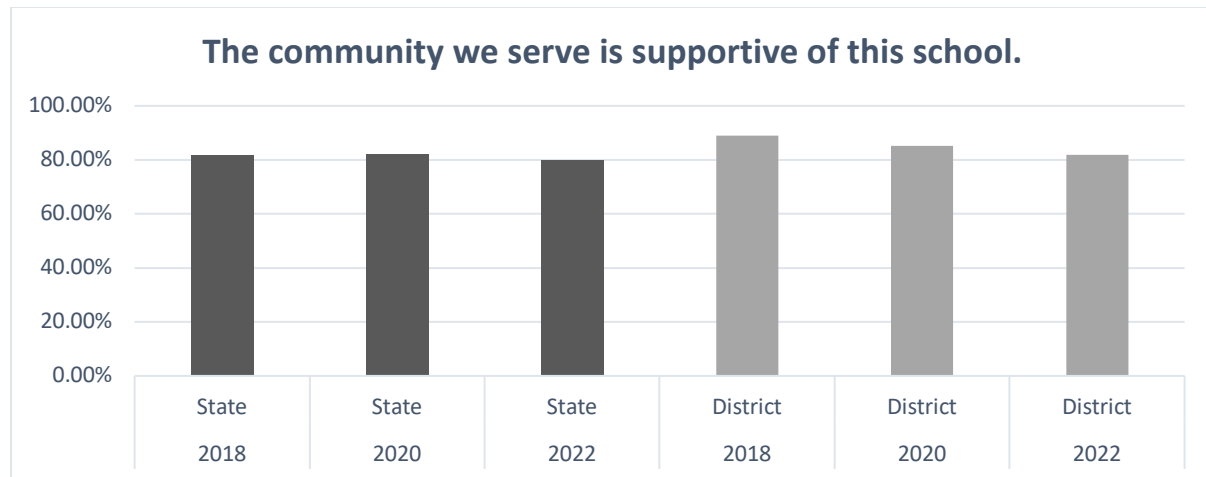
Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2022)

Educators in the Peartree District reported greater feelings of support than their statewide colleagues when responding to the statement of perceived support of their respective schools from their communities. The agreement level displayed in Figure 4.3 indicates that the overall feeling of community support by educators in the Peartree District was 90% in 2018, which was 10% above the average reported by educators across the state that same year. The 2020 survey administration showed the state average remained at 80% while the Peartree District average dropped 5% to 85%. While the overall perception of community support in the Peartree District declined from 2018 to 2020, the district’s mean was still 5% above that of the state. In 2022, while the state continued to maintain an approximate average of 80%, the Peartree District’s

level of agreement dropped almost 5%. Like the results described in Figure 4.2, the district’s 3-cycle decline in the level of agreement about community support was greater than the decline in the state results.

Figure 4.3

Educator Perception Data of Community Support of the School 2018-2022



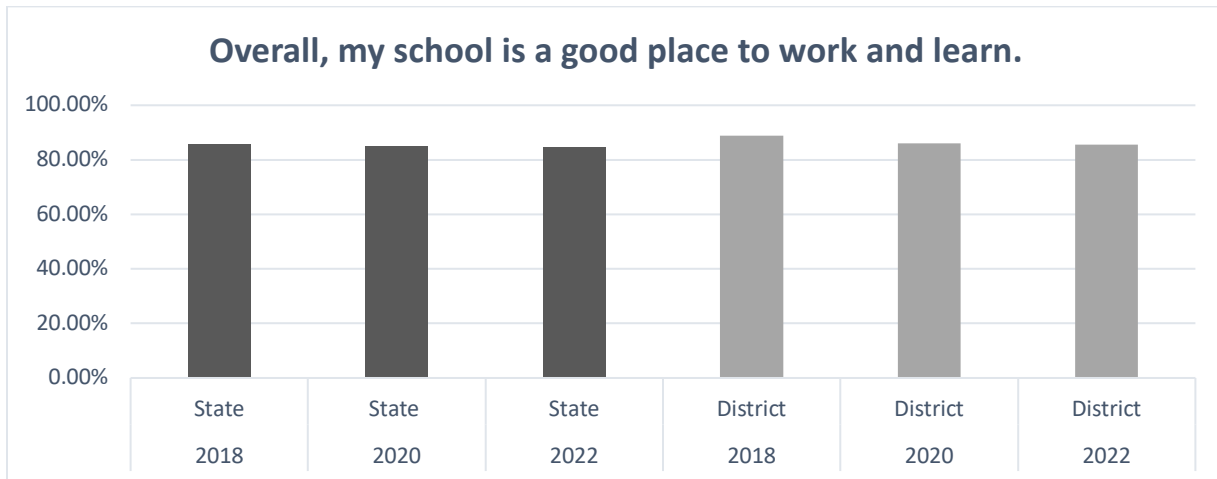
Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2022)

Figure 4.4 addresses NCTWCS factors related to personnel retention; the state average among educators agreeing that their school was a good place to work was 85% in 2018. Figure 4.4 shows the difference in state and district responses addressing how educators felt about their schools. Trending higher in this area in 2018 as well, the Peartree District reported approximately 90% of its educators in agreement that their schools were a good place to work. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, educators in the Peartree District reported teacher working conditions at a positive rate above that of their colleagues across the state. Peartree District educators reported levels of agreement closer to the state’s average near 85% in 2020 and, again, in 2022. Ultimately, the state’s average remained at a roughly 85% level of agreement while the district’s perception of working conditions declined over the three survey administrations. As the

Peartree District's data is included in the state's average, it is important to note that its decline in agreement contributed to the state's slight negative trend in this survey item response.

Figure 4.4

Educator Perception Data Rating School as a Good Place to Work and Learn 2018-2022



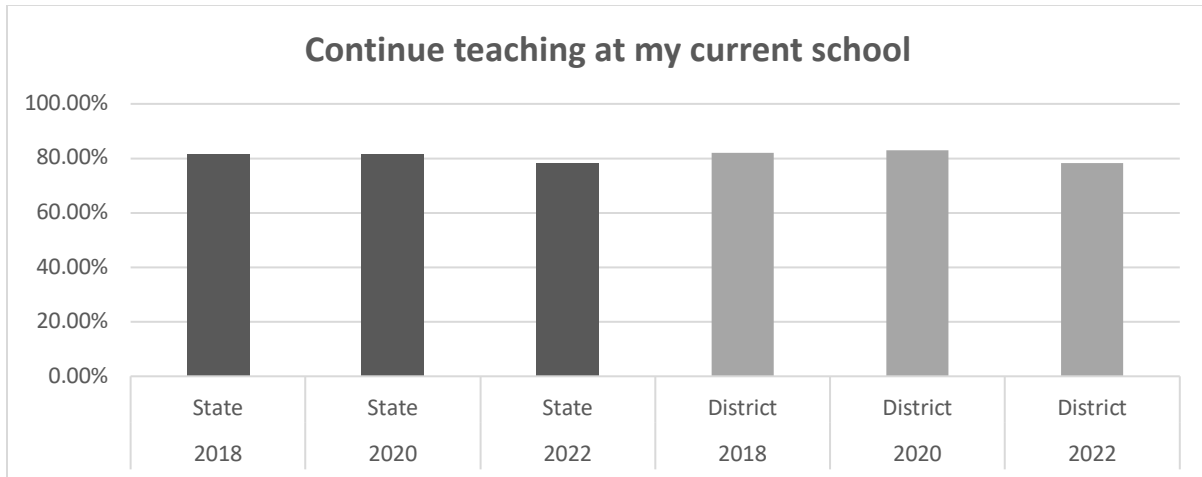
Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2022)

Data that focus on teacher persistence are depicted in Figure 4.5; these data profile educator responses addressing their plans to continue working at their current schools. In responding to their immediate plans to continue teaching at their current school, to remain in their district, to remain in the state, or to leave education entirely, the rate of agreement among teachers in the Peartree District in 2018, 2020, and 2022 was very comparable to the state's average. It is important to note that the 2018 survey results do not reflect a distinction between teachers and administrators in the area of retention. Approximately 80% of the state's educators reported that they planned to continue at their current schools which was comparable to the responses from educators in the Peartree District in 2018. The figure demonstrates that teachers in the Peartree District reported plans to continue teaching in their current schools in 2018 and 2020 at a rate which was only slightly above the data reported by teachers across North Carolina.

The percentage of teachers in the Peartree District who reported plans to continue teaching at their individual schools fell in 2022 and was similar to that of the state mean, which was just below 80%.

Figure 4.5

Teacher Plans to Continue Working at Their Current Schools 2018-2022



Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2022)

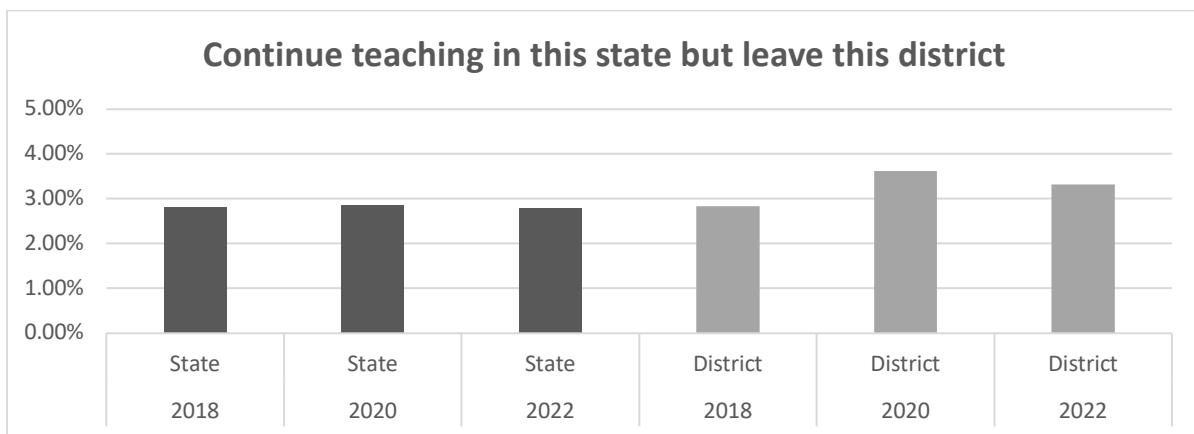
While Figure 4.5 provides data from educators with a focus on remaining in their current school sites, Figure 4.6 provides data about the NCTWCS item that asked educators to report their intentions to continue serving in their current school districts. Data displayed in Figure 4.6 demonstrate that teachers in the Peartree District reported plans to leave the district but remain teaching in North Carolina in 2020 at a percentage above their 2018 numbers. The percentage of teachers reporting plans to leave the Peartree District decreased in 2022 from those reported in the 2020 survey results. However, the district’s percentage of teachers who planned to leave their individual districts but remain serving as teachers in the state was still above the average of the state’s respondents.

When asked if they would continue to serve in the district, educators across the state matched the average reported by educators in the Peartree District in 2018, as approximately 3%

reported that they would continue working in their districts but planned to leave their current school sites. While the state began to question educators regarding their general persistence in the field of education in 2020, the 2018 survey did not report data from educators who planned to leave education entirely. It is important to note that in the NCTWCS data, the rates of teachers planning to leave the Peartree District increased beyond the state averages during the pandemic in 2020, and remained slightly above the state average following the pandemic when the survey was administered in 2022.

Figure 4.6

Teacher Plans to Continue Working in North Carolina but Leave Peartree District 2018-2022



Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2022)

The 2020 administration of the NCTWCS was conducted at the start of the pandemic-induced school shutdowns in March of 2020. The Peartree District’s educators’ level of agreement that their success with their students was supported by parents, guardians, and community members was no longer above the state average; instead, teacher and administrator levels of agreement in the Peartree District about community support and involvement had largely dropped to match that of the state’s educators.

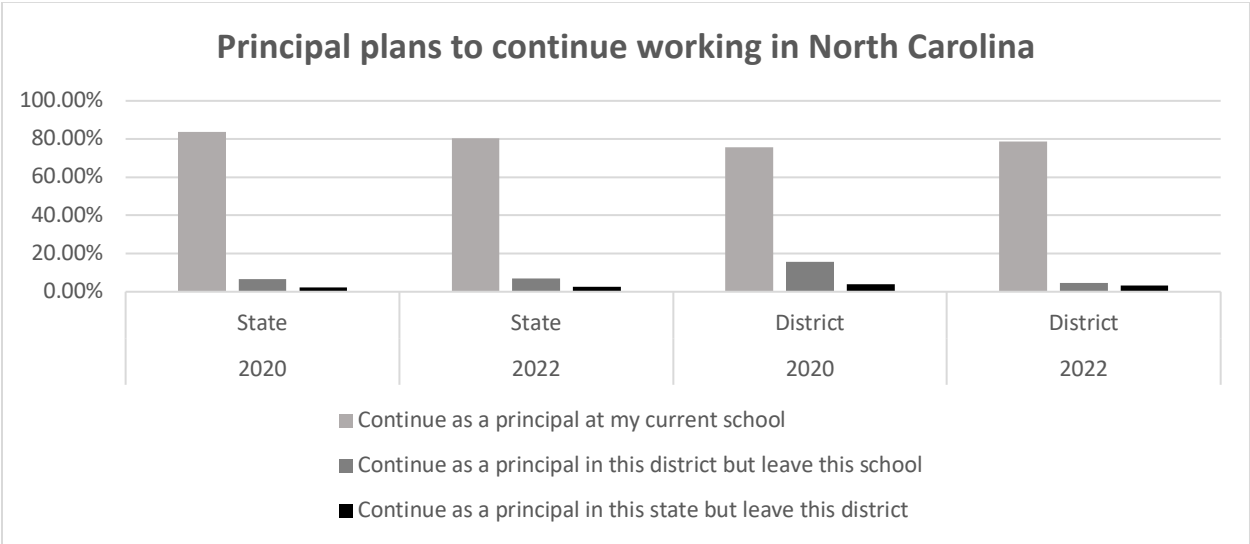
The same trend was reflected in how the Peartree District's educators reported their level of agreement in rating their feelings that their schools were good places to work. Peartree District educators expressed their 2020 survey agreement at a rate 5% below their 2018 levels. While the state's averages remained unchanged from 2018 to 2020, Peartree teachers and principals rated their levels of agreement at 5% below their 2018 levels of agreement in areas of both support and retention. In 2020, the retention question that addressed immediate professional plans provided separate data for teachers and principals. Teacher responses in the Peartree District remained in line with those reported by teachers across the state. In 2020, the survey included a question that asked if the respondents' plans were to leave education entirely. Teachers in the Peartree District answered their intention to leave education at a rate of agreement of approximately 3.5%, the same average reported by teachers in districts across North Carolina. These percentages documented a trend of decreasing satisfaction among the districts' educators.

The NCTWCS reported data in 2020 and 2022 that captured school principal plans to continue serving as an administrator in their current school, in their current district, and in North Carolina. The term *principal* used in the survey includes responses from both lead principals and assistant principals. The figure presents data from principals across the state; these data reflect that approximately 85% of principals across the state in 2020 reported that they would continue to serve at their current schools while only approximately 75% of the principals in the Peartree District reported that they would continue to serve at their current schools in 2020. The greatest disparity reported between the state and district in the 2020 survey was reflected in responses that showed that 15% of the Peartree District's administrators noted that they would continue to serve in the district, but not in their current schools. This number contrasts to the approximate 7% agreement reported by principals across the state who planned to continue to serve in

leadership positions at their current schools in both the 2020 and 2022 administrations of the survey. Important to note is that the percentage of principals in the Peartree District who intended to change school sites from their current schools dropped from 15% to 5% from 2020 to 2022. The percentage of principals who responded that they would continue to serve as a principal in North Carolina but leave their current district was maintained at approximately 2.5% in the state in 2020 and 2022. While the percentage of Peartree District principals who planned to leave their current district was higher than the state average in both 2020 and 2022, it was only slightly above that of the state percentage.

Figure 4.7

Principal Plans to Continue Working in North Carolina 2020-2022

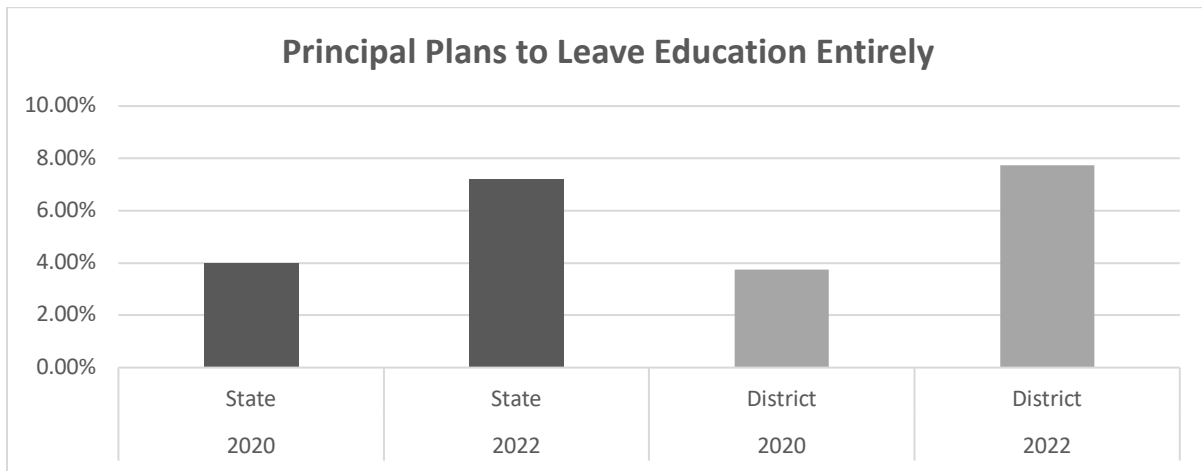


Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2022)

Figure 4.8 depicts the immediate plans of school principals in the Peartree District to leave the principalship. It compares these data to those of principals across North Carolina. Approximately 3.5% of the principals in both the Peartree District and across the state indicated plans to leave education entirely in 2020. In 2022, principals in the Peartree District were on par with state average for principals, as more than 7% indicated plans to leave education entirely.

Figure 4.8

Principal Plans to Leave Education Entirely 2020-2022



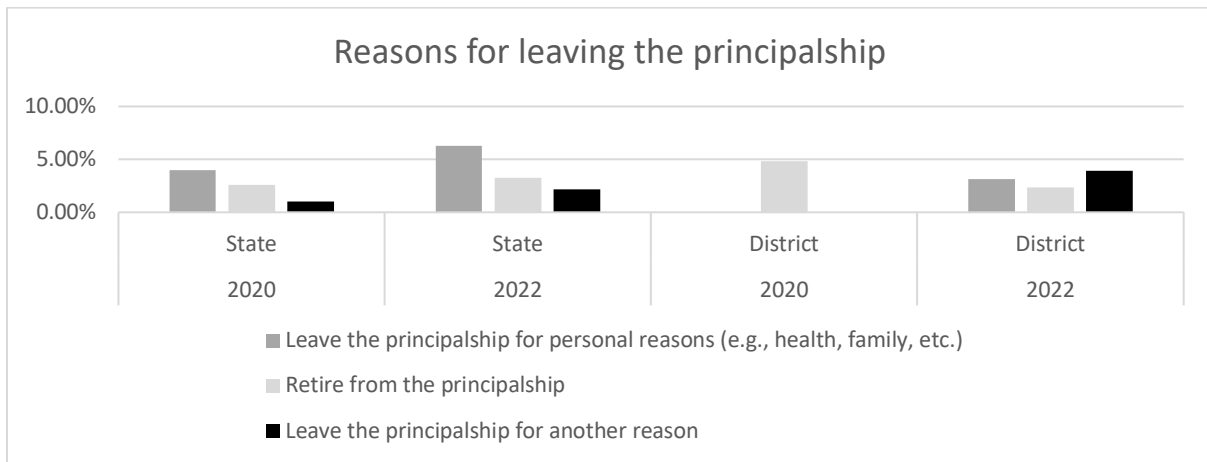
Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2022)

While school principals reported plans to leave education entirely in Figure 4.8, Figure 4.9 provides specific reasons principals gave for leaving the principalship. Figure 4.9 reports the immediate plans of school principals in the Peartree District to leave the principalship for personal reasons, to retire from the principalship, or to leave the principalship for another reason compared to that of principals across districts in North Carolina. The Peartree District did not report data for principals in 2020 who planned to leave for reasons other than retirement while the state did report these reason options, which included the three categories of *personal reasons*, *retirement*, and *other*. Peartree District principals reported intentions to retire at a rate of 5% above that identified across the state in 2020 at 2.5%. In 2022 the Peartree District included all three reasons for departure. While over 6% of the state’s principals identified plans to leave the principalship in 2022 for personal reasons, only 3% of the Peartree District’s principals cited personal reasons for leaving the principalship. The figures were more on par in addressing the percentage of those planning retirement in 2022. The state’s principals self-identified plans to

retire at an average 3% while only 2% of Peartree District’s principals cited retirement in their survey responses. Finally, stating they were leaving for reasons best described as other, state principals responded at 2% while almost 4% of Peartree District’s principals provided this as their reason for leaving the principalship in 2022.

Figure 4.9

Immediate Career Plans of Principals 2020-2022



Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2022)

Summary of Findings from the NC Teacher Working Conditions Data Analysis

Data reported in the 2022 NCTWCS, the first administration of the survey following the COVID-19 pandemic, showed educator responses to be the same between educators across the state and those of the Peartree District when reporting their feelings about community support and involvement. It is important to note that while state respondents held steady in their level of agreement in reporting the support they felt from parents and guardians, percentages reported by over 100,000 educators in North Carolina fell 5% from 2020 to 2022 in terms of their perceptions of the contribution of community members toward the success of their students. Peartree District educators reported the same level of agreement as state educators

(approximately 75%) in their feelings of community member support and contributions to student success. While the Peartree District averages were on par with the state averages in several categories in 2022, it is important to note that the parity with the state is a result of a drop among educators in feelings of support and job satisfaction in the Peartree District. Another significant decrease was reflected in the data from the 2022 survey as Peartree District educators responded that only 80% felt that the community they served was supportive of their schools. While the 80% level of agreement reported in the Peartree District reflected a decline, the data matched the 80% level of agreement reported by the state with this question in 2022. It is important to note that while the state's average remained at 80% from 2018 to 2022, the Peartree District had reported a rate of agreement in 2018 at 90%, and 85% in 2020, before falling to 80% in 2022. Dropping by 10% across the three survey administrations, the level of support felt by educators in the Peartree District was notable.

In 2022, 85% of Peartree District educators agreed that their schools were good places to work. This number remained the same as that reported in 2020 for both teachers and administrators in the Peartree District as well as those across the state of North Carolina. When responding to questions that sought to address their immediate professional plans in the 2022 spring survey, teachers across the state and in the Peartree District reported just under 80% that they would continue serving in their current schools. The state's teachers matched agreement in responses that addressed that 3% of teachers would continue to teach in their current districts, and 3% would leave their current school districts but continue to serve in North Carolina. When responding to plans to leave education entirely, the 2022 survey reported that approximately 7% of the teachers in the Peartree District and in North Carolina planned to leave education. This number doubled for teachers in both the state and district from the 2020 administration of the

survey, signaling a concerning trend for teacher persistence in the Peartree District and North Carolina. The 2022 survey provided separate data for teachers and principals in the area of retention. While 80% of the state's principals reported that they planned to continue in leadership at their current schools, those in the Peartree District reported a number slightly below 80% in their plans to continue in their current schools. Principal responses in the Peartree District were in line with those reported by teachers in the district. Persistence at their individual sites in the district reflected a positive change from the 2020 survey when administrators responded that only approximately 5% planned to leave their current schools, compared to 15% reported in 2020. Trending in a positive way in the 2022 survey data, principal in the Peartree District reported that approximately 2% planned to retire, which was a smaller percentage than they reported in 2020 at 5%. Still, the 2022 survey also included data that showed that administrators indicated that they would leave the principalship for another reason. The state's principals responded affirmatively at 2% while the Peartree District's administrators were closer to a 5% rate of agreement.

Participant Profiles

Study participants included 14 educators who were selected from the sample of educators who responded positively to my request to take part in the study. Participants were selected based on my stratification plan. It was important that both teacher and administrator voices were included in the study since their roles can provide them with different perspectives of the experienced phenomenon. I further stratified the sample based on years of experience, racial diversity, gender, and grade level role. The sample of interview participants included teachers and administrators who represent various backgrounds and the three main school levels: elementary, middle, and high school.

Working through the district's Public Information Office, I sent an email to every teacher and administrator in the school system through the district's email network. The purpose of this email was to invite their participation in this study. While the response rate was adequate, I had to make repeated attempts to secure one final teacher interview to even out the administrator and teacher subgroups that participated in the study.

Participant Biographies

After winnowing the prospective participants to those who provided a diverse representation of educators for the study, I selected seven teachers and seven administrators for interviews. The 14 participants interviewed served as educators in the Peartree School District at the time of the study. Of the total participants, five were elementary school educators, three were middle school educators, and six were high school educators. Several of the participants had worked at school levels different than the settings where they were serving at the time of the study. Interviewing teachers who were in the first three years of their careers proved to be one of my earliest challenges. The majority of participants represented educators whose careers exceeded 20 years.

The participants are introduced in the following pages using pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality of their identities. The teacher participants are introduced in the first group. The administrator participants follow.

Teachers

Hillary Cole. Hillary Cole was an elementary teacher who began her third year in the classroom at time of the study. She was a White female who completed her student teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Isabel Gonzalez. Isabel Gonzalez served as a teacher at a Title 1 school in the Peartree School District. At the time of the study, she was beginning her 14th year in this school, after having worked in other schools inside the district. She was bilingual.

Julie Hatcher Julie Hatcher was a career teacher who had taught in several schools in the Peartree School District. She was a National Board Certified teacher. She was a White female teacher with over 30 years of experience. At the time of the study, she planned to retire from education.

Grace Johnson. Grace Johnson was a counselor who had worked in the Peartree School District for close to 30 years. She was a Black female educator who stated that she wanted to make a difference.

Jake Massengill. Entering education as a second career, Jake Massengill stated that he began his tenth year in the classroom at the time of the study. He had worked at three schools in two districts. His teaching experience had been with both middle and high school students. He was a White male who shared that he wanted to be a teacher when he was younger, but was talked out of it by his own teachers.

Poppy Parker. Poppy Parker was a National Board Certified teacher. She was a White female beginning her twenty-first year in education as a teacher in the district. She worked in another district at the beginning of her career, but the majority of her teaching career had been in Peartree School District. Serving only in high school settings, Parker had taught in three different high schools.

Mike Smith. Working in the high school setting, Mike Smith was a White male beginning his 12th year in education at the time of the study. He began teaching as a second

career. He went back to school, leaving his previous role to work and serve as a teacher.

Teaching remained his passion.

Administrators

Benjamin Dunn. Benjamin Dunn was a White male administrator of a middle school with more than 20 years of experience. He worked as a middle school teacher and coach before making the shift to administration. He had worked at both the middle and high school level in the district. Showing people that they matter was one of his core values.

Charles Green. Charles Green was a Black male high school administrator. He had over 30 years of experience in schools across three states and 14 years in the district.

Maria Guzman. Maria Guzman was a minority female elementary administrator. She began her teaching career outside of the United States.

Millie Holder. Millie Holder was a White female elementary administrator who had worked in the district for 21 years. At the time of the study, she was serving at an elementary school, but she also had high school experience. She had worked in the Peartree School District her entire career.

Colleen Myers. Colleen Myers served as an administrator at a public high school. She had taught in two districts in the last six years. At the time of the study, she was beginning her ninth school year.

Evan Thomas. Evan Thomas was a Black male administrator of an elementary school. He had elementary and high school experience with more than 10 years served in public education. He always wanted to be a teacher but was discouraged by family because of the low salary paid to educators in North Carolina.

Chandra Wilson. With almost 30 years in education in the Peartree School District, Chandra Wilson served as an administrator who had worked in both middle and high school settings. She was a Black female leader.

Table 4.1 presents the breakdown of the 14 interview participants including their school level, years of experience, race, and gender. I interviewed seven teachers and seven administrators to capture perception data from educators serving in elementary, middle, and high schools. The participant’s personal data also reflects my attention to seeking interviews with persons who reflect different genders, years of experience, and multiple races.

Table 4.1
Interview Participants

	School Level	Years of Experience	Gender
Teacher			
Hillary Cole	ES	0 to 10	Female
Isabel Gonzalez	ES	11 to 20	Female
Julie Hatcher	HS	21 to 30	Female
Grace Johnson	MS	11 to 20	Female
Jake Massengill	HS	0 to 10	Male
Poppy Parker	HS	0 to 10	Female
Mike Smith	HS	11 to 20	Male
Frequency	7		
Administrator			
Benjamin Dunn	MS	21 to 30	Male
Charles Green	HS	21 to 20	Male
Maria Guzman	ES	21 to 30	Female
Millie Holder	ES	21 to 30	Female
Colleen Myers	HS	0 to 10	Female
Evan Thomas	ES	11 to 20	Male
Chandra Wilson	MS	21 to 30	Female
Frequency	7		

Note: ES=Elementary School, MS=Middle School, HS=High School

Research Questions

This section provides the results that serve to answer the research questions that guided this study. The purpose of this study was to research and explore practitioner perspectives pertinent to the issue of educator job satisfaction and attrition related to negative media and online comments that demonstrate a lack of public confidence in the services provided by public school educators. This inquiry into the perspectives of educators regarding the portrayal of educators and education was guided by one central research question and the following three sub-questions. The central research question was posed as follows: What are educators' perceptions about the impact of how they and public education are portrayed in the media? The three sub-questions follow:

1. How do educators working in a large district describe their experiences with mainstream and online media that focuses on educators and education?
2. How do educators describe the impact of news stories, articles, social media posts, and online comments about education and educators on educator job satisfaction?
3. How do educators describe the impact of negative media and public commentary about education and educators on educator attrition?

This section details the research questions addressed by the study and the themes for each that emerged through the individual interviews of teacher and principal participants.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 called on teachers and administrators to describe their experiences with mainstream and online media that focused on educators and education. Participants were asked to share their perspectives specific to these two interview questions:

1. What is your general experience with news and social media?

2. How do you access news and social media? How often?

From their responses, I hoped to learn each educator's overall experience and use of news and social media. I also wanted to understand the sources used by the participants to access their news and social media.

An analysis of the data revealed a variety of experiences of the teacher and administrator participants. Experiences were generally described as either positive or negative. Participants elaborated in specific remarks addressing their access to news and social media and the purposes for which they used different news media. Participants also described various applications, or "apps," and their particular functions for the educators. Reviewing their responses through the lens of social constructivism gave rise to several themes from the educators' experiences. Themes represented from the interviews included social media experiences, Facebook Moms, access to news, and lifestyle tools. I compared teacher responses with administrator responses in order to determine the degree of consensus, or lack thereof, between these subgroups.

Social Media Experiences

Social media experiences encompass the various ways in which individuals engage with platforms that allow for the creation, sharing, and exchange of information, ideas, interests, and other forms of expression across virtual communities and networks. Interview responses regarding social media experiences included whether or not the participant maintained and accessed social media accounts, the frequency of their social media interactions, and their descriptions of their online interactions as generally positive or negative.

Teacher Participants. Throughout the case study interviews, teacher respondents were split in their descriptions of their use of social media. High school teacher Mike Smith started out by saying that he may be an outlier in the study because when he went to school to become a

teacher he was warned to away from social media. In fact, he was told “do not use social media at all. Do not have Facebook. Do not have anything.” This advice, he felt, placed in him a greater level of dormancy related to social media than many of his colleagues. Still, the youngest member of the study, elementary teacher Hillary Cole, stated that she used Facebook and Snapchat. Repeatedly, Facebook was the social media application, or app, that that was cited most frequently among all participants.

One’s experience with social media need not focus only on the use of apps. A participant’s social media experience included their use of tools for communicating, sharing, exchanging ideas, and creating content. Julie Hatcher described herself as “not a big phone person.” She shared that her phone “lives” in the glove compartment of her car and she described herself as “one of the few teachers who can safely say you’ll never see [her] on [her] cell phone because [she] hates them.” She only had Facebook to interact with her church choir and stay up-to-date on life events for members of her church. She shared that her feeling about social media was that “something can seem very innocent, and probably is very innocent, but can be misinterpreted.” Another teacher responded that she uses her phone and social media apps minimally. Grace Johnson said that she accessed social media apps on her phone and noted that some things may pop up while she’s on her phone. If they interested her, she would click on the notification and read the article. Otherwise, she relied on her husband to keep her up-to-date with news happenings. The participants’ experiences demonstrated the variety of platforms and significance that the educators placed on social media use.

Three of the seven teacher participants described their social media use as infrequent, but the remaining four described themselves as more active in their use of social media. Specific examples of their social media habits are illustrated in their responses. Elementary teacher Isabel

Gonzalez stated that she regularly used Instagram and read articles from CNN on her phone. She said that she received alerts on her phone's Facebook account from news organizations such as *The News & Observer*. Gonzalez also noted that she read posts made in the Mom Facebook groups. While she previously subscribed to news services, she indicated that she stopped signing up to receive those email updates. High school teacher Poppy Parker reported that she regularly accessed Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and *Headline News*. She did not use TikTok and she stated that she does not post much on Twitter. Further demonstrating the variety of uses social media provides to consumers, high school teacher Jake Massengill reported that he used social media for a business that he ran online.

The experiences shared by the teacher participants with regard to social media use and tools varied from limited use to a great level of comfort with social media described by four other respondents. Participants identified multiple social media platforms and behaviors with which they engage. Given that the group was diverse, their habits likely reflected the variety of social media experiences of many other educators in the Peartree School District.

Administrator Participants. When administrator participants shared experiences regarding content related to education and educators in their news and social media feeds, they generally spoke in terms of what they saw on social media instead of how much they used it. Facebook was mentioned by administrators, who described the social media application, or "app," and its inclusion of negative content. Participants were quick to point out that the Facebook social media app hosted posts from angry parents, clickbait news stories that painted education in a negative light, and highly politicized content that promoted divisive comments. Two directly stated that they tried not to look at the site. Three administrators noted that they

avoided Facebook and the news posted on the specific social media platform because they felt it featured inaccurate information in its reports.

Administrators' experiences supported a common view of social media with several examples. When referencing new stories, Benjamin Dunn commented that positive stories were not shared as much as those that are negative. Dunn stated, "I don't get up every day and come to work hard and try to get results for students so I can go around the state and be embarrassed of how our business is always so public." Dunn continued, "And it's not that it's necessarily that someone's digging [for information]. It's like people from within sharing shots of their closets with everybody. So we do it to ourselves, you know. It is not a professional way to run things." He added that online content was managed by algorithms that push content that was similar in nature to posts with which consumers engage, so negative content was what the individual saw more frequently on their news and social media feeds. Evan Thomas shared that he was a transplant in the area, and that, while he loved his job, he did not understand the reason or source of the negativity toward the work done by educators in the Peartree District's schools. He had family who work in another East coast state and saw support of their educators by the general public. He shared, "I don't see so much negativity [in her district] coming towards their public schools in the media. They're telling their story in a good and positive way. And I think it's important for media outlets to tell the good things about schools, and the good things that go on, so that the general public is able to buy in to the work that is going on in education."

Compared to teacher responses, administrator experiences were largely unified in their vilification of the content about educators and education that were included on Facebook. Teacher participant reflections, by comparison, did not address the content in explicit terms, but rather in terms of maintaining distance from the app and its content.

Facebook Moms

Facebook Moms groups are online communities of parents who connect on topics that center on children and families. Topics include a variety of subjects such as parents' interest in connecting with others who have children in a similar age range, events in the community that may or may not be school-related, advice and assistance finding sitters, or suggestions for reputable home vendors such as roofing, plumbing, and landscaping. Facebook Moms sites are run by individuals who set up private group pages for a specific demographic. Examples include groups that are named for the towns in which the members live, or are organized around a specific age focus of the members, or a specific age group of children on which the group's membership is focused. Members may be invited to the online groups or may ask to join, but all have to respond to entry-level questions in order to ensure that new members have an understanding of the guidelines of operating in the online group.

Teacher Participants. One theme that was reflected in teacher participant interviews was the phenomenon of Moms groups on Facebook. Five of the seven teacher participants mentioned experiences related to these community posts in their interview responses. Responses from teacher participants reflected a general question by educators that sought to understand why the groups appeared to band together to spew negativity instead of support. Comments posted to the pages were reported by several teacher participants to focus on individual incidents that generated a high volume of negative responses from parents and community members. High school teacher Mike Smith said, "Why are they bashing school instead of trying to help it?" Isabel Gonzalez shared that she has seen posts that reflected that "the parents have no respect for their children's teachers at all." Several teacher statements regarding Facebook Mom groups characterized the overall content as "mean" instead of supportive.

Sharing another side of the Facebook Mom groups, Hillary Cole explained that the attraction for her is that “all the babies [represented in one of her Facebook groups] were born around the same time. So, I’m kinda, you know, seeing us all grow and seeing all the babies grow. Nothing’s normal with toddlers.” In that one Facebook Mom group with which she participated, Cole stated, “The members of that particular group post activities they are doing with their children.” She also shared that she does not believe that members should post some of the negative content they post. Still, Cole shared that she also picked up information and advice that are helpful to her in her role as mother and as a teacher. Isabel Gonzalez shared a concern that many posts are negative but also stated that she regularly followed the posts to stay informed about the conversations taking place online. She said, “Sometimes in the Mom Facebook groups, [the members] post like anything that they see on the news.” Since a number of their posts relate to children and schools, Gonzalez explained that she wants to know what is being said about these topics.

While some teacher participants commented that they have seen negative content or heard of negative content being posted on local Moms pages, high school teacher Poppy Parker noted that she has connected with parents through the Moms pages to share information about school events, answer general calendar questions, and to request volunteers for events her school is hosting. Parker shared, “I’ve joined a lot of the community groups... I’m not a mom but, man, those moms know some stuff. They know what’s going on in the community. They can also help you out.” She added that when she has requested assistance in the Moms groups in her area, it has produced positive results. When “we need some help, they show up.”

Parker also addressed negative aspects of these Moms Facebook groups. She stated that some of the leaders of certain online Moms pages do a good job of policing the posts and

comments on their sites; they take down content that crosses the line between sharing information and trying to be disruptive. Mike Smith brought up the phenomenon of the Moms pages when he spoke of a neighbor who was upset at something in her child's school and made posts on a local page to garner support for her point of view. He said, "She goes on there and just rails against the school and everything, and, you know, she was doing this all last year. I was like, I'm working there. Why are we bashing the school instead of trying to make it better, you know, for our kids?" Jake Massengill also mentioned the Moms pages; he became the target of what he believed were inaccurate posts that focused on an issue at his school. "I think there should be repercussions for people that post [inaccurate information about teachers]," Massengill said. He followed up his statement by saying, "It can't be a one-way street. Teachers aren't allowed to post anything without repercussions, or they're scared to, but yet if something is said about a teacher, nothing is done and I think that is the fault of the district." The participants' comments supported that this type of negativity expressed online does not help, but rather hurts the strong, supportive relationship needed between school personnel and parents.

Administrator Participants. Like the teachers, administrator participants included the phenomenon of the Facebook Moms groups in case study interviews. Members in these groups are connected with one another to pose questions and share information with their online communities, but some groups have a reputation for crowd-sourcing negative discussion around issues that involve their children. Administrator participants were more consistent than teacher participants in describing their general experiences with the postings as negative. Members in the Moms groups are connected to pose questions and share information with their online communities, but some have a reputation for crowd-sourcing negative feedback around issues that involve their children. Millie Holder shared that she felt that some parents turn to their

Facebook groups to address issues related to their children and school before actually contacting the school to remedy the situation. She shared an experience that involved a situation with a student and a visiting international teacher. When there was an incident in the classroom, “instead of just dealing with the situation and the administration, and through the proper process, [the mom] put it all over social media.” Holder’s comment reiterated the sentiment shared by teacher participants. She added, “So in my mind [the classroom situation] was not right but you’re only making it worse and you’re only drawing negative attention to a situation that’s already bad.” She followed up the comment when she noted that the district is facing staffing shortages; this has caused them to turn to outside agencies for staffing needs. The district has increased the number of visiting international teachers employed in the district to address the staffing shortages schools have experienced. Holder said that it was exhausting to have parents usurp the protocol for bringing concerns to the school. Taking to social media only delayed her ability to address the concern and caused it to grow in scope before the administrator became aware of it. Due to negativity she found when using Facebook, Colleen Myers shared that she tried to stay away from the app but has looked at it in order to access local information that was pertinent to her job. She shared, “I have been discriminated against by parents for my race and age. I have to remind myself of how to deal with issues in a professional manner.” She stated, “I am very conscious of my online presence at times. I represent the face of my school. I filter what I post and to whom I post it to.” She followed up her comment with, “I think that the media often contributes to the perceptions of administrators [as less than professional].”

Administrator participants did not mention contacting parents or being connected with the Facebook Moms groups in the role of partner in the manner that two of the teacher respondents reported. In general, the energy around administrators’ statements regarding

Facebook posts and Moms groups was negative. Administrators addressed the frustration they experienced at the frequency with which parents usurped the process for addressing concerns to them and failed to uphold the expected behavior of the adults as partners in caring for their children.

Access to News

With the advent and expansion of the Internet, sources that were traditionally accessed for information, such as news and weather outlets compete with specialized apps. While there are many news agencies, the prevalence and variety of apps available to the public have created a greater likelihood that individuals will only access news that is in line with their personal beliefs.

Teacher Participants. Overall, respondents shared that their individual access to news and social media did not reflect a variety of sources when consuming media. Few of the teacher participants reported watching television as a source of news, and none of the applicants reported reading a newspaper. Mike Smith stated that he tried to stay up to date by watching the news. When he watched the news, it was the morning and evening programming. He described that he had seen the news presenting education in a negative light. He added, “The news is like bashing the teaching profession for the most part. As long as you’re not watching, you know, the talking heads type of news. You know, when it’s individuals talking about it, I just see a lot of different, crazy, different views that are kind of from all over the place.” Those social media accounts that he had once accessed, he shut down around 2016 as a result of the intensity he saw online with the presidential election. He added that he had only reopened those accounts recently. When he described accessing specific apps, he spoke of CNBC, CBS, MSNBC, and Fox as news sources that he read in order to learn about stories that had been brought to his attention. Smith stated

that “the thing that baffles me the most is that, you know, they don’t really have a full understanding of things.”

Like Smith, Grace Johnson stated that she looked at the news in the morning. She stated, “I try to look at the news every morning while I’m getting ready for different reasons: traffic, weather, and just to kind of hear what’s going on.” Julie Hatcher shared that she no longer watched the morning news while dressing; she listened, instead, to the radio for her news when she was in the car. Hatcher shared, “I used to watch the news. I used to turn it on first thing in the morning, at least to get a little bit of some idea of what was going on outside of school,” but she had a considerable drive and stopped listening to this programming. She added, “I better just get the heck out of the house, and I have to catch the news at some other point.”

Teacher participant descriptions of their news habits did not reveal that they uniformly sought out a steady consumption of news and media. Hillary Cole noted that while she is a regular consumer of social media, she tried to stay away from the news side of it because she perceived much of the content to be negative toward educators and education. A similar sentiment was shared by Isabel Gonzalez who explained that she previously subscribed to various news agencies for news and updates, but no longer did so due to the negativity expressed in both national and local news related to education. Hatcher stated that she transitioned to listening to the news in her car on the way to her part-time job. When she has heard news being reported on educators and education, she mentioned a specific news story that caused her to question why the news singles out educational struggles as separate from other professions. The news story focused on a district that was short on workers. Because the school district was having difficulty hiring bus drivers, the reporter noted that there had been talk of some closures. She said, “Instead of people saying, oh, my gosh! They probably need more drivers and they’re

probably not paying these people enough. Instead, there just seems to be a default position of well, it must be the school system. The school system must be incompetent. All these other occupations are having trouble finding workers. Why would bus driving be any different?" Overall, teachers expressed that the news regarding education and educators is negative and that, as a group, they were not tuning in to read or listen to negative news stories about their profession.

Administrator Participants. Administrator participants noted their use of specific news apps when looking for news and information. Millie Holder identified her use of local news apps to access news and information, while Evan Thomas identified CNN for news and ESPN for sports coverage. Others reported using a variety of sources when accessing news and social media, with the majority of study participants citing the greatest access through the use of their phones and computers. In reviewing educators' experiences with news and social media, there was no clear group that preferred television over radio or exclusively accessed information solely from their phones. Educators participating in the study noted accessing news and media through television news, radio broadcasts, phone apps, and computer links.

Overwhelmingly, the administrator participants shared that when they looked at news, the news shared about schools was negative. While most participants expressed concerns about how educators and education was portrayed in media, there were occasional exceptions. As a social media platform, Twitter received the least negative feedback from the teacher and principal study participants. For instance, elementary school principal Evan Thomas commented that positive stories are not shared as much as those that are negative so he specifically searched for positive content on Twitter. He stated, "I found [filtering content on] Twitter for my educational brain and news to be very beneficial. I enjoy following [state educational leaders]."

Thomas found the curated posts of some online educational leaders to be positive and informational. He continued, “It’s just good stuff. It’s not bashing public education or telling educators what they need to do, but it’s celebrating the many accomplishments of educators across our state, and I love to see it.”

Supporting the idea that people find what they look for, Benjamin Dunn remarked that online content is managed by algorithms that push content that is similar in nature to posts with which consumers prefer to engage, so negative content is what the individual sees more frequently on their news and social media feeds. Dunn added, “I think that’s the problem with our social media consumption.” Describing how programmed algorithms impact social media and news feeds, Dunn stated, “I really tend to [be presented with content that] I already believe in. [Platform creators] want you to consume more and more. And obviously, I consume what I enjoy. And so, I would only be talking to people who agree with me.” Dunn went on to say, “I find it to be depressing. I think there’s actual statistics that highlight the more time you spend on Facebook, the more depressed you are.”

Due to the volume of negative media attention the research district had garnered over the previous decade, Benjamin Dunn stated that he did not reveal the name of his school district as the Peartree District when traveling to events outside the county. “It’s embarrassing,” he said. Frustrated that the hard work of the district’s educators was being dimmed by salacious news stories in news and social media feeds, two participants stated that they did not read the news unless it pertained to their jobs.

Administrator participants in the study shared that they used various news apps and platforms to access information, with many using phones and computers as their main devices. They expressed that the news about schools is predominantly negative, which was a concern for

the participants. Despite this, the participants observed that there are platforms like Twitter, renamed X. where some find more positive content can be found, especially when they follow educational leaders who share achievements and positive stories about education. Despite the volume of news available, some of these educators only read news relevant to their jobs, possibly to avoid the overwhelming negativity. Overall, administrators stated concern over how news media and social media portray education and the desire to find and share more positive stories and content.

Lifestyle Tools

Social media platforms offer ways to unite individuals, much like the Moms pages on Facebook cater to those with shared interests. Traditional interactions that once occurred in person, over calls, or through printed newsletters now predominantly happen online. These connection tools are frequently on smartphones but can also be accessed through other technology devices. Social media apps have created opportunities to bring people together as much as the Facebook Moms pages focus on individuals with common interests. Former communication that took place face-to-face, over the phone, or in a printed newsletter now often takes place on the Internet. The tools that help people connect are often on their phones, but can also be accessed using other technology devices.

Teacher Participants. The reasons for which teacher participants reported accessing social media apps were varied. Julie Hatcher characterized herself when she said, “I’m not a phone person. I come home, and if I want to relax, I’ll access Facebook on my Kindle and check to see if anybody from church or school has posted something that might be of interest.” She continued with some specific examples that included looking for information on the birth of a colleague’s baby and funeral service information for people in her church. Hatcher also shared

that she is a part of the church choir and a running group. Both of those groups, she stated, post information through the Facebook social media app. Hatcher stated that “invariably, I have to pay attention to where are we going this week, and what time do we have to be there on Saturday mornings.” Poppy Parker said she accessed Facebook for similar reasons. Parker shared, “I’m in so many Facebook groups out of personal interest. So, I get like the dog videos, or the painting videos, or the travel videos because I know a lot of that goes into the algorithms and I’ve joined a lot of groups like that.” She stated that she used the opportunity to connect with individuals who share similar interests. Not only accessing social media platforms for personal reasons Hillary Cole noted that she had gained access to new teaching strategies through contacts made in online platforms. Noting that Facebook can be helpful to her professionally, Cole shared that she had learned activities and strategies that she has employed in her classroom in addition to the online shops she has frequented from her phone.

Social media is a part of the American lexicon as its uses serve a wide variety of purposes. Jake Massengill noted that he used social media platforms for business as well as to connect with friends. Massengill stated, “I run a business. I do a lot of business stuff on social media and I know how to market. I love it. I think if you use it for the right purposes, and don’t get in there and try to get in fights and post stupid stuff, it’s a way to have some fun.” He noted as problematic the fact that “people get brave behind the screen or on their phones.” He indicated that he was not “there” to share his political views or complain about restaurants or work. Further emphasizing his point, Massengill stated that he did not need to engage with others online. As consumers of social media and news, individuals can choose whom they let onto their sites. If they do not like what others are saying, they can delete them from their site and no

longer have to deal with it. Massengill stated that the choice is up to the individual regarding whom they allow to access their personal social media pages.

Administrator Participants. Administrators in the study indicated that they use social media as a communication tool for professional and personal contacts. Similar to the responses shared by teacher participants, some administrators said that they interacted with social media as lifestyle tools to enhance their lives. Chandra Wilson stated that she did not use social media a great deal, but when she did, her focus was on interactions and posts of a faith-based and spiritual nature. Wilson stated, “When I am on social media, I am there to glean from others. I have a principal network that I am a part of that includes peers that are not localized. You know, just to see what others are challenged with and if they are similar to my challenges.” Wilson also added, “I also look for things regarding the Bible and God. I use online platforms for that primarily, and don’t engage in a lot of this one-on-one social media stuff.” Elementary administrators Millie Holder and Evan Thomas both noted that they used Twitter as a professional tool for connecting to other educators, education leaders, and posting positive leadership messages. Holder also mentioned that she specifically identified the content on her Instagram and TikTok feeds as humorous, while she saw Facebook as a tool of negativity. She stated that in her Twitter feed she tried “very hard to follow educators who have a lot of good leadership tips.” Holder continued, “I try really hard for my Twitter feed to be positive and uplifting, and have good leadership strategies, because I like that. I’m more into Twitter for the coaching and leadership strategies.”

Administrators Charles Green and Benjamin Dunn shared that they only interact with social media as a means of conducting their professional responsibilities. Green stated, “I see it because it’s a part of my job. I have to stay abreast, but I try to stay away from it as much as

possible. I don't really interact with media, number one, because my understanding of media is that they're going to report it the way it sells. And a lot of times the way it sells is negative, so I stay away from the social media aspect of it." "I'm a face-to-face person," Green added. "I'd rather talk to a person face-to-face than hide behind a camera or email." Maria Guzman and Colleen Myers accessed social media, but Myers stated that she was warned long ago not to end up on the local online news platform. She checked social media from her phone daily, but she did not tend to read up on news unless it pertained to her job. Guzman stated that she looked at articles on local news outlets online and used social media to post positive messages about her school staff and students. Her online newsletter has many visitors. She shared, "you can see the stats. The beauty of it is to see the number of people [who are viewing it]." Guzman added, "When I sent the beginning of year [newsletter], it had 700 hits. I think that's pretty good in terms of communication when you have around 800 students."

Summary for Research Question 1

As the teachers and administrators in the study responded to questions that established their experiences with social media, they emphasized the importance of intentionally curating their social media feeds to avoid negativity and stated that they attempted to remain focused on positive experiences. They also highlighted the impact of social media and the news on public perceptions of education and expressed frustrations with the prevalence of negative stories. Some participants mentioned using social media for professional networking and accessing educational resources. Overall, they highlighted the need for more positive and accurate representation of education in the media.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 called on teachers and administrators to describe the impact of news stories, articles, social media posts, and online comments about education and educators on educator job satisfaction. Participants were asked to share their perspectives specific to five interview questions:

1. During the pandemic educators dealt with a lot of attention in the press and on social media. What is your perception of how educators are portrayed in the press and on social media?
2. What do you observe being stated in the online comments sections of online news and on social media about education and educators?
3. How do you engage with online comments?
4. Describe the effect that social media and online comments sections have had on you personally.
5. How do these perceptions impact your feelings about the field of education and your job as an educator?

From their responses, I hoped to learn the individual and collective perceptions of the participants regarding the impact of news stories, articles, social media posts, and online comments about education and educators on educator job satisfaction.

An analysis of the data revealed that teachers and administrators perceived the phenomenon of educator job satisfaction in similar ways. An analysis of the data revealed many shared experiences held by the teachers and administrator participants regarding job satisfaction in relation to how educators are portrayed in the media, their experiences with online comments, and how their feelings about education and their jobs have been impacted by media and online

comments. Themes that developed from the participant interviews follow; these included portrayal of educators, online comments, and impact on educators and education. I compared teacher responses with administrator responses in order to determine the degree of consensus, or lack thereof, between these subgroups.

Portrayal of Educators

The theme of portrayal of educators refers to the representation or depiction of teachers, instructors, professors, and other education professionals in various forms of media, literature, discussions, and public perception. This portrayal can influence societal views on the roles, characteristics, challenges, and expectations associated with educators. The accuracy and impact of these portrayals can play a significant role in shaping attitudes towards educators and the education profession and its importance in society. It can further impact the attitudes of educators regarding teaching as a viable career choice.

Teacher Participants. Most teacher participants expressed that educators were initially praised and celebrated at the start of the pandemic, but that this positive perception quickly turned negative. Participants remarked on the lack of trust and respect educators felt from news and social media posts, as well as the false perception that teachers did not want what was best for students. Teacher responses also touched on the challenges teachers faced during the pandemic and the efforts they made to adapt to online learning during periods of school closure. Facebook posts were referenced by the participants as sources of negative discussions focused on student performance and classroom behaviors. Overall, their responses suggested that the media's portrayal of teachers was inconsistent and often negative.

Findings from the interviews demonstrated that teacher participants felt frustrated and disrespected, especially when they saw negative videos and comments directed towards

educators. Isabel Gonzalez stated exasperation she felt at the assertions seen on social media by parent and community members. Gonzalez said, “it’s just frustrating when I see these comments because they’re saying that we are teaching this critical race theory. And I’m like, first of all, I don’t even understand what that is, I’m gonna be honest. I highly doubt [parents] do, too.” In general, the participants believed that the positive aspects of education, such as scaffolding instruction to support student learning and differentiating lessons to meet the individual needs of students were not sufficiently acknowledged. The teachers who were interviewed felt that there were no repercussions for those who made negative comments made about educators.

Participants generally perceived that there was a lack of understanding and that there are misconceptions about teachers' work. Examples of such inaccurate perceptions included thinking that teachers have summers off and not realizing the that it is actually unpaid leave that educators experience which requires them to adjust their incomes accordingly. Teacher participants felt that media, especially social media, often focused on the negative aspects of education and failed to highlight the good that teachers do. They also communicated that they felt there was a lack of respect and appreciation for educators and public education. Poppy Parker and Julie Hatcher both shared personal experiences that involved hurts created by family members who viewed educators negatively. Parker shared that a family text conversation included a message from her mother who forwarded a Facebook news clip about a book being used in a classroom in another state. Instead of asking questions or seeking clarification, Parker was hurt that her family members immediately validated the story’s truth and expressed anger toward the teacher in the family chat. Parker expressed that she was the only family member who reminded the group that the news clip did not provide enough information to make a fair judgment about the situation. Finally, she said, “I can’t stay quiet on that, so I said, ‘Hey, we don’t know the whole picture

here.” She shared, “I know, personally, people who know me and support me in my career... And I’m looking at them asking, ‘Who do you think you’re talking to? You know I do this daily, right?’ There’s a disconnect.” Hatcher shared a personal example involving teachers and strikes during the pandemic. She stated, “My dad had a lot of false perceptions, you know, all these people striking in different states and not going back to school.” Hatcher stated that she responded to her father’s criticism of educators when she said, “I’m sure that in every career there are always people who are going to try to work the system and take advantage of it, but that education is not the government job you want to pick if you don’t want to work. Even just to do a halfway decent job in education, you have to do some pretty serious work.” She further stated, “Some of those school systems [that were striking] were fighting a lot of other problems, particularly inner-city school systems. So, I think there was this false perception that teachers didn’t want to do what was best for students.” With both examples, Parker and Hatcher noted that their family members obtained the content that shaped their perceptions through the news and social media they consumed.

Both Parker and Hatcher believed that it is important to counteract these negative narratives by emphasizing the positive aspects of education and celebrating the accomplishments of educators. There was a pervasive belief among the teacher participants that there is a small percentage of people who always complain and create problems. However, they shared that they have experienced some support from parents and the community. Still, teachers expressed concerns about the increasing needs of children and the multiple roles that educators have to fulfill. They hoped to see a more positive portrayal of education in the media and a recognition of the hard work and dedication of teachers.

High school teacher Poppy Parker expressed her belief that it is important for media outlets to highlight the positive aspects of schools so that the public can understand why people choose to send their children to the schools in their area. She expressed concern that negative stereotypes about public schools lead some parents to choose charter schools or homeschooling. She noted that there are misconceptions about public school teachers and their efforts, and depending on the media source, opinions vary on whether they are doing their best or have failed the children. Especially discouraging was a conversation she had with another educator who said, “The state of education has just gone down. Teachers are just, you know, they’re not doing what they need to be doing. And you can’t trust that they’re going to teach the curriculum. And you can’t trust that the school is doing right by the kids. And yeah, Peartree District is just going way down.” Parker expressed her confusion at the remarks made by a fellow educator. She said, “I’m certain that he’s not the only teacher trashing other teachers, and that really kind of rocked my mind. I’m certain he is not the only one who thinks that way.” She added, “I don’t think he’s in the majority. I don’t. I think most teachers want to do a good job. I think most teachers care about their students and care about the work they do. I really do think most teachers are not in the same headspace that he is, but it was baffling to me to hear that from the current, active teacher.” Parker said that she would encourage people to seek out positive stories about teachers going the extra mile for their students.

Administrator Participants. The perspectives of administrators regarding the theme of portrayal of educators were largely consistent with those heard from teachers. Similar themes were revealed in the findings; these included lack of trust, inaccurate perception of educators and their work, and professional challenges faced by educators during and after the pandemic. Responses from administrator participants acknowledged that there was a brief period during the

pandemic in which parents realized how difficult it was to teach their children and expressed respect for educators. However, this perception quickly changed, and educators were criticized for not doing enough.

According to these participants, the lack of trust in education has been an ongoing issue. The pandemic changed education dramatically; one significant transformation was the incorporation of online platforms like Google classroom. School resources were essential for many students who relied on school for meals and a secure environment. There were conflicting opinions about teachers' efforts during the pandemic, but overall, educators were still needed and respected. Administrators shared concerns that the lack of trust and negative perceptions addressed through news and social media could demotivate teachers and hinder their ability to do their jobs effectively.

Administrator participants expressed frustration with the negative portrayal of public education in the news. Charles Green stated, "I don't think educators, on the whole, get a fair shake to start with. I mean, I think there's a misconception of education out there. I don't pay a lot of attention to the news. I really don't. I don't put a lot of stock in it because I really feel like it can be biased." Administrators shared how the media often focused on the problems and failings of the education system, rather than highlighting the good work that teachers and schools were doing. Maria Guzman stated, "I feel some people think teachers are great and others think they're not great. I do see that there's a lot of attempts to dismantle public education. It seems to me that [some] want to go to vouchers or to privatize schools." They shared a belief that this negative narrative contributed to a lack of respect for educators and a decline in the appeal of the profession. They emphasized the need for more positive stories to be shared and for the media to acknowledge the challenges and successes in education. Additionally, they expressed concern

about the politicization of education and the spread of misconceptions about topics such as critical race theory. Guzman referenced the repetition of questions from community and Board of Education members addressing Critical Race Theory in the district's schools. "This crazy, critical race theory," she said, "which is something kids learn in college. No one's doing that in elementary. We teach the standards." Overall, their interview responses indicated a desire for a more balanced and supportive narrative surrounding public education.

The administrators who were interviewed generally agreed that the perceptions held of teachers and other educators ranged from neutral to negative. They discussed how they worked hard to support their staff and students academically, socially and emotionally, but that the efforts of educators at each level are not always acknowledged or respected. Like the teacher participants, they also mentioned the misconception that school staff have summers off. The administrators also clarified that educators often have unpaid leaves of absence and must adjust their income accordingly. They believed that there is a lack of respect for educators in general.

Online Comments

Online comments refer to the feedback, opinions, reactions, or discussions posted by users on digital platforms, such as websites, blogs, social media posts, news articles, and forums. These comments can be in the form of text, images, videos, or a combination thereof. Online commenting systems allow users to interact, share their perspectives, ask questions, or respond to the content presented on the web. Depending on the platform and its moderation policies, comments can either appear immediately or be subject to approval before being publicly visible.

Teacher Participants. The teachers interviewed reiterated that educators work hard to support children academically and emotionally. They reported that they invest many hours in creating and maintaining stable and supportive environments in which they serve students in

their care. As community members and consumers of social media, they all acknowledged that they have seen negative posts about educators and education. Several participants spoke to the fact that negative comments that address teachers in the media and on social platforms can be hurtful. Hillary Cole noted that she has viewed comments from persons who she knows personally who have posted negative content about what they perceived to be taking place in the district's classrooms. Cole shared, "I see a lot of posts with kid behaviors being put on teachers like, oh well, if the teacher did it this way, maybe this wouldn't have happened. Things about classroom management and, you know, performance overall." Participant interviews revealed that these teachers felt that some people go online to put others down to feel better about themselves. They further perceived that when this involves teachers who are working to support children, it can create a toxic environment and discourage teachers. Interview participants stated repeatedly that they felt that negative stories got more attention than the positive ones; this explained why the negative posts were prevalent on social media platforms.

When the workload of teachers increased during the pandemic, there was a need for more support for teachers as they supported children participating in school from home. When the stay-at-home restrictions continued, Poppy Parker shared that a parent contacted the district office to complain. The parent had taken some brief excerpt from the lesson and exploded it into something it was not without contacting the teacher for clarification and understanding. Participants, overall, shared that they felt parents today are more likely to believe that teachers are guilty of wrongdoing than to contact their child's teacher to seek understanding. Parker stated, "[The mom] informed me that all of a sudden, I was promoting some political beliefs that she did not agree with and I was very confused. I said, 'Can you help me understand where this is coming from. She went on a tirade.'" Once the teacher was made aware of the parent concern

that had bypassed her to the superintendent, she was able to share the full video lesson with the parent. Once the parent spoke to the teacher, viewed the lesson, and watched the video, the mom realized she had been wrong. Specific comments from the participants depicted their belief that parents criticized the education system without attempting to gain understanding or seek clarification when they had concerns. Teacher responses noted that negative comments have overshadowed the good work that teachers do.

Participants also stated that, like negative comments, positive comments have an influence on one's sense of satisfaction with their job as a teacher. Respondents included the need for teachers to try to focus on the positive and not let negative tear them down. Only two teachers remarked to have seen specific positive comments regarding teachers during the interviews. Jake Massengill noted repeatedly that he had seen positive comments about teachers during the COVID-19 shutdown. Massengill stated, "There was quite a bit online about how we turned on a dime, and how we still continue to incorporate our practices that we learned overnight [into our lessons]." Another teacher stated specifically that she had seen comments from supporters and students who had spoken up for teachers. Grace Johnson said, "I hear a lot of positive things. I see a lot of positive things. Things like 'good job' or teachers need more pay. Teachers need more respect. I have seen a lot of parents really standing up and supporting educators at this point in time." The positive comments shared by Johnson and Massengill were not reflected in the interviews of their Peartree colleagues but reflect that some teachers are still feeling supported by their communities.

The teacher participants shared their reluctance to engage in online comments and debates. Several mentioned instances in which they have participated in arguments on social media platforms in the past but had since adopted the practice of avoiding negativity and

maintaining a positive online presence. A general concern for wasting their time on unproductive debates or even potential backlash from their district was shared by participants repeatedly during the interviews. Hillary Cole stated that she feels conflicted when she reads and does not respond to the inaccurate or unfair comments she has seen online. Describing the online behavior as “bullying,” Cole stated, “If you don’t say anything, you’re just as guilty [as the ones who posted the negative comments], but I don’t say anything because I don’t want to say anything that will reflect poorly on educators or give my school or district a bad image.” Participants included sentiments that some people who criticize educators are not connected to the field and do not understand the realities of teaching. Teacher colleagues agreed that everyone is entitled to their own opinions, and it is not worth arguing or trying to change someone's mind.

Administrator Participants. The administrator participants also expressed frustration with negative comments and misinformation posted on social media. Chandra Wilson said, “I wish I could say that a lot of what I’ve read is positive, but it’s not. There’s always something wrong with what we do, and what we do to serve kids is never enough.” Administrators shared that they believed that the media often portrayed teachers in a negative light, and that positive stories about their work are not shared often enough. Responses by administrators also included the impact of social media on mental health and the need for repercussions for those who post negative comments. Participants expressed the importance of focusing on the good that they and their teachers do and the challenges they face in meeting the needs of students. Wilson continued, “I feel that now, more than ever before, we’re having to wear so many hats for children and I don’t think that’s gonna get any better, because I think the needs of our children are just gonna continue to increase.” Administrators also addressed topics seen in news and social media such as Critical Race Theory and the lack of understanding from the public.

Overall, administrative participants emphasized the need for more understanding, respect, and recognition for the work of educators.

Like the teacher participants, administrators shared their frustration and reluctance to respond to online comments or involve themselves in online debates. All seven stated that it is not worth their time to react and that doing so often leads to negativity and toxicity. They mentioned being careful with their emotions and not wanting to get into arguments with people who were not knowledgeable about their field of work. Benjamin Dunn commented, “People get behind screens and make comments to news reports or either give part of news reports and it gets printed as gospel. And then ... reputations can be tarnished because of assumptions made. People just retweet things or restate things” without much thought.

Several administrator participants acknowledged that educators can, themselves, feed negative narratives. They mentioned the disappointment they have felt when they have witnessed teachers making negative comments in online media. Millie Holder asserted that teachers do not help themselves or the profession when they go online and post a message like, “I can't believe I'm doing this, and I'm so tired, and I have to answer a parent email. I had to do this, and I had to do that.” Holder questioned aloud, “Why would they do that?” She continued, “If you do that, then less people want to come and be teachers. So sometimes teachers and other educators do it to themselves.” The comments principals attributed to teachers reflected the concern that it was not just parents and community members who helped spread negative information about teaching. Administrator participants also mentioned the potential consequences of engaging in online discussions, such as getting in trouble with their district administrators and/or board of education. Overall, their responses demonstrated that they preferred face-to-face conversations when they presented themselves and their thoughts on educational matters. Their responses also

reflected a shared a belief that individuals are entitled to their own opinions. Still, having an opinion and presenting that opinion online as a representative of the Peartree School District, especially when the posted content is negative, had hurt the image of public education in the district in the same ways that educators had described negative content shared by community members.

Impact on Education and Educators

When addressing the impact that negative news and media have on education and educators, the study focused on job satisfaction. Job satisfaction refers to the extent to which an individual feels positive or contented with their job. It encompasses an individual's overall attitude towards their work and is determined by various factors, including the nature of the job itself, working conditions, pay, work-life balance, relationships with colleagues and superiors, opportunities for growth and advancement, recognition, and the alignment of the job with the individual's personal values and goals. Sims (2020) found that “teachers who are recognised [sic] for their good work through promotion are more likely to feel competent and satisfied with their jobs.” High levels of job satisfaction can lead to increased productivity, loyalty, and reduced absenteeism, while low job satisfaction can result in decreased morale, burnout, and high turnover rates (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Sims, 2020; Woods & Weasmer, 2004).

Teacher Participants. Teacher interview participants expressed frustration and sadness about negative comments and misconceptions about the education profession on social media. They believed that these comments often stem from ignorance and lack of understanding about the work that they do. Hillary Cole admitted that negative comments posted by parents and community members following the publication of the state’s report card grades left her feeling guilty. While she knows multiple factors created the school data that was reported out by the

district and state, Cole stated that she had taken online comments and news reports focused on low-performing students and poor student behaviors personally. Because she works hard to support her students and has not always seen the positive results desired by her principal or district, Cole stated, "What hurts me the most is whenever I see [comments] about performance." Cole continued, "Classroom management and behavior, that's something we're always gonna have to deal with and that's always gonna be changing, but you know, how can we better support low-performing students?" Cole stated, "I just feel guilty, like I've played a role in it somehow. All these parents are saying it's the teacher's fault. But what if it is? Then I continue to think on the problem and I know it's not just the teacher. I know it's not due to one person or one thing. Still, it hurts when my students and their scores don't meet the expectation set for us because I know how far [my students have] come from the start of the school year." It is important to note that North Carolina's school report card grading system currently assigns annual grades to schools using a weighted calculation that favors student proficiency at 80% while student growth accounts for 20% of the school's letter grade. Educators and stakeholders alike desire to see proficient scores reported in the state's data but in the 80%-20% grade calculation, proficiency overshadows the growth that is possible for every student.

Participants emphasized the positive impact they have on students' lives and noted that they are motivated by the support they receive from parents and community members who understand and appreciate their efforts. Findings also included the importance of maintaining integrity and professionalism in the face of criticism. Some teachers chose not to engage with negative comments, while others felt compelled to defend themselves and set the record straight. Despite the challenges and negativity, the teachers remained committed to their work and found

inspiration in the positive interactions and experiences that they had with students and parents. They believe that their work in education is valuable and meaningful.

Teachers acknowledged that there will always be people who complain and are unhappy. Poppy Parker stated, “you’re trying to think of ways to engage students and assess students, and provide them feedback in these meaningful ways. You want to develop all these positive role model relationships with student, and then you’re doing everything you can to do right by these students, by the school, by the community, and then you hear from ill-informed people in the public that you’re trash. That’s an emotional hit.” The speakers in this conversation were passionate about teaching and making a difference in education. They acknowledged the challenges they faced, such as negative perceptions, lack of support, and difficult parents. Despite these obstacles, participants were determined to continue their work and not let negativity affect their love for teaching. They also discussed the importance of telling their story and attracting and retaining educators. Ultimately, they shared a belief in the impact they were making on students and remained optimistic despite the hardships they faced.

Administrator Participants. Administrator participants shared their frustrations with negative comments and opinions about education on social media. Maria Guzman spoke of posts that she had viewed on social media. She said, “I see, like half of the positive things, and half with this cry for support, this cry for the world to know how unfair the teaching profession is to [teachers].” She continued, “Teaching is the most honorable profession, but I just see a lot of [need for support among teachers].” Administrators expressed their dedication to their work and the impact that they have on students. While some individuals had experienced discrimination or criticism, they continued to find strength in positive feedback and support from parents and former students. Overall, administrators said that they sought to set the record straight and

maintain their professional integrity. They acknowledged the negative effects of social media but remained committed to their roles in education.

Administrators discussed the negative perception of the teaching profession in the media and the impact it has on attracting and retaining teachers. They expressed frustration at the constant negativity and lack of competitive pay. Despite the challenges, they remain passionate about their work and believe in the difference they make in students' lives. They emphasized the importance of urging others to conduct their own research to form their opinions of education-based topics instead of relying on social media and headlines. Chandra Wilson stated, “It hurts when people question our hearts and our integrity to do the work we do. That’s what really burns my heart. But that’s our world today. People don’t get to know people, or situations, or organizations for themselves. It’s unfortunate because we get ridiculed by people who don’t know who we are and don’t know what we do.” Wilson continued, “I think there’s so many people that cast opinions about what we do as educators. They don’t know what we do and they form opinions based on what others have said.” The observations of the administrative participants also touched on the difficulties that teachers face with parents and district leaders. Overall, they acknowledged the obstacles but remained committed to their profession.

Summary for Research Question 2

The interviews with both teachers and administrators included the negative portrayals of educators in the media and on social media platforms. Participants discussed how they felt that people who are not part of the education system often generalize and criticize teachers without understanding the challenges they face. Both teacher and administrator groups also mentioned that they perceived a lack of positive stories being shared and how negativity spreads quickly. Such imbalance in media depictions, they contended, leads to a biased view of educators and the

work they do to support students. Teacher and administrator participants highlighted the importance of questioning negative narratives regarding education and the need for all persons—parents, community members, and other teachers—to promote positive experiences in education in online posts and other media.

Respondents discussed the negative portrayal of teachers and administrators and the importance of community and legislative support for their work. They shared stories of educators who worked through the pandemic under stressful conditions and still had to contend with disrespectful comments from parents online. They also mentioned instances where negative incidents involving students or parents were blown out of proportion on social media. While participants generally acknowledged that those outside the system are entitled to express their opinions, some spoke to a belief that those who were not directly involved in education should not be recognized in their opinions about it. Interview participants noted that they appreciated when parents, community members, and students spoke up to support educators, but overall, those in the study shared that the negativity was overwhelming and undermined the important work that teachers do.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 called on teachers and administrators to describe the impact of negative media and public commentary about education and educators on educator attrition. Participants were asked to share their perspectives specific to two questions:

1. What are your thoughts about educators who are leaving the field of education due to the negativity they experience in the media?
2. Have you considered leaving the field of education due to negative media attention surrounding education and educators?

From their responses, I hoped to learn each educator's perception of the impact of negative media and public commentary about education and educators on educator attrition.

An analysis of the data revealed that teachers and administrators perceived the impact of negative media and public commentary about education and educators on educator attrition in similar ways. Themes that were revealed through participant interviews were political barriers surrounding education, parent and community support, mental health and happiness, impact of media, counteracting narratives, and persistence.

Political Battles Surrounding Education

Political battles surrounding education include the contentious issues, debates, and disputes that arise within the realm of education and are influenced or driven by political ideologies, agendas, and interests. These battles often manifest in policy decisions, funding allocations, curriculum choices, and overall educational priorities. These political battles are often influenced by broader societal debates and can vary in intensity and focus depending on the political climate, cultural shifts, and regional or local contexts.

Teacher Participants. The theme of political conflict was reflected in teacher responses to the interview query about educators who have left the field of education due to the negativity they experience in the media and the external pressure felt by teachers. Several stated that they understood why people have left education in North Carolina in general, and the Peartree District in particular. High school teacher Julie Hatcher shared a story in which professors at a university in the Western part of North Carolina “actually sat down and met with all the education majors and said we will help you change majors because it might not be worth it” after “legislative decisions were made that were discouraging to teachers.” Hatcher stated that she knows “...why people leave education and why people don't even start.” She continued, “I'm hearing people say

I don't want my child to go into education, or I don't want to go into education, or my colleague saying you need to contact that student who's in education and tell that student not to teach.”

Participants shared that it is difficult to see others leave a profession they love and one in which they know they make a difference in the lives of their students. But they also said that they understand such choices. Mike Smith, another high school teacher, stated, “I can't fault them for doing it. If I have an opportunity, I mean, I don't know if I would. I'm sticking with this because I love it. If another opportunity came, and it was financially feasible and all that, all the things kind of lined up, yeah, I would. I would have to seriously consider it.” Both Hatcher and Smith were older teachers and, in general, closer to retirement than many of their colleagues. Colleges and universities in North Carolina are not currently enrolling students in education majors at the rate needed to support public schools (*Fact Sheet*, 2022; Goldberg, 2021; Will, 2022a). Hatcher said, “when I see other people, you know, jump ship, it makes me highly concerned about that as an educator, where we are, what talent we are and are not attracting. And what message we're sending, what message we're giving as to the importance or lack of importance of education in our state.”

Participants focused on younger teachers and those new to the profession when they addressed teacher persistence. Jake Massengill, a late-career high school teacher, said “I think when I see a lot of young kids that come into education leave, they're very easily influenced because they're still young. When you're bombarded, like I was in high school about how negative teaching is, you don't want to get into it. You start listening.” He continued, “And even once they get into it, if they're not in a good school or a good place, they're going to leave. I mean, they're college educated.” Massengill added that he had seen some good teachers leave largely because they felt like they were not valued. He concluded by saying, “I think more

teachers have more issues with the politics of teaching than they do with the environment of teaching. I think they love what they do. They don't love who they do it for, even though we should be doing it for the children, but we cannot control all the outside forces. I think that's one reason they leave, and they're leaving in droves.”

The teachers’ responses highlighted the challenges faced by the teaching profession in North Carolina, the impact of political and societal pressures on teacher retention, and the concern for the future of education in the state. Many of the teacher participants shared that they understood and empathized with those who were leaving the education sector in North Carolina, especially in the Peartree District.

Administrator Participants. Sentiments similar to those offered by teacher participants developed during administrator interviews. Evan Thomas expressed his concern about the state of public education, noting that there was a shortage of teachers because people were retiring at a faster rate than new teachers could be hired. Similar to teacher participants Jake Massengill and Julie Hatcher, Thomas mentioned hearing people discourage others from pursuing a career in education. He was discouraged from becoming a teacher by his family. Echoing a comment made by Hatcher, Thomas stated that he was worried about the message this sends about the importance of education. Administrators expressed their love for teaching and the positive impact they have on students and staff, but also acknowledged the challenges they faced in their profession. Overall, there was a concern about the negative narrative surrounding education and the impact it was having on recruitment and retention of educators.

Elementary administrator Millie Holder stated, “We are struggling to fill our teaching vacancies because there is nobody out there.” Evan Thomas commented that “we have to be cautious about the way we sell education in the media to that younger generation who are all on

their cell phones. Why would anyone wanna start a job where every time you look at the news, someone is saying something negative about it? Why would you wanna get into it? And you're not paid on top of that, you know, a competitive salary. So, I'm fearful, but optimistic.”

Benjamin Dunn commented that when one considers the disrespect that is so prevalent that “it’s not worth it.” Like the comments made by high school teacher Jake Massengill, Dunn stated that when an educator decides to change careers, “there’s a lot of companies that will take you because you’re a teacher.” Teachers have a strong set of skills that employers find desirable.

Middle school administrator Benjamin Dunn shared that he had experienced the greatest attrition of his career during the preceding school year. The experiences of elementary school administrators were similar. Millie Holder stated, “All the schools are struggling to fill our teaching vacancies. We’re having to pull from various sources to find educators.” Participants expressed a common feeling that attacks on public education are significantly to blame for so many vacancies. “People have options,” stated Evan Thomas, “and they’re smart.” Peartree District is close to other larger school districts. Thomas also noted that schools in the district were not filling teaching vacancies as fast as people were retiring. The district continued to have people retiring early and not coming back. Thomas believed that this would not have been the case in prior years; those same educators would have returned.

The administrator responses reflected concerns about the state of public education, particularly around the issue of teacher recruitment and retention. Administrators and teachers alike expressed concern about the shortage of teachers and the negative narrative surrounding the profession. They noted that the challenges and low salaries in teaching were discouraging new candidates, while existing educators were leaving for other careers where their skills were valued. The administrators expressed a love for teaching and its positive impacts, but were also

candid about the issues they faced. The presence of better opportunities in other districts and the trend of early retirement without return were additional concerns. The sentiments indicated a critical need for a shift in how education was perceived and valued, both in the media and in society at large.

Parent and Community Support

Parent and community support for public education is a multifaceted and critical aspect of a thriving educational system. Both parents and the broader community have roles to play in enhancing and ensuring the quality of public education. A community that values education will inherently support public schools. This cultural aspect creates an environment where education is seen as a collective responsibility and a shared benefit. Parent and community support for public education is about more than just financial backing. It is about a comprehensive investment of time, resources, and care, with the shared goal of fostering an environment where students can thrive academically, emotionally, and socially. The collaboration between parents, educators, and the broader community creates a robust support system that can significantly influence the success of public education.

Teacher Participants. One of the greatest contributors to educator job satisfaction is parent and community support. Grace Johnson shared that she has “known a few [educators] over the past couple of years who left because [the job] has changed.” She stated that parent support and support from the community were no longer the norm. She followed up by saying, “I think some educators feel [the change in the levels of parent and community support] more so than others.” Citing higher expectations and the amount of work involved, Johnson added that “Some of those folks may have stayed [in education]” with the presence of greater support.

Several participants commented on what they viewed as a shift by community members away from the support of educators. Community members demonstrated focus more on fractious relationships within the local Board of Education. “Over the past couple of years there has been drama with our school district there. There’s been some infighting on our school board.” Others specifically addressed the phenomenon of the Facebook Moms groups. Isabel Gonzalez noted, “that’s where you see everything, a lot of negative things, a lot of negative talking about teachers.” Jake Massengill shared, “you know a lot of people get brave behind the screen or a phone.” Massengill’s comments addressed how some persons make public comments online that they would not likely state in face-to-face interaction. He commented that “what we have on our social media depends largely on the connections that we have on our own social media.” To control with whom she interacted online, Isabel Gonzalez kept her profile locked down to prevent others from viewing her account. Poppy Parker noted that some of the Facebook Moms pages have webmasters who uphold prescribed online practices that prohibit the calling out of individuals. She noted that she is familiar with other Moms pages that have allowed negative conversations to continue, as long as they center on school procedures or events, and not individuals.

News stories also help shape parent and community views of educators. “They can take a story that has no teeth in it,” Jake Massengill said, “and really make it look negative for that teacher, that individual that’s involved. And then in the end that teacher may be cleared of all wrongdoing. But yet they don’t go back and clear that up. So, you know that teacher’s career is ruined because of the media, and I think there should be repercussions for that.” As was noted in the previous paragraph, when it comes to social media platforms, Massengill stated that what he saw on his social media also depended on the “friends” he allowed on his social media site, or

account. If someone began “complaining about stuff all the time,” he just deleted them as a contact on the platform.

Teachers shared the impact of parent and community support on educator job satisfaction, highlighting a perceived decline in such support. Participants noted that some educators have left the profession because the job had changed; it lacked the prior norm of community backing. This sentiment was echoed by others who observed a shift in community members' attitudes, which had become more focused on conflicts within the Board of Education rather than supporting teachers. The negative role of social media was mentioned, with Facebook Moms groups being a particular source of negative comments about teachers.

Administrator Participants. Commensurate with the opinions of teacher participants, administrators identified parent and community support as important by administrator participants. This support may be demonstrated as communication with the school and its staff, attendance at school events, or even participation with parent-teacher-student organizations. When the support that staff feel they need is not present, some may seek support by moving to other schools where they perceive there to be greater support or by changing careers completely. Maria Guzman was direct in her comments. She stated, “Maybe [some left because] they weren’t feeling supported or just didn’t have the strength. This is not a job for weak people.” Chandra Wilson’s response was softer than Guzman’s. Wilson believed that the lack of support from parents and the community is a major factor contributing to teachers leaving the profession. She suggested that if more support was provided by parents and the community, some of the teachers who were leaving the profession might have chosen to stay.

Charles Green also shared concern about the high number of educators leaving the profession. He believed that changes in salary and retirement needed to be made by the state in

order to attract and retain good educators. He highlighted the importance of positive leadership in schools and the need for support from parents and the community. Millie Holder's response indicated that the lack of support included parents and community, but like Green, she asserted that change was needed for greater support to be extended beyond those areas. Holder's comments focused on a lack of respect from others, including those in state government. She said, "[Lawmakers] focus on education when they argue over the budget because education takes up so much of the state budget." She continued that educators have continued to see this focus on their jobs reflected in the media. She continued, "I'm not paid enough. I'm told I'm not good enough. It's all these things on the screen and they keep coming at you." The comments from administrators reflected a pervasive feeling of disrespect for educators and the work they do.

Dealing with difficult parents, lack of support, and low pay are some of the reasons administrator participants gave for educators leaving. One approach to helping create balance between school staff and community members was suggested by Benjamin Dunn. His idea was to have school staff members rank their communities in the same way educators rank their workplace experiences through the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey. Dunn said, "if we start ranking communities, then communities will have to police themselves on their social media because they'll get called out by this website." Teachers would have the ability to research the level of parent and community support offered in a district or school community with which they were considering working. Dunn stated, "After completing a great interview, a teacher candidate would say 'I think I wanna teach there. What's the community like?'" Schools are microcosms of the communities in which they serve. Dunn suggested that a website of this nature could assist districts in helping parents and community members edit out some of the

negative comments that have become prevalent on social media that may dissuade teachers from accepting jobs in their schools.

The consensus among administrator participants was that a lack of support from district leaders, parents, and the community members significantly contributed to educators' decisions to leave. They cited issues such as the demanding nature of the job, a need for stronger support systems, better salary and retirement benefits, and a general lack of respect from the state government and media. One administrator proposed a novel solution to balance the relationship between school staff and the community: a ranking system for communities similar to the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey. This system could help teachers gauge the level of support they might expect from a district and could encourage communities to moderate negative social media commentary that might deter educators from working in their schools. The idea was consistent with the perspective of participants that schools are a reflection of their communities and that mutual respect and support are essential for a positive educational environment.

Mental Health and Happiness

Mental health and happiness are deeply interconnected and play a pivotal role in one's ability to lead a productive, fulfilling life. Mental well-being can enhance an individual's ability to learn from experiences and adapt to changes, vital in a rapidly changing world. Good mental health can lead to better physical health. Stress, anxiety, and depressive states can contribute to a host of physical problems, from heart disease to weakened immune response. Employees with good mental health are less likely to take sick days or suffer from burnout, and are better able to contribute to consistent productivity (Green, 2023). In essence, mental health and happiness are not just desirable states of being but are crucial for leading productive lives. They foster the

necessary cognitive, emotional, and social skills required to function optimally in personal and professional spheres. Given their importance, promoting mental well-being and happiness should be a priority for individuals, communities, and organizations (Dennison, 2023).

Teacher Participants. Teachers in the study frequently commented on happiness and mental well-being. A related subtheme addressed in the findings was the need to make personal decisions that were in the best interest of self and family. High school teacher Mike Smith stated, “If this [job] is not making you happy, you need to do something that’s gonna make you happy.” He added, “Everybody I talked to, like after they've moved out of the of the profession, usually seems to be more happy, or at least they're putting on that front like they are.” Elementary teacher, Isabel Gonzalez, shared that she had read articles that supported this idea and she had seen it herself. She shared that her motto is “your mental health is what matters.” She said, “There comes a point with your mental health, if you're not well mentally, you're not gonna be well and happy at a job. If you're miserable, that's gonna affect the way you teach.” She further stated, “It’s gonna also affect your classroom management at the same time, because your students will notice that you are not happy there.”

Demonstrating that teachers can have a second career following their teaching experiences, Jake Massengill noted that he hired teachers in his previous work in the private sector. Due to their skill level, training, and work ethic, he concluded that teachers are a wanted commodity, not just to serve in classrooms, but in other professional positions. Massengill said, “I hired ‘em almost every time because I was, like, they know how to problem solve. They know how to communicate.” Massengill’s point was that, with a college degree, those leaving teacher positions have options outside of education.

Administrative Participants. Mental health and happiness were addressed in the responses provided by administrator participants. Happiness and mental health contribute to a sense of purpose and satisfaction in life, making individuals more invested in their endeavors. Mental well-being provides resilience against stress, allowing individuals to bounce back from adversities more quickly and tackle challenges effectively (Dennison, 2023; Green, 2023). Chandra Wilson's beliefs regarding teacher attrition were similar to those shared by Evan Thomas when she stated that many teachers have left their positions because they felt emotionally drained and had nothing more to give in the role. While some teacher participants specifically cited mental health during their interviews, administrator participants spoke in terms of continuous challenges, exhaustion, and burnout. Wilson mentioned that it was often the kids and their parents who contributed to the challenges teachers face. She shared that teachers today were confronted with varying needs of children. She further stated that there's so much more that educators contend with to serve "students educationally, and when all you hear and see is the bad and not so much wonderful or good, people's hearts begin to fail them, you know. And I think that's why some people are just like, you know what, I'm done with this." Millie Holder said, "We have lost many people who just walked out and said they just cannot handle it anymore. It makes me really sad that we've lost so many good educators."

Millie Holder referenced the 2001 World Trade Center attacks when she addressed the dire experience that the district had faced with maintaining staff needed to serve students.

You're seeing this mass exodus. It's kind of like, you know, when the Twin Towers were collapsing and everybody ran away because they didn't want to be a part of it, you know, and only a small handful of people were running to go help. I think that's kind of what education has become. We have all of these people running from this collapse and only a

small handful of people who are running to try to help, and who are trying to save what it is, and that breaks my heart.

Like teacher participant Jake Massengill, Benjamin Dunn observed that private businesses are ready to hire former teachers to benefit from their skill sets. In their new roles, Dunn stated that “teachers would likely not fall asleep grading papers.” According to Dunn, teachers reported that they felt disrespected. Their comments, he said, were not offered in an angry way, but in a depressed way. Chandra Wilson reported that she had lost four core teachers at her school going into the school year. Three of the four left for a career change. Each told her, “I’m done. I can’t do this anymore.”

Participants stated that teacher pay was not enough to compensate for having to deal with all the things that continue to come at educators. Wilson added, “Their families suffer, and they’re supposed to do all that just because they know it’s a good job.” But Dunn said, “You know, in the end we gotta remember, society needs to remember, in the end, it’s a job. And people have a lot of options.” The Peartree District has seen the result of what happens when teachers have been pushed as far as they can be pushed and they have chosen to exercise their options. Still, most administrators acknowledged that it made them sad that the Peartree District had lost many good educators from its schools and that recruiting good educators has been extremely difficult.

Impact of Media

Negative media, whether it pertains to sensationalism, misinformation, or undue focus on distressing news, can have a range of effects on education and on educators. While the media is a powerful tool for information dissemination and shaping perspectives, it is essential for

educators, parents, and students to be aware of its potential negative influences. News stories and comments that focus on educators and education help shape public perception.

Teacher Participants. Teacher participants expressed a desire for unbiased news and factual reporting. They also discussed the negative impact of social media and how it can perpetuate negative perceptions of public education. Some educators found social media to be a useful tool for communication with parents, while others preferred face-to-face interactions. Isabel Gonzalez commented, “I see some [posts] saying that teachers are teaching critical race theory, and I’m like, I’m not. I start reading the comments. It makes me frustrated because [the parents] generalize. ‘Oh, all the teachers are teaching this. All the teachers are doing that.’” She continued that she saw instances in which parents commented, “I don’t have access to my child’s curriculum’ But not one parent has ever asked me ‘What are you teaching?’ It’s frustrating. If a parent were to ask me ‘What are you teaching?’ I could say, ‘Here’s the newsletter. This is what the unit is.’ Because our curriculum actually has parent newsletters.” Teachers emphasized the importance of those commenting online to describe firsthand experiences and to be involved in their child’s education before forming opinions and sharing them online. They also mentioned the negative aspects of social media, such as anonymous commenting and the spreading of false information. Overall, teachers emphasized the need for accurate reporting and a more positive portrayal of public education.

Administrator Participants. Another theme that appeared in the responses from administrator participants was discussion about the negative impact of media and social media on the perception of the education profession. When the media frequently portrays educational institutions in a negative light, they observed, it can diminish trust in these institutions and generate a lack of respect for teachers and other school employees. Benjamin Dunn stated that

the media and society should demonstrate respect for teachers and not make jokes or believe everything said about them. He referenced a radio broadcast from 2020 in which the North Carolina State Superintendent of Public Instruction Mark Johnson engaged in negative remarks about a school district with an on-air radio host. “Common sense should prevail in understanding and supporting the individuals who educate the future generation,” stated Dunn. Evan Thomas echoed this sentiment when he stated that, often, the public does not have the full story when it forms opinions about educators or public education. “Attacks on public education are one of the reasons why you’re seeing so many vacancies.” Dunn wondered aloud, “I wonder how many teachers we lose based off of negative interactions they’ve had with the general public, in headlines, in comments. It just eats away at you gradually.”

Charles Green viewed the negative media attention another way. He suggested looking at the messenger instead of the message. He said, “Understand that the media can be biased.” He further stated that “If teachers are leaving the profession due to this negative perception perpetuated by social media or the news, then it is because they do not feel supported by their fellow teachers or by that admin team.” Still, Maria Guzman stated clearly, “If you left, good for you. It wasn’t for you.”

Benjamin Dunn expressed that he felt that “Educators [were] used as weapons as to what is wrong and not wrong [in the district], and the media uses wide sweeps and broad strokes [when discussing what is happening in schools] and then that makes many educators feel uncomfortable.” He further stated, “I think that the media has a role to play and must be able to acknowledge the consequences.”

Administrators shared their views on the negative impact of media and social media on the public's perception of the education profession. Participants highlighted how negative

portrayals have eroded trust in educational institutions and respect for teachers and other staff. Their responses emphasized the importance of supporting educators.

Counteracting Narratives

Counteracting narratives is a theme that emerged during the participant interviews that addressed the desire of administrators to present a greater number of positive stories about their schools and students to balance the number of negative stories and events reported in the media. Positive stories can motivate educators, students, and parents. They serve as a reminder of what is possible when people come together with a shared purpose. They can inspire others to take similar actions or to believe in the potential of public education (Shine, 2018).

Administrator Participants. A theme that was not apparent in the teacher interviews but in those of administrators was a focus on counteracting narratives to make improvements in the Peartree District. High school administrator Colleen Myers stated that is important to counteract negative narratives by highlighting the positive aspects of education happening throughout the school. Millie Holder and Charles Green both stated they want teachers and others to do their own research when faced with negative headlines. Holder said, “Instead of accepting what you see on social media as the gospel, do your own investigation. We have a lot of difficulty getting teachers in the Peartree District because we have had a lot of craziness at the top.” She stated that the selection of those who serve in leadership positions is important because they can help turn things around by speaking positively about educators and education in the district. She elaborated on this idea when she said, “We need people who are going to promote positivity and say, ‘You know what? Yes, we have problems, but everybody else does too. So, here’s the good things that are going on [in the Peartree District].’”

While it is essential to acknowledge and address challenges in public education, these administrators asserted that it is equally crucial to celebrate and publicize its successes. Doing so, they contended, provides a more balanced view, inspires stakeholders, and fosters a supportive environment for students and educators alike. As a matter of accuracy and fairness, educators cannot allow only negative stories to dominate the media landscape; it creates a skewed perception of public education. These administrators believed that, by sharing positive stories, educators ensure that the public gets a fuller, more accurate picture of what's happening in schools.

Persistence

Educator persistence is a fundamental element in sustaining a robust public education system. Educators who remain in the profession provide a stable and consistent learning environment for their students. This stability is essential for student achievement and emotional well-being, especially for those who may not live in stable home environments. Consistent positive relationships with teachers can foster trust and a sense of security, which are conducive to learning. Job persistence leads to the accumulation of instructional expertise. Experienced teachers have honed their skills and strategies over time, allowing them to effectively manage classrooms, differentiate instruction, and address diverse learning needs. This expertise is vital for student success and is not easily replaced (Kini & Podolsky, 2016).

Teacher Participants. Findings from participant interviews demonstrated that the teachers who took part in the phenomenological case study were concerned with the negative media attention and politics focused on educators in the Peartree District. They were further concerned that these phenomena had been factors in the decisions of some colleagues to leave the district. Jake Massengill expressed skepticism towards the media and how he had seen the

media portray teachers. Massengill stated, “[The media] can take a story that has no teeth in it and really make it look negative for that teacher, that individual that’s involved. And then, in the end, that teacher is cleared of all wrongdoing. But [no one] goes back to clear that up. So they ruin a career for that teacher because of the media.” However, he personally did not let online comments or social media affect him and his perception of the field of education. Massengill continued, “Now, I think if there was something very negative [said] about me, maybe I would care, and I would try to defend myself. But it depends on what it was. Someone saying they don’t like me or I’m ugly, or whatever, I’m okay. I don’t care.” While he believed that many teachers have left the profession due to negative media attention and the politics surrounding teaching, he loves teaching and was dedicated to his students. He did not plan to leave his role as a teacher in the Peartree District. Like Massengill, Poppy Parker and Grace Johnson stated that they recognized the declining enrollment in education programs as a threat to the future of the profession but stated a decision to remain in the district. Johnson said that she saw the value in her work. Johnson stated, “I think I can make a difference.” She discussed her commitment to being involved in her children's education and supporting her fellow teachers and public education in the Peartree District. Addressing her resolve to maintain her role as a public educator in the district, Johnson added, “I can’t say I don’t have the guts or the toughness to deal with [the challenges], but I’m gonna continue to send my kids for y’all to deal with? “No. If I’m gonna send my kids [to school in the district] and I work with the school system, I’m gonna be in the fight as well. I’m gonna fight with [my colleagues]. I trust this system. That’s why my kids are still there. So I’m doing something I believe in.”

Mike Smith shared that online comments were often critical of the profession, with few voices defending educators. He avoided engaging with these online comments to avoid being

brought into unproductive discussions. Smith shared that the negative attention from media and social media was discouraging, making him less likely to promote the field of education in the Peartree District. He expressed that he understood why some teachers chose to leave due to the negativity they experienced. He stated, “If another opportunity came, and it was financially good, and all the things kind of lined up, yeah, I would have to seriously consider that.”

Elementary teacher, Isabel Gonzalez, shared that she had seriously considered leaving her job due to negative media attention directed toward teachers. However, Gonzalez stated, “I don’t see myself doing anything else. And even if it’s just like one student who says I’m happy to see you, it absolutely makes my day.”

The teachers interviewed expressed concern over the negative media attention and political focus on educators, which they believed had influenced some colleagues to leave the district. Teachers shared their skepticism of the media’s portrayal of teachers and believed there should be consequences for spreading false information.

Administrator Participants. Professional persistence is a topic that is equally important to school and classroom leaders. When faced with the question of whether or not she had considered leaving the Peartree District or the field of education due negative media attention, Chandra Wilson responded that she had considered leaving the profession, but it was due to other factors such as the expectations of her role as principal. She did admit that she had considered leaving her role due to a lack of support and her desire for professional coaching. “I have considered leaving at times, because I felt like I wasn’t supported enough,” Wilson shared. She continued, “There are some things I don’t want to figure out on my own. I’m sorry. I don’t. I want a coach to show me if I’m moving. ‘Do I need to move right? Am I going left too long?’ When a coach is on the sidelines, he can see what the player can’t see.” Wilson reiterated that

having someone who fulfilled the needs of such a support role for principals in the Peartree District would “save us so much heartache, save us so much time, so much energy and resources.”

Several participants emphasized the importance of having support and coaching as school administrators and the need for mentors in their roles. Chandra Wilson’s specific desire to be coached as an effective leader echoed the descriptions of the supportive environment desired by administrator and teacher participants. Providing a thought-partner and mentor for administrators, regardless of how seasoned one is, would add support for administrators to help them persist in their difficult positions.

Millie Holder stated that although her position was a difficult job, she would not want to go to another county. When Chandra Wilson had considered leaving education, she said that ultimately “I will think about it and think about it, and then I think about children. I think about impact. And that's what keeps me here. That's what keeps me in it for as long as I'll be allowed to stay.”

Despite having faced challenges and having considered leaving their positions at times, the principals interviewed remained dedicated to their work as administrators. They emphasized the importance of having support and coaching, and expressed a belief in the impact they have made on students' lives. They were motivated by their love for what they do and the belief that education is a powerful force. They acknowledged the negative influence of media and difficult interactions with parents, but ultimately, their passion for making a difference kept them committed to their roles. Maria Guzman’s comment captured the sentiment of other administrators: “I really love teaching. And I really love the kids. And I have a decent working environment. Why am I listening to the noise?”

Administrators addressed the importance of professional persistence, particularly in the context of school administration and leadership. The value of having a coach or mentor to provide guidance to school leaders was identified as crucial not only for administrators' effectiveness, but also for their mental health. The principals collectively acknowledged the tough aspects of their roles, such as negative media perception and difficult parent interactions, but they remained committed to their roles due to their love for teaching and belief in the transformative power of education. Maria Guzman summarized this attitude by questioning why she should pay attention to external negativity when she has a love for teaching, the children, and a supportive working environment. They voiced the importance of support, mentorship, and the intrinsic motivation and passion for education that keep school leaders engaged and committed to their roles despite external challenges.

Summary for Research Question 3

The interviews with both teachers and administrators reflected concerns that negative media and public commentary of education and educators had led to attrition among educators in the Peartree District. In addressing specific factors that contributed to the dissatisfaction and departure of educators, the participants cited discouraging legislative decisions that impacted pay and respect for educators across the state, a lack of parent and community support for educators and their school communities, a need for educators to protect their own mental health and well-being, the impact of negative media, and a desire to see positive educational stories to counteract negative education-based stories to bolster and improve educator persistence.

Both teachers and administrators expressed concerns that the negative messaging about education in the media contributed to the shortage of teachers faced by the Peartree District. They stressed the importance of community support and spoke to the impact of social media on

public perception. Challenges such as difficult parents, lack of support, and low pay were cited as reasons for educators leaving the profession. Participants addressed their concerns that the state's devaluation of education has diminished their ability to attract new talent in their schools. Younger teachers, in particular, were perceived as vulnerable to the negative narratives, which they felt influenced their decisions to enter or stay in the profession.

Both teachers and administrators emphasized the crucial role of parent and community support in education. A shift away from such support was seen to contribute to teacher attrition. Social media has played a significant role in shaping community opinions, often to the detriment of educators' reputations. Participants emphasized the importance of mental health and happiness in the profession, with some educators having left their positions due to stress and burnout. The possibility of a second career outside education was acknowledged by several participants, with recognition that teachers as employees were valued in other job sectors for their problem-solving and communication skills.

The interviews addressed that the negative portrayal of educators in the media was a common concern, with a call for more accurate and positive reporting. The spread of misinformation, particularly on social media, was highlighted as a damaging factor that has affected teachers' professional lives. There was a strong desire among educators, especially among school administrators, to share positive stories to counteract the negative ones that have dominated media portrayal of public education. Positive narratives were noted as essential among educator participants to fostering community support and attract new talent to the field.

Despite challenges, many educators described their intentions to persist in the profession out of dedication to their students and the impact they make. Administrators also spoke to the importance of support and coaching to bolster their job satisfaction, performance, and

persistence. In summary, the data for Research Question 3 disclosed that negative media and public commentary have had a considerable impact on educator attrition, affecting both teachers' and administrators' morale and decisions to stay in the field. Participants repeatedly identified the need for a balanced portrayal of education in the media, increased community support, and recognition of educators' mental health needs.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the findings revealed by the research investigation. The findings are organized around the research questions and themes that emerged from the data analysis regarding the perceptions of educators when faced with negative news and media. The interview items to which these participants responded included questions about their experiences with news and media, job satisfaction, and educator attrition. Data from interviews disclosed the study participants' experiences with the phenomenon. The participants discussed their experiences as educators and the challenges they had faced. They mentioned issues such as lack of support, negative perceptions in the media, low pay, and political battles surrounding public education. Many expressed sadness concerning the loss of good educators and the impact that this had on students and their school communities. They also discussed the importance of valuing and respecting teachers and highlighted the positive aspects of education.

Some participants expressed that teachers should prioritize their mental health and happiness and make career changes if necessary. They expressed their love for their jobs and the impact they have had on students' lives. Some mentioned that negative media attention and lack of support have made them consider leaving, but several stated that they have remained in education because they believe in the work they do. Some mentioned that financial reasons could potentially lead them to consider leaving, but overall, they were dedicated to making a difference

in education and will continue to serve as educators at this time. Ultimately, those who participated in the study stated they would persist and not allow the opinions of those who do not understand their profession to affect their commitment to education.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Chapter Introduction

Chapter 5 provides a summary and discussion of the findings reported in Chapter 4, along with a discussion of the results from the study. The chapter also addresses the implications of these findings as policymakers and practitioners review current practices, procedures, and policies. Limitations of the study are discussed along with recommendations for future research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how negative news stories, articles, social media posts, and online comments about education and educators influence educator job satisfaction and attrition in one North Carolina school district. Job satisfaction has been an area of concern for public school leaders and communities and has been explored in research; however, the stress of the demands placed on educators and school staff throughout the COVID-19 pandemic increased the number of educators who are resigning from their school roles. This study examined the perceptions of teachers and administrators in one large, rural district and their experiences with negative media, job satisfaction, and educator attrition. The study included an examination of educator responses from the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey (NCTWCS) over three bi-annual administrations in which I compared survey responses from the district's educators with those of educators across the state. Using a case study approach, I explored the perspectives of educators who serve in the district relative to the phenomenon of negative media and its impact on educator job satisfaction and attrition. In particular, the case study examined the educators' individual experiences with news and social media and how they access that information. The study also called on teachers and administrators to reflect on how they perceive that educators are portrayed in news and social

media, on specific comments they have seen that refer to educators, on their level of engagement with online comments, and how these phenomena affected them and influenced their feelings about education and their jobs as educators. Finally, the study examined teacher and administrator perspectives specific to educator persistence by exploring their conclusions about the reasons that educators had left the district or the profession. This included determining whether participants' experiences with negative news and media had also caused them to consider leaving their roles.

I was motivated to complete this study due to my professional role in serving as a principal of a comprehensive high school in North Carolina through the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Preliminary research revealed a focus on the relationship of stress to educator attrition in several studies that examined teacher job satisfaction studied in rural communities. I also examined a prior study that focused on job dissatisfaction among building principals. Previous research focused on the stress of all educators or was specific to building principals. Because job satisfaction plays a critical role in determining a person's intentions to remain employed with their current employer, I chose to study the connection between job satisfaction and attrition. My research aimed to capture the experiences of educators in a large district with negative media that focused on educators and education. I examined educator responses from the NCTWCS items related to support and retention in order to compare educator responses from the district with those provided by the state's educators. My study also sought to assess the degree to which the perceptions of educators regarding education-focused media impact their job satisfaction and desire to remain in their current school role. Through an examination of responses in the NCTWCS and individual interviews with 14 educators that included seven teachers and seven

administrators in one North Carolina school district, the study documented their reactions to negative news stories, social media posts, and public comments about educators and education.

Summary of Findings

I analyzed responses from the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey (NCTWCS) and findings from the teacher and administrator interviews to gain deeper insights into the educators' perspectives about news and social media that focus on educators and education. I analyzed the emergent themes from an examination of the participant responses to open-ended questions that allowed the educators to share their experiences with me concerning their perceptions of educator-related media coverage.

The study addressed three research questions as follows:

1. How do educators working in a large district describe their experiences with online media that focuses on educators and education?
2. How do news stories, articles, social media posts, and online comments about education and educators impact educator job satisfaction?
3. How do educators describe the impact of negative media and public commentary about education and educators on educator attrition?

North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey (NCTWCS) data were derived from items in two thematic areas: support and retention. I examined data from 13 NCTWCS items when comparing mean levels of agreement with these statements by educators from the school district and mean levels of agreement with these statements by educators across the state of North Carolina:

1. Parents/guardians support teachers, contributing to their success with students.
2. Community members support teachers, contributing to their success with students.

3. The community we serve is supportive of the school.
4. Overall, my school is a good place to work and learn.
5. I plan to continue teaching at my current school.
6. I plan to continue teaching in this district but leave this school.
7. I plan to continue teaching in this state but leave this school district.
8. I plan to continue as a principal at my current school.
9. I plan to continue as a principal in this district but leave this school.
10. I plan to continue as a principal in this state but leave this district.
11. I plan to leave the principalship for personal reasons (e.g., health, family, etc.).
12. I plan to retire from the principalship.
13. I plan to leave the principalship for another reason.

From these data, I hoped to identify whether there was a difference in the levels of agreement portrayed in the averages of educators in the district compared to the levels of agreement of educators across the state of North Carolina. I also wanted to identify any changes over time in the levels of agreement that could relate to the phenomenon being studied.

An analysis of the survey results revealed that data reported in the 2022 NCTWCS, the first administration of the survey following the COVID-19 pandemic, showed educator responses to be the same between educators across the state and those of the Peartree District when participants reported their feelings about parent and community support. It is important to note that while statewide respondents held steady from 2020 to 2022 in their level of agreement in reporting the support they felt from parents and guardians, percentages of agreement reported by these educators in North Carolina fell 5% from 2020 to 2022 in terms of their perceptions of the contribution of community members toward the success of their students. Peartree District

educators reported the same level of agreement as state educators, at approximately 75%, in their feelings of community member support and contributions to student success. While the Peartree District averages were on par with the state averages in several categories in 2022, it is important to note that the parity with the state is a result of a drop among Peartree's educators in feelings of support and job satisfaction in the Peartree District from 2018 to 2022. Another significant decrease in the Peartree levels of agreement was reflected in the data from the 2022 survey as Peartree District educators responded that only 80% felt that the community they served was supportive of their schools. While the 80% level of agreement reported in the Peartree District reflected a decline, the data matched the 80% level of agreement reported by the state with this question in 2022. It is important to include that while the state's average remained at 80% from 2018 to 2022, the Peartree District had reported a rate of agreement in 2018 at 90%, and 85% in 2020, before falling to 80% in 2022. Dropping by 10% across the three survey administrations, the decline in the level of support felt by educators in the Peartree District was notable.

In 2022, 85% of Peartree educators agreed that their schools were good places to work. This number remained the same as that reported in 2020 for both teachers and administrators in the Peartree District as well as those across the state of North Carolina. When responding to NCTWCS items that addressed their immediate professional plans in the 2022 spring survey, teachers across the state and in the Peartree District agreed at just under 80% that they would continue serving in their current schools. The state's teachers matched agreement in responses with those of teachers in the Peartree District. Three percent of teachers responded that they would continue to teach in their current districts. Three percent responded that they would leave their current school districts but continue to serve in North Carolina. When addressing intent to leave education entirely, the 2022 data reported that approximately 7% of the teachers in the

Peartree District and in North Carolina planned to leave education. This number was twice the rate reported in the state and district two years previously in the 2020 administration of the survey; this growth in teacher attrition signaled a concerning trend for teacher persistence in the Peartree District and across North Carolina.

The 2022 survey provided separate data for teachers and principals in the area of retention. While 80% of the state's principals reported that they planned to continue in leadership roles at their current schools, slightly fewer than 80% of those in the Peartree District reported plans to continue in their current schools. Principal responses in the Peartree District were in line with those reported by teachers in the district. Trending positively in the 2022 survey data, principals in the Peartree District reported that approximately 2% planned to retire, which was a smaller percentage than the 5% rate in 2020. Still, the 2022 survey also included data that showed that a similar rate of administrators indicated that they would leave the principalship for another reason. Two percent of the state's principals indicated this intent, while the Peartree District's administrators were closer to 5%.

Ultimately, educator responses with regard to community support and involvement were consistent across the state and within the Peartree District in the results of the 2022 NCTWCS. Important to note is that educators in the Peartree District had rated their satisfaction with parent and community support in the district above that of the state's educators in both the 2018 and 2020 surveys. But by 2022, the NCTWCS data showed the level of agreement in community support to be approximately the same as that reported by the state's educators (approximately 70%). Peartree's parity with the state in 2022 resulted from the fact that the district's educators had fallen in their level of satisfaction with support by almost 10% over the three survey periods. Peartree District educators who felt their community was supportive of schools dropped from

90% in 2018 and 85% in 2020 to 80% in 2022, mirroring the state average, which remained at 80%. About 7% of the Peartree District's teachers and state's teachers planned to leave education, double the rate from 2020. The survey highlighted issues with educators' perceptions of community support and diminishing intentions to remain in their positions, particularly in the Peartree District, and indicated a potentially concerning trend for teacher and principal retention.

Research Question 1 assessed the experiences of teachers and administrators in the Peartree district related to the phenomenon of news and social media. Open-ended questions during participant interviews enabled me to understand each educator's general experience with news and social media, as well as their means of accessing news and social media. From their responses, I gained insights into each educator's overall experience and use of news and social media. I also wanted to learn the sources used by the participants by which they accessed their news and social media.

The analysis of information showed that educators reported diverse interactions with various digital media tools and platforms. These interactions were predominantly categorized as either favorable or unfavorable, with few neutral or mixed reactions. The participants provided detailed comments on how they accessed information sources and social media for different purposes. They also discussed how they engaged with media platforms, which included checking news and weather, maintaining ties with close-knit personal circles, and utilizing broader social media networks. Moreover, the educators spoke about different applications and how these served specific roles in their professional lives. Key topics identified from the interviews included their use of social media, the phenomenon of Facebook Moms, news accessibility, and digital tools related to their lifestyle. By comparing the viewpoints of teachers with those of

school administrators, I assessed the extent to which responses between these two groups agreed or disagreed.

The educators and administrators emphasized the significance of deliberately managing their social media streams to eschew negative content, striving to concentrate on positive interactions. They also pointed out how social media and news media shape the public's view of the educational sector, voicing their discontent with the frequent focus on negative narratives. A number of them mentioned that they use social media for building professional connections and for seeking out educational materials. Collectively, they underscored the necessity for the media to portray education more positively and accurately.

Overall, educators expressed a desire for unbiased news and factual reporting. They also discussed the detrimental impact of social media and how it can perpetuate negative perceptions of public education. Some participants found social media to be a useful tool for communication with parents, while others preferred face-to-face interactions. They emphasized the importance of firsthand experiences and involvement in education before forming opinions. They also expressed frustration with misinformation and negative media coverage. Some educators mentioned the positive impact of social media when used appropriately and highlighted the support they received from parents and community members. They also mentioned the negative aspects of social media, such as anonymous commenting and the spreading of false information. Overall, educators emphasized the need for accurate reporting and a more positive portrayal of public education.

Research Question 2 assessed the perceived impact of news stories, articles, social media posts, and online comments about education and educators on educator job satisfaction. From their responses, I gleaned the individual and collective perceptions of the participants regarding

the impact of news stories, articles, social media posts, and online comments about education and educators on educator job satisfaction.

Analysis of the responses revealed that teachers and administrators perceived the phenomenon of educator job satisfaction in similar ways. Ultimately, participants shared that the lack of support from their parents, school communities, and legislative leaders made the job harder for educators. Personal stories also revealed how difficult it is for educators to sit by and not respond to inaccurate information that is shared in the media and on social media sites. Several of the participants stated that their inability to address the lack of truthfulness in online posts led to feelings of depression and helplessness. The data revealed many shared experiences held by the teachers and administrator participants regarding job satisfaction in relation to how educators are portrayed in the media, their experiences with online comments, and how their feelings about education and their jobs had been impacted by media and online comments. Words that were repeated in interviews included “disparaging,” “disheartening,” “difficult,” and “depressing.” Themes that developed from the participant interviews included portrayal of educators, online comments, and impact on educators and education. I compared teacher responses with administrator responses in order to determine the degree of consensus, or lack thereof, between these subgroups.

Respondents discussed the negative portrayal of teachers and administrators and the importance of community and legislative support for their work. They shared stories of educators who worked through the pandemic under stressful conditions and still had to contend with disrespectful comments from parents online. They also mentioned instances where negative incidents involving students or parents were blown out of proportion on social media. While participants generally acknowledged that those outside the system are entitled to express their

opinions, some suggested that those who were not directly involved in education should be more restrained in their opinions about it. Interview participants noted that they appreciated when parents, community members, and students spoke up to support educators, but overall, those in the study shared that the negativity was overwhelming and undermined the important work that teachers do.

The interviews with both teachers and administrators included the negative portrayals of educators in the media and on social media platforms. Participants indicated that people who are not part of the education system often generalize and criticize teachers without understanding the challenges they face. Both teacher and administrator groups also mentioned that they perceived a lack of positive stories being shared, conversely, how negativity spreads quickly. Such imbalance in media depictions, they contended, leads to a biased view of educators and the work they do to support students. Participants shared the emotional toll they felt as their efforts led to stress and exhaustion as a result of the work they do while buffering criticism from outside sources. Teacher and administrator participants highlighted the importance of questioning negative narratives regarding education and the need for all persons—parents, community members, and other teachers—to promote positive experiences in education in online posts and other media.

Research Question 3 assessed the perceived impact of negative media and public commentary about education and educators on educator attrition. From their responses, I gathered insights into each educator's perception of the impact of negative media and public commentary about education and educators on educator attrition. An analysis of the data revealed that teachers and administrators perceived the impact of negative media and public commentary about education and educators on educator attrition in similar ways. Themes that

were revealed through participant interviews were political barriers surrounding education, parent and community support, mental health and happiness, impact of media, counteracting narratives, and persistence.

Both teachers and administrators expressed concerns that the negative messaging about education in the media contributed to the shortage of teachers faced by the Peartree District. They stressed the importance of community support and spoke to the impact of social media on public perception. Challenges such as difficult parents, lack of support, and low pay were cited as reasons for educators leaving the profession. Participants addressed their concerns that the state's devaluation of education had diminished their ability to attract new talent in their schools. Younger teachers, in particular, were perceived as vulnerable to the negative narratives, which the participants believed influenced their decisions to enter or stay in the profession.

Both teachers and administrators emphasized the crucial role of parent and community support in education. A shift away from such support was seen to contribute to teacher attrition. According to the participants, social media had played a significant role in shaping community opinions, often to the detriment of educators' reputations. Participants emphasized the importance of mental health and happiness in the profession; they noted that some educators had left their positions due to stress and burnout. The possibility of a second career outside education was acknowledged by several participants, with recognition that teachers were valued as employees in other job sectors for their problem-solving and communication skills.

The interviewees uniformly indicated that the negative portrayal of educators in the media was a common concern; they stressed the need for more accurate and positive reporting. The spread of misinformation, particularly on social media, was highlighted as a damaging factor that has affected teachers' professional lives. There was a strong desire among these educators,

especially among the administrators, to bring more attention to positive stories to counteract the negative ones that they perceived have dominated media portrayal of public education. Positive narratives were noted as essential among educator participants to fostering community support, retaining educators, and attracting new teaching talent to the field.

Despite challenges, many educators described their intentions to persist in the profession out of dedication to their students and the impact they make. Administrators also spoke to the importance of support and coaching to bolster their job satisfaction, performance, and persistence. The data for Research Question 3 disclosed that negative media and public commentary had impacted educator attrition significantly, affecting both teachers' and administrators' morale and decisions to remain in the field. Participants repeatedly asserted the need for a balanced portrayal of education in the media, increased community support, and recognition of educators' mental health needs.

Overall, educator responses reflected concerns that negative media and public commentary about education and educators had led to increased attrition among educators in the Peartree District. In addressing specific factors that contributed to the dissatisfaction and departure of educators, the participants cited multiple factors. These educators cited discouraging legislative decisions that impacted pay and respect for educators across the state and a lack of parent and community support for educators and their school communities. They expressed a need for educators to protect their own mental health and well-being. The participants also made reference to the impact of negative media and their desire to see positive educational stories to counteract negative education-based stories to bolster and improve educator persistence.

Discussion of the Study Findings

Research Question 1 addressed the perceptions of interview participants with regard to their experiences with mainstream and online media that focused on educators and education. Participants shared their experiences by responding to questions that sought to understand their general experiences with news media and social media. Experiences addressed in the literature with negative media were similar to educator experiences shared by participants. Like my findings concerning the views shared by participants, Shine (2020) noted that many consumers believe that the news coverage found in today's social media and from news agencies is unbalanced. Christopher (2022) stated that education is a topic that is of interest to many and appears in news and social media posts often, yet many educators perceive they are frequently failing their students and their communities. Research identified values such as timeliness, relevance, conflict, sensation, and exclusivity as values that dominate news articles and media. Values such as these have been promoted to attract audiences with their ability to grab the attention of the reader amid the unprecedented amount of information available to the consumer (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017; Lee & Chyi, 2014).

Coe and Kuttner (2018) reported that what viewers see presented as news shapes their understanding of various issues. Participants in the study noted the impact of social media algorithms that play a role in the content presented to individuals when they have accessed online platforms. One participant stated that such algorithms created greater likelihood that consumers will interact most often with others who share their point of view. In the study, educators stressed the value of selectively managing their social media presence to steer clear of negative content, focusing instead on uplifting experiences. Both Coe and Kuttner (2018) and Shine (2020) reported that school-related stories often describe student performance as lackluster

and assert that this is the result of caring but ineffective educators who deserve the blame.

Participants voiced concerns about how social media and news outlets shape the public's view of the educational sector, lamenting the dominance of adverse reports.

The research supported that the inclusion of negative media content in relation to education is not a new phenomenon and is not confined to American media. Australian educators in 2020 described their portrayal in media as inaccurate and superficial. They also expressed dissatisfaction with the reporting of education which attacked educators and placed the responsibility of declining test scores and standards on them (Graham, 2021; Shine, 2020). Peartree District participants reported similar feelings to those expressed by their Australian colleagues with respect to the manner in which media addressed the responsibility of educators in student success and proficiency. It is significant that Shine's research identified that local media attention to educational issues revealed more positive stories than did the content of national news stories. Peartree District participants, on the other hand, did not report feeling that the local news was supportive of educators and education. In fact, one participant specifically reported that she was warned to not end up on the local online news platform when she began working in the Peartree District. Of the themes reflected in the study's interviews, Facebook Moms pages were identified as a prevalent source of negative comments about teachers and the public schools in the Peartree District. Participants also commented on the local media shift that they felt had taken place in the Peartree District away from the support of educators and had focused, instead, on fractious relationships within the local Board of Education.

My review of literature included research that indicated that the 1983 publication, *A Nation at Risk*, remains one of the most widely cited works that reported on the decline in American education (Park, 2004). Additionally, *The Washington Post* printed an article in 1990

whose author called American kids “dumb” and warned that current educational practices were allowing American students to fall behind those in other countries with more rigorous practices (Cohen, 1990). The sentiments expressed in those writings continue today. While Berliner and Biddle (1995) sought to counter such negativity and highlight the good that schools do in *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud, and the Attack on American’s Public Schools*, the need for positive portrayals of educators and schools persists. Several interview participants cited their use of social media as a tool for professional networking and a means to learn about new teaching practices. Principals, as a group in my study, specifically addressed the need of educators to post positive messages about their schools, their staff, and their students, to communicate the good work that schools are doing. Overall, participants collectively advocated for a media narrative that more positively and accurately reflects the field of education.

Research Question 2 called on educators to describe their perceptions of the impact of news stories, articles, social media posts, and online comments about education and educators on educator job satisfaction. Participants described how they perceived that educators were portrayed in the press and on social media during the COVID-19 pandemic and currently. Both teachers and administrators interviewed in my study stated that they remembered being praised and feeling celebrated at the start of the pandemic for their efforts to support students and their families, but they also noted that the support they felt from the community did not last. The literature documented similar experiences with articles that addressed the task that educators assumed when students could not meet with their teachers in face-to-face lessons in school buildings. Research supported that teachers were initially celebrated for their ability to pivot to online platforms to deliver their lessons and to help their students connect to the world beyond their homes, but the celebration ended as the pandemic continued (Barnum & Bryan, 2020;

Lieberman, 2021). Similar to the feelings shared by teachers and principals in my study, Barnum and Bryan (2020) described the change in the ways that educators were portrayed in the news and online once student engagement decreased and academic success dwindled through the COVID-19 pandemic's virtual lessons.

Teachers and principals in my study specifically shared their observations of online comments about education and educators and their personal level of engagement with online comments. Comments that presented a lack of respect for educators and education was shared by study participants. However, comments in news articles, those following online news articles, and comments made in social media posts were included in the literature documenting the lack of respect for educators prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Goldstein's (2015) *The Teacher Wars* chronicled the issues of job satisfaction and attrition from America's earliest days as she outlined multiple attempts to undermine the job of educators. Interview participants were also asked to describe the effect that social media and online comments had on them personally, and how their perceptions impacted their feelings about the field of education and their job as an educator. Similar to perspectives shared by my study's participants, educators in the literature cited negative remarks that blamed them for learning loss during the COVID-19 pandemic and blamed teachers for failing to support their students (O'Brien, 2022). Perhaps more significant than comments that left educators feeling unfairly treated and underpaid as professionals (Martin, 2022), was the threat tag created by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in 2021, which helped to track statements intended to intimidate and threaten violence against educator groups that included teachers, administrators, and school board members (Zalaznick, 2021b). Themes that emerged through my study participant's responses included derogatory portrayal of educators, demeaning online comments, and their negative impact on educators and education.

In my interviews, educators reported feeling that their portrayal in the media and on social platforms was often negative. They believed that those outside the educational sphere tended to unfairly criticize teachers without a real grasp of the difficulties they encounter. However, a significant event from January 2020 was cited by study participants from inside the educational sphere when then North Carolina State Superintendent laughed online with a radio show host when addressing significant financial issues experienced by a public school district in the state. Both teachers and administrators observed a shortage of positive narratives and the rapid spread of negativity. This perception of skewed representation in the media had created a distorted perception of educators and their dedication to supporting students. The importance of challenging these adverse narratives and encouraging everyone—parents, community members, and fellow educators—to share uplifting educational experiences online was emphasized.

The interview conversations in my study also touched on the negative depiction of educational professionals and the crucial role of community and legislative backing in driving educator job satisfaction. The literature included a survey of teachers by Met Life, which “found that between 2008 and 2012, the proportion [of teachers] who reported being ‘very satisfied’ with their current job plummeted from 62 to 39 percent, the lowest level in a quarter century” (Goldstein, 2015, p. 3). My study participants recounted their experiences of working under the intense pressures of the pandemic, while also dealing with online disrespect from parents. They noted how social media often magnified minor negative events. Consistent with the findings of Christopher (2022) and Martin (2022), I found that educators in my study reported a lack of support by parents in their local communities but also feeling that they were targeted by news and social media posts that cast educators in a negative light. Although there was acknowledgment by study participants that everyone has the right to voice their opinions, there

was a sentiment that those without direct involvement in education do not have adequate understanding to form a valid opinion. Despite this, the participants appreciated the support they had received from some parents, community members, and students. However, the overarching sentiment was that the prevalent negativity overshadowed and devalued the significant contributions of teachers.

Research Question 3 asked educators to describe the impact of negative media and public commentary about education and educators on educator attrition. Interview participants were asked to share their perspectives specific to their thoughts about educators who are leaving the field of education due to the negativity they experienced in the media and whether or not they, themselves, had considered leaving the field of education due to negative media attention surrounding education and educators. Zamarro et al. (2021) stated that it is “important to get a better understanding of the factors that explain the increase in teachers’ considerations to leave so that we might find ways to better support teachers” (para. 13). Themes revealed through the participants interviews included political barriers surrounding education, parent and community support, mental health and happiness, impact of media, counteracting narratives, and persistence.

The literature supported that there is a direct correlation between job satisfaction and attrition in the education profession. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) focused on Norwegian teachers and found that the greatest rate of attrition followed a U-shaped curve. Their research reported that the greatest numbers of teachers who were leaving education before retirement were those at the beginning and end of their careers. My study’s participants noted that they have seen colleagues retire and leave teaching who might not have done so if they had experienced greater community support. My conversations with educators and school leaders revealed that adverse media depictions and public opinion of education had contributed to teacher turnover in

the Peartree District and had served as a barrier to attracting new teacher to the district. Skaalvik and Skaalvik's (2011) work centered on Dinham and Scott's 1998 domains of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction which included intrinsic rewards, extrinsic facts, and school-based factors when researching workplace turnover. When discussing the reasons behind educators' perceived dissatisfaction and exit from the profession, my study participants pointed to demotivating policy decisions affecting compensation and esteem for educators statewide, insufficient backing from parents and the community, a need for educators to safeguard their mental health, the detrimental effects of unfavorable media, and a wish to see encouraging educational narratives to enhance and sustain teacher commitment.

Educators and administrators in my study voiced their unease over the negative representation of education in the media, linking it to the scarcity of teachers in the Peartree District. The factors that caused educators to leave their jobs were consistent with those noted in by Richards et al. (2019), who identified "perceived mattering" as important to an intent to persist. My participants revealed a diminished sense of belonging and a state of emotional exhaustion.

Other variables noted in the literature that increase educator role persistence included value consonance, supervisory support, relations with colleagues, relations with parents, time pressure, and discipline problems (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Richards et al., 2019; Shine, 2020; Woods & Weasmer, 2004). My study participants underscored the necessity of community backing and touched upon how social media influenced public opinion. Obstacles like difficult parents, lack of support, and meager salaries were mentioned as factors that have caused educators to quit. My study participants expressed concern that the state's undervaluation of education has eroded their capacity to attract fresh talent to their schools. They further asserted

that novice teachers, in particular, were susceptible to the adverse stories, which affected their professional choices.

Both participant groups in my study underscored the importance of support from parents and the community in education. A move away from such support was perceived as a factor in the exodus of teachers. Again, this shift in public support for educators and education is not new. Berliner and Biddle (1995) contended that the George H. W. Bush administration was not interested in promoting good news about schools. Shine (2020) added that this portrayal is not an exclusively American phenomenon. The role of social media in molding public opinion has had a negative impact on teachers' images. Shine (2020) stated that policymakers serve their own agendas in the ways they interpret educational issues for the public. Coe and Kuttner (2018) stated that when schools are presented as failing, their calls for privatization and school choice are more easily supported by the public. Due to the scrutiny and pressure educators experience, the literature states that their stress is turning to burnout and exhaustion (Gonzalez, 2021; Shine, 2020). Highlighting the significance of well-being in the profession, my study participants similarly noted that stress and burnout have driven some educators to leave their posts, with many considering alternative careers, recognizing that their skills in problem-solving and communication were prized in other industries.

My teacher and principal interviews pointed out that the negative depiction of educators in the press was a widespread concern; they called for more truthful and uplifting coverage. Both Graham (2021) and Shine (2020) noted in the literature that many school staff are not satisfied with the reporting about education. The dissemination of false information, especially through social media, was identified as harmful to teachers' professional lives. There was a strong call from my study's educators, particularly from school leader group, for sharing uplifting stories to

offset the negative ones that prevail in media representations of public education. Positive stories were deemed crucial by educators to garner community support and entice new individuals to the profession.

Despite hurdles, several of my study's educators expressed their resolve to stay in the profession, motivated by their commitment to their students and the difference they believed that they were making. School leaders in the study also mentioned the importance of support and mentorship in enhancing their job satisfaction, performance, and resolve to stay. In conclusion, the findings for Research Question 3 indicated that negative media and public discourse significantly affected educator turnover, influencing the morale and retention decisions of both teachers and administrators. A recurring theme was the call for a more equitable depiction of education in the media, amplified community support, and acknowledgement of the mental health needs of educators.

Reflections on Social Constructivism as a Conceptual Framework

Social constructivism is the theoretical framework that was used in this study. Social constructivism is an interpretive framework in which individuals seek to understand their world, their reality, and develop meaning that corresponds to their experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study was also guided by social socialization theory, which explains that “persons are members of social positions and hold expectations for their own behavior and those of other persons” (Biddle, 1986, p. 67). Role socialization theory was used as I examined the relationship of educators' job satisfaction to their perceptions of “perceived mattering, role stress, emotional exhaustion, and job satisfaction” (Richards et al., 2019, p. 390). I used social constructivism as a theoretical framework to understand the perceptions of educators working in one large North Carolina school district as they encountered negative media and social media regarding educators

and education. My purpose was to understand how negative media attention impacted their job satisfaction and desire to persist in their current district. The social constructivism framework and role socialization theory guided the development of the research questions that directed my study. I interviewed 14 teachers and principals and prompted them to share their understanding of their world using interview questions that explored their individual experiences with the phenomenon of negative media.

Results of the study support that educators working in one large North Carolina district perceived dissatisfaction with the way in which they were presented in news and social media. I found Lev Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism to be a useful framework as I developed the research questions and interview questions for this study. After implementing the study and analyzing the results, I concluded social constructivism provided an appropriate framework for creating a study protocol that assisted participants in understanding their world, their reality, and for developing meaning that corresponds to their experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Additionally, role socialization theory aligned with my participants' responses to interview questions as they each expressed the disrespect they perceived from parents, the community, as well as local and state government. Such diminishment of positive teacher working conditions impacts satisfaction, commitment, and persistence (Richards et al., 2019).

While Vygotsky's social constructivism theory performed well as a framework to guide my study, I would add one extension to Richards et al.'s (2019) role socialization theory. Richards et al. adapted this theory from George Mead's role theory to study the perceived mattering of physical education teachers in performing their roles. I contend that this theory is applicable to understanding the relationship of educators' job satisfaction to their perceptions of perceived mattering instead of relegating it solely to the study of physical education teachers. I

believe that role socialization theory is applicable to understanding the relationships among all employees and their levels of job satisfaction.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

Delimitations of this study were related to the constraints and applications to practice that were accepted prior to implementation of the study. The study was limited to a single school district. The district used for this study was selected due to its location, size, and recent experience with negative media surrounding educators and education. I relied on administrators and teachers to accept my invitation to participate in interviews for the study. This could have skewed the results by leaving out certain voices or by over-representing certain groups of educators.

The findings of the study were limited to the perceptions of the participants who were teachers and principals in one North Carolina district and their experiences with the phenomenon of negative media toward educators and education. The participants from the district were selected because they held certified positions at the elementary, middle, and high school levels and represent various years of experience, gender, and racial diversity. The study was limited by the number of participants, which included only seven teachers and seven administrators in one school district. This rendered findings relative to a narrow band of educators in one large, rural school district.

Of the participants in the survey, only one teacher responded whose professional experience was fewer than three years. If I had received responses from more teachers in their first three years of teaching, I might have had a broader set of perspectives upon which to build the discussion of the concerns and needs of beginning educators related to the phenomenon of negative media and how it impacts job satisfaction and the likelihood of persistence among early

educators. Due to the relatively small sample size of this study, the results may not allow me to generalize conclusions to educators in other districts. In addition, the findings of this study may be over representative of educators who have strong feelings regarding the topic of negative media directed towards educators and education. The number of participants representing minority groups other than African Americans was low as well. The results may lead future researchers to pose similar questions with larger groups of diverse participants. Despite the promise of confidentiality, some interview participants might have been less candid when providing information during individual interviews.

Implications of the Study for Policy and Practice

A number of implications emerged in the discussion of findings presented in this chapter that have a bearing on the impact of negative news and social media posts as coverage pertains to educators. The findings provide implications for development and review of policies and professional practices. The following subsections address implications for state leaders, local education agencies, administrators, teachers, and school support staff.

Implications for Policy

To address negative media attention towards educators and education in North Carolina, which can impact job satisfaction and retention, specific policy changes could be implemented. These policies could create a more positive and supportive environment for educators, while better ensuring that media coverage is balanced and fair. Some potential policy changes include the following:

- Local and state agencies should adopt training programs for educators and school administrators on how to effectively respond to media inquiries and engage with the

press. Such training could assist educators in managing negative media attention more effectively and in presenting a positive image of the school or educator involved;

- Legislators should review and potentially strengthen privacy laws to protect educators from unwarranted media scrutiny. This includes safeguarding personal information and limiting the release of details that could lead to negative attention or harassment;
- Local educational agencies and school boards should develop communication policies within school districts that support educators facing negative media attention. This could include providing spokespersons or legal assistance to educators, as well as offering guidance on handling social media backlash; and
- State educational agencies should work with journalism schools and media outlets to encourage ethical reporting practices, especially concerning sensitive educational topics. This could include workshops, seminars, or partnerships.

Implementing these policies would require a collaborative effort among the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, State Board of Education, educational institutions, media outlets, institutions of higher education, and legislators. The goal would be to create a more supportive environment for educators, where education is not only a priority in policy but also in the public discourse, facilitated by consistent and informed media coverage which in turn could lead to improved job satisfaction and retention among educators.

Implications for Practice

Addressing the nature of media attention towards educators and education involves a combination of communication, public relations, and community engagement strategies. Some practices that arise from my findings include:

- Educators and educational institutions should consistently use social media platforms to share news, stories, and educational content. Engaging content like videos, infographics, and blogs can attract attention and be shared widely to increase visibility;
- Local school districts and individual schools should organize events such as open houses, educational fairs, workshops, and speaking engagements to attract media coverage, especially if they address current educational trends or community needs;
- School district public information offices should build relationships with local journalists, newspapers, TV stations, and radio stations to help in getting more positive education coverage. Regular press releases, op-eds, and letters to the editor about educational topics can proactively keep education in the news cycle;
- State and local school district public information liaisons should collaborate with local or national public figures who can speak about educational issues to garner media interest. This could include guest lectures, joint events, or social media campaigns; and
- State offices, local district offices, and individual school liaisons should provide easily accessible information for journalists, such as press kits, expert contacts, high-quality images, and fact sheets, to facilitate more accurate and detailed coverage.

These practices require a consistent effort and a strategic approach to ensure that educators and education receive the media attention that is merited. It is essential that educators share positive stories to counter unwarranted negative media about public education. While the media has tended to gravitate towards dramatic or negative stories because such stories often garner more attention and evoke stronger emotions in viewers, educators can share positive

stories and provide a more balanced perspective on the realities of public education. Sharing the successes of public schools can help build trust with the community. When local stakeholders see the achievements and progress being made, they are more likely to support and invest in public education initiatives. A negative image of public education can deter talented professionals from entering the teaching profession or convince them to seek opportunities elsewhere. Positive stories can help to paint a more accurate picture of education and attract passionate individuals to the field.

Recommendations for Future Research

My study protocol and findings are instructive to future researchers. Educators in one large North Carolina district were the subject of the current study, but educators in additional districts could provide insight into the factors that drive job satisfaction and impact attrition as they reflect on how educators are presented in the media. Also, future researchers could operationalize this study in other states to make the findings more generalizable. My findings speak to the need to support educators in order to maintain a strong educator workforce.

Positive job satisfaction and persistence are critical to maintaining a passionate, caring, and professional educator workforce to provide rigorous instruction for students in public schools. The consequences for failing to improve working conditions for educators include an increased lack of highly trained and skilled teachers and administrators leading schools to support student success. The findings in my study revealed a challenge and call to action as more consumers obtain their news from various platforms tailored to unique perspectives and fewer seek out news from legacy media companies.

Future researchers expanding on the current study could include focus groups of educators in their study in order to include a greater number of voices regarding the study

phenomenon. This study rejected the use of focus groups in order to protect educators who may participate in an effort to protect their confidentiality and keep them from bringing negative attention to themselves through their participation. Future researchers may also choose to construct and send out a survey to all teachers and principals to include questions that are more in-depth and targeted than those found in the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey.

Future researchers could address some of the participation issues that were confronted in this study. Participation by minority educators or educators who represent specific years of experience could be a focus for future researchers as my study included few teachers in their first 10 years and few minority educators. Teachers and principals are not the only staff members whose job satisfaction and attrition are critical to operating strong public schools. Future researchers may choose to include classified staff in a study that examines staff perceptions of negative media directed at the institution of public schools and how that impacts their ability to persevere in their roles. Another route that future researchers may take could be to survey or interview students to learn how they perceive the degree to which educator attrition plays a role in their educational experiences. Finally, future research could explore how Artificial Intelligence (AI) may impact the spread of misinformation about educators and education through online platforms.

Conclusion

Waning public support for education and educators has been an issue of concern for public education for many years. My study addressed how the decline in support for public education and educators observed in news and social media has resulted in diminished job satisfaction and attrition among educators in the Peartree School District. I concluded that such

research was needed because of the general decline of the public's faith in institutions observed in public polls that reflected lowered respect for the work of establishments such as schools. This public loss of faith was illustrated in literature that profiled the rise of anti-establishment candidates in the 2016 elections and the concerted efforts of local and national groups across the United States to manipulate disagreements over COVID mandates and lessons on race and gender as political fodder used to further divide communities for their own political purposes (Graham, 2021; McGrath, 2017).

Feelings of public distrust in American institutions appeared to have crept into public attitudes exhibited in the Peartree District, the site that I chose for my study. Antagonistic public sentiments had been displayed in negative media and online comments that did not reflect that education and educators were being held in high regard. My study participants included 14 educators, including seven teachers and seven principals, whose professional experiences ranged from one year to 30+ years of work in the district. My research design was a phenomenological case study that used individual participant interviews to address how study members viewed news stories, articles, social media posts, and online comments about education and how these posts influenced educator job satisfaction and attrition.

I gathered archival data via the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey site. Data available through the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey revealed that the perceptions of educators in the Peartree School District regarding support from parents, guardians, and community members had diminished across the three administrations of the survey from 2018 to 2022. Teacher and principal participants in my study expressed diminished feelings of job satisfaction that resulted from their perceptions of negative media directed at educators in the Peartree School District. The study revealed that both the teacher and principal

participants felt the need for greater support of educators and public education as they expressed dissatisfaction with the way in which they were presented in news and social media. Both the teacher and principal participant groups addressed the challenges they faced as educators. These challenges included lack of support, negative perception in the media, low pay, personal mental health needs, political battles surrounding public education, and the loss of educators who have left the district or the profession. Recommendations for policy and practice indicated that specific changes could be made to create a more positive and supportive environment for educators and encourage their job persistence while ensuring that the media coverage is more balanced and fair. I provided suggestions for future research that can support the study of educator job satisfaction and retention with a focus on educator sub-groups or through the replication of this study in other districts, states, or regions as other researchers address the importance of valuing and respecting teachers, principals, and school staff, and highlighting the positive aspects of education.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter to the Superintendent

January 1, 2023
Superintendent

RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear Superintendent:

I am currently enrolled in the Educational Administration and Supervision doctoral program at North Carolina State University.

The purpose of this letter is to request permission to reach out to potential focus group participants in your school district. With your approval, I will send out the survey electronically as well as send an email invitation to prospective interview participants. All survey responses will remain anonymous at all times and participants will use a pseudonym. No teachers, administrators, or schools will be identified anywhere in the research findings.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns at (919) 631-1657 or jwswartz@ncsu.edu. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of North Carolina State University. My dissertation co-chairs are Dr. Mike Ward and Dr. Lance Fusarelli. They can be contacted at meward@ncsu.edu and ldfusare@ncsu.edu respectively.

If you agree to my request, please sign and return the form on the second page of this document. The signed form can be emailed back to me at jwswartz@ncsu.edu

Sincerely,

Jennifer Swartz

Appendix B: Consent Form

By signing and returning this form, I give Jennifer Swartz, a doctoral candidate at North Carolina State University, permission to conduct a research study in the school district. I acknowledge that Jennifer Swartz may send an electronic survey and conduct semi-structured interviews during the months of May 2023 – September 2023.

Approved by:

Signature:

Date:

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Interviews: Information for Participants

Thank you for completing the consent and agreeing to speak with me today. I have a few reminders before we begin:

I am conducting this interview for research. The purpose of this interview is to gather information from teachers and administrators in one district their experience with news and social media directed toward educators and education.

The interview will last about 30 minutes.

I will record this interview and transcribe our discussion so that I may refer to your perspectives accurately.

I will change names of participants, schools, and any other identifying markers.

I may ask follow-up questions as warranted.

The risks of participating in this research are minimal. Due to the nature of this interview, it is possible that your responses may be re-identified. You may not want to participate in this interview for that reason. Please note, I will never report your name or identifying information. As the researcher, I will try to mitigate the risk of re-identification by removing identifiers from your responses—specific people, locations, or events—and replacing them with pseudonyms for presentations and publishing. I will also report themes, instead of specific events, to protect your identity wherever possible. However, I cannot guarantee that you will not be re-identified.

There is no compensation for participating in this interview. As a gentle reminder, your participation is voluntary. You may withdraw from the interview at any time or skip any question you desire. To do so, please state, “I would like to revoke my consent,” or if you would like to skip a question, “I will refrain from answering this question.”

If you revoke your consent, I will destroy the recording associated with your interview and remove any data associated with the interview to the best of my ability from my research.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Pre-Interview Survey Questions	
1	Context is important. May I ask about your current school? Which of the following best describes your current school? (Traditional public, public magnet, public charter, private)
2	How long have you been an educator?
3	What grades and subjects have you taught in the past three years?
4	How long have you taught in the district? Have you ever taught in another district?
5	What was your experience teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Now I'd like to ask you more about your perspective as an educator in the district. Of course, there are no right or wrong answers. I'm interested how your insights might add depth to this research study.

6. Tell me about your career path; how did you end up where you are today?
7. What's it like being a teacher/administrator in Peartree County? Please describe for me your typical workday.
8. What is your general experience with news and social media? How do you access news and social media? How often?
9. During the pandemic educators have been dealing with a lot of attention in the press and on social media. What is your perception of how educators are being portrayed in the press and on social media?
10. What do you observe being stated in the online comments sections of online news and on social media about education and educators?
11. How do you engage with online comments?
12. Describe the effect the social media and online comments section has had on you personally?

13. How do these perceptions influence your feelings about the field of education and
14. AND your job as an educator?
15. What are your thoughts about educators leaving the field of education due to the negativity they experience in the media?
16. Have you considered leaving the field of education due to negative media attention surround education and educators?

Thank you for your time and your willingness to speak with me about the perception of news and social media focused on education and educators. If you think of anything else you'd like to add to this study, you may email me at any time.

Appendix D: Expert Panel Review Protocol

Bad Teacher: The Impact of Negative Media on Today’s Educators

Thank you for volunteering to serve on the expert panel for evaluating the interview protocol designed for this study. The purpose of this study is to examine how negative news stories, articles, social media posts, and online comments about education and educators influence educator job satisfaction. Educator attrition has been an area of concern for public school leaders and communities and has been explored in research; however, the stress of the demands placed on educators and school staff throughout the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the number of educators who are resigning from their school roles. This study seeks to understand the perceptions of teachers and principals when faced with negative media stories and public comments that reflect a lack of respect and support for public education.

As a part of this study, I will interview educators from a single district to hear their perceptions regarding their common experience with negative media attention toward education and educators which impact job satisfaction and educator attrition.

Your time, expertise, and assistance are needed to evaluate the content validity of the interview protocol. The attached interview outline is designed to identify teachers’ perceptions regarding how and to what extent negative media attention impacts job satisfaction and attrition.

Your input and feedback are extremely important, greatly appreciated, and will provide useful information about the clarity, appropriateness, and relevance of the interview questions. Your knowledge and experience in education qualifies you to serve as an expert panel member. Your input and feedback will provide valuable insight for possible adjustments or revisions to the interview protocol.

Please take your time and critique the attached interview protocol by answering either “Yes” or “No” to the questions below, as well as providing your reasoning behind any responses that receive a “No” on the lines that follow.

Questions	Yes	No	<p>If you selected No, please write why, and provide any feedback and/or suggestions that you feel would correct this aspect of the survey. <i>This section of feedback will be most helpful.</i></p>
Teacher Interview Questions			

1. Are instructions to the participant clear?			
2. Are the interview questions/statements direct and specific?			
3. Are the questions/statements designed in such a way that participants can understand them? <i>Please note that for the survey to be successful, the language needs to be understood by each participant.</i>			
4. Do you feel additional information is needed for participants to answer these questions regarding how and to what extent media impacts job satisfaction? If so, please indicate the type of additional information that is needed in the box to the right.			
5. Do the interviews adequately address factors that will allow the researcher to obtain sufficient information regarding the role negative media attention leads to educator attrition?			
6. Are there any items within the interviews that you would modify?			<i>*Please specify the item number(s) with your response if you selected "Yes".</i>
7. Are there any items within the survey that you believe should be excluded from the survey?			<i>*Please specify the item number(s) with your response if you selected "Yes".</i>
8. Are there any survey items that you feel should be included that are not currently included on the questionnaire attached?			<i>*If you selected "Yes" please write your suggested statement(s) below:</i>

<p>9. Do you have any suggestions related to the 'readability' of the interview questions (i.e.: wording of the questions, the layout of the questions, etc.)? If so, please write them in the box to the right.</p>	
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