

# Why Do They Stay? Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of Job Satisfaction and Retention

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## **Abstract**

*The purpose of this study was to identify intrinsic and extrinsic variables that influence teacher job satisfaction and retention. A survey was sent to 300 randomly selected Missouri public elementary schoolteachers in grades K–5 having 5 or more years of teaching experience. The results from 201 respondents suggest that three intrinsic motivators (personal teaching efficacy, working with students, and job satisfaction) were perceived to significantly influence satisfaction and retention, while two extrinsic motivators (low salary and role overload) did not have any effect. Using multiple linear regression and qualitative analysis, the findings show that teachers who experienced satisfaction at their school and/or satisfaction with the profession of teaching were more likely to remain. No relationship was found between satisfaction with the job of teaching, suggesting that retention was determined by teacher satisfaction with the profession and not with work-related duties.*

One of the core challenges facing primary and secondary education is retaining qualified teachers. Twenty to thirty percent of beginning teachers leave the profession within the first 5 years (American Federation of Teachers, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2003). According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF), teacher attrition problems cost the nation in excess of \$7 billion annually for recruitment, administrative processing and hiring, and professional development and training of replacement teachers (NCTAF, 2007).

The problem of teacher attrition forms a vast body of literature. A significant thrust of this research appears to be based on the hypothesis that a relationship exists between teacher attrition and the conditions of teaching (Murnane, Singer, Willett, Kemple, & Olsen, 1991), while research focused on "why teachers remain in the profession" is relatively scant.

Recent reform initiatives like No Child Left Behind (NCLB) created a national effort to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers in every classroom, but that goal remains elusive. Turnover among the nation's teachers rank significantly higher than other professions, emphasized further by the alarming number of teachers leaving the profession during their first few years of teaching (Ingersoll, 2001).

The ability of schools to keep their classrooms staffed with quality teachers will be supported more effectively if the debilitating rate of teacher attrition is addressed and reversed (NCTAF, 2002). The NCTAF Partners' apt observation that the "visible side of the coin, whose underside is high attrition rates" (NCTAF, p. 3) emphasizes that researchers tend to focus on the symptom without addressing the underlying sources of the problem. Instead of asking how to find and prepare more teachers, researchers need to ask, "How do we get the good teachers we have recruited, trained, and hired to stay in their jobs?" (NCTAF, p. 3).

This study proposes to shift the focus from teacher attrition to teacher retention by examining how professional experiences and influences shape teachers' decisions to remain in the classroom. Investigation focuses on examining the relationship between job satisfaction and intrinsic variables (e.g., personal teaching efficacy, working with students, job satisfaction) and extrinsic variables (e.g., low salary, role overload). The findings from this investigation may provide deeper insight into

teachers' perspectives regarding job satisfaction and retention and present school districts, boards, and administrators, with key information to form meaningful decisions and policies.

### *Job Satisfaction*

Job satisfaction has been the subject of seminal and significant research in the social sciences (Arnold, Cooper, & Robertson, 1998). A key finding notes that employee satisfaction has been found to be a reliable predictor of retention (Bobbitt, Faupel, & Burns, 1991; Meek, 1998). Arnold et al. found that personal satisfaction, along with professional responsibility, is an important indicator of a person's psychological well-being, as well as a predictor of work performance and commitment.

Extant literature has also shown that satisfaction is influenced directly by the characteristics of the job and the extent to which motivational characteristics (e.g., task significance, autonomy, feedback, personal work ethic) match what people value and is expected of them on the job (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Steers & Rhodes, 1987).

### *Teacher Job Satisfaction*

Research on job satisfaction in the field of education has explored both the consequences (outcomes) and antecedents (influences) of teacher satisfaction. Research has examined at least three possible outcomes (retention, attrition, and absenteeism) and at least three major influences (demographic variables, job role-related characteristics, and work experiences). This area of research has repeatedly demonstrated that job satisfaction results in higher levels of teacher retention, as well as an increase in teachers attaining tenure (Bobbitt et al., 1991; Cockburn, 2000; Cohn, 1992; McLaughlin, Pfeifer, Swanson-Owens, & Yee, 1986; Meek, 1998). Conversely, as satisfaction decreased, teacher attrition and absenteeism were shown to increase—creating an inverse relationship between satisfaction and turnover (Bobbitt et al., 1991; Hargreaves, 1994; Lortie, 1975; McLaughlin et al., 1986). Among beginning teachers, most research suggests that one-third to one-half leave within their first 5 years (Ingersoll, 2001; Murnane et al., 1991) due to the increase in responsibilities and demands placed upon them (Billingsley & Cross, 1992), as well as a lack of support financially (Murnane et al., 1991) and morally (Bobbitt et al., 1991; Cohn, 1992).

*Demographic variables.* Although relatively few studies have examined the relationship between teachers' job satisfaction and their demographic characteristics (Bogler, 2002), findings in this area have shown that job satisfaction has been positively related to age, gender, marital status, grade level taught, and educational level. Ma and MacMillan (1999) found that older and more experienced teachers expressed significantly less satisfaction with their professional role than their younger and less experienced colleagues. Female teachers tended to be more satisfied than male teachers (Bogler, 2002; Lortie, 1975; Ma & MacMillan, 1999), while married women were more satisfied than unmarried women and men (Goodlad, 1984; Lortie, 1975). Elementary teachers were more satisfied than secondary teachers (Bogler, 2002; Perie & Baker, 1997), and teachers with higher qualifications (higher education level or degree earned, more professional development) tended to be more satisfied than those with lower qualifications (Meek, 1998).

*Job- or role-related characteristics.* Studies have suggested such aspects as role conflict, role ambiguity, role overload, and stress to be predictors of job satisfaction (Billingsley & Cross, 1992; Hargreaves, 1994). Billingsley and Cross note that greater leadership support and lower levels of role conflict, role ambiguity, and stress were predictors of greater job satisfaction and teacher retention. Similarly, Hargreaves found an inverse relationship between job satisfaction and role overload—increased teacher-perceived levels of role overload (e.g., excessive paperwork and other nonteaching duties) resulted in significantly decreased satisfaction. In addition, Hargreaves revealed role overload to be a major variable in teacher attrition.

*Work experiences.* Positive experiences for teachers, such as opportunity to work with children and to nurture student learning (Cockburn, 2000; Cohn, 1992; Hargreaves, 1994; Klecker & Loadman, 1999; Lortie, 1975; McLaughlin et al., 1986) were reported by teachers as prime influences of job satisfaction. Work in this area also demonstrates that when teachers had the opportunity to collaborate with

colleagues (Cockburn, 2000; Hargreaves, 1994; Klecker & Loadman, 1999; Kushman, 1992; McLaughlin et al., 1986; Meek, 1998), receive recognition from supervisors and administrators (Ma & MacMillan, 1999; Meek, 1998; Perie & Baker, 1997), serve in a leadership role (Kushman, 1992; Perie & Baker, 1997), and improve their professional skills and abilities (Kushman, 1992; Meek, 1998) they were significantly more satisfied with their role as teacher than those who did not have these experiences.

Negative work experiences, such as lack of student and parent interest (Bobbitt et al., 1991; Cohn, 1992; Goodlad, 1984; Meek, 1998; Perie & Baker, 1997), and professional autonomy (Perie & Baker, 1997), were found to have a negative influence on teachers' perceptions of job satisfaction. Research in this area also indicates that teachers who went into teaching because of inherent professional values were more satisfied than those whose entry into the occupation was for economic reasons (Goodlad, 1984). Although recent debate about teacher salary suggests teachers might be more satisfied if their paychecks were larger (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Macdonald, 1999; Murnane et al., 1991), Perie and Baker found no significant relationship between salary or benefits and teacher satisfaction.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study posits that teachers' job satisfaction, intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, their commitment and intent to remain in the profession, and demographics are directly related to teacher retention.

*Job satisfaction.* Job satisfaction is affected by a wide variety of factors. For example, Herzberg's Two Factor Theory (1966) of job satisfaction has influenced a number of studies regarding teachers' job satisfaction. In his work, Herzberg theorized that job satisfaction was influenced by "intrinsic factors" or "motivators" relating to actual job content or "what the person does" (p. 74) and by "extrinsic factors" or "hygienes" associated with the work environment or "the situation in which [the person] does" (p. 75) the work. Examples of motivator factors for teachers would be teaching and working with students (intrinsic) and working conditions such as salary levels and role overload (extrinsic). According to Herzberg, extrinsic hygiene factors, which are external to what a person does, do not contribute to job satisfaction but rather to job dissatisfaction. Alternatively, the presence of intrinsic factors or motivators lead to job satisfaction, but their absence does not lead to job dissatisfaction. Herzberg's concept of intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of job satisfaction has been widely used and has influenced studies examining K-12 teacher satisfaction (e.g., Cohn, 1992; Hargreaves, 1994; Lortie, 1975; Meek, 1998; Perie & Baker, 1997).

*The intent to remain in teaching.* The "intent" to stay in or leave one's position has been found to be a good indicator of actual turnover (e.g., Bluedorn, 1982; Lee & Mowday, 1987). Previous research on teachers more generally indicates the power of affective responses, such as job satisfaction and commitment to the profession, on the intent to remain in teaching (e.g., Bobbitt et al., 1991; Goodlad, 1984; Lortie, 1975; Meek, 1998; Murnane et al., 1991; NCTAF, 2002). Therefore, the influence of antecedents involving teacher demographic and profile characteristics, job satisfaction, and commitment to the profession may, in turn, have an influence on intended teacher turnover. Building upon these findings, this study is conceptualized to examine teachers' satisfaction and commitment and their intent to remain in the profession.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was twofold: 1) to identify variables that influence the job satisfaction of Missouri public elementary schoolteachers, grades K-5; and 2) to determine the extent to which these satisfaction variables influence the teachers' intent to remain in teaching. Results of this investigation extend our knowledge and previous understanding of teacher job satisfaction by including how these teachers' perceptions influence their retention decision, as well as what issues they verbalize as influencing their intent to remain.

## Methods

### *Data Source and Procedures*

The participants in the study consisted of a random sample of public elementary schoolteachers, grades K–5, in the state of Missouri. Since no public list existed for the approximately 18,600 population members, a sample was obtained by the random selection of 30 counties, followed by the random selection of one school district from each county, and then the random selection of one elementary school from each school district. Principals from each randomly selected elementary school submitted a list of all classroom teachers grades K–5 who had taught 5 or more years. Ten teachers were randomly selected from each of the 30 lists, resulting in a final sample of 300 subjects.

After the instrument was pilot tested,<sup>1</sup> the survey was designed, distributed, and collected using the process and procedures recommended in Dillman's (2007) Tailored Design Method. Surveys were mailed to each teacher selected for the study, along with a participant cover letter explaining the purpose of the study, and a postage-paid, self-addressed envelope. All participants were advised that their participation was voluntary and that all information would be held in the strictest of confidence. Maintaining university protocol procedures to protect the rights of human subjects was paramount. A total of 201 surveys were received for a return rate of 67%.

### *Instrumentation and Variables*

The survey instrument consisted of 34 questions (Sections A–E) that examined teachers' perceptions of their job satisfaction and retention (see Appendix). The first section (A) consisted of a shortened version of the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) 1993–94 and 2003–04 (U.S. Department of Education, 1993; 2003). The application of the SASS survey follows work conducted by Perie and Baker (1997) that used the 1993–94 SASS data to compare teacher satisfaction with the workplace conditions of administrative support, decision-making roles, student behavior, parental support, workload, availability of resources, staff recognition, and cooperation among staff. For section A, teachers completed 25 items regarding their job satisfaction in teaching using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 7 (strongly agreed) to 1 (strongly disagreed). The retention measure (Section B), or the intent to remain (outcome variable) questions were previously tested and constructed by Johnsrud and Rosser (1999). This section consisted of three statements: 1) I plan to remain in this position; 2) I plan to remain in this school; and 3) I plan to remain in this profession. These statements of intent were also scored on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 7 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree).

The next two sections (C and D) were developed to help further explain teachers' perceptions regarding their satisfaction and retention. Section C included questions that were specifically developed for this study and asked teachers to score their level of satisfaction on a 5-point Likert scale, from 5 (very satisfied) to 1 (very dissatisfied). Three open-ended questions were added in this section to delve further into teacher perceptions regarding job satisfaction. These questions asked: 1) How satisfied are you with teaching as a profession? Why? 2) How satisfied do you feel with your job this current school year? Why? and 3) If you indicated that you were "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" [with your job], what is the number one reason you attribute to this satisfaction? Why?

In terms of retention (Section D), the following questions were asked on a scale from 5 (certainly would) to 1 (certainly would not): 1) If the opportunity arose, would you leave the teaching profession for another occupation? Why? 2) Given that you have been a teacher for over 5 years, what is your number one reason for remaining in teaching? Why? Finally, on a scale from 5 (highly likely to stay) to 1 (definitely not staying), the following question was posed: 3) How long do you plan to remain in teaching? Why?

The final section (E) consisted of questions regarding teachers' demographic and profile data. Questions were asked regarding gender, marital status, ethnic background, age, highest degree earned, years taught in education, and years taught at a K–5 grade level.

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<sup>1</sup> The pilot test was used to highlight concerns or issues that might arise regarding the survey question items and the instrument, as well as to assess the length of time it takes to complete the entire survey.

### *Analysis*

The study applied descriptive statistics and linear regression analyses using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 15.0 (2007) to address the quantitative aspects of this study. Frequencies and percentages were gathered to develop the demographic and profile characteristics of the respondents. Following these preliminary profile statistics, additional descriptive statistics (i.e., mean, standard deviation) were used to present the issues perceived as contributing to the job satisfaction of Missouri public elementary schoolteachers, grades K–5.

The primary analysis applied multiple linear regression, a statistical procedure that is used to find the linear combination of independent variables (e.g., satisfaction issues, demographics) and is best suited for explaining multiple predictors on the dependent variable (intent to remain). Multiple linear regression separates the effects of independent variables on the dependent variable, allowing examination of the unique contribution of each variable (Allison, 1999). In this case, multiple linear regression was used to indicate how well Missouri public elementary schoolteachers' intent to remain in teaching can be explained by the independent variables (e.g., satisfaction issues, demographic and profile variables such as gender, race or ethnicity, marital status, age, years in education, highest degree earned).

In addition to the statistical analyses, data from the survey's six open-ended questions were analyzed inductively, guided by coding recommendations by Bogdan and Biklen (1998). Survey participants' written responses for each of the six open-ended survey questions were integrated and typed as six units of data (one unit of data per open-ended survey question). Respondents' repeated use of expressions, which illustrated commonly shared viewpoints and perspectives, were used to define the coding categories used for sorting the data. After additional review and analysis of the data, the coding categories were modified by adding or discarding categories until a final list of coding categories was developed. This code list was then used to mark the data, which enabled disaggregating the responses to further analyze teachers' perspectives on job satisfaction and intent to remain as guided by the tenets of Bogdan and Biklen.

## **Results**

### *Demographic and Profile Characteristics*

As shown in Table 1, the demographic and profile information<sup>2</sup> regarding those who responded to the survey indicates that 185 (92%) of the teachers were females and 16 (8%) were males. Of those who responded, 198 (98.5%) were Caucasians and 3 (1.5%) were ethnic minorities. A higher percentage of respondents were female (14%) and Caucasian (6%) in contrast to state averages (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2003).<sup>3</sup> Respondents' marital status showed that 32 (16%) were single and 169 (84%) were married. There were 56 (27.9%) respondents under the age of 35, 64 (31.8%) were 36–45, 67 (33.3%) were 46–55, 14 (7%) were 56–65, and no respondents were older than 66. Respondent ages were similar to state averages (Missouri State Board of Education, 2007).

As for highest degree earned, 70 (34.8%) of the respondents held a Bachelor' degree, 126 (62.7%) held a Master's degree, 4 (2%) were Education specialists, and 1 (0.5%) held a doctorate. These data differ from state averages of which 68% held a Bachelor's degree and 31% held a Master's degree (Missouri State Board of Education, 2007). Sixty (29.9%) respondents taught in education for 5–10 years, 41 (20.4%) taught for 11–14 years, 47 (23.4%) taught for 15–20 years, 25 (12.4%) taught for 21–25 years, and 28 (13.9%) taught for 26 or more years. State averages reported 20% more teachers in the 5–10 year group and 20% less in the 11–20 year group (Missouri State Board of Education, 2007). All of the respondents taught in grades K–5 for 5 or more years, 69 (34.3%) taught 5–10 years, 36 (17.9%) taught 11–14 years, 47 (23.4%) taught 15–20 years, 25 (12.4%) taught 21–25 years, and 24 (12%) taught 26 or more years.

<sup>2</sup> Numbers and percentages may not total 201 or 100% due to missing data.

<sup>3</sup> These data were publicly accessed; therefore, we were unable to oversample the population by gender, ethnic minority, and marital status.

**Table 1**  
*Frequency (n = 201) and Percent of Respondents by Demographic Characteristics\**

<i>Demographics</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Gender		
Male	16	8.0
Female	185	92.0
Marital Status		
Single	32	16.0
Married	169	84.0
Race/Ethnicity		
American Indian/Alaska Native	2	1.0
Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0.0
African American/Black	0	0.0
Hispanic	1	0.5
Caucasian/White	198	98.5
Age		
35 or under	56	27.9
36–45	64	31.8
46–55	67	33.3
56–65	14	7.0
66 or older	0	0.0
Highest Degree Earned		
Bachelor's degree	70	34.8
Master's degree	126	62.7
Education Specialist	4	2.0
Doctorate degree	1	0.5
Total Number of Years Taught		
10 or less	60	29.9
11–14	41	20.4
15–20	47	23.4
21–25	25	12.4
26 or more	28	13.9
Number of Years at K–5		
10 or less	69	34.3
11–14	36	17.9
15–20	47	23.4
21–25	25	12.4
26 or more	24	12.0

\*Numbers and percentages may not total 100 or 100% due to missing data.

*Teacher Job Satisfaction*

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze responses to the 24 Likert-type survey items and assess the importance of each item within the total survey group of teachers. The top five issues identified as contributing most to respondents' job satisfaction were: (a) I am evaluated fairly in this school ( $M = 6.14$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ); (b) I share similar beliefs and values with my colleagues regarding the central mission of this school ( $M = 6.03$ ,  $SD = .95$ ); (c) I am generally satisfied with being a teacher at this school ( $M = 6.02$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ); (d) I make a conscious effort to coordinate the content of my courses with that of other teachers ( $M = 5.99$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ); and (e) Rules for student behavior are consistently enforced by me in this school, even for students who are not in my class ( $M = 5.98$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ).

*Qualitative Analysis of Job Satisfaction Responses*

A qualitative analysis was conducted on participants' responses to the three open-ended questions concerning their perceptions on job satisfaction.

*Q1: How satisfied are you with teaching as a profession? Why?*

The top three reasons based on 178 (88%) of the 201 total survey respondents, with 141 (79%) of those who were either "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied," were (a) working with students, (b) personal teaching efficacy, and (c) job satisfaction. The following are representative comments for each of these three reasons: (a) working with students (24 responses)—"I get to work with children, share my knowledge, experience new experiences each day, and grow in wisdom they enlighten me with" (Teacher 91—from this point on will be cited as T91); (b) personal teaching efficacy (15 responses)—"Teaching has its challenges, but I feel good almost every day knowing I've made a difference to at least one child" (T1); and (c) job satisfaction (14 responses)—"I love what I do, and this is why I get passed the red tape and politics" (T186).

An interesting part of this analysis was that 74 of the 141 "satisfied" respondents' written responses were negative in nature and similar to those participants who chose a response of "neutral," "somewhat dissatisfied," or "very dissatisfied." The top three reasons satisfied teacher respondents followed their positive comments with a statement of dissatisfaction were: (a) role overload (28 responses)—"I would be very satisfied if I could just teach the kids. The less pleasing part is the stress put on us about assessments, paperwork, etc." (T125); (b) low salary (22 responses) —"It is a rewarding job to see gains the children make. The low salary makes the job disappointing" (T169); and (c) lack of parent support (7 responses) —"I have a somewhat challenging class with little parental support. I feel we are moving at a much slower pace" (T93).

*Q2: How satisfied do you feel with your job this current school year? Why?*

The top three reasons based on 170 (85%) of the 201 total survey respondents, with 107 (63%) who were "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with their current teaching, were: (a) good students, (b) positive school environment, and (c) small class size. Representative comments for each were: (a) good students (30 responses) —"Life is good! I have a pretty good bunch of students" (T91); (b) positive school environment (16 responses) —"I think being at this building makes my job easier because we have so much support and encourage each other to do a good job" (T97); and (c) small class size (14 responses) —"Class size is small; 15 compared to 26 last year" (T148).

The top three reasons satisfied teacher respondents followed their positive comments with a statement of dissatisfaction were: (a) role overload (11 responses) —"I feel frustrated with the increasing responsibilities and time doing my best in this job takes each year" (T38); (b) student behavior (5 responses) —"We seem to be having more and more discipline problems making teaching extremely difficult" (T132); and (c) large class size (4 responses) —"My class size is the highest I've had in years" (T133).

*Q3: If you indicated that you were 'very satisfied' or 'somewhat satisfied' [with your job], what is the number one reason you attribute to this satisfaction? Why?*

The top six reasons based on 149 (74%) of the 201 total survey respondents who were either "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied," along with a representative comment for each, were: (a) working

with students (32 responses)—“My own personal enjoyment in working with children” (T59); (b) teacher support (24 responses) —“The support offered by the administration and fellow teachers” (T87); (c) good students (18 responses) —“They [students] are a great group of kids. Well behaved and eager to learn” (T178); (d) job satisfaction (17 responses)—“I love teaching. It never has been a question for me of did I pick the right profession? I have always known that teaching is what I wanted to do” (T91); (e) positive school environment (13 responses)—“Comfortable work atmosphere and positive work relationships” (T109); and (f) personal teaching efficacy (12 responses)—“Seeing the light come on. I change lives” (T192).

In summary, the majority of respondents reported to be “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” with teaching as a profession and with their job in the fall of 2004. Factors that positively influenced this satisfaction were working with students, personal teaching efficacy, job satisfaction, good students, positive school environment, and small class size.

### *Teacher Retention*

Descriptive statistics were first gathered to examine responses to the following question: “What satisfaction factors do Missouri public elementary schoolteachers grades K–5 perceive as influencing their intent to remain (i.e., position, school, profession) in teaching?” The analysis focused on three Likert-type statements originally developed by Johnsrud and Rosser (1999). The importance of each “intent-to-remain” item was then assessed within the total survey group of teachers. Results for the three retention measures are as follows: (a) I plan to remain in this position ( $M = 6.18$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ); (b) I plan to remain in this school ( $M = 6.22$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ); and (c) I plan to remain in this profession ( $M = 6.22$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ). Cronbach’s alpha was also employed for estimating the internal consistency of the construct intent to remain. The three items comprising the intent-to-remain construct or outcome variable for the regression analysis held together quite well as a homogenous concept ( $\text{Alpha} = 0.90$ ). Gable and Wolf (1993) note that a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.71 or higher is an acceptable measure of the construct’s internal consistency.

### *Qualitative Analysis of Teachers’ Responses for Staying*

Respondents’ written responses to three open-ended survey questions were analyzed inductively to understand their perspectives about issues they perceived as important in influencing their decision to remain in teaching.

*Q1: If the opportunity arose, would you leave the teaching profession for another occupation? Why?*

The top five reasons based on 179 (89%) of the 201 total survey respondents, with 108 (60%) of those who either “certainly would not” or “probably would not” remain in teaching, were: (a) job satisfaction, (b) retirement, (c) personal teaching efficacy, (d) schedule/time off, and (e) working with students. Representative comments for each were: (a) job satisfaction (58 responses)—“Chances are pretty slim that I would leave because I am quite satisfied with my job. I would greatly miss this profession” (T19); (b) retirement (19 responses)—“I have 22 years invested [toward] teacher retirement. I feel that teaching is ‘what I do’ and can’t see anything else having a pull to make me change” (T60); (c) personal teaching efficacy (8 responses)—“I enjoy making a difference in the life of children” (T5); (d) schedule/time off (7 responses) —“I like the work schedule—my days off are the same as my own children’s” (T199); and (e) working with students (6 responses)—“Even though teaching is more challenging than in the past, I still enjoy children” (T97).

Of the 179 respondents to this question, 71 (40%) individuals indicated a response of either “certainly would” or “probably would” leave teaching. The top two reasons were the same top two reasons stated for teacher job dissatisfaction: (a) low salary and (b) role overload. Representative comments for each were: (a) low salary (32 responses)—“I would leave because I don’t feel like I make enough money for all the time and effort I put in” (T44); and (b) role overload (17 responses)—“Teachers are expected to attend to such a vast array of problems and new problems and curriculum. New duties are added every year with virtually none taken away. TOO MUCH!!!!” (T62).



*Q2: Given that you have been a teacher for over 5 years, what is your number one reason for remaining in teaching? Why?*

The top five reasons based on 194 (97%) of the 201 total survey respondents who indicated the number one reason they remain in teaching were: (a) personal teaching efficacy, (b) working with students, (c) job satisfaction, (d) schedule/time off, and (e) retirement. Representative comments for each were: (a) personal teaching efficacy (69 responses)—“I know that I am making a positive difference in my students’ lives. I see improvement everyday in my students. This is the reason I went into teaching and why I will stay in teaching” (T189); (b) working with students (47 responses)—“I enjoy working with children.... I love seeing them become proud of themselves as they succeed” (T182); (c) job satisfaction (35 responses)—“It gives me a satisfaction that other jobs couldn’t give me” (T120); (d) schedule/time off (14 responses)—“There aren’t any other jobs that allow you the same work schedule and snow days as your kids” (T34); and (e) retirement (12 responses)—“I am currently completing my 20<sup>th</sup> year in education and I realize that it is too close to retirement to quit” (T87).

*Q3: How long do you plan to remain in teaching? Why?*

The top five reasons based on 171 (85%) of the 201 total survey respondents, with 141 (82%) of those who were either “highly likely to stay” or “very likely to stay,” were: (a) retirement, (b) job satisfaction, (c) working with students, (d) personal teaching efficacy, and (e) schedule/time off. Representative comments for each were: (a) retirement (68 responses)—“I will teach till retirement. I only have 14 years to go after this one. The first 15 went by really fast” (T88); (b) job satisfaction (55 responses)—“Teaching is very satisfying to me and I’m proud to be a teacher” (T189); (c) working with students (7 responses)—“I love working with the kids” (T117); (d) personal teaching efficacy (3 responses)—“I plan to teach as long as I can make a difference in a child’s life” (T139); and (e) schedule/time off (2 responses)—“The time at home during holiday seasons and summer allows me ample time with my family” (T74).

In summary, the majority of survey respondents plan to remain in teaching. Key responses articulated were found to group on five recurrent themes: (a) personal teaching efficacy; (b) working with students; (c) job satisfaction; (d) schedule/time off; and (e) retirement.

### *Explaining Teacher Retention*

Table 2 displays the results for the final regression model, which applied a significance level of  $p < 0.05$ . The results indicate that the following five variables were significant and explained teachers’ intent to remain: (a) I am generally satisfied (satisfy) with being a teacher at this school ( $p = 0.00$ ); (b) What is your marital status? (dummy coded as single;  $p = 0.00$ ); (c) Often, I find it difficult to agree with this school’s policies (policy) on important matters relating to its employees ( $p = 0.00$ , reverse scored); (d) How satisfied (satteach) are you with teaching as a profession? ( $p = 0.01$ ); and (e) If the opportunity (opportun) arose, would you leave the teaching profession for another occupation? ( $p = 0.01$ ). When further examining the unstandardized regression coefficients ( $b$ ), the interpretation of the findings in the final regression model were mixed. Two variables in the model suggest that those teachers who were satisfied with the profession of teaching (satteach;  $b = 0.27$ ) and those who were satisfied with being a teacher at this school (satisfy;  $b = 0.30$ ) were more likely to remain in teaching. However, other variables, such as those teachers who were single (single;  $b = -0.85$ ), those who perceived school policies less favorably (policy;  $b = -0.14$ ), and teachers who had an opportunity to leave for another occupation (opportun;  $b = -0.21$ ) were less likely to remain in teaching. Other demographic and profile characteristics such as age, degree earned, years taught in education, and years taught at a K–5 grade level were not significant. Also, the satisfaction variable (How satisfied do you feel with your job this current school year? [satjob]) had no influence on teacher retention. The final regression model explained 39% (adjusted R square) of the variance or error (61% unexplained variance) in teacher retention. While we would have liked to explain more error variance in the regression model, the amount of variance explained is only one indicator (e.g., theoretical consideration, substantive reliability) of a complete model (Lewis-Beck, 1980).

**Table 2**  
*Regression Model Summary Table*

Independent Variable (Question Number / Coding Name)	<i>b</i>	Std. Error	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
A24/satisfy	.30	.09	.28	3.56	.00*
A25/policy	-.14	.05	-.20	-2.88	.00*
C1/satteach	.27	.10	.22	2.72	.01*
C2/satjob	.10	.09	.09	1.14	.26
D1/opportun	-.21	.09	-.19	-2.49	.01*
E4/age	-.10	.11	-.08	-.98	.33
E5/degree	-.09	.13	-.04	-.64	.52
E6/yrsed	.21	.17	.24	1.26	.21
E7/yrsk5	-.07	.16	-.08	-.44	.66
E2/single	-.85	.28	-.18	-3.07	.00*

*Note.* Dependent Variable: Intent to Remain

Adj. R Square = .39,  $F = 13.75$ ,  $df = 200$ ,  $*p < .05$

### Discussion and Conclusions

Although a random sample of 300 Missouri public elementary schoolteachers grades K–5 were sought out to participate in this investigation, the findings and conclusions are limited in their generalizability because they were derived from 201 public elementary schoolteachers in one midwestern state. With this caveat in mind, results have clearly demonstrated that the issues Missouri public elementary schoolteachers, grades K–5, perceived as most important when promoting their job satisfaction appeared to be as multifaceted, as stated in past empirical research. In light of previous research, the findings from this investigation are important because they provide teachers a more current “voice” and the opportunity to explain their perspectives on the teaching profession.

The individuals’ responses to the open-ended questions provide interesting insights in the area of teacher job satisfaction. The findings clearly show that intrinsic variables (e.g., working with students, job satisfaction, personal teaching efficacy), as well as extrinsic variables (e.g., good students, teacher support, positive school environment, small class size) appear to influence teacher job satisfaction. Only extrinsic factors were found to influence teachers’ dissatisfaction (e.g., role overload, low salary, parent support, student behavior, large class size). Previous research supports the notion that job satisfaction can be classified into intrinsic and extrinsic categories, with the major source of job satisfaction for teachers coming from the intrinsic category (Cohn, 1992; Lortie, 1975). These findings suggest that a lack of obstacles to teaching (Taylor & Tashakkori, 1995) increase teachers’ job satisfaction, while amplification in obstacles and barriers would decrease teachers’ satisfaction with their position.

The data from the open-ended survey questions regarding satisfaction with the profession of teaching and with the job of teaching indicate several factors that influence these teachers' perceptions of satisfaction. The top three responses for satisfaction with the profession were more intrinsic in nature (e.g., working with students, personal teaching efficacy, job satisfaction), whereas the top three responses for satisfaction with the job of teaching were more extrinsic in nature (e.g., good students, positive school environment, small class size). The data from these same two open-ended questions also indicate a nuance of dissatisfaction issues among satisfied teachers that were extrinsic in nature for both the profession (e.g., role overload, low salary, and parent support) and the job of teaching (e.g., role overload, student behavior, and large class size). These findings parallel previous research in this area (Bobbitt et al., 1991; Cohn, 1992; Goodlad, 1984; Hargreaves, 1994; McLaughlin et al., 1986; Meek, 1998; Perie & Baker, 1997; U.S. Department of Education, 1993) and appear to indicate that a difference in satisfaction exists between the teaching profession and the job of teaching, and that negative extrinsic factors acted as roadblocks to otherwise satisfied respondents.

The findings from this investigation also support previous research (Bobbitt et al., 1991; Meek, 1998) that points to the fact that satisfied teachers were more likely to remain in the teaching profession. For example, teachers who declared their intent to remain in teaching because of a high level of satisfaction were influenced primarily by extrinsic variables (e.g., their school, their profession). The findings demonstrate that teachers' top reasons for not leaving teaching, even if the opportunity arose, are weighted by both intrinsic (e.g., personal teaching efficacy, working with students, job satisfaction) and extrinsic (e.g., schedule/time off, retirement) variables. The findings also indicate that teachers' reasons for not remaining were solely extrinsic (e.g., low salary, role overload). Moreover, in this study, no significant relationship exists between teachers' satisfaction with the "job" of teaching and the intent to remain in teaching. This is contrary to previous research that indicates teachers who experienced satisfaction at their school and/or satisfaction with the teaching profession were more likely to remain in teaching (Bobbitt et al., 1991; Klecker & Loadman, 1999; Meek, 1998). This finding suggests that satisfaction with the profession of teaching—not the job of teaching—determined retention.

Evidence from this investigation suggests that the relationship of job satisfaction, intent to remain in teaching, and the demographic characteristics of the study participants shows that teachers who were single were less likely to remain in teaching. This finding echoes previous research (Karge, 1993). Even though previous research shows that males demonstrate an increased retention rate (Bobbitt et al., 1991), this study did not find a significant relationship between gender and intent to remain. Results of this investigation indicate that the demographic variables of age, degree earned, years taught in education, and years taught at a K–5 grade level were not characteristics that helped to explain teachers' intent to remain. These findings echo the research of Billingsley and Cross (1992) that demographics were not significantly related to job satisfaction and, therefore, were not indicators of retention. In addition, previous case studies that examine teachers' careers suggest that satisfaction with their job and/or profession and the intention to remain or not to remain may influence career decisions more than simple demographics (Lortie, 1975).

Moreover, these findings support the previous work of Herzberg (1966) in that those intrinsic factors or motivators relating to one's job content and the extrinsic factors or hygienes relating to the situation in which they work have a positive influence on teachers' satisfaction and, subsequently, their intent to remain in teaching. The intrinsic and extrinsic influences of satisfaction and retention that emerged from this study might assist school districts in their efforts not only to retain an experienced work force but also to search for new teachers.

#### *Future Research*

A significant finding of this study indicates a positive relationship between satisfaction with the profession of teaching and intent to remain; however, the study yielded no significant relationship between satisfaction with the job of teaching and intent to remain. Based on the previous research and the analysis and interpretation of this study's data, one area of future research would be to examine job

satisfaction through two distinct variables: one that focuses on satisfaction with the “profession” of teaching, and the other that focuses on satisfaction with the “job” of teaching. Billingsley and Cross (1992) made the recommendation for educational researchers to distinguish between commitment to the profession of teaching and commitment to the employing school because organizational “researchers often distinguish between commitment to the organization and to the profession ...” (p. 454). This same recommendation could also be applied to “job satisfaction.”

#### *Teacher Preparation and Professional Development*

The findings underlying educational research on teacher satisfaction suggest that employee job satisfaction would be a reliable predictor of certain behaviors. In essence, when the influences were satisfying, the outcome was retention (Bobbitt et al., 1991; Meek, 1998). Since this study parallels those findings, initiating and sustaining teachers’ satisfaction to teaching would appear to be an important step for those who employ teachers and to those who institute professional development. In doing so, districts could save capital—financial and human. Instead of spending precious dollars on teacher replacement and hiring, these dollars could be better spent on keeping teachers in our schools. This study identifies factors that influence job satisfaction and ultimately retention, which may provide solutions for promoting teacher retention. Those individuals (e.g., schools boards, legislatures, policy decision makers) who shape the conditions in which teachers work could take a major step in promoting teacher retention by ensuring that teachers have a positive school environment, adequate support, and small class sizes. Furthermore, other key issues such as low salaries, role overload, and student behavior must be vigorously pursued. Investing money to advance teacher job satisfaction should not only slow the exodus of teachers but also promote the building of successful learning environments. By closing the teacher job-satisfaction gap, educators may then have a tool for closing the student achievement gap.

While this study focused on 201 Missouri public elementary schoolteachers grades K–5, the findings may be relevant to teachers with similar profile characteristics, grade levels, and content areas, and to school districts within the state of Missouri. By giving credence to these participants’ perceptions and understanding the extent to which satisfaction influenced the intent to remain for teachers in this study, other school districts and administrators may seek new ways to enhance teacher retention, maintain highly qualified teachers, and reduce attrition in their schools.

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### Appendix: Job Satisfaction and Retention Survey

A. Please completely fill the one circle O that best represents your agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements.

	Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree			
1. The principal lets me know what is expected.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
2. The school administration's behavior toward me is supportive and encouraging.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
3. I am satisfied with my teaching salary.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
4. The level of student misbehavior in this school interferes with my teaching.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
5. I receive a great deal of support from parents for the work I do.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
6. I receive the necessary instructional materials to do my work effectively.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
7. Routine duties and paperwork interfere with my teaching.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
8. My principal enforces school rules for student conduct and backs me up when I need it.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
9. The principal talks with me frequently about my instructional practices.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

	Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree			
10. Rules for student behavior are consistently enforced by me in this school, even for students who are not in my class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. I share similar beliefs and values with my colleagues regarding the central mission of this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. I am evaluated fairly in this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13. I participate in making the most of the important educational decisions in this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14. I understand clearly the goals and priorities for my school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15. The principal knows what kind of school he/she wants and has communicated it to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16. I feel there is a great deal of cooperative effort among staff members.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17. In this school, I am recognized for a job well done.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18. I worry about the security of my job because of the performance of my students on state or local tests.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
19. I am given the support I need to teach students with special needs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
20. I am satisfied with my class size(s).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
21. I make a conscious effort to coordinate the content of my courses with that of other teachers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
22. I believe that the amount of tardiness and class cutting by students interferes with my teaching.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
23. I sometimes feel it is a waste of time to try to do my best as a teacher.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
24. I am generally satisfied with being a teacher at this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
25. Often, I find it difficult to agree with this school's policies on important matters relating to its employees.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

B. Please completely fill the one circle O that best represents your agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements.

	Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree			
1. I plan to remain in this position.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. I plan to remain in this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. I plan to remain in this profession.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C. Please completely fill one circle O for the following two questions AND explain your reason for each choice. THEN completely answer question 3. Please use the back of this page if you need additional room for these responses.

1. How satisfied are you with teaching as a profession?
- Very satisfied
  - Somewhat satisfied
  - Neutral
  - Somewhat dissatisfied
  - Very dissatisfied

**Why?**

2. How satisfied do you feel with your job this current school year?
- Very satisfied
  - Somewhat satisfied
  - Neutral
  - Somewhat dissatisfied
  - Very dissatisfied

**Why?**

3. If you indicated that you were “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” what is the **number one** reason you attribute to this satisfaction?

**Why?**

D. Please completely fill one circle O for the following two questions AND explain your reason for each choice. THEN completely answer question 3. Please use the back of this page if you need additional room for these responses.

1. If the opportunity arose, would you leave the teaching profession for another occupation?
- Certainly would
  - Probably would
  - Chances about even
  - Probably would not
  - Certainly would not

**Why?**



2. Given that you have been a teacher for over 5 years, what is your **number one** reason for remaining in teaching?

Why?

3. How long do you plan to remain in teaching?
- Highly likely to stay
  - Very likely to stay
  - Neutral
  - Not likely to stay
  - Definitely not staying

Why?

E. Please completely fill in one circle  for each of the following questions.

1. What is your gender?

- Male                       Female

2. What is your marital status?

- Single, never married       Married       Widowed/divorced/separated

3. What is your ethnic background?

- American Indian/Alaska Native       Asian or Pacific Islander  
 African America/Black       Hispanic  
 Caucasian/White       Other (please specify)

4. What is your age?

- 35 or under                       36–45                       46–55  
 56–65                       66 or older

5. What is the highest degree you earned?

- Bachelor's degree                       Master's degree  
 Education specialist                       Doctorate degree

6. What is the number of years you have taught in education?

- 10 or less (please specify \_\_\_\_)  
 21–25
- 11–14                       15–20  
 26 or more

7. What is the number of years you have taught at a K–5 grade level?

- 10 or less (please specify \_\_\_\_)  
 21–25
- 11–14                       15–20  
 26 or more

*Thank you again for your cooperation and participation.*