Burnout in Rural Oregon: Exploring the Perspectives and Experiences of Teachers in the Wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Title: Burnout in Rural Oregon: Exploring the Perspectives and Experiences of Teachers in the Wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic

This study explored the perspectives and experiences of full-time K-6 teachers in primary schools in rural Oregon during the 2023-2024 academic year to gain a deeper understanding of a common phenomenon, burnout, in a commonly overlooked research setting, rural localities, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The primary researcher utilized an adapted version of The Professional Quality of Life Scale (Pro-QOL-5) (quantitative) to explore the perspectives and experiences of full-time K-6 teachers in rural Oregon during the 2023-2024 academic year to gain a deeper understanding of burnout in rural schools in the wake of the COVID-19. The results of the quantitative exploratory study found no statistical significance of burnout in teachers in Title I and Non-Title schools in rural areas however varying degrees of compassion satisfaction, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress offer a snapshot of teachers' working conditions in rural Oregon in the wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my chosen family as a reminder that dreaming, after all, is a form of planning.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Teacher burnout is a longstanding issue in the United States Education system exacerbated by the emergence of the infectious and contagious SARS-CoV-2 virus and consequently, the COVID-19 pandemic (COVID-19). Burnout can occur in any profession and is a syndrome most often caused by a prolonged response to chronic stressors at work (Maslach, 1998). Burnout syndrome is considered an occupational phenomenon and is characterized by three dimensions (see Table 1): (a) feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion, (b) increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job, and (c) reduced professional efficacy or personal accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2022; World Health Organization [WHO], 2019).

Table 1

Burnout Dimensions

Emotional Exhaustion	Cynicism or Depersonalization	Reduced Personal Achievement
This dimension manifests in the form of feelings and the sensation of being exhausted by the psychological efforts made at work.	This dimension, the interpersonal component of burnout, is a response of detachment, indifference, and unconcern toward the work being performed and/or the people who receive it.	This dimension is reflected in a negative professional self-evaluation and doubts about the ability to perform a job effectively, with a greater tendency to negatively evaluate the results.

Source: Maslach and Michael (2022)

Burnout is especially prevalent in helping professions that provide health and education services to individuals and groups, including occupations in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, counseling, medicine, nursing, social work, physical and occupational therapy, and education (American Psychological Association, 2018). Regardless of the type of profession, the six sources of burnout are (a) workload, the extent to which the organization's demands are manageable or overwhelming for staff; (b) control, the amount of professional autonomy staff experience; (c) reward, organizational recognition or rewards for work; (d) community, the organization's responsiveness to staff and community; (e) fairness, the respect and fairness among people in the organization; and (f) values, the alignment of personal and organizational values (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). The six sources of burnout fall under three major factors, (a) individual, (b) organizational, and (c) transactional (Chang, 2009). Individual factors include personality traits, experience, and background. Organizational factors include workplace culture, structure, and leadership. Transactional factors include perceptions of leadership, support, and professional satisfaction.

Self-assessments are commonly used by healthcare professionals, work organizations, and individual workers to help identify and monitor symptoms and behaviors of burnout. Additionally, self-assessments are recognized as a tool in recovery. Self-assessments include the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI-GS), the Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT) the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI), and the Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL). Considering the widespread use of self-assessments and over 50 years of research, burnout remains a relevant phenomenon in the years before, during, and after the COVID-19 Pandemic.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 Pandemic disrupted the United States K-12 education system. School staff across the United States worked tirelessly to navigate new teaching modalities to ensure the safety and access to education of students during a time of incredible loss. On March 13, 2020, in response to climbing rates of reported cases and confirmed deaths from COVID-19, the U.S. presidential administration declared COVID-19 a national emergency. School staff and students followed new guidelines issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and implemented individual state health protocols including masking, social distancing, and vaccination to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Many districts and schools changed their operational status from in-person to hybrid and/or virtual to prevent or respond to outbreaks.

The COVID-19 pandemic impeded the academic success of students in classrooms across The United States while widening achievement gaps between groups of students. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 2022 survey on national education responses to COVID-19 school closures, the staggering loss of instructional time and limited access to remote learning pushed students behind their grade-appropriate learning levels (UNESCO Institute for Statistics [UIS], 2022, p. 22). In a 2023 report, *School District and Community Factors Associated with Learning Loss During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, researchers analyzed school closure data of 7,800 school districts to describe pandemic-related learning losses (Fahle et. al, 2023, pg. 2). A comprehensive comparison analysis among communities and student subgroups revealed that learning loss during the pandemic was historic, with greater losses in lower-income and minority districts that remained remote or hybrid for longer periods. Other schools have changed the workweek altogether, for

example the four-day workweek has been adopted by hundreds of school systems around the country (Hollingsworth, 2023).

COVID-19 Pandemic learning losses widened achievement gaps for students. Achievement gaps occur when one group of students outperforms another group and the difference in average scores for the two groups is statistically significant. For example, the 2024 report, *The First Year of Pandemic Recovery: A District-Level Analysis*, by the Educational Opportunity Project at Stanford University and the Center of Education Policy Research at Harvard University found a significant academic achievement gap in test scores of students across 20 states between White, Black, and Hispanic students before, during, and after the COVID-19 Pandemic tracking data between 2019 and 2022 (Education Recovery Scorecard, 2024). In a joint press release researchers urged state leaders to follow a multipronged approach to close achievement gaps. For example, in the wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic schools should expand summer learning and contract high-quality tutoring and after-school programs.

Additionally, the prevalence and severity of academic achievement gaps between groups of students by economic status is significant in that students from socioeconomically advantaged communities score higher in math and reading in comparison to students from socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. Today, despite concerted efforts to make up for losses in academic achievement and close gaps at state, district, and school levels, disparities in student learning persist.

The loss in school instruction and frequent routine changes due to the global health crisis led to an increase in child behavioral and mental health disorders, for example, anxiety, depression, and suicide. In 2021, the Pew Charitable Trusts, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the Children's

Hospital Association declared the pandemic-related decline in child and adolescent mental health a national emergency (Vestal, 2021). Many students experienced hospitalizations and/or the loss of a family member or multiple family members due to COVID-19. According to a 2022 study, *COVID-19-Associated Orphanhood and Caregiver Death in the United States*, from April 1, 2020, through June 30, 2021, over 140,000 children in the United States experienced the death of a parent or grandparent caregiver (Hillis et al., 2021). In response to the worsening behavioral and mental health in students, school staff nationwide worked around the clock to provide support for students experiencing great tragedies and inequities.

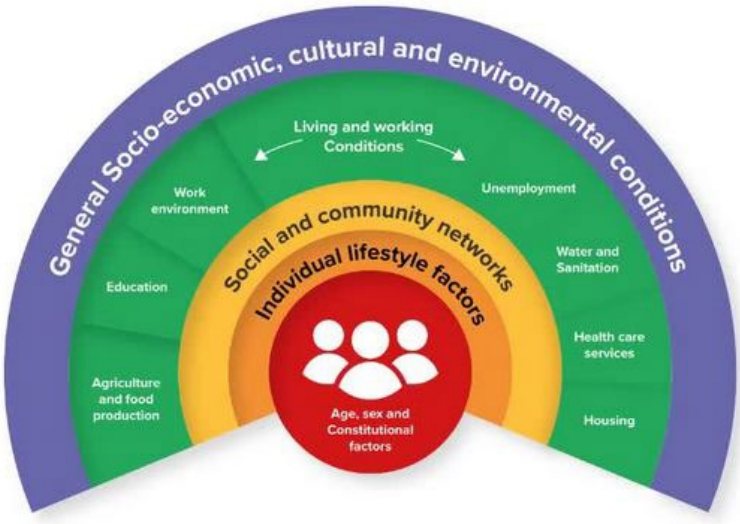
Teacher Burnout

Teachers play an integral role in the lives of students. K-12 teachers spend a great deal of time in classrooms with students and help shape the learning conditions and experiences of children and adolescents in two major ways. First, teachers are an integral part of education access and quality. Education access and quality are a Social Determinant of Health (SDH) (see Figure 1). Social Determinants of Health are nonmedical factors influencing the health outcomes of individuals. Education access and quality are strongly associated with life expectancy, morbidity, and health behaviors, and educational attainment plays a vital role in health by shaping opportunities, employment, and income (Lancet Public Health, 2020).

Second, according to the U.S. Department of Education, teachers are the backbone of our democracy – fostering curiosity and creativity, building skillful individuals, and strengthening informed citizens (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], n.d.). Considering work is a social determinant of the health of teachers and considering teachers help shape the lives of students who will continue The United States's legacy of democracy, the well-being of teachers is an ethical and shared responsibility.

Figure 1

Social Determinants of Health



Note. Education access and quality include key issues such as literacy, language, early childhood education, vocational training, and higher education. Source: Dahlgren and Whitehead (1991)

Teacher burnout is associated with many negative repercussions for students, and at an individual level, the psychological symptoms and behavioral responses of burnout can have an adverse effect on teachers' mental and physical health (Brown, 2012). In other words, when teachers experience prolonged stress, then students can become stressed which, in turn, can widen achievement and motivation gaps between groups of students (Madigan et al, 2021). For example, Oberle and Schonert-Reichl (2016), when researching teacher burnout, found higher cortisol levels in teachers were associated with higher cortisol levels in students (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016).

Teacher burnout is a major education workforce issue. In a 2022 National Education Association (NEA) survey of 3,621 educators, 90% reported burnout as a *very serious* or

somewhat serious issue while more than half (55%) reported they were more likely to leave or retire from education sooner than planned because of the pandemic (GBAO, 2022). Additionally, 86% of respondents indicated they had witnessed more educators leaving the profession and in turn, 74% had taken on additional roles due to staff shortages (GBAO, 2022). It is important to note many factors can contribute to a teacher leaving classroom teaching or the field of education altogether and burnout is considered a major factor. In addition to contributing to teacher attrition (leaving classroom teaching or the field of education altogether), burnout is a well-known contributor to teacher absenteeism, which includes any absence from class; presenteeism, which is a loss of productivity when employees show up to work but do not fully function with performative measures; teacher turnover (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). Burnout also leads to teacher shortages, and the inability to fill vacancies at current wages with individuals qualified to teach in the fields needed (Sutcher et al., 2016). Although the COVID-19 pandemic is over, teacher burnout persists, contributing to workforce supply and demand issues that, in turn, perpetuate yet more burnout.

United States Education System

Teacher burnout is largely linked to inequities in working conditions within the United States Education System. The U.S. Education System is grossly underfunded and subsequently, teachers are overworked and underpaid. Decades of disinvestment in the U.S. Education System erode school buildings and overwhelm the capacity of school staff to provide students with high-quality access to education. According to *Closing America's Education Funding Gap*, a 2020 study published by The Century Foundation, a progressive nonpartisan think tank, the United States underfunds K–12 public-schools by nearly $150 billion a year (TCF, 2020). Each year, schools across The United States are funded by federal, state, and local dollars. Most funds for

primary and secondary education come from local taxes, largely property taxes, and state income and sales taxes. A small percentage of funding comes from the federal government by way of the Department of Education in partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Labor.

For example, in 2017-2018, more than 90% of school funding came from state and local sources while the federal government covered only 7.8% of expenses (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2020). Without a centralized funding model and proper funding, the conditions of schools vary depending on local and state wealth and politics. For example, in the 2022 report, *Public Education Funding in the U.S. Needs an Overhaul: How a Larger Federal Role Would Boost Equity and Shield Children from Disinvestment During Downturns*, researchers from the Economic Policy Institute researchers investigated the trends in revenues and expenditures by state and by district poverty level and found the current system for education funding is inadequate and inequitable; it relies too heavily on state and local resources; the federal government plays an insufficient role; funding levels vary widely across states; and high-poverty districts get less funding per student than low-poverty districts (Allegretto, et al., pg. 2, para 2, 2022). Researchers argued for an increase in investment in education at a federal level, especially during economic downturns, considering that a stable and consistent funding system with a significantly higher level of investment would generate economic and social returns (Allegretto, et al, 2022).

The popular privatization of education further depletes a scarcity of funds in public primary and secondary schools. The disinvestment in public education is especially disadvantageous to staff and students in high-poverty schools, where access to education is often the key to upward mobility. According to a 2014 statement, *School Privatization Threat to*

Public Education, by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP], the further privatization of schools (private and charter) is detrimental to the continued development and financial stability of the public education system (NAACP, 2014). According to a 2021 article by the National Education Association, voucher programs, tax credit scholarships, education savings accounts, and tuition tax credits are rooted in segregation and perpetuate student achievement gaps in public-schools (NEA, 2021).

Title I Schools

Teacher burnout occurs most often in high-poverty schools. High-poverty schools, which make up nearly half of all public primary and secondary schools, qualify for federal Title I funds and are often referred to as Title I schools. The Title I federal education program provides additional funding to schools where more than 75% of the student population have families with low incomes that are eligible for free or reduced-price breakfast and lunch subsidies. The Title I program began in 1965, under the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA). According to the Elementary and Secondary Act statement of purpose (1965), the U.S. Department of Education distributes Title I grants to provide all children with a significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps (ESEA of 1965). The success of a Title I program is often measured by the academic achievement, attendance, and graduation rates of students.

Title I schools are more racially and ethnically diverse in student population than Non-Title schools. According to the NCES *Condition of Education 2020* report, in the Fall of 2017, the percentages of students who attended high-poverty schools were highest for Black and Hispanic students (45% each), followed by American Indian/Alaska Native students (41%),

Pacific Islander students (24%), students of Two or more races (18 %), Asian students (15%), and White students (8%).

The majority of education research on Title I schools is concentrated in urban areas with larger populations and greater research resources. For example, a basic Google Scholar search for studies on teacher burnout in Title I schools reveals most studies on burnout, compassion satisfaction, compassion fatigue, and secondary traumatic stress in metropolitan localities with greater numbers of Title I schools than in rural localities with smaller populations and greater distances between Title I schools. Considering Title I schools exist in every state and more than one-third of school districts (Katz, 2020), additional studies are needed across the urban-rural divide to investigate the conditions of Title I schools in rural localities.

Title I schools exist across the rural United States; however, they are often left out of burnout research and education research altogether. According to a 2018 report, *Out of the Loop: Rural Schools are Largely Left Out of Research and Policy Discussions, Exacerbating Poverty, Inequity, and Isolation*, by the National School Boards Association Center for Public Education, the needs of rural education are often obscured in comparison to urban or suburban schools and the first step to address the unique needs of rural education is to focus the attention of policymakers and communities (Lavalley, 2018).

Rural Classifications

The terms urban and rural are NCES local classifications (see Table 2). Rural locales comprise 97% of the geographical landscape in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017) (see Figure 2) and are home to approximately one in five U.S. citizens (Davis et al., 2023). Rural communities are diverse in race and ethnicity. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) report, *Rural Poverty & Wellbeing*, in 2020 people of color comprised approximately

20% of the nation's rural population, a figure corroborated by similar statistics from the 2021 report *Rural America at a Glance* by the USDA Economic Research Service, in which researchers found that "non-white minority residents" made up roughly 24% of rural the United States.

The makeup of rural populations is highly regionalized with variations in the concentration of Black Americans, Latino Americans, and Indigenous Americans across the nation (Rowlands & Love, 2021). Additionally, rural America is increasingly diverse, however, it is often depicted as homogenous. In reality, "the Mountainous Appalachia, the Mississippi Delta, the wide-open Great Plains, remote Alaska, lush Hawaii, and pastoral New England all evoke images of rural United States, but they are unique regions with distinct differences in people, values, landscapes, and lifestyles" (Tomlinson, 2020, p. 1). In the 2019 report *Redefining Rural America* by the Center for American Progress, authors Olugbenga Ajilore and Zoe Willingham draw attention to the dangers of common misassumptions. "Though some policymakers may be eager to tackle the challenges facing rural areas, discussions on this topic tend to make sweeping generalizations about the dynamics at work in these communities, leaving many Americans out of the conversation" (p. 1). Consequently, Americans in rural localities often feel disenfranchised when left out of research, policy, and decision-making at local, state, and national levels.

Table 2
NCES Rural Classifications and Criteria

Rural, Fringe	Rural, Distant	Rural, Remote
A census-defined rural territory is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized	A census-defined rural territory is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25	A census-defined rural territory is over 25 miles from

area, and a rural territory is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster.	miles from an urbanized area and more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster.	an urbanized area and over 10 miles from an urban cluster.

Note: The NCES locale framework comprises four locality types: city, suburban, town, and rural. Source: NCES (n.d.)

Rural Oregon

Oregon, in the Pacific Northwest, is one of many states with a large rural population. As of 2023, Oregon is home to over 4 million people. While the majority live in urban and suburban areas along the Interstate-5 (I-5) corridor, approximately 33% (1,405,705) live in rural Oregon and another 2% (96,950) live in frontier Oregon (Oregon Office of Rural Health, 2023). Frontier localities are any county with six or fewer people per square mile. I-5 connects the three major cities in Oregon: Portland, Eugene, and Salem from north to south.

Any exit off the I-5 reveals Oregon is overwhelmingly geographically rural. According to a joint publication by the Chalkboard Project, the Children's Institute, and ECONorthwest (ECON) in 2016, "The economies in many parts of rural Oregon never fully recovered from the twin recessions of the early 1980s, automation of the wood products manufacturing industry, and regulations that limit timber harvests on federally owned lands" (Foundations for a Better Oregon, 2016, p. 1). Generations of rural communities across Oregon can be described as resourceful with tightly knit communities accustomed to weathering lower incomes and geographic isolation. In the wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic, more than one-third of all Oregon students attend school in rural areas including, east of the Cascades, the coastline, and southwest Oregon.

The Oregon Education system is composed of 1,200 public K-12 schools organized into 197 school districts across 95,962 square miles. Along the I5 corridor, Portland, a major urban area, is home to Portland public-schools, Oregon's largest PK-12 district. Also found along I5, the capital of Salem, Oregon is home to the second-largest PK-12 district, Salem Keizer.

The Study

This study explored the perspectives and experiences of full-time K-6 teachers in primary schools in rural Oregon during the 2023-2024 academic year to gain a deeper understanding of a common phenomenon, burnout, in a commonly overlooked research setting, rural localities, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 Pandemic. To explore teacher burnout, I utilized an adapted version of The Professional Quality of Life Scale (Pro-QOL-5) (quantitative) to explore the perspectives and experiences of full-time K-6 teachers in rural Oregon during the 2023-2024 academic year. The Pro-QOL-5 is a 30-item self-report questionnaire designed to measure compassion satisfaction (CS), burnout (BO), and STS (STS).

The results of the quantitative exploratory study offer a snapshot of teachers' working conditions in rural Oregon. To demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of teacher burnout, the literature synthesis is thematic and organized by: (1) definition, (2) dimensions, (3) process, and (4) effects followed by limitations and conclusions. Next, to demonstrate transparency and ethics, the method section is organized by: UPDATE of the final study design. The study concludes with a comprehensive results section with recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE SYNTHESIS

I used APA PsychNet, ERIC, Google Search, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and NCES to conduct a preliminary exploration of 'burnout'. The keywords entered in the search bar include *burnout*, *emotional exhaustion*, *cynicism*, *depersonalization*, *helping professions*, *Oregon*, *public*, *reduced personal achievement*, *rural*, *teachers*, *students,* and *reduced personal achievement* as well as the Boolean operator "and" and prepositions "in" and "among". My search returned material from peer-reviewed journals, federal government data, news stories, state agency reports, podcast interviews, published books, and teacher surveys (see Table 3).

Table 3

Literature Review Matrix

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Title	Author	Date	Search Engine	Description	Apa Citation
2	The times they are a-changin': Teaching and learnir	Marshall, D. T., Pressley, T., & Love,	2022	Google Scholar	The COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on the world, but especially on the e	Marshall, D. T., Pressley, T., & Love, S.
3	Online Teaching Practices and the Effectiveness of	Tartavulea, C. V., Albu, C. N., Albu, I	2020	Google Scholar	Our respondents also view the switch to online teaching to have an overall moderat	Tartavulea, C. V., Albu, C. N., Albu, N.,
4	Understanding teacher burnout following COVID-	Pressley, T., Marshall, D. T., & Moore	2022	Google Scholar	Despite the world entering the endemic phase of COVID-19, there is still limited re	Pressley, T., Marshall, D. T., & Moore, T
5	NEA Survey: Massive Staff Shortages in Schools I	Jotkoff, Eric	2022	Google Scholar	Similarly, a large-scale survey by The NationalEducation Association indicated tha	Jotkoff, Eric. 2022. NEA Survey: Massi
6	Extinguishing Teacher Burnout	Hurley, D.	2021	ERIC	The growing number of teacher burnout cases can no longer be ignored and the effi	Hurley, D. (2021). Extinguishing Teache
7	Cultivating teacher renewal: Guarding against stres	Larrivee, B.	2012	Book	The highest incidence of burnout syndrome occurs in human service professionals	Larrivee, B. (2012). Cultivating teacher
8	Individual and school predictors of teacher stress,	Herman, K. C., Sebastian, J., Reinke,	2021	Google Scholar	Teacher health and well-being took on even more importance in the immediate afte	Herman, K. C., Sebastian, J., Reinke, W
9	An Exploration of Strategies to Support Retention	Harden, S. P.	2023	Google Scholar	To further understand the perspectives of those who chose to leave, one option is to	Harden, S. P. (2023). *An Exploration of*
10	The trouble with teacher turnover: How teacher att	Carver-Thomas, D., & Darling-Hamm	2019	ERIC	the nation's teacher shortages are caused mainly by the highteacher turnover rate, w	Carver-Thomas, D., & Darling-Hammon
11	U.S. schools struggle to hire and retain teachers: Tl	García, E., & Weiss, E.	2019	Google Search	Unfilled vacancies happen for any number of reason, including reduced attractiven	García, E., & Weiss, E. 2019, April 16. T
12	Teacher Turnover and Teacher Shortages: An Orga	Ingersoll, Richard	2001	University of Oregon	The results of the analysis indicate that school staffing problems are not primarily c	Ingersoll, Richard M. 2001. "Teacher Tu
13	Demoralized: Why teachers leave the profession th	Santoro, D. A.	2021	ERIC	Based on ten years of research and interviews with practitioners across the United S	Santoro, D. A. (2021). *Demoralized: Wh*
14	Teacher Burnout or Demoralization? What's the Di	Tim Walker	2018	Google Search	Demoralized by the direction of public education and the effect it has had on their p	Walker, T. (2018). Teacher Burnout or D
15	Good teaching in difficult times: Demoralization in	Santoro	2011	JSTOR	Consistent and persistent frustrations in accessing the moral rewards of teaching re	Santoro, D. A. (2011). Good teaching in
16	Defining Rural Oregon: An Exploration	Crandall	2005	Google Scholar	Several of the most frequently noted differences between the 'two Oregons' are the	Crandall, M., & Weber, B. (2005). Defin
17	Challenges Facing Schools in Rural America.	Tieken, M. C., & Montgomery, M. K.	2021	Google Scholar	The economic effects of the pandemic will be long-lasting and devastating, as distr	Tieken, M. C., & Montgomery, M. K. (2
18	Online Learning for Rural Students. *State Educatic*	Leichty, R.	2021	ERIC	Despite 25 years of significant progress in connecting schools to the Internet, the al	Leichty, R. (2021). Online Learning for
19	The geography of rural educational opportunity.	Drescher, J., Podolsky, A., Reardon, S	2022	ERIC	We use nearly 430 million standardized test scores, including test scores from more	Drescher, J., Podolsky, A., Reardon, S. F
20	Multiple Author Citations	Multiple Author Citations	2018-2019	ERIC	Research conducted on geographic variation in educational outcomes has often foc	Owens, Ann. 2018. "Income Segregation
21	Immigration and the new racial diversity in rural A	Lichter, D. T.	2012	ERIC	Immigration and the new ethnoracial diversity will be at the leading edge of major	Lichter, D. T. (2012). Immigration and t
22	Distributed leadership, professional collaboration,	Torress	2019	ERIC	Overall, results point toward the significance of distributed leadership for other asp	Torres, D. G. (2019). Distributed leaders
23	Stress, Burnout, Depression: Teachers and Principa	Will	2022	Google Search	But many teachers say sessions on superficial self-care—like breathing exercises, y	Will, 2022. Stress, Burnout, Depression:
24	2022 Oregon Educator Equity Report	Oregon Department of Education, et.	2022	Google Search	Prior to the pandemic, U.S. schools consistently struggled with teacher shortages, s	Oregon Department of Education, et. al.
25	Keeping good teachers: Why it matters, what leade	Darling-Hammond, L.	2003	University of Oregon	Probably the most important thing a school administrator at the school or district le	Darling-Hammond, L. (2003). Keeping
26	America's teachers: Profile of a profession	NCES	1993	Google Scholar	Nationally, teachers in schools serving the largest concentrations of low-income stu	National Center for Education Statistics
27	Solving the teacher shortage: How to attract and re	Multiple Author Citations	2016	Google Scholar	This paper reviews an extensive body of research on teacher recruitment and retent	Podolsky, A., Kini, T., Bishop, J., & Dar
28	Recent Trends in the Characteristics of New Teach	Redding, C., & Nguyen, T. D. (2020)	2020	Google Scholar	*This attention is a result of demographic shifts in the teacher labor market, increas*	Redding, C., & Nguyen, T. D. (2020). R

Note. The literature review matrix is protected on a password-protected external hard drive.

As I read, it became clear to me that *burnout* is a slippery word with various definitions. A large literature on burnout revealed definitions were more complementary than different; therefore, I could divide my review into themes to highlight similarities and differences.

Simultaneously I read several published books from seminal authors in psychology and education including *The Burnout Challenge: Managing People's Relationships with Their Jobs* by Christina Maslach and Michael P. Leiter (2022), *Demoralized: Why Teachers Leave the Profession They Love and How They Can Stay* by Doris A. Santoro (2021), *Burnout: The Cost of Caring* by Christina Maslach (2003a), and *Burnout: The High Cost of Achievement, What It Is – And How to Survive It* by Dr. Herbert J. Freudenberger (1980). These books stayed near my work desk alongside *Writing Literature Reviews: A Guide for Students of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* by Jose. L. Galvan and Melisa C. Galvan (2017) throughout the time I spent writing the literature synthesis.

Over a year, I wrote and rewrote the literature synthesis several times to ensure I communicated a comprehensive understanding of over 50 years of literature on burnout. To demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of teacher burnout, the literature synthesis is thematic and organized by: (a) definitions, (b) dimensions, (c) process, and (d) effects, followed by limitations and conclusions.

Definition of Burnout

In the years following the pandemic, COVID-19 is still a major health concern shaping the lives of educators and students, and teacher burnout remains a major workforce issue. Any basic internet search for teacher burnout in the United States for the years 2023-2024 will result in an overwhelming number of sources, and many of those sources include definitions of burnout. The various definitions of burnout exist because it is polysemous and because it is the focus of over 50 years of research from around the world.

Burnout is generally used as a metaphor for suffering or the snuffing out of energy. As a noun, burnout is defined as (a) the cessation of operation, usually of a jet or rocket engine; (b)

the exhaustion of physical or emotional strength or motivation, usually as a result of prolonged stress or frustration; and it can take on a derogatory meaning as (c) a person showing the effects of drug use (Merriam-Webster, 2024). As a verb, burnout is defined as (a) to drive out or destroy the property of fire and (b) to cause to fail, wear out, or become exhausted, especially from overwork or overuse (Merriam-Webster, 2024).

At first glance, burnout is a slippery concept because there are so many different variations in definitions and theories over more than 50 years of clinical studies in psychology and education. A closer read of studies reveals an evolution of burnout theory in which the various definitions have more commonalities than differences and the various theories of burnout provide a comprehensive understanding of a widespread occupational phenomenon (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022). A notable example of differences in burnout theory can be found in the seminal work of Dr. Herbert Freudenberger, Dr. Christina Maslach, and Dr. Doris Santoro.

Unilateral Definition

Dr. Herbert J. Freudenberger, a German American psychologist, first used the term "burnout" in clinical research in the 1970s. As a member of the Free Clinic movement, Freudenberger questioned the organizational practices of hospitals and rallied for healthcare access for marginalized populations. Inspired by his own experience with exhaustion as a psychologist in free clinics in New York, Freudenberger investigated chronic exhaustion in healthcare workers dedicated to delivering fair healthcare services to low-income and historically marginalized populations. In his 1974 *Journal of Social Issues* article, "Staff Burnout," Freudenberger provided the first unilateral definition of burnout, "becoming exhausted by making excessive demands on energy, strength, or resources" (p. 159). Six years later, Freudenberger (1980) published the first of his many books on burnout, *Burnout: The High Cost*

of High Achievement, in which he defines burnout as, "someone in a state of fatigue or frustration brought about by devotion to a cause, way of life, or relationship that failed to produce the expected reward" (Freudenberger, 1980, pg. 13, p. 2). Then in 1986, in *Women's Burnout: For the Woman Who's Made Commitments to Everyone but Herself: How to Spot It, How To Reverse It, and How To Prevent It*, the definition of burnout in the context of women expanded to "an exhaustion born of excessive demands which may be self-imposed or externally imposed by families, jobs, friends, lovers, value systems, or society, which deplete one's energy" (Freudenberger & North, 1986, p. 9).

Freudenberger's unilateral definition of burnout evolved multiple times throughout his research depending on the setting and demographic of people; however, all the definitions have something in common. In all cases, Freudenberger argues the external demands of an organization or community are essentially mismatched with the worker or individual's expectations. Freudenberger's theory of burnout eventually evolved to include stages of burnout and personality types prone to burnout.

Multidimensional Definition

While Freudenberger conducted his work in New York in the 1970s, across the country, a recent graduate student at Stanford University, well known for her involvement as a "whistleblower" in the Stanford Prison Experiment, began her career as a professor and researcher of psychology at the University of California, Berkeley. Dr. Christina Maslach was especially interested in behavioral responses, such as "detached concern" and "dehumanization as a form of self-defense" in high-stress jobs. Early in her research, Maslach (1982) addressed the general ambiguity of burnout as an everyday phrase and highlighted the importance of a

shared clinical definition, lest a concept stretched out to encompass everything ends up meaning nothing.

Five decades later, Dr. Christina Maslach, Ph.D., is regarded as a prominent pioneer in burnout research. In *The Burnout Challenge: Managing People's Relationships with Their Jobs* by Christina Maslach and Michael P. Leiter (2002), the definition of burnout is multidimensional and characterized by (a) feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion, (b) increased mental distance from one's job or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job, and (c) reduced professional efficacy (Maslach & Leiter, 2022). Dr. Maslach's comprehensive burnout theory was adapted for the World Health Organization's general definition of burnout.

In 2024, the *Maslach Burnout Inventory* (MBI), an assessment of burnout, is considered "the gold standard" for measuring burnout. Several versions of the MBI exist, including the *MBI: Educators Survey (MBI-ES),* made up of 22 self-report questions on a 7-point Likert scale. Today, 40+ years since her first seminal research on burnout, Dr. Christina Maslach, Ph.D., is Professor Emerita of Psychology at the University of California Berkeley and regularly writes and speaks on burnout. Beth Hudnall Stamm, Ph.D., utilized Maslach's definition in developing the Professional Quality of Life Scale (Pro-QOL-5) that is now owned by the Center for Victims of Torture. Stamm defines burnout as characterized by feeling emotionally depleted or drained and can result after a period of long-term, work-related stress and includes a table that features Maslach's three dimensions of burnout.

Demoralization

Freudenberger and Maslach are two of many researchers who have helped develop a large literature on burnout; however, not all researchers agree on its prevalence. It is important to

note Maslach is a lead researcher in burnout research and burnout theory is constantly evolving; therefore, her multidimensional model is also the topic of continued investigation. Some—for example, Dr. Doris Santoro—argue that demoralization is commonly mistaken for burnout. Similar to burnout, there are various definitions of demoralization as shared in research and popular terminology. For example, in research dating back to the 1940s, demoralization was coined as the "Giving Up-Given Up syndrome," the "social breakdown syndrome," and the "root cause of all conditions psychotherapy attempts to relieve" (Malesic, 2022).

Santoro agrees with Maslach and Freudenberger that burnout is a serious problem with negative implications. However, she argues that in the context of education, the current definition of burnout does not fully capture the experiences of dissatisfaction, despair, or symptoms experienced by teachers working in archaic and inequitable education settings across The United States. Santoro's work draws from the seminal contributions of several researchers dating back to the 1940s, including Frank, Engel, and Cassell.

For example, according to Frank, demoralization is associated with feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, meaninglessness, subjective incompetence, and diminished self-esteem. According to Santoro (2021) in *Demoralized: Why Teachers Leave the Profession They Love and How They Can Stay*, demoralization is rooted in discouragement and despair borne out of ongoing value conflicts with pedagogical policies, reform mandates, and school practices. In other words, addressing major teacher workforce issues requires addressing teachers' professional well-being and working conditions to properly address burnout and demoralization. Moreover, although many existing studies in the broader literature have examined the causes, symptoms, and preventive measures of burnout, Santoro (2021) advocated for the distinction between burnout and demoralization, "caring for the integrity of teaching" (p. 88), with more

research exploring recovery. Santoro developed five broad categories of remoralization or recovery: (a) student-centered action, (b) teacher leadership, (c) activism, (d) voice, and (f) professional community. Research on demoralization has signaled the need for more studies to explore demoralization in schools.

In the years following the COVID-19 Pandemic, researchers explored the well-being of teachers and the prevalence of burnout in comparison to distress and demoralization. For example, in the 2023 study, *Post-Pandemic Mental Health: Psychological Distress and Burnout Syndrome in Regular Basic Education Teachers*, the researchers investigated whether or not psychological distress is significantly related to burnout syndrome in regular basic education teachers upon their return to in-person teaching (Estrada-Araoz et al., 2023). The researchers found out of 184 participating teachers, 40.7% of teachers self-reported moderate level of psychological distress using the psychological Distress Scale and 45.1% self-reported burnout using the Maslach Burnout Inventory. The significant relationship between psychological distress and burnout syndrome models how future research can focus on the relationship between distress and burnout – and demoralization and burnout.

Sources

Teachers are especially vulnerable to chronic stress and burnout. An extensive literature on teacher burnout in schools can be organized into three general focuses: *individual factors*, the personality traits and coping skills of an individual; *organizational factors*, the working conditions of workers; and *transactional factors*, a combination of the two (see Figure 9). Individual factors include age, gender, marriage status, years of experience, educational background, personality, self-esteem/self-concept, teacher resilience, coping strategies, and religious background. Organizational factors include class size, work demands, inadequate

salary, role ambiguity, teacher preparation, school SES/Culture, Organizational rigidity, and teacher participation in school decision-making. The combination of Individual and Organizational factors is known as Transactional Factors and include teachers' attribution/judgment of student misbehavior, perceptions of organizational leadership style, perceived principal, peer support, administrative support, teacher efficacy/socially reflected self-concept, norms of student-teacher interactions, and internal rewards/professional satisfaction.

Individual Factors

Freudenberger (1974) argued a general asset-based theory explaining, "Burnout is pretty much limited to dynamic, charismatic, goal-oriented people or to determined idealists who want their work to be outstanding" (p. 19). Since 1974, many researchers have investigated how personality traits, such as perfectionism, a need for validation, or neuroticism, are more susceptible to burnout. Additionally, researchers investigate the external locus of control, coping skills, and self-esteem of individuals associated with burnout.

For example, Dr. Mei-Lin Chang, (2009), a professor in applied quantitative research and educational analysis at Kennesaw State University, agrees with Freudenberger that the emotional aspects of teachers' lives play a critical role in burnout. In a 2009 literature review, *An Appraisal Perspective of Teacher Burnout: Examining the Emotional Work of Teachers,* Chang investigates whether the habitual patterns in teachers' judgments about student behavior and other teaching tasks may contribute significantly to teachers' repeated experience of unpleasant emotions and those emotions may eventually lead to burnout. Chang's study results of 554 teachers' emotional responses revealed that the judgments teachers made regarding student behaviors influenced the unpleasant emotions teachers felt: particularly, goal incongruence and lower perceptions of coping potential displayed a significant covariate with teachers' unpleasant emotions (Chang,

2009). Chang (2009) argues that to be proactive about feelings of burnout, teachers must be reflective and address how their appraisal processes function in the classroom and how these may be habitual patterns that lead to unpleasant emotions, for example, anger.

A focus within appraisal theory is Type A personality traits. Type A personality traits include competitiveness, perfectionism, and time urgency, and are also associated with burnout (Alarcon et al., 2009). In a 2011 research study, *Job Stressors: Personality and Burnout in Primary School Teachers*, Constantinos M. Kokkinos found that across a sample of 447 primary school teachers, neuroticism was a common predictor of all dimensions of burnout. More studies are needed to investigate how the personality of workers interplays with burnout; however, in education, a growing number of researchers remark in one way or another that the root cause of teacher dissatisfaction may have more to do with how the profession has been degraded and less with a perceived inability to handle the pressures of the job (Walker, 2018). In a 2023 Merrimack College Teacher Survey of 1,718 public-school teachers including elementary school teachers, middle school teachers, high school teachers, and teachers whose work extends to multiple grade spans, researchers found only 55% of teachers said the general public respects them and sees them as professionals (Merrimack College, 2023).

Another focus in educational research is the link between burnout and teacher experience. For example, Riggs' 2023 study, "I Just Couldn't Do It Anymore": A Study of Post-Pandemic Teacher Burnout, collected the perspectives and experiences of veteran teachers, with more than 10 years of experience in classrooms, to answer several research questions including, "What factors contributed to veteran teacher's experience of burnout in the post-shutdown pandemic environment?" Results of the Maslach Burnout Inventory Educator Survey (MBI-ES) revealed the significant factors that contribute to burnout in veteran teachers included: lack of coherence,

lack of student accountability, unsustainable workloads, and erosion of professionalism (Riggs, 2023, pg. ix).

Organizational Factors

In education, research on teacher burnout primarily focuses on how the conditions of schools shape the lives of teachers and students. In educational research, it is overwhelmingly understood that the U.S. Education system is underfunded, and funding practices for schools are inequitable. Therefore, there are a multitude of contributors linked to the widespread burnout of teachers. For example, in a 1986 study, *Educator Burnout: Sources and Consequences*, Schwab et al. examined educator burnout among 339 elementary and secondary teachers. These researchers assessed six potential causes of job burnout: (1) participation in decision-making, (2) role of conflict and ambiguity, (3) freedom and autonomy, (4) social support, (5) rewards and punishments, and (6) expectations across age and sex of participants. Researchers found the sources of burnout were found to include the individuals' unmet expectations and job conditions of low participation in decision-making, high levels of role conflict, a lack of freedom and autonomy, absence of social support networks, and inconsistent reward and punishment structures (Schwab, R., & Schuler, R., 1986, pg.1, para. 1).

Linda Darling-Hammond, Ed.D., President and CEO of the Learning Policy Institute (LPI) and expert on education and teaching, goes a step further and states that U.S. teaching conditions are outdated and in desperate need of reform considering,

> heavy workloads; school schedules offering little time for relationship building with students and families or for collaboration with other teachers; standardized curriculum that fails to meet the needs of diverse learners; extensive testing; and the hiring of

> teachers with little training who come and go quickly, add to staff instability and depressing student achievement. (Darling-Hammond & Borrud, 2023, p. III)

The working conditions of primary and secondary schools vary across the United States because of differences in funding. Subsequently, after decades of chronic disinvestment in public education, many public-schools are in dire need of building updates or even full tear-down and reconstruction. For decades, lead in drinking water, toxic mercury in fluorescent lighting, mold in collapsing school ceilings, faulty heating and air conditioning, outdated HVAC systems, and subsequently, high rates of pollutants in the air, have wreaked havoc on the health of school staff and students. In a 2015 report, *Failing the Grade: Asbestos in America's Schools*, 69.5%, or 3,690 of the 5,309 local education agencies in 15 participating states across The United States, were identified as harboring asbestos (Markey, 2015).

Today, most teachers and students are accustomed to crowding into antiquated buildings and classrooms with limited workers, spaces, and resources. Often spaces for music or art are gutted to make room for more classrooms. Meanwhile, it is commonplace for a newly hired teacher to walk into a classroom lacking curriculum and supplies, prompting many teachers to take it upon themselves to buy materials with their own money for the basic tools necessary to do their job (Litvinov, 2023). For example, despite inflation and low pay, educators spend $500-750 of their own money each year on student supplies (Litvinov, 2023).

To make matters worse, school communities are steadily terrorized by violence, especially gun violence, which has steadily increased over the last 25 years to the point where it is now considered a public health crisis. According to a U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence in 2019, 39 of 41 targeted attacks occurred in public-schools (n = 39, 95%; U.S. Secret Service, 2019). According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2020), in

addition to the loss of life, school shootings result in fear, anxiety, and loss of safety and security for students and school staff. In addition to teaching earthquake and fire drills, teachers now regularly practice active shooter drills.

Despite an increasing concern about violence and despite being perpetually busy during the school day, teachers often stay after hours or bring their work home. According to the 2023 RAND *State of American Teacher* Survey, K–12 public teachers nationwide work an estimated 53 hours a week while being grossly underpaid and report 25% of their work as uncompensated (Steiner et al., 2023). Teachers regularly donate their time during work breaks, lunch breaks, prep periods, and free time out of moral reward or sometimes unwritten work expectations.

In alignment with teacher retention studies, most of the findings on teacher job satisfaction determinants point to salary and other compensation, such as student loan reimbursement, as a major factor in teachers deciding whether they stay or leave the profession. For example, in 1997, nationally, teachers in schools serving the largest concentrations of low-income students earned, at the top of the scale, salaries one-third less than those in higher-income schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997). In a 2023 report by the Economic Policy Institute, a nonprofit nonpartisan think tank, the downward trend in teacher pay since 1996 has today's teachers earning, on average, 73.6 cents for every dollar other professionals made in 2022 (Allegretto, 2022).

In addition to being underpaid, teachers have lacked a sense of control in their decision-making for decades. Today, fierce debates over what teachers should be allowed to do and say in classrooms, an ascendant parents' rights movement seeking control of what children learn at school, recent criticism of teachers from conservative lawmakers and news outlets, and the

lingering aftershocks from the pandemic have all sapped public confidence in the teaching profession (Natanson, 2022).

Teaching is a complex and dynamic profession requiring great attention to detail and organizational planning. Teachers are often in a constant state of motion and communication with students, colleagues, and school community members. In other words, 'there is simply no way to complete all the work for one day in one day'. Given the complexity, prevalence, and persistence of teacher burnout, one of the tough challenges for all researchers in this domain is to decipher how individual factors and organizational factors interplay with one another.

Organizational factors are a key focus in burnout research in the wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic. In the 2024 study, *Understanding Teacher Burnout Following COVID-19, researchers* distributed a survey to 779 teachers across the United States to better understand the predictors of burnout following the COVID-19 Pandemic. Participant responses revealed that at the end of the 2021-2022 school year, learning management systems, administrative support, and teacher autonomy were all significant organizational predictors of burnout alongside teacher mental health (Pressley et al., 2024).

Process

Burnout is a process that can be experienced more than once in a lifetime. The process is fluid and is often categorized into three or more stages or phases. For example, Freudenberger outlined 12 stages of burnout in which an individual's compulsion to prove themself can inadvertently cause a domino effect that ultimately leads to complete exhaustion. The 12 stages of burnout, in order, are: (1) the compulsion to prove oneself, (2) increased effort, (3) neglect of own needs, (4) repression of conflicts and needs, (5) reinterpretation of values, (6) denial of problems, (7) withdrawal, (8) behavioral changes, (9) depersonalization, (10) inner emptiness,

(11) depression, and (12) exhaustion (Freudenberger, 1974). According to Freudenberger, burnout becomes progressively more disruptive, however he does not address the self-awareness of the individual. In comparison, prominent psychologist and anthropologist Dr. Michael Lauderdale agreed burnout had specific stages, or as he called them phases of burnout in his 1982 book *Burnout, Strategies for Personal and Organizational Life: Speculations on Evolving Paradigms*. However, Lauderdale expressed them as (a) confusion, (b) frustration, and (c) desperation (Lauderdale, 1982).

Dr. Cary Cherniss, emeritus professor of Applied Psychology at Rutgers University, also disagrees with Freudenberger on the number of stages. In a 1980 research study, *Professional Burnout in Human Service Organizations*, Cherniss observed 28 human services professionals across mental health, poverty law, public health, and education. He interviewed all participants throughout the first two years of their work and developed a process model of burnout from his findings. Then in a 1995 study, *A Longitudinal Examination of the Cherniss Model of Psychological Burnout*, researchers interviewed 362 educators and found the results support a process model of burnout (Burke & Greenglass, 1995). Today, Maslach and Leiter argue there are no phases or stages of burnout, but rather dimensions of burnout (Table 1). Maslach and Leiter agree that burnout is a complex occupational phenomenon with multiple sources. However, they argue that the process is not linear but rather organic, and the burnout dimensions are inherently interconnected.

Effects

A lengthy list of physical symptoms and behavioral responses characterizes burnout; however, the list differs depending on the researcher. Dr. Freudenberger (1974) states burnout is characterized by physical symptoms such as exhaustion, fatigue, frequent headaches and

gastrointestinal disorders, sleeplessness, and shortness of breath while the World Health Organization's (2019) description of burnout borrowed from Maslach, suggesting emotional and physical exhaustion can manifest as chronic fatigue, insomnia, memory loss, trouble concentrating, anxiety, depression, chest or stomach pain, heart palpitations, shortness of breath, headaches, fainting and dizziness, loss of appetite, and increased illness.

In a 2014 research study, *Burnout Among Senior Teachers: Investigating the Role of Workload and Interpersonal Relationships at Work*, a group of researchers led by Dr. Filip Van Droogenbroeck (2014) found that burnout can result in interpersonal consequences, including conflict, irritably, and reduced communication. Teachers can also endure long-term physical symptoms strongly associated with burnout, including cardiovascular disease, digestive problems, depression, hypertension, and a weakened immune system. In a 2023 systematic review of 21 relevant studies that together included 5267 teachers, burnout was consistently associated with somatic complaints (e.g., headaches), illnesses (e.g., gastroenteritis), voice disorders, and biomarkers of hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal-axis dysregulation (cortisol) and inflammation (cytokines) (Madigan et al., 2023). Ultimately, research has shown that burnout impedes teachers' health while emerging studies have highlighted a ripple effect of negative consequences for the students of teachers experiencing burnout.

Research on teacher burnout also identifies a link to major implications for students. When teachers are stressed, students can become stressed. In a 2016 research study, Eva Oberle and Kimberly A. Schonert-Reichl investigated a link between classroom teacher burnout and morning cortisol levels in elementary school students. Considering 406 elementary student participants across multiple grades, Oberle and Schonert-Reichl (2016) found that when teachers experienced burnout, students had significantly higher cortisol levels than their peers in classes

with non-burnout teachers. According to the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2014), research on the biology of stress now shows that healthy development can be derailed by excessive or prolonged activation of stress response systems in the body and the brain, with damaging effects on learning, behavior, and health across the lifespan.

Additionally, in *Social and Emotional Learning and Teachers,* Kimberly A. Schonert (2017) further explored the importance of teacher wellbeing for students. Schonert explained that teacher beliefs influence the fidelity and success of students' social-emotional learning (SEL). In other words, teachers experiencing burnout are unlikely to be as invested in the content of their lessons, ultimately depriving students of the critical content that will serve their well-being in future years. Considering teachers' importance in students' lives and that education access and quality are key SDOHs, teacher burnout is both a workforce and an equity issue.

Gaps and Limitations

There is extensive literature on burnout, yet today more work is necessary to understand how the global health crisis impacted educators during the pandemic while simultaneously exploring how burnout manifests in them in the pandemic's aftermath. Considering that teacher burnout in the United States is a complex problem requiring immediate action, the first step is changing the way we talk about the issue in research and the media.

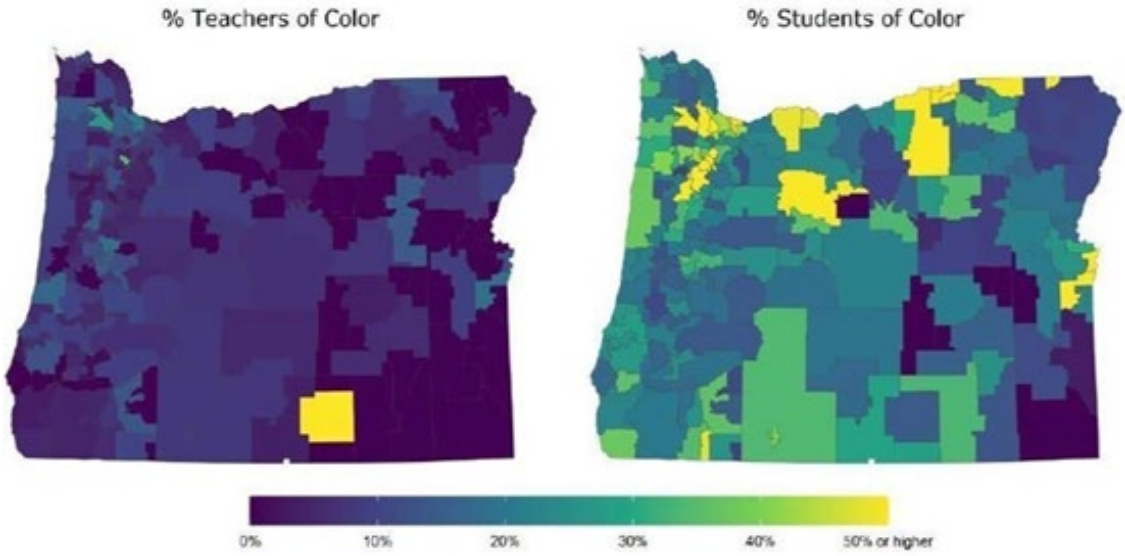
First, a more systematic and theoretical analysis is required to better recruit, actively support, and successfully retain beginning teachers and racially and ethnically diverse teachers. When a teacher experiences burnout and, in many cases, leaves their classroom or the profession of education altogether, it is an incredible loss for students and school communities. This loss is especially poignant because most teachers leaving the profession are beginning teachers. Additionally, teachers in their first years of teaching are especially vulnerable to burnout. They

are often assigned the most demanding workloads, leading to physical and emotional exhaustion. Beginning teachers make up the most racially and ethnically diverse group of teachers The United States has ever had. Meanwhile, the student population across the United States is more diverse than ever, but the K–12 teacher workforce still lags significantly behind the diversity of public-school students (Hansen & Quintero, 2019). For example, the distribution of teachers and students of color differs greatly across Oregon (see Figure 2).

Second, as researchers in education note, more work is necessary to understand how to address the disproportionate rates of teacher burnout in Title I schools still recovering from the COVID-19 Pandemic. In popular media, teacher burnout in Title I schools is often discussed as if it is a medical condition and the treatment suggested is to provide professional development for teachers so they can individually tackle burnout rather than address organizational practices in need of reform. While teachers are often participants in burnout research a major limitation is the lack of longitudinal studies over an academic year or multiple years. Most studies, including this dissertation, offer valuable snapshots of burnout rates; however, they do not provide a comprehensive understanding of how burnout could manifest over a school year. Additionally, burnout is especially common in culturally and ethnically diverse teachers as well as teachers who self-identify as female. It is critically important to investigate why burnout is especially common in specific groups of teachers.

Figure 2

Distribution of Teachers and Students of Color



Note. The distribution of teachers and students of color is based on the school district 2019-2020 Fall membership reveals the diversity of students is overwhelmingly greater than the diversity of teachers with the exception of one spot in southern Oregon with 50% or higher percentage of teachers of color. Source: Oregon Department of Education.

Finally, arguably the toughest challenge for all researchers in this domain is the ambiguity concerning burnout. The sheer number of definitions and theories of burnout means there are many burnout measurements rather than one specific definitive tool. Subsequently, the results on burnout, while often complementary, vary enough that they can lead to confusion. Now that Maslach has set a "gold standard" for burnout measurement, additional studies are needed to understand more completely the key sources and effects of burnout and provide insights that might help educational leaders mitigate burnout. Replication and expansion of prior studies are needed, especially in The United States's most overlooked schools, including schools in rural localities, the focus of my research.

In conclusion, there is robust and comprehensive literature on burnout *and* more research is needed to understand the short-term and long-term effects of burnout concerning COVID-19. Considering the dire need for education reform, researchers who focus on addressing the organizational factors of burnout can help guide federal, state, district, and school continuous improvement. Considering education access and quality for students and working conditions for teachers are both Social Determinants of Health, the widespread problem of teacher burnout in the wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic, is a worthwhile focus for my study.

Expectation

After reviewing a large literature body on burnout in teachers I had five general expectations for the results of my study. First, given teacher burnout is considered a crisis in the United States education system, I hypothesized the majority of participants would self-report burnout across all three RENS. Second, given COVID-19 exists after the pandemic and continually shapes the lives of teachers and students alike, I hypothesized the majority of participants would self-report high rates of burnout in comparison to moderate or low. Third, given the desperate need for educational reform to improve the working conditions of teachers and the learning conditions of students in schools, I hypothesized burnout would be prevalent in both Title I and Non-Title Schools. Fourth, I hypothesized higher rates of burnout would exist in Title I schools in comparison to Non-Title Schools. Finally, I hypothesized that rates of burnout would be more prevalent in the Eastern Oregon Regional Educator Network considering the greatest degrees of geographic isolation across the largest of the three RENs. The following method section outlines why and how I chose to explore teacher burnout in a commonly overlooked setting, rural schools, in my home state of Oregon.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

This study explored the perspectives and experiences of full-time K-6 teachers in primary schools in rural Oregon in the wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic. My goal was to gain a deeper understanding of a common phenomenon, burnout, in a commonly overlooked research setting, rural localities, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The study was inspired by the primary researcher's teacher burnout experience in rural Oregon during the COVID-19 Pandemic and a desire to draw the curtain back on rural schools and move a spotlight onto teacher burnout as a relevant and important area of research.

Research Design

I utilized an adapted free version of The Professional Quality of Life Scale (Pro-QOL-5) (quantitative) to explore the perspectives and experiences of full-time K-6 teachers in rural Oregon during the 2023-2024 academic year. The Pro-QOL-5 is a 30-item self-report questionnaire designed to measure compassion satisfaction (CS), burnout (BO), and STS (STS). Quantitative data from the adapted Pro-QOL-5 was collected, analyzed for comparison, and reported in the results section.

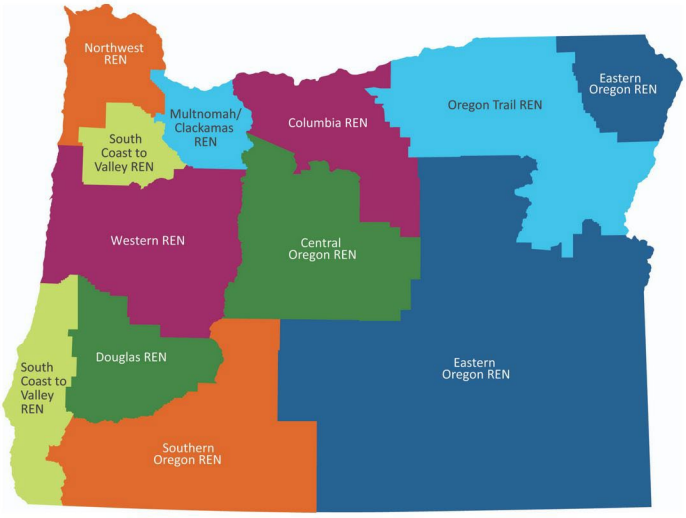
Setting

The study was conducted in primary public-schools within the geographical boundaries of three Regional Educator Networks (REN): (a) the Eastern Oregon Regional Educator Network (EOREN), (b) the Northwest Regional Educator Network (NREN), and the Southern Oregon Regional Educator Network (SOREN). EOREN, NREN, and SOREN are 3 of the 10 established RENS in the state of Oregon created by the Educator Advancement Council in 2017 to address the unique regional needs of folks in education across the state. I did not include the other 7

RENs in the study because of my previous work in the regions as an educator and rotating director on the Educator Advancement Council. Specifically, the Western REN and Multnomah/Clackamas REN are excluded from the study because of my previous work as an educator and union member in both regions. Additionally, the Central Oregon REN, Columbia REN, Douglas REN, South Coast to Valley REN, and Oregon Trail REN are excluded from the study because of my previous work on workgroup committees as a rotating director on the Educator Advancement Council. The Educator Advancement Council (EAC) created the 10 RENS and oversees the work of RENS. The EAC is a public nonprofit organization formed by a 20+ person council investing in initiatives to diversify Oregon's teacher workforce, support Oregon's educators, and create a racially affirming education system.

Figure 3

Regional Educator Network Map



Source: Educator Advancement Council, 2024

Regional Educator Networks

The Eastern Oregon REN (EOREN) is geographically the largest of the RENS. EOREN encompasses five counties: Harney, Grant, Lake, Malheur, and Wallowa. All five counties are rural with a total of 41 school districts, 12 of which are one-room schoolhouses with a handful of staff. According to the EOREN website, by June 30, 2025, 80% of eastern Oregon educators will have equitable access to relevant, sustained, quality professional learning to recruit and retain high-quality educators and develop the capacity of educators to improve learning (EOREN, 2022).

The Northwest REN (NREN) is home to the largest Education Service District (ESD) in Oregon. The NREN region is comprised of more than 20 different school districts across areas in Clatsop, Columbia, Tillamook, and Washington Counties. According to the NREN website, the aim of NREN is that every student is educated, equipped, and inspired to achieve their full potential and enrich their communities (NREN, 2022).

The Southern Oregon REN (SOREN) serves 13 districts across three counties. The SOREN serves Jackson, Josephine, and Klamath Counties with a 37-member advisory team that mirrors the regional demographics with 51% teacher voice. According to the SOREN website, they aim to improve experiences and outcomes for every person, children, and adults, in schools by connecting with courage and compassion to build empathy, shift limiting beliefs, inspire imagination, empower educators, improve school climate, radically transform systems, and ultimately do no harm (SOESD, 2022).

Title I and Non-Title Schools

I initially recruited participants from Title I schools because teacher burnout occurs most often in high-poverty schools. However, after a limited response rate from participants, I broadened the inclusion criteria to include teachers from Non-Title schools. As stated in the

introduction section, Title I federal education program provides additional funding to schools where more than 75% of the student population have families with low incomes that are eligible for free or reduced-price breakfast and lunch subsidies. All Title I and Non-Title Schools in the study reside within rural remote, distant, and fringe localities.

Participants

I employed a non-probability judgment sample to recruit participants for the study. Non-probability judgment sampling is reminiscent of a cluster sampling design. Cluster sampling is a commonly used method in educational research to collect data across a large spread-out population. The population was divided into 6 groupings of participants based on Regional Educator Network (REN) and Title classification (Title I or Non-Title): Group 1: EOREN_Title I, Group 2: NREN_Title I, Group 3: SOREN_Title I, Group 4: EOREN_Non-Title, Group 5: NREN_Non-Title, Group 6: SOREN_Non-Title.

The invitation to participate in the study was sent via the public work emails of 117 teachers in Title I schools and 80 teachers in Non-Title schools for a total of 197 qualifying teachers across the six groups of participants from the three RENs. In all, 23 teachers volunteered for the study, a response rate of 11.6%. All participants were full-time active teachers in primary schools in rural Oregon located in either EOREN, NREN, or SOREN. Thirteen participants worked in a Title I school, and 10 participants worked in a Non-Title school. Six participants worked in schools in EOREN, 13 participants worked in schools in NREN, and 4 participants worked in schools in SOREN. Teachers from pre-kindergarten, middle school, and high school were not eligible for participation. All participants received a statement detailing their rights and a description of the purpose and procedures of the study and signed the informed consent form as a condition of their participation. All participants volunteered

understanding there was no compensation offered for participation in the study. The major demographic characteristics and place of work of the participants are not reported to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants in rural localities in all data collection, analysis, and results.

Instruments

I used multiple tools and techniques to recruit participants, conduct data collection, record and organize participant responses, and conduct data analysis. To recruit participants, I created a Google Form with all the information for participant consent and to record and organize participant information, I used Microsoft Excel (Version 16.67). To conduct quantitative data collection, I employed an adaptation of The Professional Quality of Life (Pro-QOL-5). To record and organize participant responses, I utilized Microsoft Excel (Version 16.67) and IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 20). To organize the many 'to-dos' of the study I utilized Trello (Version 2.12.3).

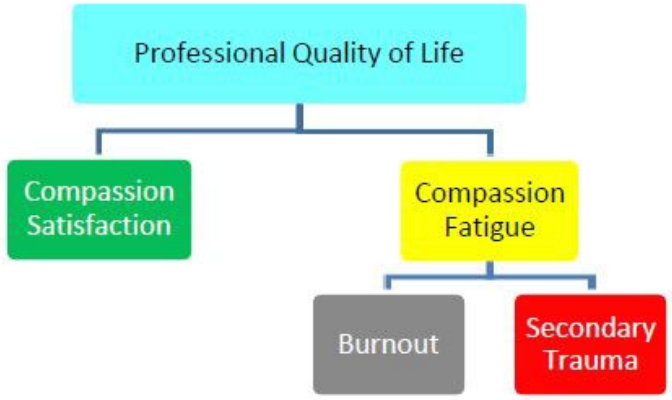
Adapted Pro-QOL-5 Self-Report Questionnaire

The *Professional Quality of Life Scale* (Pro-QOL-5) is a 30-item self-report questionnaire designed to measure compassion satisfaction (CS), burnout (BO), and secondary traumatic stress (STS). According to the 2010 ProQOL-5 Manual, the self-report questionnaire is the most commonly used measure of the positive and negative effects of working people who have experienced extremely stressful events (ProQOL-5 Manual, 2010, pg.12). I chose to use the ProQOL-5 for the study because it is a highly reliable and valid instrument measuring burnout, used in hundreds of peer-reviewed articles. Additionally, unlike the MBI-ES, the Pro-QOL-5 is available for free use.

The Pro-QOL-5 is not a diagnostic tool; rather it can be a guide regarding an individual's or organization's balance of positive and negative experiences related to doing either paid or volunteer work (ProQOL-5 Manual, 2010, pg.18). The Pro-QOL-5 measures compassion satisfaction (CS) and compassion fatigue (see Figure 4). According to the manual, compassion satisfaction is about the pleasure you derive from being able to do your work well, and compassion fatigue is explained in two parts: burnout (BO) and secondary trauma stress (STS) (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Diagram of Professional Quality of Life



Source: ProQOL-5 Manual, 2010, pg.8

The first dimension of compassion fatigue is burnout, characterized by feelings of unhappiness, disconnectedness, and insensitivity to the work environment (ProQOL-5 Manual, 2010). The second dimension is secondary Trauma stress characterized by being preoccupied with the thoughts of people one has helped and the work-related secondary exposure to people who have experienced extremely or traumatically stressful events (ProQOL-5 Manual, 2010). I entered all 30 questions from the ProQOL-5 with minor adaptations in the language of the questions to increase their relevance for my research participants. Specifically, I changed the

phrasing "___" to "teachers" and "___" to "teach". I used Google Forms to create the adapted ProQOL-5 and send it to participants. Google Forms is commonly used in the creation of online forms and surveys that can be shared through a link delivered via email (See Appendix A).

Procedure

Data collection occurred over three months during the 2023-2024 academic school year, from April to June. To recruit participants, I used Microsoft Excel (Version 16.67) to organize the public work emails of full-time active classroom teachers in primary schools in rural areas across EOREN, NSED, and SOREN. To organize the public work emails of possible participants, I utilized public Educator Advancement Council and Oregon Department of Education materials to identify all counties within the boundaries of each REN, districts within the boundaries of each county, and individual schools within each district.

Then, on May 10, 2024, I sent out a Google Form Survey titled "Teacher Experience and Perspective in Rural Oregon in the Wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic". The Google Form Survey was composed of two sections. The first section of the survey explained the study and a Consent for Research Participation statement and signature line for voluntary sign-up, followed by the second section, the adapted ProQOL-5 Survey (see Appendix A). Next, I sent two follow-up emails on May 20, 2024, and May 29, 2024, to recruit more participants for the survey. Each follow-up email included a thank you to participants.

Data Analysis

After all participant responses were collected, I used Microsoft Excel (Version 16.67), SPSS Statistics software, and the ProQOL Manual (2010) to record results and to conduct a comparison analysis of scores by REN and by category of school (Title or Non-Title). The analysis

took place from June to July of 2024 in two phases: (a) primary analysis using raw scores and (2) comparison analysis using descriptive statistics.

First, I conducted a primary analysis of the raw scores of each item by subscale for Compassion Satisfaction (CS), Burnout (BO), and Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) (see Table 4).

Table 4

Adapted Pro-QOL-5 Survey Item by Subcategory

Survey Item	Response Options
Compassion Satisfaction	
3. I get satisfaction from being able to teach students.	(1-5)
6. I feel invigorated after working with those I teach.	(1-5)
12. I like my work as a teacher.	(1-5)
16. I am pleased with how I am able to keep up with the teaching techniques and protocols.	(1-5)
18. My work makes me feel satisfied.	(1-5)
20. I have happy thoughts and feelings about those I teach and how I could help them.	(1-5)
22. I believe I can make a difference through my work	(1-5)
24. I am proud of what I can do as a teacher.	(1-5)
27. I have thoughts that I am a "success" as a teacher.	(1-5)
30. I am happy that I chose to do this work.	(1-5)
Burnout	
*1. I regularly implement(ed) technology in my lessons.	(1-5)
*4. I feel connected to others.	(1-5)
8. I am not as productive at work because I am losing sleep over traumatic experiences of a student I teach.	(1-5)
10. I feel trapped by my job as a teacher.	(1-5)

*15. I have beliefs that sustain me.	(1-5)
*17. I am the person I always wanted to be.	(1-5)
19. I feel worn out because of my work as a teacher.	(1-5)
21. I feel overwhelmed because my workload seems endless	(1-5)
26. I "feel bogged down" by the system.	(1-5)
*29. I am a very caring person	(1-5)
Secondary Traumatic Stress	
2. I am preoccupied with more than one student I teach.	(1-5)
5. I jump or am startled by unexpected sounds.	(1-5)
7. I find it difficult to separate my personal life from my life as a teacher.	(1-5)
9. I think that I might have been affected by traumatic stress of those I teach.	(1-5)
11. Because of my teaching, I have felt "on edge" about various things.	(1-5)
13. I feel depressed because of the traumatic experiences of the students I teach.	(1-5)
14. I feel as though I am experiencing the trauma of someone I have taught.	(1-5)
23. I avoid certain activities or situations because they remind me of the frightening experiences of the students I teach.	(1-5)
25. As a result of my teaching, I have intrusive, frightening thoughts.	(1-5)
28. I can't recall important parts of my work with students who have experienced trauma.	(1-5)

Note. * = Reverse Scores

After I calculated the raw scores of each survey item for each participant, I reversed questions 1,4,15,17, and 29 into 1r, 4r, 15r, 17r, and 29r (1=5) (2=4) (3=3) (4=2) (5=1) in Microsoft Excel. It is important to note the only subcategory with reversed scores is BO. Once the raw scores of each survey item were organized and recorded, I calculated the sums of each subcategory as shown below:

CS = SUM(pq3,pq6,pq12,pq16,pq18,p20,pq22,pq24,pq27,pq30).

BO = SUM(pq1r,pq4r,pq8,pq10,pq15r,pq17r, pq19, pq21, pq26, pq29r)

STS = SUM(pq2,pq5,pq7,pq9,pq11,pq13,pq14,pq23, pq25,pq28).

Finally, I converted the Z scores to t-scores with a raw score mean = 50 and a raw score standard deviation = 10. I then ran descriptive statistics in SPSS for a comparison of each subcategory by REN and by category of school (Title or Non-Title).

Validity and Reliability

The three RENS were specifically chosen to ensure voluntary participation and minimize the possibility of coercion or undue influence on the participants because they were the RENs with which I had previously interacted the least in my former role as rotating director on the Oregon Educator Advancement Council. I did not affiliate with the Educator Advancement Council in communications with the participants. I prioritized survey participant recruitment with teachers with no relationship with the REN whenever possible. Out of an abundance of caution, two school sites that met all inclusion criteria were excluded from the study because I knew an administrator from the school sites.

Limitations

As with all research, this study had methodology and research process limitations. The first major methodological limitation of the study is the small sample size of 197 qualifying participants for the study. The second methodological limitation of the study is the use of self-report data. The Pro-QOL-5 is a widely recognized guide in regard to an individual's or organization's balance of positive and negative experience related to doing either paid or volunteer work however it is important to note that scores can be consciously or unconsciously influenced by biases for example, social desirability. The third methodological limitation of the study is technology, considering the possibility of technological errors including low bandwidth or disconnection. Finally, a major research process limitation was the time constraint.

Researcher Positionality

My interest in Indigenous axiology and methodology inspired the study design, including an epistemology and ontology based on relationships (Wilson, 2008), where the researcher acknowledges as being inseparable from the research subject (Wilson, 2008). Therefore, I adhered to relational accountability: (a) respect, (b) reciprocity, and (c) responsibility with all research participants. Acknowledging the potential for bias was the first step in the mitigation of bias, as evoked in the following quote from *Research as Ceremony: Articulating an Indigenous Research Paradigm*,

> Part of our methodology and axiology is that we are mediators in a growing relationship between the community and whatever it is that is being researched. And how we go about doing our work in that role is where we uphold relational accountability. We are accountable to ourselves, the community, our environment, or the cosmos, and to the idea or topic we are researching. (Wilson, 2008, p. 106)

As a researcher, I believe it is important to be transparent in all aspects of my research, including the inspiration for my study. Before conducting graduate research in education, I taught in rural Oregon primary schools and was a rotating director on the Educator Advancement Council. I am a teacher who experienced burnout and left the classroom. Although I made this choice and recognized it as healthy for me, my students, my colleagues, and other school community members I left behind, I know that my departure was an added stressor on an already struggling system.

In the Fall of 2021, I was assigned to be a second-grade teacher in rural Oregon during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The school district in which I worked was tightly knit and many of the school staff had worked together for decades. The primary school where I taught sat atop a hill

with a garden, an orchard, hiking trails, and sweeping views of the Umpqua Valley. Following school closures across the state, a COVID-19 pandemic-related school closure delayed the start of the school year. Then, school was delayed again, by a major wildfire encompassing 131,542 acres that destroyed over one hundred homes and displaced residents (see Figure 8). Our local and volunteer firefighters worked around the clock to keep the fire from encroaching on the school. Community member volunteers rallied alongside the American Red Cross to address the immediate safety of families. School staff worked together to find ways to support students and families while experiencing grief for their beloved community. By the time school began, the collective exhaustion of the community was palpable.

During the first few weeks of the school year, the staff worked tirelessly to create a sense of normalcy during a time of panic and confusion brought on by the global health crisis and wildfire. Despite our best efforts, the year was full of disruptions. Meanwhile, my original grade assignment changed from teaching second grade in person to second grade in-person and online to kindergarten, to first grade, second grade, and third grade online and in person. I struggled to teach from multiple curriculums while advocating for the follow-through of COVID-19 health protocols at our school.

Subsequently, I experienced chronic stress and burnout and for the first time in my career, tasks that once took little effort became physical exhaustion, and my zealous joy for teaching dissolved. My experience with burnout brought me to an early career change and led me to pursue a doctorate in educational leadership. Today, I am dedicated to ensuring that teachers' perceptions and experiences in schools are actively and authentically heard in local, state, and national decision-making in education. My experiences as a teacher are part of my identity as a

person, and they no doubt impact my research as well. Acknowledging my history is an important part of transparency in research, increasing the trustworthiness of my findings.

Figure 5

My Experience with Burnout

Note. I created the above illustration to depict my own unique experience with burnout over an academic school year. The panels represent the beginning of the school year, the winter, spring, and summer.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Of the 197 participants to whom I sent invitations to participate in the study, 23 educators voluntarily responded to an adapted version of the Pro-QOL-5 Google Survey for a response rate of 11.6%. I utilized the *ProQOL Manual* (2010), Microsoft Excel (Version 16.67), and SPSS Statistics software to record results and to conduct a descriptive statistical analysis of the *Professional Quality of Life Scale* (Pro-QOL-5), a 30-item self-report questionnaire. The analysis was conducted in two phases, a primary analysis and descriptive statistics.

Primary Analysis

Following the *ProQOL Manual* (2010) scoring guide, I organized the total sums of each category by participant, REN, and school classification. The 30 questions comprising the survey are divided into three categories in random order. Questions 3,6,12,16,18,20,22,24,27 and 30 comprise compassion satisfaction (see Table 5), defined as the pleasure a person derives from being able to do their work well.

Table 5

Compassion Satisfaction Questions

Survey Item	Response Options
3. I get satisfaction from being able to teach students.	(1-5)
6. I feel invigorated after working with those I teach.	(1-5)
12. I like my work as a teacher.	(1-5)
16. I am pleased with how I am able to keep up with the teaching techniques and protocols.	(1-5)
18. My work makes me feel satisfied.	(1-5)

20. I have happy thoughts and feelings about those I teach and how I could help them.	(1-5)
22. I believe I can make a difference through my work	(1-5)
24. I am proud of what I can do as a teacher.	(1-5)
27. I have thoughts that I am a "success" as a teacher.	(1-5)
30. I am happy that I chose to do this work.	(1-5)

Questions 1,4,8,10,15,17,19,21,26 and 29 together provide an estimate of a person's Burnout (see Table 6), defined as an element of compassion fatigue associated with feelings of hopelessness and difficulties in dealing with work or doing one's job effectively. The total CS, BO, and STS scores are computed by summing the response selected from the 5-point Likert scale response options, with 1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, and 5=Very Often. It is important to note that the scoring for questions 1,4,15, 17, and 29 are reversed scores (0=0, 1=5, 2=4, 3=3, 4=2, 5=1).

Table 6

Burnout Questions

Survey Item	Response Options
*1. I regularly implement(ed) technology in my lessons.	(1-5)
*4. I feel connected to others.	(1-5)
8. I am not as productive at work because I am losing sleep over the traumatic experiences of a student I teach.	(1-5)
10. I feel trapped by my job as a teacher.	(1-5)
*15. I have beliefs that sustain me.	(1-5)
*17. I am the person I always wanted to be.	(1-5)
19. I feel worn out because of my work as a teacher.	(1-5)

21. I feel overwhelmed because my workload seems endless	(1-5)
26. I "feel bogged down" by the system.	(1-5)
*29. I am a very caring person	(1-5)

Note. * = Reverse Scores

Finally, questions 2,5,7,9,11,13,14,23,25, and 28 measure people's secondary traumatic stress (see Table 7), defined as the second component of compassion fatigue and secondary exposure to extremely or traumatically stressful events at work.

Table 7

Secondary Traumatic Stress Questions

Survey Item	Response Options
2. I am preoccupied with more than one student I teach.	(1-5)
5. I jump or am startled by unexpected sounds.	(1-5)
7. I find it difficult to separate my personal life from my life as a teacher.	(1-5)
9. I think that I might have been affected by traumatic stress of those I teach.	(1-5)
11. Because of my teaching, I have felt "on edge" about various things.	(1-5)
13. I feel depressed because of the traumatic experiences of the students I teach.	(1-5)
14.I feel as though I am experiencing the trauma of someone I have taught.	(1-5)
23. I avoid certain activities or situations because they remind me of the frightening experiences of the students I teach.	(1-5)
25. As a result of my teaching, I have intrusive, frightening thoughts.	(1-5)
28.I can't recall important parts of my work with students who have experienced trauma.	(1-5)

To protect the confidentiality and privacy of participants working in rural communities, some of whom work in schools with fewer than 20 staff members, I exclude the demographics

and school site names of participants from these results. However, I report scores by REN and by Title Category.

At first glance, it was clear participants had a wide range of scores in each category. The scores for CS varied from 22-46 (out of a possible 50), the scores for BO varied from 16-36 (out of a possible 50), and the scores for STS varied from 17-36 (out of a possible 50). I used the *Pro-QOL-5 Manual* to help interpret the scores. According to the Pro-QOL-5 scoring guide, a score of 22 or less equals a *low* level of STS, CS, and BO. Alternatively, a score between 23 and 41 is considered a *moderate* level of STS, CS, and BO, and a score of 42 or more is considered a *high* level of CS, BO, and STS. According to the Pro-QOL manual, the ideal work environment combines high CS with low BO and STS; however, the participant responses of this small study reveal the majority of participants experienced a *moderate* degree of CS, BO, and STS (see Table 8).

Table 8

Total Scores of Participants by Category

Participant	REN	School Classification	CS	BO	STS
1	NSED	Title I	26 (M)	34 (M)	28 (M)
2	NSED	Title I	32 (M)	34 (M)	36 (M)
3	NSED	Title I	38 (M)	34 (M)	34 (M)
4	NSED	Title I	35 (M)	24 (M)	23 (M)
5	NSED	Title I	31 (M)	34 (M)	29 (M)
6	NSED	Title I	36 (M)	29 (M)	30 (M)

7	NSED	Title I	33 (M)	31 (M)	36 (M)
8	NSED	Non-Title	37 (M)	21 (L)	17 (L)
9	NSED	Non-Title	41 (M)	17 (L)	21 (L)
10	NSED	Non-Title	40 (M)	26 (M)	28 (M)
11	NSED	Non-Title	40 (M)	20 (L)	20 (L)
12	NSED	Non-Title	38 (M)	19 (L)	18 (L)
13	NSED	Non-Title	22 (L)	32 (M)	28 (M)
14	SOREN	Title I	38 (M)	32 (M)	34 (M)
15	SOREN	Title I	40 (M)	24 (M)	17 (L)
16	SOREN	Non-Title	34 (M)	33 (M)	33 (M)
17	SOREN	Non-Title	25 (M)	36 (M)	35 (M)
18	EOREN	Title I	31 (M)	35 (M)	35 (M)
19	EOREN	Title I	43 (H)	28 (M)	30 (M)
20	EOREN	Title I	43 (H)	23 (M)	21 (L)
21	EOREN	Title I	41 (M)	22 (L)	18 (L)
22	EOREN	Non-Title	46 (H)	16 (L)	20 (L)
23	EOREN	Non-Title	39 (M)	26 (M)	25 (M)

Note. The scale is 1-50. L = Low, M = Moderate, H = High.

For Survey Item 1, *I am happy*, one teacher in my sample (4%) indicated that they *rarely* experience happiness at work, seven (30%) marked *sometimes*, 13 (57%) marked *often*, and two (9%) marked *very often*. It is important to note all participants experience some degree of happiness at work considering 0 participants marked *never*. For Survey Item 2, *I am preoccupied with more than one student I teach,* four (17%) marked *sometimes*, seven (30%) marked *often*, and twelve (52%) marked *very often*.

The results of Survey Item 2 reveal the majority of participants perceive themselves to be preoccupied with more than one student they teach, and 0 teachers marked *never* or *rarely*. For Survey Item 3*, I get satisfaction from being able to teach students,* three (13%) marked *sometimes*, 11 (48%) marked *often*, and nine (39%) marked *very often*. Similar to Survey Item 1, the responses show all teacher participants self-reported they experience some degree of satisfaction teaching students. Similarly, for Survey Item 4, *I feel connected to others,* four (17%) marked *sometimes*, 12 (52%) marked *often*, and seven (30%) marked *very often*.

For Survey Item 5, *I jump or am startled by unexpected sounds,* eight teachers in my sample (35%) indicated that they *rarely* jump or are startled by unexpected sounds at work, ten (43%) marked *sometimes*, three (13%) marked *often*, and two (9%) marked *very often*. For Survey Item 6, *I feel invigorated after working with those I teach,* six teachers in my sample (26%) indicated that they *rarely* feel invigorated at work, seven (33%) marked *sometimes*, 13 (57%) marked *often*, and two (9%) marked *very often*.

For Survey Item 7, *I find it difficult to separate my personal life from my life as a teacher,* four teachers in my sample (17%) marked *rarely*, eight (35%) marked *sometimes*, six (26%) marked *often*, and five (22) marked *very often*. It is important to note the majority of participants experienced difficulty separating their personal life from their life as a teacher during the 2023-

2024 academic school year. For Survey Item 8, *I am not as productive at work because I am losing sleep over traumatic experiences of a student I* teach, six teachers in my sample (26%) marked *never*, eight teachers in my sample (35%) marked *rarely*, seven (30%) marked *sometimes*, and two (9%) marked *often*. For Survey Item 9, *I think that I might have been affected by the traumatic stress of those I teach,* two teachers in my sample (9%) marked *never*, 6 teachers in my sample (26%) marked *rarely*, five (22%) marked *sometimes*, six (26%) marked *often*, and three (13%) marked *very often.*

For Survey Item 10, *I feel trapped by my job as a teacher,* three teachers in my sample (26%) marked *never*, nine teachers in my sample (39%) marked *rarely*, five (22%) marked *sometimes*, three (13%) marked *often*, and three (13%) marked *very often.* For Survey Item 11, *Because of my teaching, I have felt "on edge" about various things,* three teachers in my sample (13%) marked *never*, six teachers in my sample (26%) marked *rarely*, five (22%) marked *sometimes*, six (26%) marked *often*, and five (22%) marked *very often.* For Survey Item 12, *I like my work as a teacher,* five (22%) marked *sometimes*, thirteen (57%) marked *often*, and five (22%) marked *very often.*

For Survey Item 13, *I feel depressed because of the traumatic experiences of the students I teach,* four teachers in my sample (17%) marked *never*, six teachers in my sample (26%) marked *rarely*, nine (39%) marked *sometimes*, four (17%) marked *often.* For Survey Item 14, *I feel as though I am experiencing the trauma of someone I have taught,* nine teachers in my sample (39%) marked *never*, five teachers in my sample (22%) marked *rarely*, six (26%) marked *sometimes*, two (9%) marked *often*, and one (4%) marked *very often.* For Survey Item 15, *I have beliefs that sustain me,* one teacher in my sample (4%) marked *never*, seven (30%) marked *sometimes*, ten (43%) marked *often*, and five (22%) marked *very often.*

For Survey Item 16, *I am pleased with how I am able to keep up with teaching techniques and protocols,* two teachers in my sample (9%) marked *rarely*, eleven (48%) marked *sometimes*, and ten (43%) marked *often*. For Survey Item 17, *I am the person I always wanted to be,* two teachers in my sample (9%) marked *rarely*, twelve (52%) marked *sometimes*, seven (30%) marked *often*, and one (4%) marked *very often.* For Survey Item 18, *My work makes me feel satisfied*, two teachers in my sample (9%) marked *rarely*, seven (30%) marked *sometimes*, eight (_%) marked *often*, and one (4%) marked *very often.*

For Survey Item 19, *I feel worn out because of my work as a teacher,* eight (34%) marked *sometimes*, three (13%) marked *often*, and 12 (52%) marked *very often.* For Survey Item 20, *I have happy thoughts and feelings about those I teach and how I could help them,* one teacher in my sample (4%) marked *rarely*, four (17%) marked *sometimes*, fifteen (65%) marked *often*, and three (13%) marked *very often.* For Survey Item 21, *I feel overwhelmed because my workload seems endless,* two teachers in my sample (9%) marked *rarely*, seven (30%) marked *sometimes*, four (17%) marked *often*, and ten (43%) marked *very often.*

For Survey Item 22, *I believe I can make a difference through my work,* two teachers in my sample (9%) marked *rarely*, nine (39%) marked *sometimes*, seven (30%) marked *often*, and five (22%) marked *very often.* For Survey Item 23*, I avoid certain activities or situations because they remind me of frightening experiences of the students I teach,* fifteen teachers in my sample (65%) marked *never*, three teachers in my sample (13%) marked *rarely*, and five (22%) marked *sometimes*. For Survey Item 24, *I am proud of what I can do as a teacher,* one teacher in my sample (4%) marked *rarely*, five (22%) marked *sometimes*, fourteen (61%) marked *often*, and three (13%) marked *very often.*

For Survey Item 25, *As a result of my teaching, I have intrusive, frightening thoughts,* ten teachers in my sample (43%) marked *never*, eight teachers in my sample (35%) marked *rarely*, and three (13%) marked *sometimes*, one (4%) marked *often*, and one (4%) marked *very often.* For Survey Item 26, *I feel "bogged down" by the system,* one teacher in my sample (4%) marked *never*, four teachers in my sample (17%) marked *rarely*, five (22%) marked *sometimes*, five (22%) marked *often*, and seven (30%) marked *very often.* For Survey Item 27, *I have thoughts that I am a "success" as a teacher,* four teachers in my sample (17%) marked *rarely*, eleven (48%) marked *sometimes*, seven (30%) marked *often*, and one (4%) marked *very often.*

For Survey Item 28, *I can't recall important parts of my work with students who have experienced trauma,* one teacher in my sample (4%) marked *never*, four teachers in my sample (17%) marked *rarely*, five (22%) marked *sometimes*, five (22%) marked *often*, and seven (30%) marked *very often.* For Survey Item 29, *I am a very caring person,* two (9%) marked *sometimes*, twelve (52%) marked *often*, and nine (39%) marked *very often.* For Survey Item 30, *I am happy that I chose to do this work,* one teacher in my sample (4%) marked *rarely*, seven (30%) marked *sometimes*, ten (43%) marked *often*, and five (22%) marked *very often.*

According to the Pro-QOL Manual (2010), participants who score 23 or lower on the STS scale may encounter job-related problems. Those who score 42 or higher on the STS scale likely experience significant professional satisfaction from their job. Participants who score 23 or lower on the CS scale may also face job-related challenges. Conversely, those who score 42 or higher on the CS scale probably derive substantial professional satisfaction from their work. Participants who score 23 or lower on the BO scale generally feel positive about their work. On the other hand, those who score 42 or higher on the BO scale might want to consider factors at work that could be affecting their effectiveness in their position.

Table 9 displays how many of the participants in my study fell in each of the three scale categories. According to the Pro-QOL Manual (2010), participants who score high in compassion satisfaction (CS), and moderate to low in burnout (BO) and secondary traumatic stress (STS) may "benefit from engagement, opportunities for continuing education, and other opportunities to grow in their position" (p. 22).

Table 9

Number of Participants by Scale Category

	n	**Low**	**Moderate**	**High**
CS	23	0	**20**	3
BO	23	6	**17**	0
STS	23	8	**15**	0

Descriptive Statistics

After I compared the results of the raw data, I totaled the raw sums of the three following categories: (a) Compassion Satisfaction (CS), (b) Burnout (BO), and (c) Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) to reveal the corresponding level of CS, BO, and STS.

CS = SUM(pq3,pq6,pq12,pq16,pq18,p20,pq22,pq24,pq27,pq30).

BO = SUM(pq1r,pq4r,pq8,pq10,pq15r,pq17r, pq19, pq21, pq26, pq29r)

STS = SUM(pq2,pq5,pq7,pq9,pq11,pq13,pq14,pq23, pq25,pq28).

Then, I calculated the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) of each survey item to evaluate whether there were any statistically significant differences in teachers' self-reported degrees of CS, BO, and STS by survey item (see Table 10).

Table 10

Descriptive Statistics by Survey Item

Survey Item	*M*	*SD*
1. I am happy.	85	3.70
2. I am preoccupied with more than one student I teach.	100	4.35
3. I get satisfaction from being able to teach students	98	4.26
4. I feel connected to others.	108	4.13

Table 10

Descriptive Statistics by Survey Item (Continued)

Survey Item	*M*	*SD*
5. I jump or am startled by unexpected sounds.	70	4.70
6. I feel invigorated after working with those I teach.	81	3.04
7. I find it difficult to separate my personal life from my life as a teacher.	51	3.52
8. I am not as productive at work because I am losing sleep over traumatic experiences of a student I teach.	71	2.22
9. I think that I might have been affected by the traumatic stress of those I teach.	71	3.09
10. I feel trapped by my job as a teacher.	63	2.74
11. Because of my teaching, I have felt on edge" about various things.	77	3.35
12. I like my work as a teacher.	92	4.00
13. I feel depressed because of the traumatic experiences of the students I teach.	59	2.57
14. I feel as though I am experiencing the trauma of someone I have taught.	50	2.17
15. I have beliefs that sustain me.	87	3.78
16. I am pleased with how I am able to keep up with the teaching techniques and protocols.	77	3.35

17. I am the person I always wanted to be.	77	3.35
18. My work makes me feel satisfied.	82	3.57
19. I feel worn out because of my work as a teacher.	96	4.17
20. I have happy thoughts and feelings about those I teach and how I could help them.	89	3.87
21. I feel overwhelmed because my workload seems endless.	91	3.96
22. I believe I can make a difference through my work.	84	3.65
23. I avoid certain activities or situations because they remind me of the frightening experiences of the students I teach.	36	1.57
24. I am proud of what I can do as a teacher.	88	3.83

Table 10

Descriptive Statistics by Survey Item (Continued)

Survey Item	*M*	*SD*
25. As a result of my teaching, I have intrusive, frightening thoughts.	44	1.91
26. I "feel bogged down" by the system.	82	3.57
27. I have thoughts that I am a "success" as a teacher.	74	3.22
28. I can't recall important parts of my work with students who have experienced trauma.	37	1.61
29. I am a very caring person.	99	4.30
30. I am happy that I chose to do this work.	88	3.83

Table 11 displays the standardized means and standard deviations for my sample's response to the Pro-QOL, divided by Non-Title and Title school designation, with a raw score mean of 50 and a raw score standard deviation of 10. The averages in participant responses for

each subcategory reveal teachers in my sample are experiencing *moderate* to *moderately high* levels of compassion satisfaction, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress. In all categories, the average score fell under *moderate* rather than *low* or *high*. Because my sample was so small, there was insufficient power for further group comparison analyses.

Table 11

Standardized Average Scale Scores by Category of School

	School Category	***n***	***M***	***SD***
CS	Non Title	10	24.60	2.252
	Title	13	29.54	1.343
BO	Non Title	10	24.50	1.996
	Title	13	28.54	1.876
STS	Non Title	10	36.20	2.337
	Title	13	35.92	1.439

Because I was also interested in examining potential differences based on geographic area, I compiled the results by REN as well. The descriptive statistics provide some useful insights. Teachers from EOREN scored an average of 6 points higher on the CS scale than teachers in either NREN or SOREN. In contrast, teachers from SOREN scored an average of 4 and 6 points higher on the Burnout scale than teachers from NREN and EOREN, respectively. This same pattern also held for the STS scale, with teachers from SOREN scoring an average of

3 and 5 points higher on the STS scale than teachers from NREN and EOREN, respectively (see Table 12).

Table 12

Standardized Average Scale Scores by REN

	REN	***n***	***M***	***SD***
CS	NREN	13	34.54	5.666
	SOREN	4	34.25	6.652
	EOREN	6	40.50	5.206
BO	NREN	13	27.31	6.447
	SOREN	4	31.25	5.123
	EOREN	6	25.00	6.387
STS	NREN	13	26.77	6.508
	SOREN	4	29.75	8.539
	EOREN	6	24.83	6.555

Finally, I ran a series of *t*-tests to compare participant responses across the three RENS for each subcategory: CS, BO, and STS (See Table 10). It is important to note that, as with the comparison between teachers working in Title and Non-Title schools, my sample size was too small for meaningful group comparisons. Thus, these *t*-test results should be viewed with

caution. Not surprisingly given the small sample, I found no statistically significant differences in teacher responses to the Pro-QOL based on REN. Despite the small sample size, however, the results do suggest some interesting differences in teacher responses to the Pro-QOL, depending on which REN they worked in.

Table 13

T-Test by REN

	REN	***REN Comparison***	***Mean Difference***	***Std. Error***	***Sig***
CS	NREN	SOREN	-5.962	2.821	.142
		EOREN	.288	3.268	1.000
	SOREN	NREN	5.962	2.821	.142
		EOREN	6.250	3.690	.317
BO	NREN	SOREN	2.308	3.085	1.000
		EOREN	-3.942	3.574	.849
	SOREN	NREN	2.308	3.085	1.000
		EOREN	6.250	4.035	.411
STS	NREN	SOREN	1.936	3.387	1.000
		EOREN	-2.981	3.924	1.000

SOREN	NREN	1.936	3.387	1.000
	EOREN	4.917	4.430	.841

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The study had too few participants for robust group comparisons; however, the results of the study do provide a jumping-off point for researchers and educational leaders in Oregon to explore further the conditions of teachers in rural public schools in the wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The results of this exploratory quantitative study hint at burnout as a *moderately* relevant phenomenon in rural Oregon in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Considering the small size and scope of the study, additional studies are needed to better understand how and why burnout manifests. The study adds to a growing literature on the well-being of teachers in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and to a smaller body of literature on teacher burnout across the rural United States.

Interpretation of Findings

The results of the study did not fully align with my original five hypotheses. First, the majority of participants self-reported burnout across all three RENS. Additionally, the majority of participants self-reported moderate levels of compassion satisfaction and secondary traumatic stress. Second, the majority of participants self-reported moderate levels of burnout when I had expected a different outcome: high levels of burnout. One interesting finding is moderate degrees of burnout exist alongside moderate degrees of compassion satisfaction, and similarly moderate degrees of compassion satisfaction exist alongside moderate degrees of secondary traumatic stress. Similar to Santoro's argument that burnout and demoralization can exist alongside one another, I can imagine an investigation of burnout alongside compassion satisfaction could reveal an "and" situation rather than "or".

Before the study, given the desperate need for educational reform to better the working conditions of teachers and the learning conditions of students in schools, I hypothesized burnout would be prevalent in both Title I and Non-Title schools. Indeed, moderate degrees of burnout were found across both school categories. It is also important to note there was a noticeable difference between burnout averages of Non-Title, (M=24.50), compared to Title I (M=28.54) schools. Although these differences were not sufficiently large to be statistically significant, the small sample size may well be the reason for the lack of statistical significance. Had my sample been larger, there would have been sufficient statistical power to detect differences if they truly existed. The results align with my original hypothesis, that higher rates of burnout would exist in Title I schools in comparison to Non-Title schools.

Finally, rates of burnout were not more prevalent in the Eastern Oregon Regional Educator Network despite it having the greatest degree of geographic isolation across the largest of the three RENs. The small sample size may well be the reason for the lack of statistical significance. Had my sample been larger, there would have been sufficient statistical power to detect differences if they truly existed. All participants across the three RENS reported finding happiness in their work and satisfaction from teaching students.

Trustworthiness of Study

The Pro-QOL-5 is considered a reliable measure of the positive and negative effects of working people who have experienced extremely stressful events. It also happens to be one of the most commonly used measures of burnout alongside *The Maslach Burnout Inventory* (MBI). Scoring of participant responses followed the instructions provided in the Pro-QOL Manual to add to the reliability of the study.

My position as the principal investigator of this study, as a former director of the Educator Advancement Council, and as a former teacher all had the potential to introduce bias into the study. To reduce the potential impact of bias, I ensured the inclusion criteria for participants included 'I have never previously worked with them as a director on the EAC or a member of a REN'. Additionally, any RENS I formally worked in as a teacher were excluded from the study for this same reason.

All components of the study and the dissertation as a whole are meticulously organized on an external hard drive with password protection. In addition to protecting the confidentiality and privacy of participants in the study, the external hard drive files demonstrate organizational skills and research trust and transparency during each step of the process. Alongside each data set, I provided a narrative for my research.

In any study using a self-report measure, participants can exaggerate or underreport their perceptions and experiences due to social desirability bias, possible lack of time, and the conditions of the particular work day on which they took the survey. Considering a self-report measure will inherently involve a threat to internal and external validity, future studies could include additional sources of data. For example, data source triangulation through the inclusion of survey responses, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups could make for a more robust and comprehensive report. Originally, I had hoped to include a triangulation of data collection methods to mitigate threats to internal validity; however, due to a lack of participant willingness to be interviewed or participate in focus groups, the study was pared down to one method of data collection.

Having so few participants poses a threat to external validity, as it is difficult to generalize the findings, even across greater rural Oregon. In an attempt to mitigate the small

sample size, I increased study recruitment to include teachers in Non-Title schools in rural areas in the three participating RENS. To mitigate the potential negative impact of the timing of the study, during one of the busiest times of the academic year, I created a survey that was relatively straightforward and quick to complete.

Comparison with Existing Literature

All participants struggled to some extent with separating their personal lives from their roles as teachers. The reasoning behind why it was difficult to separate personal lives from work may not be known; however, one reason *could be* the workload. When presented with the statement, *I feel overwhelmed because my workload seems endless,* two teachers in my sample (9%) marked *rarely*, seven (30%) marked *sometimes*, four (17%) marked *often*, and ten (43%) marked *very often.* This result ties in well with previous studies by Freudenberger (1975) wherein burn-out is defined as failure or exhaustion because of excessive demands on energy, strength, or resources. Freudenberger also comments on how burnout is due to a constant workload strain whenever the expectation level of work is dramatically opposed to the reality and the person persists in trying to reach that expectation (Freudenberger, 1980). Similarly, in *The Burnout Challenge: Managing People's Relationships with Their Jobs* (2002), Maslach and Leiter outline six sources of burnout, and workload—defined as the extent to which demands are manageable or overwhelming—is the first source.

Although I found no statistically significant differences when comparing teacher responses from the different RENs or when comparing responses of teachers working in Title and Non-Title schools, the results do align with a commonly agreed-upon theory in helping professions. Helping professionals are prone to experiencing varying levels of burnout and secondary traumatic stress due to the dynamic nature of their jobs helping individuals or groups.

The averages in participant responses for each subcategory reveal teachers in my sample were experiencing *moderate* to *moderately high* levels of compassion satisfaction, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress. In a 1991 study, *A Study of Burnout and Job Satisfaction among Rural School Counselors*, rather than use the Pro-QOL-5 as in my study, Stickel surveyed 147 counselors in rural schools using the *Maslach Burnout Inventory for Educators* and found moderate levels of both emotional exhaustion and depersonalization.

In the 2009 study *An Appraisal Perspective of Teacher Burnout: Examining the Emotional Work of Teachers*, Chang argues that more studies are necessary to help teachers (helping professionals) better understand how their emotions are triggered to better learn how to regulate emotions at work. In other words, Chang advocates for teachers to critically think about their emotional reactions at work, for example, with students. Similar to Chang, the authors of the Pro-QOL-5 state the self-report measure can lead to introspection and brainstorming; however, they go a step further to explain that the measure might prompt people to consider, "what is right and what can be made better and what is wrong and what cannot be made better" (Pro QOL 5 Manual, p. 24).

In a 2023 study, *Mental Health and Quality of Professional Life of Healthcare Workers: One Year after the Outbreak of the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Rania & Brucci, 2023), 85 healthcare workers in hospitals in northwestern Italy took the ProQOL 5 one year after the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic. When comparing levels of compassion satisfaction, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress in workers during the first wave of the Pandemic vs after the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic, researchers found differences in burnout levels from one year to the next were not statistically significant. However, a second measurement used, the MBI, revealed significant differences regarding emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal

accomplishment. For example, in terms of emotional exhaustion, the mean score was statistically significantly higher after the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic. In comparison to my study, the larger sample size and the use of multiple measures provided a comprehensive exploration of burnout. Using the *Professional Quality of Life Scale* could be helpful in that it would enable comparison of results with previous studies.

Implications for Educational Practice

We have to first change the way we talk about burnout to properly address burnout. The occupational phenomenon is a complex syndrome. However, even after 50 years of clinical studies, it is often oversimplified as a medical condition or a unilateral issue. Burnout is a multidimensional occupational phenomenon; however, it is often called a unilateral medical diagnosis with quick-fix solutions (Robinson, 2024). At first glance, the variations in definitions can be overwhelming and simultaneously telling. It is widely known teachers are experiencing stress and burnout. Given the sheer amount of literature and national news stories on burnout, it is clear there is no one thing causing burnout and there is no quick-fix solution. Burnout is a constant issue in education (Menter, 2022), and considering the limited research on post-pandemic burnout, and the multidimensional nature of burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2022), additional studies are needed to understand how to address burnout in teachers. Leading researchers in burnout agree additional studies are beneficial in understanding the complex occupational phenomenon. and in a 2023 interview with Jason Pohl for Berkeley News, Dr. Maslach advocated for workers:

> If you think of the mantra that has been around forever—If you can't take the heat, get out of the kitchen—it's a recognition of a gap, a mismatch between the job and the person. But it's saying, "It's your problem. If you can't do it, then go away. Don't be

here." Meanwhile, nothing is being raised about the space itself. Could the heat be turned down? Could we redesign the kitchen to be a better place? (Pohl, 2023, para. 19)

Changing the way we talk about burnout is critical because it can help change the way we prescribe treatment for burnout. In the years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, during the pandemic, and in the aftermath of the pandemic educational organizations, for example, districts or schools, invest in increasing the individual resiliency of teachers. For example, districts often spend precious dollars on professional development for teachers, focusing on how individual workers can prevent and treat burnout with mindfulness techniques, such as breathing, or continuous self-improvement. In doing so, the message the district sends to teachers is it is the teachers' responsibility rather than the working organizations' responsibility to address burnout. Professional development with a focus on mindfulness can be helpful for individual teachers to mitigate stressors and model mindfulness for students, however, it is not a solution. Considering the leading researchers in burnout agree it is not only individual factors but also organizational factors and transactional factors that contribute to burnout, inviting teachers to address organizational and transactional factors with leadership is critically imperative. Additionally, considering the dire need for education reform, researchers who focus on addressing burnout's organizational factors can help guide continuous improvement efforts.

Recommendations for Educational Practice

Educational organizations at state, district, and school leadership levels can utilize self-report assessments to conduct longitudinal studies on teacher burnout. Considering teaching is a helping profession, and therefore prone to burnout, utilizing self-assessments regularly can regularly inform organizations of common sources of burnout while monitoring the levels of burnout in workers. Additionally, it could be novel to utilize self-assessment to monitor recovery

from burnout considering self-assessments are recognized as a tool in recovery. For example, in a 2023 study, *School and Intrapersonal Predictors and Stability of Rural Special Education Teacher Burnout,* a team of researchers distributed a longitudinal survey of burnout to 48 rural special education teachers over four-time points through the academic year just prior to COVID-19 (Ruble et al., 2023). Findings revealed burnout as prevalent and stable across the four-time points. Self-assessments, for example, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI-GS), can cost money while others, for example, the Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL), are free for use for organizations on a tight budget. Considering my study revealed moderate levels of burnout alongside moderate levels of compassion satisfaction, a possible future study could investigate the degree to which both experiences might exist simultaneously in a greater population size across rural Oregon.

Educational organizations at a state, district, and school leadership level can utilize qualitative data collection methods to conduct longitudinal studies on teacher burnout. Self-assessments are commonly used by healthcare professionals, work organizations, and individual workers to help identify and monitor symptoms and behaviors of burnout; however, they are not the only measurement for burnout. The assessments provide snapshots in time; however, collecting rich qualitative narratives through semi-structured interviews and focus groups could provide a more comprehensive understanding of burnout. For example, future studies could improve the depth of data collected by asking participants to respond to the following semi-structured interview questions:

1. How would you describe your workload this school year?
2. Can you give specific examples of tasks or responsibilities, if any, that contributed to you feeling overwhelmed or stressed?

3. In what ways did you feel empowered in making decisions about your teaching methods and classroom environment?
4. In what ways did you feel constrained in making decisions about your teaching methods and classroom environment?
5. What aspects of your job did you find particularly fulfilling and/or rewarding this school year?
6. In what areas, if any, did you feel underappreciated or lacking in recognition for your efforts?
7. How did your relationships with colleagues and the broader school community impact your experience this year?
8. Were there support systems or challenges within the community and/or specific individuals that stand out to you?
9. Did you perceive school policies and administrative decisions as fair and equitable?
10. Can you share any specific experiences where fairness or lack thereof influenced your job satisfaction and/or feelings of burnout?
11. Reflecting on your personal values and beliefs about teaching, how aligned do you feel your current role is with these values?
12. Are there aspects of your job that challenge or reinforce your professional values?
13. How did experiencing burnout affect your overall well-being and mental health this school year?
14. What coping strategies did you find effective, and what support would you find most helpful moving forward?

15. Looking ahead, what changes or improvements would you like to see implemented to address burnout among teachers in your school?
16. How do you envision these changes impacting your own job satisfaction and effectiveness as an educator?

Self-assessments, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups could be used in a single study for triangulation of methods and a deep dive into the perspective and experiences of teachers in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to researching burnout in rural schools, it is important to address the teacher workforce conditions and policies shaping the lives of teachers and students in rural schools. Grow Your Own and Teacher Preparation programs both attempt to address teacher workforce conditions. In the state of Oregon, the Grow Your Own Program seeks to eliminate systemic barriers and provide equitable professional pathways in education for African American, Black, American Indian, Alaska Native, Asian, Indigenous, Latinx, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and Multi-racial teachers. Through this program, high school students in their junior and senior years interested in becoming teachers begin training with dual-credit college courses and receive discounted tuition rates. Grow Your Own programs develop teaching workforces within local communities and prepare students for a profession in teaching. Considering the prevalence of burnout in my small study alongside a large body of literature on a teacher burnout crisis, it is critically important students develop a general understanding of burnout. Understanding how to define, assess, and destigmatize burnout can empower students who will someday be teachers to identify individual, organizational, and transactional factors of burnout in their workplaces. Carving out a space to discuss burnout also encourages students to find pathways of resiliency whether through leadership or individual reflection.

Established in 2007 through the passage of HB 2574, Beginning Teacher and Administrator Mentorship programs have historically championed for better educator working conditions. Mentorship programs are flagships for teacher advocacy however they alone cannot combat teacher burnout. At a state government level, including voices in decision-making has to be a practice extended to the farthest corners of Oregon to be in alignment with the values of the Oregon Department of Education and Educator Advancement Council. Including voices in decision-making in active ways is possible, and it is sustainable despite the vast stretches of land and geographic isolation of teachers across rural Oregon. There are many ways to include the teacher's voice and one active way is to provide pathways for leadership, for example, by continuing the Regional Educator Networks.

One specific area of interest educational state organizations and grassroots efforts could investigate an interesting finding from my study, compassion satisfaction and burnout existed alongside one another. For example, despite moderate to moderately high levels of burnout, all participants across the three RENS reported finding happiness in their work and satisfaction from teaching students. Further research on how compassion satisfaction and burnout could interplay with one another may also help shift the conversation on burnout, from a deficit of the individual to a need for organizational reform.

Limitations and Future Research

My study had several major limitations. First, a major methodological limitation of the study is the small sample size. Only 23 out of 197 – or 11.6% – qualifying participants volunteered to complete the adapted Pro-QOL-5 Survey. This sample size is too small for statistical analysis and likely does not capture the full range of perspectives within the much larger population of full-time active teachers across rural Oregon. Future studies may benefit

from including teachers across a wider range of grade levels and RENs to increase the sample size and make comparisons by geographic area and Title versus Non-Title schools viable.

A second major methodological limitation of the study was the timing of data collection, during one of if not *the* busiest times of the year (April-June). Teachers could have a variety of reasons for not participating in the survey, for example, lack of time after a long school day, lack of interest in the study, or lack of energy – possibly due to burnout associated with additional responsibilities on teachers at the end of the year. Similarly, the timeline for data collection and data analysis was short.

Another major limitation is the lack of participant demographics, which limits the ability to deepen the analysis. However, the decision to omit demographic information was intentional. Omitting participant demographics helps protect the confidentiality and privacy of participants in rural areas, where providing too much detail about participants' backgrounds might reveal their identities. Thus, the study provides a general understanding of burnout across a small sample rather than a comprehensive analysis of responses across various groups of participants. Future studies on a larger scale may also benefit from including multiple survey points throughout the year for a longitudinal study to track teacher perceptions and experiences across time.

Conclusion

Historically, rural schools across the United States are largely overlooked or altogether left out of research and policy conversations. In 2024, after the COVID-19 Pandemic, COVID-19 remains a global health concern. School is back in session with more than one-third of all Oregon students in rural areas across the 10 Regional Educator Networks. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated key issues facing Oregon's Education system including student achievement gaps, student mental health, teacher shortages, and teacher burnout. In the wake of

the COVID-19 Pandemic, efforts made to address burnout and any of the above issues require a shift in conversation.

Rural communities face greater geographic isolation and often fewer resources in comparison to urban areas; therefore, rural communities are often discussed with a 'deficit' lens. Considering the widespread prevalence and spotlight on burnout in urban areas across the state in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, maybe rural communities can provide an insight into what is working well. Given teacher burnout is considered a crisis across the state, my study hints at the possibility rural schools have lower rates of burnout when compared to urban areas. It may be worthwhile for researchers to explore the individual factors, organizational factors, and transactional factors in rural schools to identify sources of burnout and also, sources of compassion satisfaction.

APPENDIX A

SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. I am happy.

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

2. I am preoccupied with more than one student I teach.

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

3. I get satisfaction from being able to teach students.

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

4. I feel connected to others.

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

5. I jump or am startled by unexpected sounds.

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

6. I feel invigorated after working with those I teach.

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

7. I find it difficult to separate my personal life from my life as a teacher.

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

8. I am not as productive at work because I am losing sleep over traumatic experiences of a student I teach.

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

9. I think that I might have been affected by the traumatic stress of those I teach.

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

10. I feel trapped by my job as a teacher.

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

11. Because of my teaching, I have felt "on edge" about various things.

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

12. I like my work as a teacher.

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

13. I feel depressed because of the traumatic experiences of the students I teach.

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

14. I feel as though I am experiencing the trauma of someone I have taught.

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

15. I have beliefs that sustain me.

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

16. I am pleased with how I am able to keep up with teaching techniques and protocols.

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

17. I am the person I always wanted to be.

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

18. My work makes me feel satisfied.

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

19. I feel worn out because of my work as a teacher.

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

20. I have happy thoughts and feelings about those I teach and how I could help them.

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

21. I feel overwhelmed because my work load seems endless.

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

22. I believe I can make a difference through my work.

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

23. I avoid certain activities or situations because they remind me of frightening experiences of the students I teach.

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

24. I am proud of what I can do as a teacher.

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

25. As a result of my teaching, I have intrusive, frightening thoughts.

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

26. I feel "bogged down" by the system.

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

27. I have thoughts that I am a "success" as a teacher.

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

28. I can't recall important parts of my work with students who have experienced trauma.

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

29. I am a very caring person.

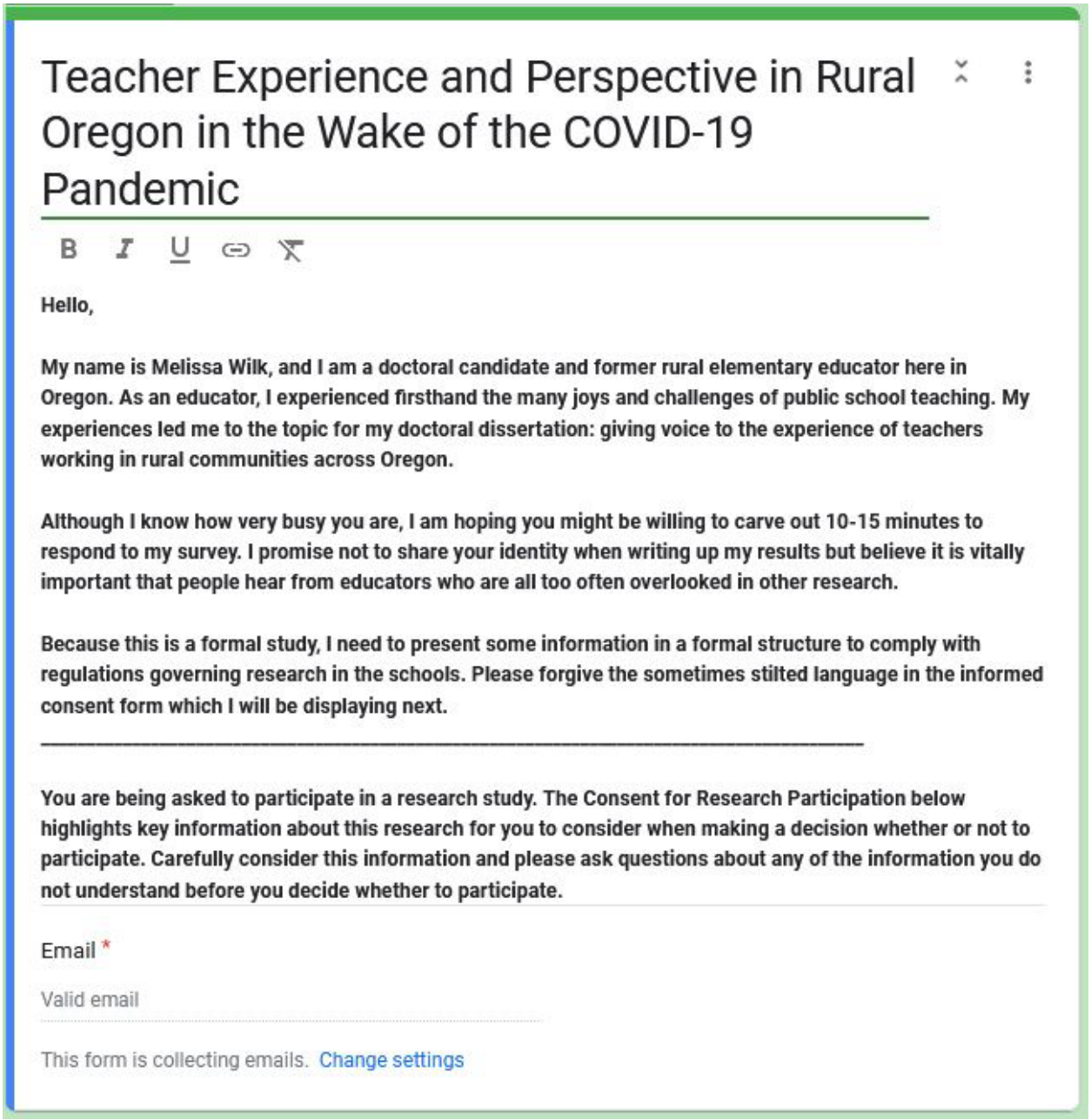
- ○ Very Often
- ○ Often
- ○ Sometimes
- ○ Rarely
- ○ Never

30. I am happy that I chose to do this work.

- ○ Very Often
- ○ Often
- ○ Sometimes
- ○ Rarely
- ○ Never

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT



Teacher Experience and Perspective in Rural Oregon in the Wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic

B I U

Hello,

My name is Melissa Wilk, and I am a doctoral candidate and former rural elementary educator here in Oregon. As an educator, I experienced firsthand the many joys and challenges of public school teaching. My experiences led me to the topic for my doctoral dissertation: giving voice to the experience of teachers working in rural communities across Oregon.

Although I know how very busy you are, I am hoping you might be willing to carve out 10-15 minutes to respond to my survey. I promise not to share your identity when writing up my results but believe it is vitally important that people hear from educators who are all too often overlooked in other research.

Because this is a formal study, I need to present some information in a formal structure to comply with regulations governing research in the schools. Please forgive the sometimes stilted language in the informed consent form which I will be displaying next.

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The Consent for Research Participation below highlights key information about this research for you to consider when making a decision whether or not to participate. Carefully consider this information and please ask questions about any of the information you do not understand before you decide whether to participate.

Email *

Valid email

This form is collecting emails. Change settings

I am very interested in hearing from teachers who would be willing to share more about the topics discussed in this survey. I am hoping to talk one-on-one with 15 or so rural educators to help deepen my understanding of their experiences.

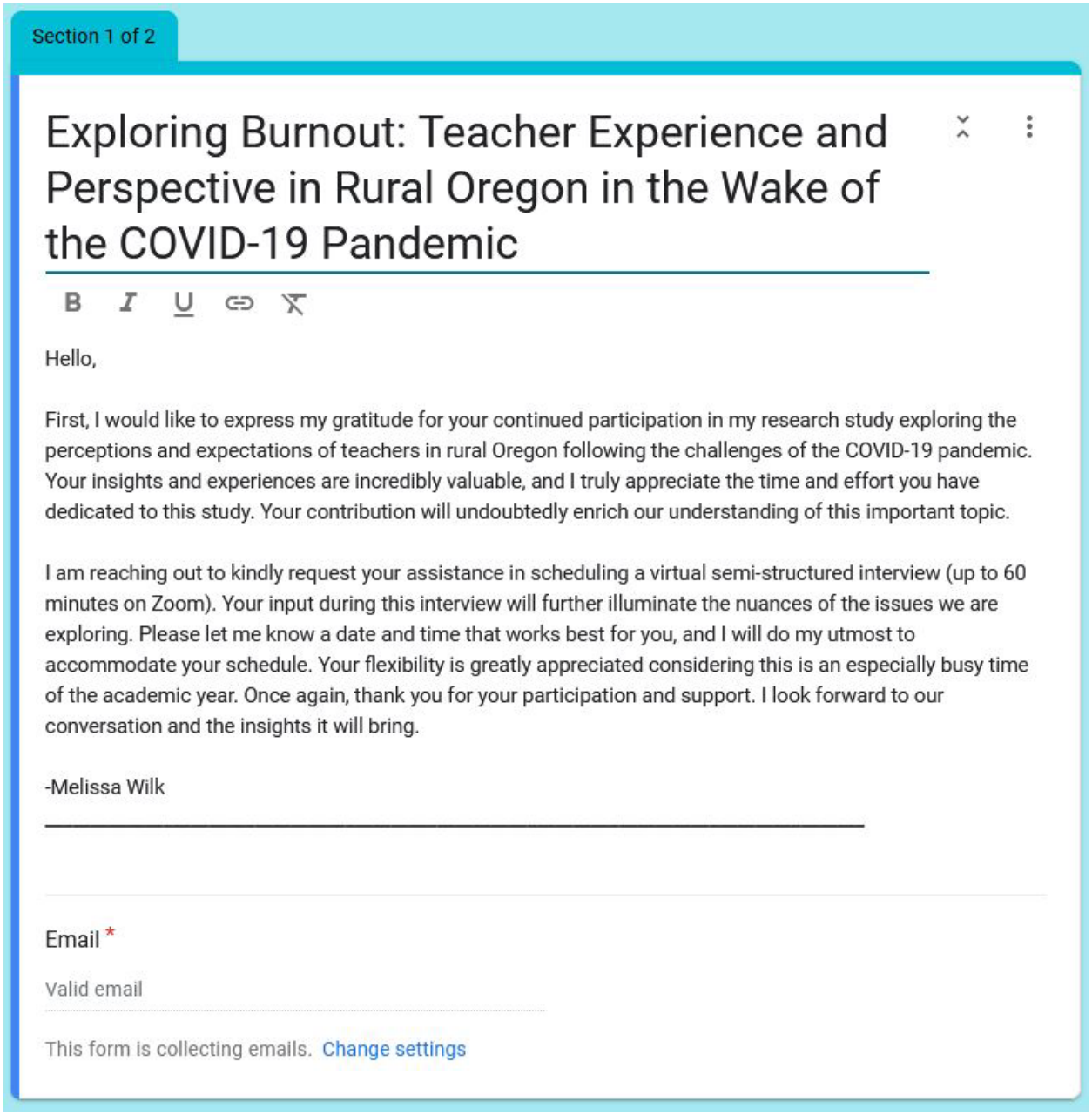
The length of these interviews will vary, based on how much a person is willing to share, but I anticipate that we will spend at least half an hour talking to each other.

If you are interested in participating in a one-time semi-structured interview to explore further the topics discussed in the survey, please provide your email address below.

Your email will only be used to contact you regarding this interview opportunity and will be kept confidential. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you are under no obligation to provide your email or participate in the interview.

Thank you for considering this opportunity to contribute to my research!

Short answer text


Section 1 of 2
Exploring Burnout: Teacher Experience and Perspective in Rural Oregon in the Wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic
Hello,
First, I would like to express my gratitude for your continued participation in my research study exploring the perceptions and expectations of teachers in rural Oregon following the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Your insights and experiences are incredibly valuable, and I truly appreciate the time and effort you have dedicated to this study. Your contribution will undoubtedly enrich our understanding of this important topic.
I am reaching out to kindly request your assistance in scheduling a virtual semi-structured interview (up to 60 minutes on Zoom). Your input during this interview will further illuminate the nuances of the issues we are exploring. Please let me know a date and time that works best for you, and I will do my utmost to accommodate your schedule. Your flexibility is greatly appreciated considering this is an especially busy time of the academic year. Once again, thank you for your participation and support. I look forward to our conversation and the insights it will bring.
-Melissa Wilk
Email *
Valid email
This form is collecting emails. Change settings

Section 2 of 2

Schedule Availability to Participate in an Interview

Hello,

I hope this message finds you well. As we move forward with our research study, I would like to kindly request your input regarding scheduling a one-time semi-structured virtual interview.

I want to ensure that the interview is scheduled at a time that is convenient for you. Could you please let me know which dates and times work best for you over the next few weeks?

I'm more than happy to accommodate your schedule, so feel free to suggest times that suit you best. Your flexibility is greatly appreciated, and I look forward to our conversation.

Thank you once again,

Warm regards,

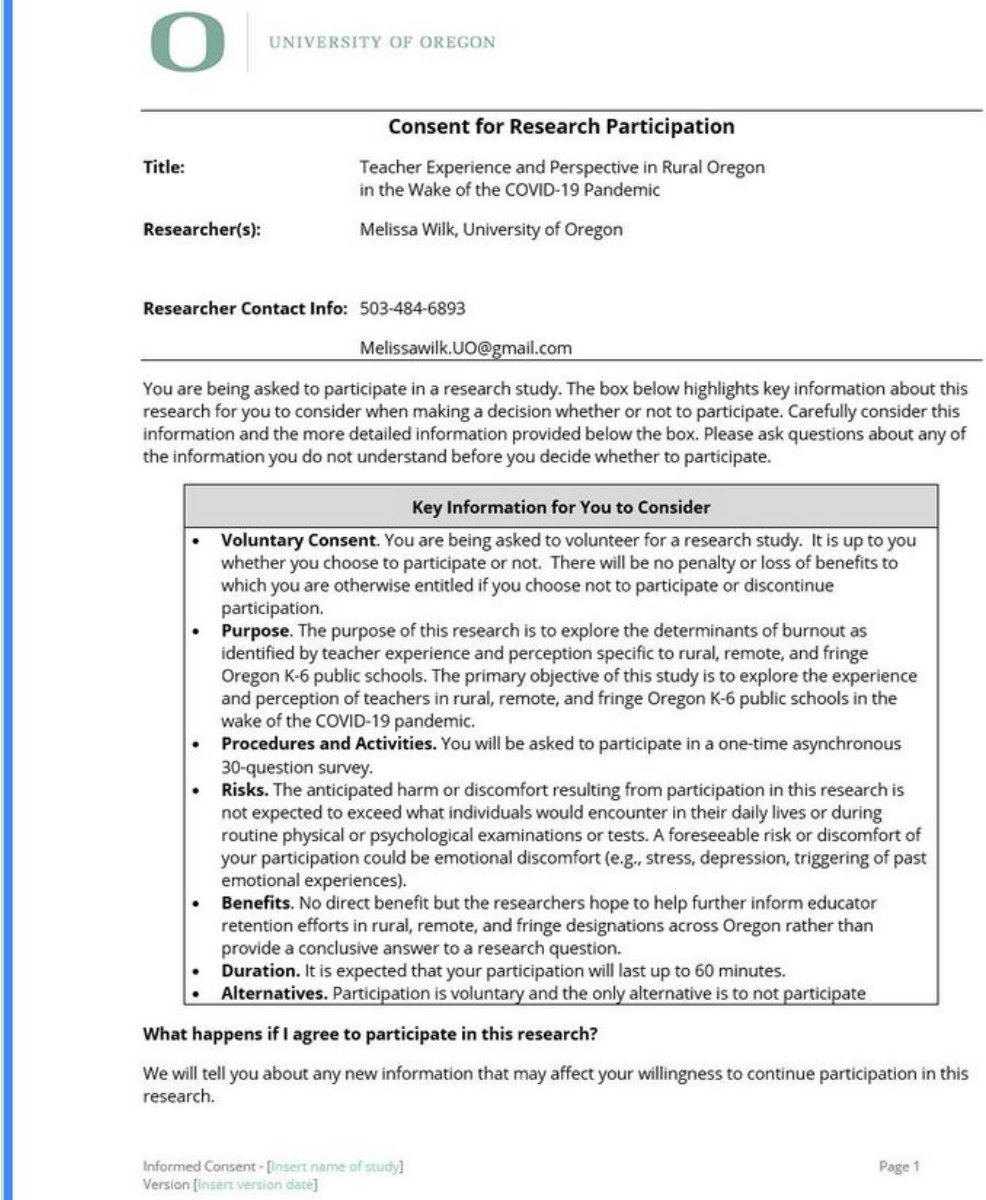
Melissa Wilk

If you are still interested in participating in an interview please provide a list of the days and times you're available for a virtual interview via Zoom. The interview will be up to one hour long and can be scheduled on any day of the week, including weekends, between June 12th and June 30th, 2024. Thank you very much for your time and participation!

Long answer text

CONSENT FORMS

Image title



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Consent for Research Participation

Title: Teacher Experience and Perspective in Rural Oregon in the Wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Researcher(s): Melissa Wilk, University of Oregon

Researcher Contact Info: 503-484-6893

Melissawilk.UO@gmail.com

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The box below highlights key information about this research for you to consider when making a decision whether or not to participate. Carefully consider this information and the more detailed information provided below the box. Please ask questions about any of the information you do not understand before you decide whether to participate.

Key Information for You to Consider

- **Voluntary Consent**. You are being asked to volunteer for a research study. It is up to you whether you choose to participate or not. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate or discontinue participation.
- **Purpose**. The purpose of this research is to explore the determinants of burnout as identified by teacher experience and perception specific to rural, remote, and fringe Oregon K-6 public schools. The primary objective of this study is to explore the experience and perception of teachers in rural, remote, and fringe Oregon K-6 public schools in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Procedures and Activities.** You will be asked to participate in a one-time asynchronous 30-question survey.
- **Risks.** The anticipated harm or discomfort resulting from participation in this research is not expected to exceed what individuals would encounter in their daily lives or during routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. A foreseeable risk or discomfort of your participation could be emotional discomfort (e.g., stress, depression, triggering of past emotional experiences).
- **Benefits**. No direct benefit but the researchers hope to help further inform educator retention efforts in rural, remote, and fringe designations across Oregon rather than provide a conclusive answer to a research question.
- **Duration.** It is expected that your participation will last up to 60 minutes.
- **Alternatives.** Participation is voluntary and the only alternative is to not participate

What happens if I agree to participate in this research?

We will tell you about any new information that may affect your willingness to continue participation in this research.

Informed Consent - [Insert name of study]
Version [Insert version date]

Page 1

Image title

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What happens to the information collected for this research?

Information collected for this research will be used to explore the determinants of burnout as identified by teacher experience and perception specific to rural, remote, and fringe Oregon K-6 public schools. The primary objective of this study is to explore the experience and perception of teachers in rural, remote, and fringe Oregon K-6 public schools in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Information collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

How will my privacy and data confidentiality be protected?

Your name will not be used in any published reports, conference presentations, etc. about this study. To protect your confidentiality, a password-protected master file will be utilized to store participant names securely, limiting access to only the primary investigator. Despite these precautions to protect the confidentiality of your information, we can never fully guarantee the confidentiality of all study information. Individuals and organizations that conduct or monitor this research may be permitted access to and inspect the research records. These individuals and organizations include Dr. Julie Alonzo and the University of Oregon Graduate School of Education.

What if I want to stop participating in this research?

Taking part in this research study is your decision. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to take part in this study, but if you do, you can stop at any time. You have the right to choose not to participate in any study activity or completely withdraw from continued participation at any point in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with the researchers or the University of Oregon.

Will I be paid for participating in this research?

You will not be compensated for this research.

Who can answer my questions about this research?

If you have questions or concerns, contact the research team at:

Melissa Wilk
(503)-484-6893
Melissawilk@UO@gmail.com

An Institutional Review Board ("IRB") is overseeing this research. An IRB is a group of people who perform an independent review of research studies to ensure the rights and welfare of participants are protected. UO Research Compliance Services is the office that supports the IRB. If you have questions about your rights or wish to speak with someone other than the research team, you may contact:

Image title

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

Research Compliance Services
5237 University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403-5237
(541) 346-2510
ResearchCompliance@uoregon.edu

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have had the opportunity to read and consider the information in this form. I have asked any questions necessary to make a decision about my participation. I understand that I can ask additional questions throughout my participation.

I understand that by signing below, I volunteer to participate in this research. I understand that I am not waiving any legal rights. I understand that if my ability to consent or assent for myself changes, either I or my legal representative may be asked to re-consent prior to my continued participation in this study.

I consent to participate in this study.

Name of Adult Participant	Signature of Adult Participant	Date

Researcher Signature (to be completed at time of informed consent)

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

Name of Research Team Member	Signature of Research Team Member	Date

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