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The critical role of happiness in education: Resilience, retention, and what happy teachers do differently

Jill Marie Hayes White
University of Northern Iowa

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The Critical Role of Happiness in Education: Resilience, Retention, and What Happy Teachers Do Differently

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Jill Marie Hayes White
University of Northern Iowa
May 2023

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Abstract

Teachers are unhappy, stressed, and leaving the field at an alarming rate. This paper analyzes how teacher happiness is related to resilience and retention. It also looks for patterns that identify what happy teachers do differently at work. To complete this investigation, current K-12 public school teachers throughout Iowa completed electronic surveys that assessed their happiness, resilience, and work life. These surveys included the Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999), the Brief Resilience Scale (Smith, et al., 2008), and 14 additional survey questions created by the researcher. Correlational, comparative, and descriptive analyses were completed to examine potential relationships and patterns in the data.

Results showed a significant positive correlation between teacher happiness and resilience. Positive connections were also found between happiness and school culture and climate. In addition, teachers who participated in greater numbers of supportive practices at work were found to have significantly higher levels of happiness. These results indicate that happier teachers are better equipped to manage stress at work, which may help prevent them from leaving the field. Results also suggest that when school leaders provide adequate resources, a positive climate and culture to work in, and an opportunity to celebrate progress with their colleagues, teachers are happier. This paper provides evidence that when educator happiness is addressed and supported in the workplace, teachers flourish.
This Study by: Jill Hayes White

Entitled: The Critical Role of Happiness in Education: Resilience, Retention and What Happy Teachers Do Differently

has been approved as meeting the dissertation requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Education

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Dr. Gabriela Olivares, Interim Dean, Graduate College
Dedication

For Neal, without whom I would not understand, experience, and appreciate happiness with such depth and gratitude. Thank you for making my hard days easier, my good days better, and my happiest days possible.

For Sailor, whose heart is as big as the sea. Empathy and compassion are her superpowers and her love can move mountains.

For Fisher, whose heart is pure sunshine. His smile is quick, his laughter contagious, and his spirit is effervescent.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank and acknowledge my personal family as well as my work family. In addition to my incredible husband and children, I have felt cared for and supported by all members of my extended family during this journey. From my loving parents to my amazing in-laws, siblings, cousins, nieces, and nephews; I am so lucky to have so many people to love and be loved by. Thank you for believing in me.

To my Cedar Falls Schools family - thank you for helping me flourish. The last eleven years have been the very best education in leadership. To be surrounded by so many intelligent, compassionate, and hardworking educators is awe inspiring. I learn from you every day. I am honored to be part of this team.

To my tribe - thanks for being my ride or die.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Teacher burnout has been cited in the research literature as an issue negatively impacting school communities across the country for well over fifty years. Despite the extensive research that has been done, the problem of burnout appears to be worsening rather than improving. Teachers continue to experience great levels of stress at work and are leaving the field at increasingly high rates. While stress and burnout are undoubtedly pervasive issues throughout the field of education, researchers and practitioners have long reported that the highest rates of attrition are among new teachers (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). In 2012 it was estimated that 30-40% of new teachers left the field within the first five years (Ingersoll, 2012). Nearly ten years later, a new meta-analysis indicates this number has increased to 50% of newcomers (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Beyond these troubling statistics of new teachers who leave is perhaps a more concerning question of who is (or isn’t) entering the field of education?

According to a report from the Center for American Progress, enrollment in teacher preparation programs decreased by over 30% from 2010 to 2018, which equates to approximately 340,000 fewer pre-service teachers entering the field during this time (Partelow, 2019). During the same time period, college students already enrolled in teacher education programs saw a 28% decline in students completing their program (Partelow, 2019). While some people blame stress, low pay, and poor working conditions for negatively impacting college students' interest in entering the teaching profession, others say there isn’t enough data to fully explain the sudden decline (Partelow, 2019; Will, 2019). Meanwhile, concerns regarding a national teacher
shortage continue to rise and districts everywhere are feeling the pinch of fewer teachers applying for openings and positions going unfilled.

To put it simply, American teachers are unhappy (Gewertz, 2019). Frustrated and stressed teachers cite many issues contributing to their current state of apathy. These include low pay; not enough resources; a lack of respect from students, parents, community members, and leaders; challenging student needs; high stress; ever-changing state-level mandates; and poor working conditions (Gewertz, 2019; Ingersoll, 2012; Madigan & Kim, 2021; Mielke, 2019). Many teachers report working well over forty hours a week, grading papers, and writing lesson plans into the evening at home each day, all while paying off student loan debts and barely making enough money to make ends meet. It has been reported that nearly 20% of all public school teachers take second jobs during the school year in order to supplement their income (Will, 2018).

While it is a common adage that one doesn’t enter the field of education for the money, for many, entering the field today feels increasingly like accepting a lifetime of debt.

For educators working as building or district leaders, finding solutions for teacher stress can feel futile. School principals typically have little to say about teacher pay, the needs students have when they walk through the school’s doors or the demands that parents, community members, and state departments make of teachers. While school leaders can’t take all of the stressors out of teaching, they might be able to do more to support teachers and nurture their emotional well-being. If resilience allows us to mitigate the impact of stress, and happiness is buildable, learnable and contagious (Achor, 2010); what can systems do to foster these attributes in their teachers?
Happy teachers have been found to elicit more joy and purpose from teaching (Moskowitz & Dewaele, 2021). This makes them more likely to remain in the field from year to year and less likely to experience burnout. While teachers who are experiencing stress and burnout can have a negative impact on their colleagues, those who are happy have been found to create an even stronger positive impact on those around them (Comola, 2023; Maslach et al., 2001; Stein, 2008). In addition, happier people have been found to be more cooperative, productive, and efficient when working together, which can lead to more harmonious working conditions and better outcomes for students (Achor, 2010; Stein, 2008). When stress and adversity at work can’t be avoided, resilient employees have been found to have strong positive coping skills and adaptability that can help teams persevere (Soer et al., 2019). Their quick thinking and calm amidst chaos make resilient teachers natural leaders and team players (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). This paper will further explore why efforts to increase happiness and resilience may be the most promising solution for keeping teachers in the field.

**Problem of Practice**

Teacher stress, burnout, and dwindling retention rates are having a significant negative impact on school systems throughout the country. Teachers leaving or failing to enter the field, cast a shadow on the future of public schools. Despite over fifty years of research on teacher stress and burnout, the problem does not appear to be improving. This research was designed to learn more about teacher happiness in K-12 schools and how it could potentially serve as a protective factor to support resilience and help keep teachers in the classroom. It asked how teacher happiness relates to
teacher resilience and retention. It also asked what happy teachers do differently, including what practices and supports happy teachers reportedly engage in at school. The plan was to garner both practical strategies that systems can put into place to support teacher well-being, as well as a deeper understanding of the role that teacher happiness plays in education.

**Purpose of Current Study**

This study was designed to search for evidence to support the hypothesis that happier teachers are more resilient and more likely to remain in education long term. The study also sought information from happy teachers about what practices and supports benefit them at school. Teacher happiness and resilience were examined to determine how they relate to one another as well as their connection to teacher retention. Because the literature suggests that investing in teacher well-being may be the most efficient way to authentically mitigate stress and prevent burnout, this study involved collecting data and examples from the field to start a conversation about teacher happiness with stakeholders. The purpose was not only to improve the lives and working conditions of teachers, but to improve outcomes for students as well.

**Research Questions**

1. What are the subjective happiness levels of K-12 teachers in Iowa public schools as measured by the Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999)?
2. What are the resilience levels of K-12 teachers in Iowa public schools as measured by the Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al., 2008)?
3. What relationship (if any) exists between teacher happiness and teacher resilience?

4. How do happiness levels of teachers with high retention differ from those with low retention?

5. What supports and practices do happy teachers receive or engage in at school?

**Theoretical Framework**

This research will adhere to the theory of positive psychology. Positive psychology is the study of why and how some individuals, groups, and communities flourish and function at high levels, while others do not (Achor, 2010; Gable & Haidt, 2005; Seligman, 2011). It involves looking for what is going right and learning from others’ successes rather than perseverating on their pitfalls. According to Seligman et al., “Positive psychology is an umbrella term for the study of positive emotions, positive character traits, and enabling institutions” (2005, p. 410). It is not a replacement for traditional psychology. Rather, positive psychology looks at data, information, and circumstances through a different lens. It seeks to answer the questions, *What went right?* and *How?* In doing so, champions of positive psychology claim to be able to see a more comprehensive view of the human experience (Gable & Haidt, 2005). Positive psychology was chosen as the framework for this study because the focus will remain on happiness and resilience as proactive and preventative solutions for improving working conditions for teachers and outcomes for students.
Significance of Study

While a growing number of initiatives are cropping up related to teacher well-being, few, if any, include evidence of how investing in teacher happiness impacts the resilience and retention of educators. Even fewer appear to ask what happy teachers do differently at school. This study focuses on the positive effects of teacher happiness in terms that are meaningful and relevant to the reader and directly applicable to school systems. The hopes and intentions of this study were threefold. The first intention was that finding solid evidence of a correlation between teacher happiness and teacher resilience would lead to increased funding and focus on taking care of teachers, both as a society and as individual school districts. The second intention of this study was to learn from happy teachers about what schoolwide practices, activities, and supports can be put into place to help support teacher well-being in a realistic and immediate way. The third intention was that by focusing on the issue of teacher happiness, this study could help solve the dilemma of increasing levels of teacher stress and decreasing levels of teacher retention in public schools.

Hypotheses

Based on the literature, this study hypothesized that there will be a positive correlation between teacher happiness, teacher resilience, and teacher retention. Furthermore, the author predicted that there would be some common activities and supports that happy teachers engage in at school. The hope was that these practices could be replicable for schools throughout the country. The author anticipated finding that happier teachers are better equipped to manage the stressors of teaching, more
apt to remain in the field year after year, and the most qualified to advise leaders on how to support their emotional well-being.

Author’s Note

At the time of this study, our world was living through the global COVID-19 pandemic. More specifically, in 2022, we were entering the third year of the pandemic. While COVID-19 has taken an emotional, financial, and physical toll on all humans in some way, shape, or form; the impact on educators has been particularly taxing. Teachers were struggling with the additional stressors and demands of educating students while keeping them safe, healthy, and engaged in school despite the chaos going on around them. These added pressures over the previous two years have undoubtedly added to the rates of teacher burnout and skewed my data. This being said, I still believed there was a lot to learn from teachers who have persevered through the pandemic and beyond.

Organization of Study

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter One provides an introduction to the topic and problem of practice, along with reviewing the purpose, research questions, theoretical framework, and significance of the study. Chapter Two provides a list of hypotheses for the study along with key terms and definitions used throughout the paper. This chapter will also provide a review of the pertinent literature relating to teaching conditions, stress, resilience, retention, happiness research, and positive psychology. Chapter Three contains a review of the methodology used in the study, including research design, survey information, and a preview of the statistical analysis to
be used. Chapter Four discusses the results that were obtained from the study. Finally, Chapter Five provides a summary of findings for each research question, limitations of the study, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter will begin by presenting meanings, definitions and key terms used throughout the paper. It will go on to provide a review of literature related to the changing role of teachers in the 21st century as well as the concepts of teacher happiness, resilience, and retention. Positive psychology is explored as a theoretical framework for learning about and overcoming the issues related to teacher stress and attrition. The literature and research related to happiness and resilience is also explored in order to understand more about these attributes as individual entities as well as part of the solution to teacher stress and waning retention levels. Finally, a brief overview of the impact of COVID-19 on today’s educational system in general, and Iowa Schools more specifically, is provided. As a whole, this literature review seeks to answer the following question: Are happier teachers more resilient and better equipped to manage the stressors of education?

Introduction

What does it mean to be a happy teacher? Finding a single ubiquitous definition of happiness is nearly impossible as the concept of happiness is relative to each person’s unique perspective and experiences. While some researchers like Diener (2000) describe happiness in simple terms relating to feeling pleasant emotions most of the time and unpleasant emotions rarely; other researchers describe happiness in a more complex way as, “the experience of joy, contentment, or positive well-being, combined with a sense that one’s life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile” (Lyubomirsky, 2001, p.239). Shawn Achor combines simple and complex assessments of happiness with his
definition. He states that happiness is “the joy we feel striving after our potential” (Achor, 2010, p.40). For the purposes of this paper, I will sample each of these and define happiness as a person’s feelings of contentment, joy, and life satisfaction.

The terms well-being and subjective well-being are frequently cited in the research as being synonymous with happiness. Adding in the descriptor of “subjective” changes the meaning slightly to reflect how one feels about their feelings. It’s more metacognitive in nature but also reflective of the fact that concepts such as happiness and well-being cannot fully exist or be measured independently of our own perceptions and experiences. One cannot draw a blood sample and measure the levels of happiness within it. Alas, subjective well-being reflects how we feel about or evaluate our own lives (Achor, 2010; Diener, 2000). These terms are used interchangeably with happiness in the research literature as well as in this paper.

**Definition of Key Terms**

*Happiness* is a person’s feelings of contentment, joy, and life satisfaction.

*Well-Being* is frequently used synonymously with the term happiness. In the research literature, well-being is often defined as life satisfaction (Diener, 2000; Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

*Subjective Well-Being* may also be used synonymously with well-being, with the major distinction being that subjective well-being represents people’s beliefs and feelings about whether they are leading a desirable and rewarding life. (Diener, 2012).

*Resilience* is an adaptive response to adversity that indicates an ability to bounce back or recover from stress (Smith et al., 2008; Soer et al., 2019).
**Teacher Retention** is the act of maintaining the same teachers in a system, school, or district from year to year in an effort to reduce turnover or attrition.

**Attrition** is the opposite of teacher retention. It represents the departure of employees (teachers) from their organization (schools and/or districts).

**Positive Psychology** is an umbrella term for the study of positive emotions, positive character traits, and the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Seligman et al., 2005).

**The Changes and Challenges of Teaching in the 21st Century**

In a time when teachers are faced with more responsibilities and restraints than ever before, teacher stress may feel like more of an expectation than a revelation. This next section will explore what has changed in teaching over the years and how these changes are impacting the emotional and physical health of teachers as well as the working conditions in education. In addition, while teaching is a stressful occupation for everyone, many remain in the field. This section will begin to explore the educators who are not only surviving but thriving. Learning from teachers who persist amidst adversity helps provide insight into preventative steps school leaders can take to support their teams. When research can focus on skills and protective factors, it provides a clear starting point to nurture teachers who are already thriving, build up teachers who are struggling, and help those who are burnt out to heal.

Being a teacher in today’s world is filled with many new challenges that teachers of the past did not encounter in their day-to-day work. The ever-changing technological
landscape, political discord, and fast-growing diversity of students learning together in historically homogeneous spaces, along with the mental health challenges of today’s youth, and the public health crises of late, have created a somewhat chaotic state of rapid change in public education. This evolution has come at a pace that may have surpassed the ability of teacher education programs and districts to adequately prepare teachers.

Along with the growing pains that accompany perpetual change are many positive opportunities as well. Some researchers say that today’s students are the most technologically savvy, culturally diverse, and critically thinking generation of American learners this country has ever seen (DuFour, 2015). Schools today have the opportunity and great responsibility to provide learning, care, and safety for millions of students and families. These opportunities range from helping students meet their basic needs to helping students find and nurture interests and passions to preparing students for college and careers after high school.

In every classroom and content area, today’s public school teachers are educating much larger numbers of students with a far wider range of needs than have ever been recorded (DuFour, 2015). Students who have barriers to their learning, either due to poverty, disability, health, or native language, now makeup well over half of the student body (DuFour, 2015). Over 10% of students attending American public schools are English Language Learners - meaning that English is not their first language (Institute of Education Sciences, 2021). Over 16% of students under the age of 18 live in poverty and 14% are identified as students with disabilities (Institute of Education Sciences,
Furthermore, 2.5% of all students attending public schools in the U.S. experience homelessness in a given academic year (National Center for Homeless Education, 2021). According to a 2016 National Survey of Children’s Health, approximately 17% of U.S. students aged 6-17 have a diagnosed mental health disorder such as anxiety or depression (Whitney & Peterson, 2019). However, it has been reported that nearly 50% of those students do not receive any kind of mental health services (Whitney & Peterson, 2019). These statistics are concerning because each of these challenges impacts the way students think, behave, and learn in the classroom.

Despite all of these complex challenges and barriers, U.S. graduation rates are at the highest they have ever been as a country; American schools have more diverse students enrolled in and excelling at Advanced Placement courses than ever before; and standardized test scores are on a steady incline (DuFour, 2015). By all means, American teachers and students are excelling. However, this message isn’t frequently the one being cited by headlines or news sources. In contrast, public opinion of American education seems to be on a steady decline. A 2021 Gallup poll asked the question, “Overall, how satisfied are you with the quality of education students receive in kindergarten through grade 12 in the U.S. today?” Fifty-four percent of American adults reported that they were dissatisfied (Gallup, 2022). The same poll went on to ask about participants' opinions of the quality of public education throughout the nation. These responses were even less favorable with 64% of respondents stating they were dissatisfied (Gallup, 2022). Responses such as these beg the question, why are people so unhappy with public education?
Despite the fact that teaching in the 21st century is rated as one of the most stressful professions, the majority of teachers continue to do their best to help students learn and grow each and every day. They do so by leaning on their school community, core beliefs, values, and purpose (Gu & Day, 2007). With over 50 million students being served by 3.2 million teachers in K-12 public schools in the United States, there are far more teachers showing up with their best for kids day in and day out that are being largely ignored in the research literature (Gu & Day, 2007; Riser-Kositsky, 2019). Over 6,000 books, chapters, dissertations, and journal articles have been published about burnout over the past fifty years (Schaufeli et al., 2009). However, only a fraction of that amount of research has been conducted on teacher resilience. Whether it’s a political motivation or an oversight by researchers, all educators will benefit from a better understanding of the attributes that enable the majority of American teachers to commit and carry on in times of stress and uncertainty.

**Teacher Stress**

This section will take a closer look at teacher stress. It will explain the mental, physical and emotional aspects of stress and burnout that impact teachers and frequently lead them to leave the field of education altogether. This information will be cited in order to build the reader’s understanding of what it feels like to experience chronic stress as a teacher as well as to articulate how focusing research and resources on increasing teacher happiness and resilience may help evade the ongoing dilemma of escalating teacher stress and declining retention.
Teacher burnout is defined as a state of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion that builds cumulatively over time as a result of chronic stress in the workplace (Blazer, 2010). While stress and burnout have been accepted as somewhat commonplace in all fields of service-oriented work, burnout specifically has been found to be more prevalent among teachers than in any other form of human services (Salovita & Pakarinen, 2021). It has been estimated that between 5 and 30% of teachers show distinct symptoms of chronic stress and burnout at any given time (Blazer, 2010). This is a concerning issue for many reasons. One is that school systems cannot produce their best results if nearly one-third of their teachers are experiencing chronic stress. Another reason is that teacher stress often leads to attrition, with teachers leaving the field of education altogether. Finally, the prevalence of chronic stress is concerning because of the toll it takes on teacher mental, emotional, and physical well-being. As a society, we have an obligation to take care of teachers because, without them, the future would be quite bleak.

Teachers experiencing chronic stress and burnout can suffer from a multitude of physical and mental health symptoms including exhaustion, headaches, digestion problems, and insomnia (Blazer, 2010). Emotionally, teachers may experience a sense of dread when thinking about going to work along with feelings of depression, low self-esteem, and anxiety (Blazer, 2010; Maslach et al., 2001). These symptoms often lead to higher rates of absenteeism and a lack of engagement when present in the classroom (Salovita & Pakarinen, 2021). This impacts students and school systems who have to deal with frequent substitutes and a lack of consistency in instruction and expectations.
Teacher stress is one of the leading causes of illness and absence and turnover in teachers (Benevene et al., 2019). It costs school districts billions of dollars each year due to absenteeism, disability claims, and high rates of turnover (Blazer, 2010).

Unfortunately, all of this stress also causes great harm to students. Not only does teacher burnout cause student learning to suffer but it negatively impacts the culture and climate of their classrooms and learning spaces (Salovita & Pakarinen, 2021). This is why teacher resilience protects more than just our teachers who are grappling with stress. It has the potential to support students and school systems as well. The following section will describe resilience and its relationship with education in more detail.

Resilience

In this section, I will discuss resilience in more depth. I will explore the literature on teacher resilience specifically, as well as the role it plays in education. How do high and low levels of resilience impact teachers, students, and schools? Furthermore, I will examine how resilience is built and what educational leaders can do to help their teachers learn, practice, and nurture these skills.

Teacher resilience has been defined in many ways by many people. This paper utilizes a definition that combines key concepts from Smith et al., (2008) and Soer et al., (2019) who state that resilience is an adaptive response to adversity that indicates an ability to bounce back or recover from stress. While different researchers have different opinions on what accounts for teacher resilience, most agree that it is more than just a static trait. Resilience is a dynamic process of interactions between internal and external protective and risk factors (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019; Beltman et al., 2011; Gu & Day,
The ability to positively adapt to the teaching profession has a huge impact on a teacher's passion, longevity, and proficiency in teaching (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019). Without the skill of resilience, not only would teachers be leaving the field at even higher rates, but the ones who stayed would likely struggle to find lasting success and happiness.

Resilient teachers have many characteristics, traits, and positive habits in common. One common finding in the research has been that educators with higher levels of resilience typically perform better under pressure (Kohll, 2017). They are more flexible thinkers and therefore bounce back from changes in plans and routines with less upheaval. Resilient individuals have also been found to be more productive at work and more capable of managing stress and setbacks (Kohll, 2017). Higher productivity and control lead to increased feelings of self-confidence and efficacy. The better people feel about themselves and their ability to do their jobs well, the more resilient they appear to be (Lee et al., 2013). This may also provide an interesting piece of evidence to support the belief that individuals with higher levels of resilience are less likely to leave their jobs. Resiliency is a pertinent factor to consider when attempting to solve the current teacher retention quandary.

A study by Mansfield et al., (2012) found that teachers with higher levels of resilience were less likely to consider leaving their current profession. This may be due in part to their increased ability to cope with stress and detach from work. Additional studies have shown that like teachers with high resilience, happier people also appear to use different motivational and positive decision-making strategies on a day-to-day
basis, leading them to respond differently to the same scenarios (Diener, 2000; Lyubomirsky, 2001). This means that it is likely that even though highly resilient individuals face all of the same stressors that less resilient individuals do, they process them very differently in their minds. One explanation for this may be that people with greater levels of resilience are better equipped to recognize and stop negative thinking cycles (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). For example, resilient teachers may be less likely to take a failed lesson personally, allowing them to problem-solve another strategy and plan a new lesson more quickly and with fewer feelings of failure or self-doubt. While everyone gets knocked down sometimes, resilient people seem to stay standing a little longer and to get back up a little quicker.

**Resilience and Students**

One of the primary reasons why resilience is so critical to education is that teachers are highly influential models of good learning for their students. If teachers expect students to bounce back from challenges, overcome stress and take risks in the classroom, they need to model these behaviors (Gu & Day, 2007). Just like reading, writing, and mathematics, resilience is a skill that must be taught, practiced, and reinforced from a young age. Some studies have found that students take notice when their teachers are more (or less) resilient (Oberle et al., 2020). Students who believe their teachers to have better social and emotional competence themselves are more likely to learn from and model after their teachers (Oberle et al., 2020). This finding was corroborated Moskowitz and Dewaele (2021), who found that student perceptions played a strong role in determining learning outcomes. This study found that students
who believed their teachers were satisfied with their life and career reported higher levels of motivation toward learning (Moskowitz & Dewaele, 2021). Students benefit from leaders who demonstrate prosocial adaptive skills such as resilience at home and work.

Resilience makes for better teachers in all aspects of their career - not just in the ability to bounce back from stress. Burnout has been said to mimic the smothering of a fire or the extinguishing of a candle (Schaufeli et al., 2009). This means that over time, teachers experiencing chronic stress provide less and less “light” or impactful instruction. Like the dwindling candle, whose light gets dimmer and dimmer; these teachers languish. This phenomenon is sometimes referred to as smoldering (Schaufeli et al., 2009). On the contrary, teachers with high levels of resilience and well-being burn brighter over time. Studies have found that teachers with high levels of resilience are better able to build strong teacher–student relationships, carry out effective classroom management, and teach meaningful social and emotional skills to their students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Their skills shine in the classroom and everyone benefits from their brilliance. In this respect, resilience leads to continuous improvement for students and teachers.

Teachers with high levels of resilience have also been found to exhibit other character strengths that support their work. These strengths act as protective factors and include a strong sense of vocation, perseverance, persistence, altruism, self-efficacy, confidence, and intrinsic motivation to teach (Beltman et al., 2011; Gu & Day, 2007; Mansfield et al., 2012). Because resilience is often cited as the result of the
relationship between our risk and protective factors, anything that educational leaders can do to grow and nurture the aforementioned attributes may also help teachers become more resilient (Beltman et al., 2011). This supports previous findings discussed in this paper that indicate when you feel better, you do better.

**Resilience and Teachers**

Resilience research over the past 20 years has called on educators to advocate for the kinds of protective factors that will help them cope with the stressors of teaching (Beltman et al., 2011; Gu & Day, 2007). Teachers deserve to thrive rather than just survive in the field of education and there are many things that employers can do to help them do so (Beltman et al., 2011). While school and district leaders cannot plan for all of the internal attributes related to resilience, they can take steps to manage the factors within their control. External factors that have been found to support teacher resilience include a positive culture and climate of your school, trusting relationships with administration, support from colleagues, opportunities for shared decision-making, and reasonable workloads (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019; Beltman et al., 2011). When leaders take the time to build relationships with staff and create a culture that values teacher autonomy and feedback, it has a lasting impact on teacher well-being (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019).

There are also many internal factors that influence teacher resilience. Protective factors and strengths aligned with resilience include altruism, intrinsic motivation, perseverance, persistence, optimism, humor, emotional intelligence, a strong sense of self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, self-esteem and problem-solving skills (Ainsworth &
Oldfield, 2019; Gu & Day, 2007; Mansfield et al., 2012). Social supports also play an important role in building resilience. Studies have shown that when teachers have wide networks of caring family and friends, they display fewer symptoms of burnout (Blazer, 2010). Personal connections support engagement in all aspects of life and career and there are many things school leaders can do to foster collaboration and connection among colleagues.

**How Educational Leaders Can Nurture Resilience**

What can schools and districts do to support teacher resilience? Studies have found that enhancing protective factors is far more effective than reducing risk factors when aiming to improve resilience (Lee et al., 2013). In this vein, educational systems should focus their energies on prevention as well as fostering protective factors. There are many environmental factors that can be nurtured by school systems. These include support systems in place at school, school-community connections and partnerships, and providing the resources and materials teachers need to perform at their best.

Protective factors such as mentoring programs for new teachers have been found to play a vital role in supporting teachers and building resilience (Mansfield et al., 2012). Pairing new teachers with career teachers who have developed strong skills in the areas of perseverance and work-life balance is a support that fosters nurturing relationships that help both parties. As mentioned previously, supportive collegial relationships also play a key role in building resilience (Blazer, 2010; Mansfield et al., 2012). School leaders can take active steps to build social networks and encourage team building both in and outside of work. Studies have shown that teachers who have
positive relationships with their co-workers have lower stress levels (Blazer, 2010). Good leaders know that individuals are stronger and happier when they are part of a high-functioning team and take steps to bring people together.

Supportive school leaders are also an integral component of resilient systems. When school leaders take the time to listen, communicate, recognize accomplishments and provide meaningful feedback, they strengthen psychological resilience and build capacity in teachers (Blazer, 2010). Other strategies for administrators include leading by example, allowing for autonomy and control in the classroom, fostering a sense of purpose, and helping teachers to maintain healthy habits (Kohll, 2017). Sometimes this means simple actions such as giving teachers permission not to check their emails at night or encouraging them to go for a walk during their brief lunch break. Some researchers assert that school principals are the most well-equipped change agents to help teachers manage stress and prevent them from leaving the field (Blazer, 2010). This may be due to the fact that principals have the greatest level of control over what happens within the school environment. This influence could also be similar to that of students learning from watching their teacher; teachers can also learn by observing the good habits of their principal.

There are also important changes to the school environment that can support resilience. A focus on the school setting, along with the people within it, is essential for interventions to deal with chronic stress (Maslach et al., 2001). Providing professional learning opportunities as well as help with time and stress management and the provision and maintenance of adequate resources is a shared responsibility that, when
implemented appropriately, provides ample protective factors for teachers (Blazer, 2010). In addition, encouraging and facilitating connections with colleagues is an important way to build resilience in the school setting (Kohll, 2017). Social support at work helps build a climate and culture that fosters resilience. When people support and relate to one another in hard times, it builds comradery and collective efficacy and reduces feelings of isolation.

**Teacher Retention**

Teacher retention is the act of maintaining the same teachers in a system, school, or district from year to year in an effort to reduce turnover or attrition. Having high levels of teacher retention is typically considered a sign of a healthy district for a few reasons. First, consistency is good for students. It increases their levels of success and feelings of belonging (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Second, high levels of teacher retention may signify that fewer teachers are leaving due to chronic stress and burnout. This could imply that teachers are emotionally, mentally, and physically healthy. Finally, if teachers want to stay in your school or district, your leadership must be doing something right to create an environment where teachers feel supported and valued and want to return year after year. In short, teacher retention is good for kids, good for teachers, and good for systems.

Maintaining high levels of teacher retention can be a challenge. Researchers have long held that teaching has the highest rates of attrition among newcomers than any other profession (Hughes, 2012; Madigan & Kim, 2021; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). In fact, it has been reported that 30-50% of new teachers leave the field after their first
year (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). High rates of teacher turnover have many negative effects on a school system. The financial toll of frequently needing to hire and train new teachers creates a significant burden for districts (Madigan & Kim, 2021). In addition, having a perpetually revolving door of teachers is hard on the school climate and culture and significantly impacts teacher shortages (Hughes, 2012). Perhaps most importantly, high levels of turnover and attrition are also likely to take a financial and emotional toll on teachers who are trying to keep their heads above water in a profession they once loved, but are now struggling to like.

A number of variables have been found to be related to turnover rates in public schools. For example, special education teachers have been found to leave the field at 2.5% the rate of other teachers (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Similarly, teachers in high-poverty areas or schools with greater incidents of behavioral issues have also been found to have significantly higher rates of attrition (Hughes, 2012; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). On the contrary, schools with high achievement scores and greater levels of parental involvement have been found to have higher retention rates (Hughes, 2012). A growing trend in this data suggests that teaching students with more needs combined with lower levels of district support will consistently lead to higher turnover rates.

While the variables described above all play an important role in teacher attrition, data suggests that the working conditions, along with the culture and climate of a school, are the strongest predictors of teacher retention (Hughes, 2012). Teachers who feel supported and enjoy coming to work are much more likely to stay in their current roles. Some researchers encourage school leaders to focus their efforts on
preventing school burnout by helping teachers to recognize and advocate for what they need, as the best way to prevent attrition (Madigan & Kim, 2021). In addition, data suggest that teachers who work in schools where they have a greater sense of autonomy, higher levels of administrative support, and clearly communicated expectations are more likely to remain in their position for the long term (Hughes, 2012).

There are many things that school leaders can do to boost teacher retention rates. Supportive activities such as providing a mentor in your first few years of teaching, providing common planning time with teachers in your same grade level or subject area, and facilitating relationships among staff in order to create a network of support, have all made a significant impact on teacher retention (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). One study found that having a mentor teacher in your field or area of expertise reduces new teachers’ risk of leaving after their first year by 30% (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). In addition, teachers’ decisions to remain in teaching are also impacted by their feelings of self-efficacy and their ability to make a difference for their students (Hughes, 2012). School leaders can support teacher proficiency in the classroom by providing quality professional learning opportunities and role models to support the work they do with students each and every day.

**Positive Psychology**

In this section, I will discuss the theory of Positive Psychology, its relevance in the field of education, and how it will be used as a theoretical framework throughout this paper for studying teacher stress and resilience. The history of positive psychology as a
field will be explored as well as the significance of the PERMA theory of positive psychology. This is relevant to my study as it explains the significance of learning from teachers who are thriving, rather than from those who are leaving the field. It will also lay the foundation for the study of happiness in the following section.

While positive psychology is a relatively newer iteration of the field of psychology, its origins date back to the early 1900s. In 1902 William James studied health-mindedness for the first time in history and in the 1960’s Abraham Maslow received attention for being the first to study healthy human subjects instead of sick ones (Gable & Haidt, 2005). Despite these early toe dips into studying wellness, the field of positive psychology was not formally introduced to the public until much later. In January of 2000, Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi published an article simply titled, *Positive Psychology: An Introduction*. In the article, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) state that, “Psychology should be able to help document what kinds of families result in children who flourish, what work settings support the greatest satisfaction among workers, what policies result in the strongest civic engagement, and how people’s lives can be most worth living” (p. 5). This article was the first of its kind in the field of psychology.

The result was a transformational change in the way individuals view and utilize psychology in the mainstream. Hundreds of studies, papers, and books have been written about positive psychology in the 20+ years following the publishing of this initial paper. These collective works have made positive psychology an “essential science-based tool for optimal living, especially for leaders in every organization, family, and
“community” (Gielan, 2015, p. 6). They have changed the way people parent, lead, learn, and support one another (Achor, 2010; Gielan, 2015). The next section will demonstrate why positive psychology is so relevant to education and important to our collective understanding of being human.

Relevance of Positive Psychology

The field of positive psychology focuses on prevention, resilience, and support over remediation. Dr. Martin Seligman, frequently celebrated as the founder of positive psychology, felt strongly that the field of psychology should be more than identifying pathology and damage; it should also be a calling to investigate strength and virtue. In this vein, treatment is not just fixing what is defective; it is nurturing what excels (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Seligman looked back at the grand history of psychological research and found that something was missing. While traditional psychology had done a good job of moving people from a place of intense suffering to baseline, it had not contributed anything to help people move from baseline to thriving (Gable & Haidt, 2005). Seligman felt that more could be done by the field to promote balance and to help people reach their full potential.

Because of this, positive psychology research aims to help people find intrinsic, long-lasting contentment and joy. It studies positive emotions, character traits, and environments that allow people to experience optimal well-being (Seligman et al., 2005; Fredrickson, 2001). By studying strengths rather than flaws and victories rather than defeats, the field focuses on a more optimistic view of the future. This benefits all
people by providing hope in dark times, and optional roadmaps toward a better tomorrow.

**PERMA Theory of Well-Being**

One such roadmap is a theory of positive psychology that was developed by Martin Seligman in 2011. It is called the PERMA Theory of Well-Being. PERMA is an acronym created by Seligman that outlines five building blocks for well-being, or as he often calls it, “flourishing.” The five building blocks, according to Seligman, are Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment (PERMA). Seligman (2011) emphasizes that what makes a good life for one person may not have the same effect on others. His PERMA theory is not a prescription for how to have a good life, rather it is a description of common factors that happy people have in common (Seligman, 2011). The intent is that these factors can be taught, practiced, and improved upon in order to enhance our own personal well-being. This is another example of learning from those who have found success, which makes it particularly pertinent to the field of education. It is also the impetus for the research question within this study that asks, “What do happy teachers do differently at school?”

The first factor in the PERMA theory of well-being is Positive Emotion. Simply stated, positive emotions are emotions that make us feel good (Ackerman, 2020). They involve pleasant responses to our environment. Achor (2010) refers to positive emotions as “the chief engine of happiness” (p. 40). He goes on to explain that positive emotions bring dopamine and serotonin to our brains and along with these feel-good chemicals come higher levels of learning, creativity, processing, and organization. This
suggests that not only do positive emotions make us happier, but they also bring out many strengths that allow us to think and see more clearly. Fredrickson (2001) explained this set of cognitive processes in her Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions. This theory explains how positive emotions have a unique ability to broaden our thought-action repertoires in order to build new skills that support lasting well-being. In other words, positive emotions breed more positive outcomes and vice versa. Some examples of these discrete beneficial emotions include, but are not limited to love, awe, gratitude, hope, optimism, forgiveness, and joy. Individuals can increase their positive emotions about the past, present, or future by focusing on different memories, and current experiences, or dreaming about what lies ahead (Seligman, 2011). In other words, when people think positively, they live positively.

The second factor in PERMA is Engagement. Seligman (2011) says that engagement is when you are so deeply invested in a challenging task that you experience a state of “flow” that is highly gratifying and reinforcing. The concept of flow state was originally coined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in 1990. Csikszentmihalyi defined flow as “a state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience is so enjoyable that people will continue to do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p.4). To experience flow you need a challenging activity, sufficient skills, clear goals, and frequent feedback (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Seligman, 2011). Once you are in the midst of flow, you are so absorbed in the activity at hand that time seems to fly by. This is one of the big goals in education - to build student engagement. Teachers want students to be so caught up
and excited about their learning that they can push them ever so gently to stretch their
skills and try new things. When teachers provide the learning environment and
circumstances needed to achieve this state of flow in the classroom, students think less
about the fact that they are working so they are able to focus more attention and
memory on the act of learning.

The third factor of PERMA is Relationships. Many educational researchers share
that positive relationships are at the core of all good learning. Seligman (2011) shared
that relationships are also fundamental to well-being. Meaningful relationships have a
way of enhancing positive emotions and experiences so they can be felt on a deeper
level. Studies have shown that the more social support you have, the happier you are
(Achor, 2010). Connections with others can be a great source of meaning and purpose
in our lives (Seligman, 2011). In their 1995 article, Who is Happy? Myers and Diener
review many traits of people with high levels of subjective well-being. They report a
number of positive effects of close personal relationships including greater health,
longer life expectancy, and higher positive affect.

The fourth factor in PERMA is Meaning. Meaning is highly connected to
belonging, purpose, and service. It involves being part of something greater than
oneself. Individuals can build their sense of meaning in many ways such as belonging to
a religious organization, feeling connected to their family, or being highly invested in a
team at work or in their community (Seligman, 2011). In fact, some studies suggest a
strong link between religious people and more stable mental and physical health (Myers
& Diener, 1995). Alternately, a study by Lavy and Bocker (2017) found that when
teachers deem their work to be meaningful, they tend to develop stronger relationships with their students and report higher levels of job satisfaction. In addition, work provides many people with a sense of personal identity and belonging (Myers & Diener, 1995). These are many examples that support the tenet that feelings of meaning and connection can be knowingly enhanced in a number of ways. You don’t have to have your dream job or be a devoutly religious person in order to find meaning, you just need to be part of a group you believe in, contribute to, and respect.

The fifth and final factor in PERMA Theory is Accomplishment. Individuals pursue achievement, competence, and success because it is intrinsically rewarding. Setting goals, making progress toward them, and achieving them all have a huge impact on our subjective well-being (Myers & Diener, 1995). Most people want to continually grow and better themselves. Setting goals allows people to measure and reflect on their progress. Achor (2010) suggests that setting smaller, more manageable goals helps us build confidence, make steady progress and allow ample opportunities to celebrate along the way. One can surmise that Accomplishment is the final tenet of the PERMA Theory because it requires the first four building blocks of Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationship, and Meaning to be built first in order to maximize its effectiveness.

**Positive Psychology in Education**

The PERMA Theory is just one example of the many ways in which positive psychology is relevant to the field of education. The idea of utilizing building blocks and individual skills to build on one another is the centerpiece of K-12 education. In addition,
positive psychology’s emphasis on continuous learning of new skills and building on personal strengths to overcome areas of weakness is a perfect fit with education. Both rely on prevention and action to help others learn to build skills and qualities to help themselves and their communities thrive (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Schools are not only committed to teaching students the skills they need to be successful in life, but also in order to serve the collective good. After all, today’s generation of students will be tomorrow’s caretakers, laborers, teachers, and leaders.

Positive psychology also parallels the field of education in its quest for both compassion and action. Traditional psychology was heavily focused on benevolence alone, and simply wanting to cure the sick (Gable & Haidt, 2005). However, in doing so, it missed out on the ever-important task of keeping healthy people healthy and happy people happy. Positive psychology aims to marry the components of compassion and action, much like education manages differentiated instruction for all types of learners. If teachers simply focused all of their attention on catching up the students in their classrooms who are lagging in skills, the students who are performing at grade level would fall behind and the students performing above grade level would miss out on the opportunity to excel.

Positive psychology, like education, studies what works. Both rely on data to reach their goals of personal growth and improvement. Teacher preparation programs would be far less effective if they spent all of their time telling teachers what not to do. The mission of positive psychology is to learn and cultivate factors that allow us to flourish as individuals, communities, and society (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).
Meanwhile, the mission of K-12 schools is to teach students the skills they need to be independent, productive members of society who achieve their personal goals. In my opinion, the alignment of the two fields is indisputable.

**The Value of Happiness**

“Happiness, therefore, being found to be something final and self-sufficient, is the End at which all actions aim.”

-Aristotle

In this section I will explore the concept of happiness. I will answer the questions of what it is, how it is quantified, and what value it brings to our personal and professional lives. I will also explore the relationship between happiness and resilience. Furthermore, I hope to share data to support the assertion that teacher happiness matters; not just to teachers, but to students and systems. When teachers are happy they are better equipped to care for themselves and others. Investing in teacher happiness is an investment in the future of our students, teachers, and educational systems.

The question of how to find happiness has been studied by philosophers, scholars, religious leaders, and researchers for hundreds of years (Seligman et al., 2005) - and with good reason. There are countless benefits of happiness and well-being cited in the research literature. Many researchers found evidence to support the notion that being happy doesn’t just feel good, it also leads to greater outcomes in our personal and professional lives. In fact, research has shown that heightened levels of happiness are
correlated with a wide variety of positive life outcomes including better performance at work and school, stronger immune systems, longer life expectancy, better health, better relationships, higher levels of creativity, greater resilience and recovery, stronger coping skills, greater levels of cooperation, self-control, self-regulation, and better sleep as well as lower levels of anxiety, depression, burnout, dropout, illness, injury and coronary heart disease (Achor, 2010; Diener, 2000; Diener, 2012; Myers & Diener, 1995; Seligman, 2011; Seligman et al., 2005). While this may sound too good to be true, the following sections will describe the extent to which happiness plays a role in our school and work lives.

**Happiness and Student Achievement**

One of the great myths that has been debunked by the field of positive psychology is that success is a one-way ticket to happiness. A great deal of research has demonstrated that the opposite may actually be true. Happiness is more likely to lead us to success than the other way around. Studies have found that when individuals are happier, they think and act in more intelligent ways and are more motivated to reach their goals (Achor, 2010; Diener, 2012). These patterns and outcomes apply to adults and kids alike. No matter what one’s goals are - getting an A in Algebra or getting their dream job at a big company - one needs to plan, learn and take action steps towards achieving them. Happy brains are primed to do just that (Achor, 2010). Making progress toward our goals improves our subjective happiness and makes us feel good (Diener, 2000). In turn, those positive emotions open our brains up to take in more learning, think more creatively and thoughtfully, and be more accepting of new ideas (Achor,
Happy people have even been found to see or interpret data in different ways than unhappy people; as if seeing it through a clearer lens (Diener, 2000). Therefore, when people are happier, they are better learners and more effective doers.

A study by Quinn and Duckworth (2007) corroborated this assertion as it applies to K-12 students. They found that not only is there a strong relationship between happiness and academic achievement but that this relationship was actually mutually reinforcing. Findings suggested that children who had higher reported levels of subjective well-being earned higher grades and made greater gains in their learning over time (Quinn & Duckworth, 2007). This led the researcher to initially assume that happiness led to better grades. However, when they dug a little deeper, they also found that students who earned higher grades were happier. Which came first? Good grades or happy students? Ultimately these researchers concluded that children who find academic success in school may do so in part because they are happy and that performing well academically may lead children to feel happier (Quinn & Duckworth, 2007). Positivity breeds positivity.

Perhaps the most winsome piece of evidence supporting the impact of happiness on learning comes from a study carried out in the 1970s at the University of Minnesota. Shawn Achor discusses the study at length and affectionately calls it “JELL-O AT LUNCH” in his book (Achor, 2010, p. 26). The study, actually titled, Affective States, Expressive Behavior, and Learning in Children, observed preschool-age children as they worked through a number of simple learning tasks (Masters et al., 1979). Before completing the
tasks, one group of children was asked to think about something that made them happy, while the other group was only given the directions.

What the researchers found was that the students who had been primed for happiness performed significantly better than the students who received neutral instructions; performing the tasks more quickly and accurately (Masters et al., 1979). Achor (2010) calls this the JELL-O study under the assumption that preschool students would have thought about something as simple as what they had for lunch to make themselves happy before completing their tasks. He asserts that the benefits of priming your brain for happiness extend into adulthood and can help both students and adults learn and perform at higher levels.

Teacher happiness and well-being also play an important role in the classroom. Each has been found to be a core contributor to both teacher effectiveness and student achievement in a number of ways. First, several studies have asserted that happiness is contagious - with some likening the spreading of happiness among social networks to be similar to the spread of the common flu (Benevene et al., 2019; Fowler & Christakis, 2008; Moskowitz & Dewaele, 2021). The findings were far-reaching and included differing levels of impact from quick bursts of happiness between simple acquaintances to more meaningful impact between close friends or relatives as well as to long-lasting impact, with some reports suggesting this shared happiness can last as long as four months.

One longitudinal study by Fowler and Christakis (2008) found that when one member of a group is happy, the happiness of other group members increases by an
average of 8-34%. This effect is frequently replicated in classrooms, particularly when teachers have strong relationships with their students. Happy teachers have happier students and vice versa. This is important as heightened levels of happiness have been found to increase productivity by 31% and accuracy on tasks by 19% (Achor, 2011). This suggests that when students are happy, they are more likely to remain engaged in lessons and accurately complete schoolwork. The same could also be said for teachers. Furthermore, happy teachers appear to produce students who are more motivated to learn. In a recent interview for ASCD, Achor stated that as educator happiness grows, so too do student outcomes – leading to better learning conditions for the entire school community (Comola, 2023). Causal relationships have been found between teacher happiness and student performance in a number of academic settings (Moskowitz & Dewaele, 2021). A study by Klusmann and colleagues (2008) found that teachers with the greatest self-reported levels of well-being had students who rated them as better teachers and themselves as more highly motivated to learn from them. Similarly, Moskowitz and Dewaele (2021) found a positive correlation between how students feel about their teacher and how they feel about the subject matter they are learning. These findings suggest that not only do students prefer to learn from happy teachers, but teachers may also be more effective in the classroom when they feel balanced and emotionally healthy.

**Happiness and Teacher Resilience**

If happiness helps individuals to learn and perform at higher levels, what impact does it have on resilience? Can happiness act as a protective factor against stress and
declining teacher retention? Some researchers say yes. According to Ainsworth and Oldfield (2019), happiness plays such a critical role in teacher resilience and retention that when levels of well-being are low, not only does teacher performance suffer but attrition rates skyrocket. Some researchers go as far as saying that happiness has a greater impact on teacher performance than any curricular strategy or job-embedded training opportunity (Dunlop, 2020). Achor (2011) states that undeniably, a happy and engaged workforce provides the greatest advantage for productivity in today’s workplace. This may be because of the previously described JELL-O effect. When brains are primed for happiness, they are more likely to build resilience. Positive emotions plant, nourish and grow psychological resilience (Fredricksen, 2001; Gu & Day, 2007).

Some studies have found that participants who practice positive emotion priming experienced a faster recovery both mentally and physically from stress (Achor, 2010; Fredrickson, 2001). This finding suggests that happy people heal more quickly. Happiness appears to prepare both our bodies and minds to be more resilient. Remember our working definition of resilience? It is the ability to bounce back from stress and adversity (Smith et al., 2008). If happiness helps us to heal and resilience helps us to manage stress and adversity, the two emotions together are a powerhouse of protective factors. This is why it may be so much more powerful to focus interventions on building happiness and resilience preventatively rather than reducing stressors and overcoming burnout after it has already happened.

It is pertinent to provide a reminder from the field of positive psychology here that focusing on the positive doesn’t require you to forget the negative exists. This
practice can lead to what some researchers refer to as toxic positivity or purposefully ignoring any and all negative feelings (Corp, 2021; France, 2021). Instead, positive psychology encourages us to acknowledge the lows while learning from the wins within the losses. Instead of getting stuck in a negative loop, people can learn to better identify their feelings and find solutions to their problems. Seligman and his colleagues (2005) reported that “happiness is causal and brings many more benefits than just feeling good” (p. 413). One of those benefits is finding the good in every kind of situation. When people train their brains to focus on what’s going right, they are better able to work through what is going wrong. Looking for the positive around you makes you feel better, and when you feel better, you perform better.

Positive psychology also reminds its tenets that focusing solely on why some teachers experience burnout and leave the field, does not give a true picture of why most teachers stay, and why many flourish (Mansfield et al., 2012). Some studies suggest that happy people process and respond to information more efficiently and generously than unhappy people. Their adaptive way of thinking leads them to perceive the world through a more positive emotional lens. Some may refer to this phenomenon as, “looking through rose-colored glasses.” This optimistic perspective leads to more positive interactions, further reinforcing their positive experiences and building new ones (Fredrickson, 2001). In that same vein, happy people tend to have more favorable first impressions of strangers than unhappy people and remember life events more fondly (Lyubomirsky & Tucker, 1998). Positive emotions in one setting help lead us to seek and find more positivity in others. Such mindsets help happy people to be better at
persevering in hard times and adapting to change (Mansfield et al., 2012). These habits cultivate more than just continued happiness. Experiencing positive emotions over time builds resilience (Fredrickson, 2001; Gu & Day, 2007). Thus, happiness creates fertile soil for growing and maintaining resilience and evading burnout. It is a positive cycle that supports teachers in their journey and may hold the key to solving the burnout crisis schools are facing today.

The Impact of COVID-19

This literature review would be remiss if it did not recognize the enormous impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on teachers and students. In December 2019, a mysterious and highly deadly virus swept through Wuhan, China inciting panic and intrigue around the world (CDC, n.d.). In early January 2020, the mystery disease was identified as the novel coronavirus and by January 20th, 2020, the first case had been identified in the United States (CDC, n.d.). Over the course of the next few months, the novel coronavirus went from a public health emergency to a full-blown worldwide pandemic.

On March 15th, 2020 Iowa Governor, Kim Reynolds, announced that she would be closing all Iowa schools for four weeks in an effort to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 (Office of the Governor of Iowa Kim Reynolds, 2020a). Schools everywhere scrambled to put plans into place to keep kids learning from home. Technology devices were sent home with students, everyone quickly learned how to navigate Zoom, and plans were made by school staff to share online learning, library books, school lunches, and a little
bit of hope and positivity with students and families who were all trying to process the frightening reality of living in a pandemic. Teachers suddenly became essential workers and continuous learning plans were a new part of their reality. On Friday, April 17th, 2020 many teachers' and students' hopes were dashed as Governor Reynolds announced that Iowa schools would not be re-opening for the remainder of the school year (Office of the Governor of Iowa Kim Reynolds, 2020b). Sporting events, proms, end-of-year celebrations, and graduation ceremonies were all canceled, leaving students and educators feeling sad and mournful. All of this happened while people were seriously worried about their health, confused about how to keep themselves and their families safe, anxious about losing their jobs, missing their loved ones, and feeling generally afraid, isolated, and discombobulated.

In the fall of 2020, teachers went back to work and students went back to school. Some remained in virtual learning opportunities, but in Iowa, the majority of districts returned to in-person learning with a milieu of new health and safety measures in place. While the general sentiment shared by students was excitement to be back at school, there was a great deal of fear and apprehension about how educators would keep everyone safe and learning at school during a pandemic. Plans and protocols changed almost daily as districts did their best to navigate frequently conflicting guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the Iowa Department of Public Health, county-level health departments, and local stakeholders. Teachers were trying to keep their students socially distanced in crowded classrooms. They were sanitizing their materials and furniture, contact tracing, lesson-planning, and teaching in a new style all while
providing mask reminders, mask breaks, lessons in proper hand washing, additional hand washing breaks, lunch in their classrooms, alternate recess times, hand sanitizer and make-up work to send home for students who were quarantined. To put it mildly, teachers were stressed (Perna, 2022).

In the fall of 2021, teachers returned with a sense of optimism that this school year would bring some sense of normalcy back to the classroom. Instead, tensions were higher than ever before. The divisive debate on masks and vaccines inevitably filtered through school systems with parents and community members making demands of teachers on all sides of every controversial topic. There appeared to be something for everyone to be angry about. Meanwhile, students were still struggling to make up for lost learning and teachers seemed to be burning out at higher levels than ever before. It is probably not the optimal time to measure teacher happiness, resilience, or retention. However, it is an excellent time to bring data and support into the conversation as to why educational leaders need to continue talking and learning about teacher well-being and resilience. Teachers need support now, more than ever.

Summary

Teaching is hard, but important work. Working in such a high-stress field has caused a burgeoning number of teachers to leave education at growing rates. If nothing is done, conditions in public education may continue to deteriorate, leading to even higher rates of teacher stress and lower levels of learning for students. However, there is hope. Many teachers are flourishing and continue to come to work with great positivity and zeal. The field of positive psychology encourages people to learn from the
teachers who are thriving rather than the ones who are burning out. Leaders are then tasked with using these lessons to pour into teachers. If schools and systems can help their teachers to feel happier and more resilient, conditions in education will improve for everyone.

There are over twenty years of promising research to suggest that happiness is teachable, learnable, and spreadable. If leaders can provide preventative support and interventions to help teachers become happier, they can not only improve teacher well-being by reducing stress and increasing positive emotions but can also improve teacher retention. By increasing teacher happiness, leaders can improve outcomes for students as well. Positive psychology provides an optimal lens through which to investigate teacher happiness. There is great potential for increased positive outcomes for teachers, students, school systems, and entire communities when stakeholders invest time into studying what happy teachers do differently; and resources into building teacher resilience.
Chapter 3: Methodology

While the previous chapters covered the why of this study, in this chapter I will examine the what, how, where, and who. This chapter will start by reviewing what research questions this paper is seeking to answer. It will go on to review the research design that was used to determine how data would be collected and analyzed. Next, I will discuss the research participants as well as the settings that define the “where” of the study. Instrumentation measures of resilience, subjective happiness and retention will also be reviewed as they pertain to this study and how they were used to determine correlations between teacher happiness, resilience, and retention. Questions regarding the supportive practices of happy teachers will be shared as well. Finally, data collection and analysis measures will be discussed.

Research Questions

1. What are the subjective happiness levels of K-12 teachers in Iowa public schools as measured by the Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999)?

2. What are the resilience levels of K-12 teachers in Iowa public schools as measured by the Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al., 2008)?

3. What relationship (if any) exists between teacher happiness and teacher resilience?

4. How do happiness levels of teachers with high retention differ from those with low retention?

5. What supports and practices do happy teachers receive or engage in, at school?
Research Design

This study utilized a correlational and descriptive research design to explore the relationships between teacher happiness and teacher resilience as well as teacher happiness and teacher retention. It also gathered data from teachers regarding what practices they engage in and/or supports they receive at school, in an effort to identify patterns or relationships between teachers with high levels of happiness (as measured by the SHS) and the activities they participate in. General demographic data such as gender, race, grade and content levels taught, years of experience, school district size, and attendance were also examined.

Data were collected using the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999), the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) (Smith et al., 2008), and a two-part teacher survey created by the researcher (see Appendix A). The teacher survey contains multiple choice questions regarding practices, activities, and supports that teachers engage in at school as well as basic demographic information about each participant. Teachers were asked to complete all of the self-report measures anonymously within one electronic survey. In total, the survey took less than ten minutes to complete.

Participants & Setting

The researcher invited K-12 teachers who held a standard or master teaching license from throughout Iowa to participate in the study. Preschool teachers were not included in this study as there are too many variables to control for between preschool programs. For example, some preschool programs have students attend for three hours per day while others attend for five; some meet daily, some meet two to three times
per week; some have students pay tuition in order to attend and some are free to anyone. Teachers from private and parochial schools were also excluded from this study for similar reasons. Teacher demands in these settings may look very different from public schools.

The researcher sought a sample size of at least 164 teachers from urban and rural public school districts in order to provide greater generalizability of results and the ability to determine accurate effect sizes. A power analysis was completed to determine that a sample size of 164 would provide 90% power to detect a correlation of 0.25 or higher. This was based on a significance level of .05 and a two-tailed test. Participants were chosen at random using a database of all K-12 teachers currently teaching in Iowa holding a standard or master teacher license. This database was provided by the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners. New teachers, those holding a conditional or initial license, were not included in this study as they hadn’t had more than one or two years of experience with teaching. The first round of surveys was sent to 400 teachers who had been randomly selected from the database supplied by the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners. Two additional rounds of surveys were sent to an additional 350 randomly-selected teachers until a large enough sample size was obtained.

Instrumentation

An electronic teacher survey was created by the researcher to include four sections. Section one includes the six questions from the Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al., 2008). The questions are listed as statements to which the respondent agrees or disagrees via a linear scale of 1-5 with one always representing “strongly disagree” and
five always representing “strongly agree,” per the test administration guidelines. The statements are as follows.

1. I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times.
2. I have a hard time making it through stressful events.
3. It does not take me long to recover from a stressful event.
4. It is hard for me to snap back when something bad happens.
5. I usually come through difficult times with little trouble.
6. I tend to take a long time to get over setbacks in my life.

Section Two includes the four Subjective Happiness Scale questions (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). The questions are all answered on a linear scale of 1-7 with one representing the lowest answer and seven the greatest, per the test administration guidelines. The questions are as follows.

1. In general, I consider myself: (1 = not a very happy person, 7 = a very happy person).
2. Compared with most of my peers, I consider myself to be: (1 = less happy, 7 = more happy).
3. Some people are generally very happy. They enjoy life regardless of what is going on, getting the most out of everything. To what extent does this characterization describe you? (1 = not at all, 7 = a great deal).
4. Some people are generally not very happy. Although they are not depressed, they never seem as happy as they might be. To what extent does this characterization describe you? (1 = not at all, 7 = a great deal).
The third and fourth sections of the survey were created by the researcher and included questions about teacher practices as well as demographic information. Section three includes six multiple-choice questions regarding the practices and supports that teachers engage in at school or with their colleagues along with teacher perceptions of their current working conditions at school. These questions and answers were written based on research data that identified supports most commonly linked with teacher happiness and resilience. These included findings from Ainsworth and Oldfield (2019) that cited reasonable workloads, support from upper management, and school culture as the three most important contextual factors impacting teacher resilience. Additionally, the impact of culture and climate on teacher well-being was noted by several additional studies and articles (Hughes, 2012; Maslach et al., 2001). Finally, these survey questions also took into account studies suggesting that supportive collegial, mentoring, or social relationships are a necessary precursor to happiness at work and at home (Diener & Seligman, 2002; Gielan, 2015; Gu & Day, 2007; Kohll, 2007; Lavy & Bocker, 2017; Mansfield, et al., 2012; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

Questions included in section three are as follows.

Section Three:

1. Which of the following activities or supports did you participate in at school during the current school year? (please check all that apply)
   a. Building or District Leadership Team
   b. Collaborative Teams
   c. Regular Common Planning Time with grade level or content area
d. Peer Mentoring (either as a mentor or mentee)

e. Social Committee

f. Staff Wellness Program

g. Learning Labs/Learning Walks/Other organized opportunities to learn from your peers

h. Eating lunch together with colleagues

i. Staff Celebrations

j. Gratitude Practices (writing down or verbalizing things you are thankful for on a regular basis)

2. How would you rate your workload on a typical day this school year?

a. Way too high

b. A little heavy

c. Manageable

d. Just right

e. Too easy

3. How often does your school or district provide you with the resources you need to effectively do your job?

a. Never

b. Occasionally

c. Sometimes

d. Often

e. Always
4. How would you rate the culture and climate of your school on a typical day this school year?
   a. Terrible
   b. Poor
   c. Average
   d. Good
   e. Excellent

5. How supported do you feel by your building administrator(s) on a typical school day?
   a. Terrible - never supportive
   b. Poor - minimally supportive
   c. Average - not supportive or unsupportive
   d. Good - mostly supportive
   e. Excellent - always supportive

6. How often do you spend social time with your school colleagues outside of work?
   a. Never
   b. Occasionally (1-2 times per school year)
   c. Sometimes (1-2 times per semester)
   d. Often (1-2 times per month)
   e. Always (1-2 times per week)
Section four included demographic information such as gender, race, district size, grade levels, and content areas taught, years of experience, retention in their current school district, and attendance during the current school year. The questions included were as follows.

Section Four:

1. What is the size of the school district you currently work in?
   a. Less than 500 students
   b. 501 - 1,000 students
   c. 1,001 - 2,000 students
   d. 2,001 - 4,000 students
   e. More than 4,000 students

2. What gender do you identify with?
   a. Male
   b. Female
   c. Non-binary/third gender
   d. Prefer not to say

3. What is your race? (select all that apply)
   a. American Indian or Alaskan Native
   b. Asian
   c. Black or African American
   d. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
   e. White
4. What grade level(s) do you currently teach? (select all that apply)
   
   a. K
   b. 1
   c. 2
   d. 3
   e. 4
   f. 5
   g. 6
   h. 7
   i. 8
   j. 9
   k. 10
   l. 11
   m. 12

5. What specific content area(s) do you currently teach? (select all that apply)
   
   a. K-6 Classroom Teacher
   b. Art
   c. Computer Science or Coding
   d. Foreign Language
   e. History or Social Studies
   f. Math
g. Music (vocal or instrumental)

h. Physical Education (PE)

i. Reading

j. Science

k. Special Education

l. Writing

6. How many years have you been a teacher?
   a. Less than 1 year
   b. 1 - 5 years
   c. 6 - 10 years
   d. 11 - 15 years
   e. 16 - 20 years
   f. More than 20 years

7. How many years have you taught in your current school district?
   a. Less than 1 year
   b. 1 - 5 years
   c. 6 - 10 years
   d. 11 - 15 years
   e. 16 - 20 years
   f. More than 20 years
8. How many days of school have you missed during this current school year due to feeling physically or mentally unwell? (*this does not include days of required quarantine for COVID-19 if you were not feeling unwell)

a. 0 - 1
b. 2 - 3
c. 4 - 6
d. 7 - 9
e. 10 or more

*The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS)*

The SHS was first published in 1999 by Sonja Lyubomirsky and Heidi Lepper as a measure of subjective global happiness. It was initially developed and validated across 14 studies with a total of 2,732 participants from the United States and Russia. Participants represented a variety of age groups from teenagers to older adults in high schools, college campuses, and community centers. The SHS was created in response to a gap in the literature regarding an overall measure of subjective happiness as the researchers were looking for a simple way to answer and quantify the question, “are you happy or not?” The SHS considers happiness from the respondent’s perspective and is easily and quickly administered, as it is only four questions long.

The Subjective Happiness Scale was found to have high internal consistency and good to excellent reliability (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). The scale meets and exceeds the minimum psychometric criteria for accuracy as it correlates highly with other happiness measures. Five measures of happiness and well-being were used to validate
the SHS include the Affect Balance Scale, The Delighter-Terrible Scale, the Global Happiness Item, the Recent Happiness Item, and the Satisfaction with Life Scale. Lyubomirsky and Lepper found the SHS to be suited for different ages, occupations, languages, and cultures with no significant sex or age differences observed (1999).

High internal consistency, unitary structure, and stability over time were found across fourteen samples (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). Internal Consistency was tested using Cronbach’s Alpha. All four samples showed good to excellent internal consistency. Alpha’s ranged from 0.79-0.94 with a mean of 0.86. Test-retest reliability was evaluated via longitudinal studies in five samples ranging in the timespan from three weeks to one year. Scores ranged from 0.55 to 0.90, with a mean of 0.72. The lowest score was for those tested the longest time (1 year) apart.

Convergent Validity was assessed by first correlating the SHS with other published measures of happiness and well-being using samples of college students and retirees. Correlations ranged from 0.52-0.72, with a mean of 0.62. Discriminant Validity testing was done testing for robustness. Researchers looked for correlations with non-related measures including grade point average, math, and verbal ability as well as reported stressful life events. The only measure that correlated somewhat with happiness was a measure of verbal ability on the SAT with a small effect size of 0.14. Finally, Informant Reports were also conducted to determine if there were correlations between self-reports and other reports from roommates, spouses, etc. The reports found substantial agreement between self-other ratings on the SHS.
For the purpose of this study, categories were created by the researcher to interpret SHS scores and define which scores indicated Low, Moderate, and High Levels of subjective happiness. Cut scores were created prior to distribution of the survey and delineated based on the same pattern used in the Brief Resilience Scale. The researcher identified that a score of 4.0 indicated a neutral response on the SHS’s Likert scale of 1.0 to 7.0. For this reason all scores below neutral (1.00 - 3.99) indicated Low levels of happiness. This means that all scores above neutral were deemed “normal” or moderate to high. When cutting the scores above neutral into equal halves, the researcher determined that scores in the mid-range of neutral (4.00 - 5.30) would be used to indicate Moderate levels of happiness, and scores above the mid-range (5.31-7.00) would be used to indicate High levels of happiness.

*Brief Resilience Scale (BRS)*

The Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) is a 6-item scale that was created and published by Bruce Smith, Jeanne Dalen, Kathryn Wiggin, Erin Tooley, Paulette Christopher, and Jennifer Barnard at the University of New Mexico in 2008. The BRS was created to assess the ability of individuals to bounce back or recover from stress. Their initial studies sought to determine if the BRS could reliably assess resilience in as few items as possible. The BRS was initially tested on four separate samples of American adults both in college campus settings and hospital settings with a total of 354 participants (Smith, et al., 2008). The BRS is unique in that it is the only measure specifically assessing resilience in its original and most basic meaning, rather than assessing personal characteristics that may promote resilience. Since its inception in 2008, the BRS has
been translated and validated into several languages including Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, and Malaysian.

The BRS was found to have good internal consistency and test-retest reliability (Smith, et al., 2008). It was also found to be reliable when measured as a unitary construct. Factor structure analysis was examined by principal component analysis (PCA) with a varimax rotation retaining eigenvalues across all four samples (Smith, et al., 2008). Results for each sample revealed a one-factor solution accounting for 55-57% of the variance. Loadings ranged from 0.68 to 0.91. Internal Consistency was examined using Cronbach’s Alpha. Findings were strong with Cronbach’s Alpha scores ranging from 0.80 - 0.91 across the samples (Smith, et al., 2008).

Convergent Validity was assessed by zero-order correlations between the BRS and 17 other measures (Smith, et al., 2008). The BRS positively correlated across all four samples with the following attributes: optimism, purpose in life, social support, positive reframing, and positive affect (in three of the four samples). The BRS negatively correlated across all four samples with pessimism, alexithymia, negative interactions, behavioral disengagement, denial, self-blame, perceived stress, anxiety, depression, negative affect, and physical symptoms (Smith, et al., 2008). Discriminant Predictive Validity was assessed by partial correlations, with health-related outcomes controlling for other predictors. Finally, researchers compared mean BRS scores across samples and subgroups using independent sample t-tests. Doing so showed strong internal consistency and test-retest reliability (Smith, et al., 2008).
Data Collection

All communication and data collection with participants took place electronically via email. Participants were chosen at random and sent an email containing information about the study, including any risks or rewards for participating, and a link to complete the survey. Clicking on the live link acted as each participant’s provision of informed consent to participate.

Recruitment

Invitations to participate, along with a live link directly to the survey, were sent electronically to a random selection of Iowa teachers holding a standard or master teaching license according to a database provided by the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners (BOEE). The emails included an overview of the study, informed consent, and a link to complete the anonymous survey (see Appendix B for a copy of the email). Survey completion was estimated to take approximately five to ten minutes per teacher. One follow-up email was sent to all teachers after three to five days reminding them of the survey. This process (including the follow-up email to participants) was repeated two more times, gathering a new random selection of teachers each time until the desired number of participants completed the online survey. In total, 167 teachers completed the survey.

Survey Administration & Organization

Surveys were created and shared with participants using Qualtrics. Surveys were completely anonymous. No names or direct identifiers were collected. The only indirect identifying information collected was district size, gender, race, grade/content level
taught, and years of experience. Each of the surveys was scored in accordance with the protocol provided by the author(s). The SHS is scored by finding the average score of the four items. The fourth item is reverse-coded. The possible range of scores on the SHS is 1.0 to 7.0 with higher scores reflecting greater levels of subjective happiness. For the purpose of this study, scores of 1.00 - 3.99 indicate Low levels of happiness, scores of 4.00 - 5.30 indicate Moderate levels of happiness and 5.31-7.00 indicate High levels of happiness.

On the BRS, items 1, 3, and 5 are positively worded, and items 2, 4, and 6 are negatively worded. It is then scored by reverse-coding items 2, 4, and 6 and finding the mean of the six items. BRS scores are interpreted as follows: 1.00 - 2.99 indicates Low resilience, 3.00 - 4.30 indicates Normal levels of resilience, and scores of 4.31 - 5.00 indicates High resilience (Smith, et al., 2008). These interpretive categories were created by the authors of the BRS.

**Response Rate**

Three rounds of emails went out to participants in order to ensure the most representative sample possible. The initial email and survey were sent out to 400 randomly selected Iowa teachers on May 8, 2022. The list was created using a randomizer from a database containing over 34,000 Iowa teachers holding a current standard or master teaching license. This initial database was provided by the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners (BOEE). The database included each teacher’s first and last name, current district, and school as well as a description of their current position (administrator, general education teacher, special education teacher, etc.) The list was
sorted to remove private, parochial, and preschool teachers. It was sorted again to remove any position other than teaching. These positions included building administrators, AEA consultants, directors, counselors, school nurses, substitute teachers, and paraeducators.

The BOEE does not share teacher email information. However, they did share a master list of each district, their superintendent, and the superintendent’s school email address. From this list, the researcher created a template to build teacher email addresses following the same pattern and handle as the superintendent’s email address. Because of this, errors were expected in that some individuals’ names are different on their teaching licenses than on their district email addresses. These emails bounced back. When they did, the researcher would attempt to look them up to make a correction. However, sometimes an alternative email couldn’t be found. In this case, a different name was randomly selected from the list to replace it.

One week after the first round of emails went out; a second round was sent to 200 more randomly selected participants. One week after the second round of emails was sent, a third and final round of emails was sent to 150 more randomly selected teachers. Each email group was sent one reminder to please complete the survey within three to five days of receiving their initial invitation via email. In total, 750 viable emails were sent inviting teachers to participate in the survey and 167 surveys were completed.

There was a response rate of 22% for this study. However, this finding should be accepted with mild caution as a number of roadblocks arose from relying on email
communication. First, there was the aforementioned issue of names being spelled differently or shortened for emails. These emails were returned to the researcher as “undeliverable” or “unfound.” A common example would be teachers named David and Jennifer having email addresses including Dave and Jen. While some of these were able to be easily corrected and resent, some of the more uncommon name spelling issues couldn’t be fixed and were replaced with a new name randomly selected from the list.

Another limitation was the number of districts with spam filters that would not allow mass emails to go through their system to even reach participants. In order to be mindful of spam filters, the researcher initially sent surveys to groups of 100 or less. However, a number of spam filter warnings returned stating that the message had been blocked and access would be denied. The researcher attempted to resend these emails individually to those participants. This worked in some cases, but in others it was unclear whether participants received the message or not. This limitation may have reduced the number of participants who received their invitation email.

Data Analysis

Data were collected from an electronic survey sent to a random sample of Iowa public school teachers who hold a current standard or master teaching license. The survey contained twenty-four questions including four from the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999), six from the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) (Smith et al., 2008), and fourteen from a two-part teacher survey created by the researcher (see Appendix A). The teacher survey contained multiple choice questions
regarding practices, activities, and supports that teachers engage in at school as well as basic demographic information about the participants.

Based on their responses, teachers received a subjective happiness score that fell within the Low (1.00-3.99), Moderate (4.00-5.30) or High (5.31-7.00) range and a resilience score falling in the Low (1.00-2.99), Normal (3.00-4.30) or High (4.31-5.0) range. Subjective happiness scores were labeled into categories created by the researcher that paralleled resilience score categories for purposes of descriptive analysis. All scores were calculated based on the pre-existing scoring rules from the testing manuals.

Descriptive analysis was completed first for each variable in order to get a comprehensive understanding and description of the study sample. Each variable was examined before looking for patterns using means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages. Next, data were explored for a number of different correlations between the quantitative variables of interest. The relationships analyzed included:

*Relationship 1: Teacher Happiness & Teacher Resilience*

*Relationship 2: Teacher Happiness & District Retention*

*Relationship 3: Teacher Happiness & Supports and Practices at Work*

This study utilizes a correlational and descriptive research design. Pearson correlation coefficients were determined to measure the strength of each linear relationship between quantitative variables while Spearman’s correlation coefficients were used for all non-linear relationships. Descriptive statistics were explored and reported for all variables. Frequency distributions and cross-tabulations were explored
for the questionnaire items from section three in comparison to happiness scores from section two. This analysis sought to answer research question five, “What supports and practices do happy teachers receive or engage in, at school?” In addition, Pearson and Spearman correlation coefficients were examined.
Chapter 4: Results

Data were collected using the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999), the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) (Smith et al., 2008), and a two-part teacher survey created by the researcher (see Appendix A). Frequency distributions, cross tabs, and descriptive statistics were also examined to explore patterns and trends in the survey data. Data were analyzed using descriptive and correlational analyses. Pearson’s correlations were calculated to determine the existence and strength of linear relationships between teacher happiness, resilience, and retention. For variables with a nonlinear relationship, Spearman’s Correlation Coefficients were determined. The researcher checked assumptions for each relationship before determining which correlational analysis to utilize. Descriptive statistics were calculated using SPSS and were used to describe the sample’s demographics including gender, district size, years of teaching experience, race, and grade levels taught.

Research questions are as follows:

1. What are the subjective happiness levels of K-12 teachers in Iowa public schools as measured by the Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999)?

2. What are the resilience levels of K-12 teachers in Iowa public schools as measured by the Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al., 2008)?

3. What relationship (if any) exists between teacher happiness and teacher resilience?
4. How do happiness levels of teachers with high retention differ from those with low retention?

5. What supports and practices do happy teachers receive, or engage in, at school?

The following section will provide an overview of the study’s results. Descriptive analyses of the demographic data of study participants are presented. The results are then presented in order of each research question. Supplementary findings not directly related to the research questions are reported at the end of the chapter.

Descriptive Analysis

Data were collected from K-12 teachers who hold a standard or master teaching license from throughout Iowa via an anonymous electronic survey. Preschool and non-public teachers were excluded from the study because of the number of uncontrolled variables such as differences in schedules (some preschool programs meet daily, while others meet a few days per week; PK programs can run anywhere from two to six hours per day), curriculum (non-public teachers have different requirements and standards), teaching demands, etc. Similarly, new teachers or those on a conditional license were not included in the study due to their lack of experience. The researcher aimed for a sample size of at least 164 teachers from urban and rural public school districts in order to provide greater generalizability of results and to determine accurate effect sizes. A power analysis was completed to determine that a sample size of 164 would provide 90% power to detect a correlation of 0.25 or higher. This was based on a significance level of .05 and a two-tailed test. Once all surveys were collected and analyzed, 167 participants were included in the study.
Demographic Data

A number of demographic data points were collected to determine the makeup and heterogeneity of the participant group. Due to the vast differences in school communities and populations throughout Iowa, the first demographic question asked was about district size. This gave the researcher an idea of whether participants taught in urban or rural settings and allowed for some analysis of patterns in responses from teachers in said groups. Teacher experiences in rural communities versus urban areas likely vary considerably. According to the Iowa Department of Public Health, 43% of Iowa’s population is classified as rural (IDPH, 2011). A summary of the distribution of each participant's district size is included in Table 1.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Size of Research Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 500 Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 167 participants included in the study, 118 identified as female, 45 as male, and 4 preferred not to answer. One hundred and fifty-nine (95%) of participants reported that they were White, while 1% reported two or more races. Less than 1% identified as Asian or African American. Zero participants identified as American Indian, Alaskan Native, Pacific Islander, or Native Hawaiian. Approximately 2% of participants
preferred not to answer. These demographic characteristics align closely with those of the state of Iowa as a whole. According to the 2022 *Condition of Education* report, 76.3% of Iowa Public School Teachers are female and 97% are White (Iowa Department of Public Education).

Participants represented a wide variety of content areas taught. The largest subgroup was K-6 classroom teachers, making up 22% of all participants. Special Education teachers made up 16% of the sample while Reading teachers accounted for another 12%. The smallest subgroups were Computer Science, Art, Foreign Language, and PE, each of which accounted for less than 5% of participants. There was a mostly even split of grade levels with 41% of teachers reporting teaching only elementary students while 56% reported teaching secondary students. See Table 2 for a full representation of the grade levels taught.

Table 2

*Grade Levels Currently Taught by Research Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Elementary (K-6)</th>
<th>Elementary + Secondary (K-12)</th>
<th>Middle School (5-8)</th>
<th>Middle School + High School (5-12)</th>
<th>High School (9-12)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Years of teaching experience also varied and ranged from less than 5 years of experience to 20+ years. Sixty-four participants reported having twenty or more years of experience. This accounted for 38% of all participants, making them the largest subgroup. Teachers with only 1-5 years of experience made up only 10% of the
participants, making them the smallest subgroup. This is likely due to the fact that only teachers holding a standard or master teaching license were included in the random sample. Having a standard teaching license requires a minimum of two years of teaching experience before being eligible to apply for a standard license. See Table 3 for a distribution of years of experience.

Table 3

*Research Participants’ Years of Teaching Experience*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>1-5 years</th>
<th>6-10 years</th>
<th>11-15 years</th>
<th>16-20 years</th>
<th>20+ years</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Procedures**

SPSS was used to conduct Pearson’s and Spearman’s correlational analyses in order to determine the existence and strength of relationships between teacher happiness, resilience, and retention. Assumptions were checked for each relationship to determine which correlational analysis was most appropriate. Frequency distributions, scatterplots, cross tabs, and descriptive statistics were also gathered to explore patterns and trends in the survey data and to answer the research questions. In the following paragraphs, the measures and procedures used to investigate each research question will be described.
Subjective Happiness Scale

Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) scores were tabulated for every participant following the scoring rules laid out by Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999). The SHS is scored by finding the average score of the four items. The fourth item is reverse-coded. The possible range of scores on the SHS is 1.0 to 7.0 with higher scores reflecting greater levels of subjective happiness. For the purpose of this study, scores of 1.00 - 3.99 indicate Low levels of happiness, scores of 4.00 - 5.30 indicate Moderate levels of happiness and 5.31 - 7.00 indicate High levels of happiness. SHS scores were labeled into these categories to parallel BRS scores for purposes of descriptive analysis only. SPSS analysis was run on raw scores alone and did not include labels. For further discussion of cut scores, please refer to Chapter 3.

SPSS was used to tabulate correlational analysis as well as descriptive statistics regarding the range of scores. The mean SHS score was 5.32, with a standard deviation of .997. This mean score falls just within the researcher’s assigned High range of happiness, which appears to impact the outcomes and assumptions that can be made about the findings. Figure 1 below depicts a frequency distribution of SHS scores prior to adding in the labels that would be used for descriptive analysis later on. Table 4 shows an overview of scores with their labels and categories added.
Although it skewed somewhat more heavily toward higher scores, the distribution of overall SHS scores looks reasonably normal and meets the assumption of the Pearson correlation coefficient. However, as demonstrated in Table 4, once the descriptive labels were added in to create categories of scores, the distribution appeared less “normal.” Approximately 92% of participants scored in the Moderate to High range of happiness according to these categories making the scores appear much more biased to high happiness.
Table 4

Participants SHS Scores by Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low 1.00-3.99</th>
<th>Moderate 4.00-5.30</th>
<th>High 5.31-7.00</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>5.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Brief Resilience Scale**

Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) scores were tabulated for every participant following the scoring rules laid out by Smith, Dalen, Wiggins, Tooley, Christopher, and Bernard (2008). On the BRS, items 1, 3, and 5 are positively worded, and items 2, 4, and 6 are negatively worded. It is then scored by reverse coding items 2, 4, and 6 and finding the mean of the six items. BRS scores are interpreted as follows: 1.00 - 2.99 indicates Low resilience, 3.00 - 4.30 indicates Normal levels of resilience, and scores of 4.31 - 5.00 indicates High resilience. SPSS was used to tabulate descriptive statistics regarding the range of scores. The mean BRS score was 3.56, with a standard deviation of .707. Figure 2 shows a frequency distribution of BRS scores.
The distribution of BRS scores appears normal and meets the assumptions of the Pearson Correlation Coefficient. The average score falls into the Normal range of resilience as defined by Smith et al. (2008). Table 5 shows an overview of scores with their assigned labels. As with the SHS scores, the labels seem to make the data appear more heavily weighted toward the positive with 81% of participants scoring in the Normal to High range of resilience.
Table 5

Participants BRS Scores with Category Labels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Normal/ Moderate</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.00-2.99</td>
<td>3.00-4.30</td>
<td>4.31-5.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SHS x BRS**

To explore the relationship between subjective happiness and resilience, I used SPSS to tabulate the Pearson correlation coefficient between all SHS and BRS scores. Before analyzing this relationship, I examined the assumptions of Pearson’s to ensure it was a suitable measure for this relationship. The first assumption is that my variables can be measured on a continuous scale. Because my variables are interval in nature, this assumption was met. The second assumption is that the continuous variables are paired so that each participant has two variables. Because each of my participants has both an SHS and a BRS score, this assumption is also true. Assumption three states that there must be a linear relationship between variables. To check this assumption, I created a scatterplot of the data. (Figure 3). The scatterplot depicted a linear relationship between the BRS and SHS scores. The fourth and final assumption is that there are no significant outliers. This assumption was also tested with the scatterplot depicted below. No significant outliers were found so this assumption was also met.

After checking for assumptions and analyzing the relationship using Pearson’s correlation coefficient, a moderate positive correlation was found \( r = .474, p < .01 \), indicating a significant positive linear relationship between subjective happiness and
resilience. This finding suggests that the happier teachers are, the more resilient they tend to be. Figure 3 depicts a scatterplot of the relationship between BRS and SHS scores.

Figure 3

*Scatterplot of SHS and BRS Scores*

Further descriptive analysis of the happiness and resilience data shows that only 26% of participants with high levels of subjective happiness also have high levels of resilience. However, 92% of participants with high levels of subjective happiness have normal to high levels of resilience. In this group of Iowa teachers, only 8% of participants who reported high happiness also reported low resilience. This suggests that happiness and resilience are related.
Teacher Retention

In order to explore retention as a variable, I first had to define teacher retention for the purpose of this study. Teacher retention is a multifaceted construct with a number of uncontrollable external variables impacting it. Some of these factors include individuals who leave teaching for another job in education such as instructional coaching or school administration; teachers who take time away from work to raise young children and then return; teachers who leave the field due to a spouse or significant other being relocated with a higher paying career; or teachers who move between districts so their retention in the field is difficult to track.

For the purposes of this study, I defined teacher retention as one’s continued annual employment in their current school district in a teaching role. To measure retention, I asked each participant how many years they have been teaching and how many years they have been teaching in their current district. To determine who had high levels of district retention, I looked for teachers whose years of teaching experience matched their years of teaching in their current district. In total, 95 participants (57%) reported having high levels of district retention.

Once I had a measure of district retention for teachers, I used descriptive and statistical analyses to identify trends and patterns between teachers with varying levels of happiness and district retention. Fifty-four percent of participants with high levels of subjective happiness also had high levels of district retention. In addition, 91% of participants with moderate and high levels of subjective happiness also had high levels
of district retention. Only 9% of participants who reported low levels of subjective
happiness also reported high retention rates.

Next, I looked to see if there were differences in subjective happiness levels for
participants in the high retention group versus the low retention group. To do so, I
categorized teachers into two dichotomous groups, with those meeting the criteria for
high district retention in one category and all others in a second category. First, I
created a frequency table to see if there was any obvious difference in happiness levels
between the two groups. While some minor discrepancies were evident, it was unclear
whether or not they were significant. As a result, I ran an independent-samples t test to
compare the means of participants with high district retention versus low retention. The
results are shared in Table 6 and discussed below.

Table 6

*Teacher Happiness by District Retention*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Statistics</th>
<th>Retention Levels</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SHS TOTAL SCORE</td>
<td>Low Retention</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>5.2887</td>
<td>.93794</td>
<td>.11131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High Retention</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>5.3490</td>
<td>1.04282</td>
<td>.10643</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An independent-samples t test was calculated comparing the mean happiness
score of participants with high district retention to the mean score of participants with
low district retention. No significant difference was found ($t(165) = -.385, p > .05$). The
mean of the teachers with low district retention ($M = 5.29, sd = .94$) was not statistically
different from the mean of teachers with high district retention \((M = 5.35, sd = .104)\).

While the frequency table showed that the mean SHS score for the High Retention group fell into the High Happiness category, and the mean score for the Low Retention group fell into the Moderate Happiness category, ultimately no statistical significance was found.

**Teacher Survey Data**

Six questions were included in the teacher survey in order to explore teacher perceptions regarding the current supports and practices they engage in and with at school. These questions made up Part Three of the survey. Participant responses were examined for patterns and frequency distributions. When appropriate, questions and responses were run through SPSS for correlational analysis in relation to happiness using either Pearson’s or Spearman’s correlations. The six questions and answer choices are provided in Appendix A.

These questions were selected based on factors frequently cited in the research as significantly impacting teacher stress and resilience. Such factors include teacher workload, administrator support, relationships with colleagues, culture/climate, and availability of resources. The first question was made from a list of the most common supports and practices in place in Iowa schools. It is not an exhaustive list, to be sure. However, it is one that could be broken down into two categories: Professional Supports and Personal Supports.

Professional supports are defined by the researcher as system-level supports or learning embedded in the workday to help teachers do their job. Personal supports are
defined as social or individual-level activities that build connection or personal betterment. Professional supports included participation in the following: (1) Building/District Leadership Team, (2) Collaborative Teams, (3) Regular Common Planning Time, (4) Peer Mentoring, and (7) Learning Labs/Walks. Personal supports that were options for participants to select include items (5) Social Committee, (6) Staff Wellness Program, (8) Eating Lunch with Colleagues, (9) Staff Celebrations, and (10) Gratitude Practices.

The most frequently selected professional supports were Collaborative Teams with 128 (77%) teachers participating and Common Planning Time with 86 (51%) teachers taking part. The most frequently selected personal supports were Staff Celebrations with 119 (71%) teachers participating and Eating Lunch with Colleagues with 92 (55%) teachers taking part. The least frequently selected supports and practices overall were Learning Labs and Staff Wellness Programs with 21 (13%) and 28 (17%) reported.

Teachers with High Levels of Happiness had similar patterns to the overall group. The two most common supports and practices reported by teachers with higher levels of happiness were Collaborative Teams (83%) and Staff Celebrations (80%). These patterns were much larger than the rest, in that the next most common was Eating Lunch with Colleagues for 61% of participants with high happiness scores. On the contrary, 57% of participants with low happiness scores participated in Staff Celebrations and 71% in Collaborative Teams. Only 14% of unhappy teachers reported
eating lunch with their colleagues. This may indicate a lack of personal relationships or feelings of isolation in teachers with low levels of happiness.

On average, teachers reported participating in 3.8 supportive practices during the current school year. Table 7 shows an overview of the number of supports and practices that participants with high, medium and low happiness levels reported engaging in. This table was created to determine whether there was a difference in happiness levels based on how many supportive practices one engaged with in a typical school year. This table demonstrates that teachers with higher reported levels of subjective happiness tend to participate in more supportive practices than those with lower levels of happiness. It also identifies which practices were used more often for each group.

Table 7

*Supports and Practices of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SHS Scores</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Average # of Supports</th>
<th>1st Most Common</th>
<th>2nd Most Common</th>
<th>3rd Most Common</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Collaborative Teams (83%)</td>
<td>Staff Celebrations (80%)</td>
<td>Eating Lunch with Colleagues (61%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Collaborative Teams (71%)</td>
<td>Eating Lunch with Colleagues (61%)</td>
<td>Staff Celebrations (56%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Collaborative Teams (64%)</td>
<td>Leadership Teams (57%)</td>
<td>Staff Celebrations (57%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The greatest number of supports teachers could report participating in was 10, while the lowest number was 0.*
Along with the descriptive analysis provided above, the number of supports and practices that each participant engaged in was also examined for a relationship with happiness. Before analyzing this potential relationship, I examined the assumptions of Pearson’s to ensure it was a suitable measure. By running a scatterplot of the two variables, it was clear that a linear relationship was not present. Therefore, assumptions were not met for Pearson correlational analysis. Assumptions were checked and met using Spearman’s correlational analysis. To complete this analysis, the numbers of supports that each participant reported taking part in was added up to provide an index score for each teacher. These index scores were then correlated with each participant’s SHS score. A weak but statistically significant positive correlation was found (rho (165) = .206, p < .01). This finding supports the descriptive analysis above and further indicates that the number of supports teachers receive is related to their reported level of subjective happiness. A simple histogram displaying these scores is provided in Figure 4.
Supplemental Findings

While analyzing data relating to the five identified research questions, a number of incidental findings were noted. While these secondary findings do not have a direct relationship with the research questions, they are important factors for building administrators to consider when supporting the well-being of their teachers. For these reasons, the incidental findings will be shared and discussed below.

Retention and Years of Experience

An anecdotal finding related to district retention data was identified while running correlational analysis for other variables. A significant relationship was found between years of teaching and teaching time in their current district. A Pearson
correlation coefficient was calculated to explore this relationship further. A moderate positive correlation was found ($r = .690, p < .01$), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. Teachers with more years of experience, tend to have more years in their current district. Table 8 displays the number of teachers in each range category of experience as well as those with high district resilience as measured above.

Table 8

*Teachers Rates of District Retention*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1-5 years</th>
<th>6-10 years</th>
<th>11-15 years</th>
<th>16-20 years</th>
<th>20+ years</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>n</strong> Teachers w/ High District Retention</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>%</strong></td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Happiness and Attendance**

In addition to district retention, I also explored the relationship between happiness and attendance. Teachers were asked how many days of school they missed during the current school year due to feeling physically or mentally unwell. A note was made on the survey that this number should not include mandatory absences due to COVID precautions if teachers felt healthy. Surveys were administered in the final one to two weeks of the year, so teachers were able to reflect on the entire school year before answering this question. Participants reporting 0-1 days missed were labeled as having Very High Attendance, while those who missed 10 or more days were labeled as having
Very Low Attendance. Of those surveyed, 72% of participants reported having High to Very High rates of attendance. Table 9 provides a summary of attendance for participants.

Table 9

*Participant Attendance Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance Level</th>
<th>Very High Attendance</th>
<th>High Attendance</th>
<th>Normal Attendance</th>
<th>Low Attendance</th>
<th>Very Low Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-1 days missed</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Attendance data was explored as an additional level of retention consideration. It was interesting to note that 90% of participants, who reported high levels of happiness, also had normal to high levels of attendance, while only 10% of teachers with high happiness had low to very low attendance. Furthermore, of the nine participants who reported high happiness and low attendance, seven of them missed ten or more days.

Correlational analysis was calculated for the relationship between happiness and attendance. Before the analysis was completed, assumptions for Pearson’s correlations were checked. A scatterplot revealed that the relationship between happiness and attendance is not linear and therefore would not be appropriate for Pearson’s. Assumptions were then checked for Spearman’s correlation coefficient instead. The data met all three assumptions for Spearman’s so the analysis was computed.
A Spearman rho correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between happiness and attendance. An extremely weak correlation that was not significant was found ($\rho (165) = -.032$, $p > .05$). Happiness levels do not appear to be related to work attendance. It would be interesting to ask additional follow-up questions to those participants about their self-care routines. Does taking more mental health days off of work relate to having higher levels of happiness? This could be a compelling follow-up study.

**Relationships Between Supportive Practices**

While the only significant relationship between SHS and supportive practices noted was with staff celebrations, there were other statistically significant relationships found between the supports and practices themselves that are noteworthy. Staff Celebrations had the highest number of significant relationships with other variables. Weak but statistically significant positive correlations were found between Celebrations and Common Planning Time ($\rho (165) = .192$, $p < .05$); Social Committee Participation ($\rho (165) = .179$, $p < .05$); Eating Lunch with Colleagues ($\rho (165) = .224$, $p < .01$); Staff Wellness Programs ($\rho (165) = .163$, $p < .05$); and participating in Gratitude Practices ($\rho (165) = .212$, $p < .01$). Although these relationships were small, they were significant, indicating that engaging in Staff Celebration practices may be a good way to encourage other positive practices, such as eating lunch with colleagues, practicing gratitude, and planning instruction together. Please see Table 10 below for a full list of Spearman’s correlations between practices.
Table 10

Spearman’s rho Correlations Between Part 3, Question 1 Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SHS</th>
<th>Lead Team</th>
<th>Collab Team</th>
<th>Com Plan Time</th>
<th>Mentor</th>
<th>Social Com</th>
<th>Well Program</th>
<th>Learning Labs</th>
<th>Lunch</th>
<th>Celebrations</th>
<th>Gratitude Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SHS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>.121</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>.086</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>.123</td>
<td>-.114</td>
<td>.140</td>
<td>.210**</td>
<td>.131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Team</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.115</td>
<td>.155*</td>
<td>.118</td>
<td>.152*</td>
<td>.141</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>-.035</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>-.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Teams</td>
<td>.121</td>
<td>.115</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.214**</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>.138</td>
<td>.134</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>.034</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>.138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Planning Time</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>.155*</td>
<td>.214**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>-.021</td>
<td>.338**</td>
<td>.192*</td>
<td>.181*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>.086</td>
<td>.118</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-.033</td>
<td>.093</td>
<td>-.173*</td>
<td>-.120</td>
<td>-.026</td>
<td>.072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Committ</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>.152*</td>
<td>.138</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>-.033</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.092</td>
<td>-.021</td>
<td>-.040</td>
<td>.179*</td>
<td>.151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellness Prgm</td>
<td>.123</td>
<td>.141</td>
<td>.134</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>.093</td>
<td>.092</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.163*</td>
<td>.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Labs</td>
<td>-.114</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>-.021</td>
<td>-.173</td>
<td>-.021</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.089</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>.140</td>
<td>-.035</td>
<td>.034</td>
<td>.338**</td>
<td>-.120</td>
<td>-.040</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.089</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.224**</td>
<td>.110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrate</td>
<td>.210**</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>.192*</td>
<td>-.026</td>
<td>.179*</td>
<td>.163*</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>.224**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.212**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gratitude</td>
<td>.131</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>.138</td>
<td>.181*</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>.151</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.111</td>
<td>.110</td>
<td>.212**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
Happiness and Workplace Perceptions

For items two through six in section three of the survey, participants were asked to rate their working conditions during the current school year on a scale of 1 – 5, with 1 being the lowest score and 5 being the highest. The working conditions assessed by these questions were workload, availability of resources, culture and climate, administrator support, and time spent socializing with colleagues outside of work. Average responses to each of these questions were delineated by happiness level and compared to determine if there were differences in perceived working conditions when compared with self-reports of happiness. These comparisons are provided in Table 11 below.

Table 11

Participant Ratings of Working Conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SHS Scores</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Average Rating of Workload</th>
<th>Average Rating of Resource Availability</th>
<th>Average Rating of Culture &amp; Climate</th>
<th>Average Rating of Admin Support</th>
<th>Average Rating of Social Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High 5.31-7.00</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate 4.00-5.30</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low 1.00-3.99</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The lowest rating a participant could provide was 1, while the highest possible rating was 5.
As demonstrated in the table above, participants with higher ratings of subjective happiness levels also had higher ratings of working conditions in almost all areas. The area with the least amount of variance was workload, which showed no difference between all levels of happiness. The area with the greatest variance was culture and climate, which showed a difference of .8 points between the low and high happiness groups. Forty-three percent of participants with high levels of happiness rated their school’s culture and climate to be a 4 (good) or 5 (excellent) while only 21% of participants with low levels of happiness and 29% with moderate levels provided the same rating.

To further examine this potential relationship, I used SPSS to tabulate a correlation coefficient between Subjective Happiness Scores and participant ratings of culture and climate in their school. Assumptions were not met for Pearson’s correlation coefficient so Spearman’s correlation analysis was explored and utilized. A Spearman’s rho correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between each participant’s happiness levels and their ratings of culture and climate. A weak but statistically significant positive correlation was found (rho (165) = .166, p < .05). This finding suggests that teachers with higher levels of subjective happiness may be more likely to work in schools with slightly better culture and climate or are more likely to perceive their schools as having better culture and climate.

**Relationships Between Workplace Perception Data**

Just as there were relationships found between supportive practice variables in Question 1 of section 3, relationships were also found between the teacher workplace
perception ratings in the remainder of section 3 in the teacher survey. These questions were relating to participant’s perceptions of the working conditions in their schools. Of note are five moderate positive relationships found between variables. Table 12 shows Spearman’s correlations between items 2 - 6 included in section 3 of the teacher survey.

Table 12

*Spearman’s rho Correlations Between Part 3, Question 2-6 Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SHS Score</th>
<th>Workload</th>
<th>Resource Availability</th>
<th>Culture &amp; Climate</th>
<th>Admin Support</th>
<th>Social Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SHS Score</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>.139</td>
<td>.166*</td>
<td>.117</td>
<td>.088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workload</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.430**</td>
<td>.373**</td>
<td>.141</td>
<td>-.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource Allocation</td>
<td>.139</td>
<td>.430**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.552**</td>
<td>.509**</td>
<td>.062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture &amp; Climate</td>
<td>.166*</td>
<td>.373**</td>
<td>.552**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.613**</td>
<td>.129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin Support</td>
<td>.117</td>
<td>.141</td>
<td>.509**</td>
<td>.613**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Time</td>
<td>.088</td>
<td>-.014</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>.129</td>
<td>.149</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Of note in the Spearman’s correlations are the relationships between Workload and Resource Availability ($rho = .430$); between Culture/Climate and Resource Availability ($rho = .552$); between Culture/Climate and Administrator Support ($rho = .613$); between Culture/Climate and Workload ($rho = .373$); between Resource Availability and Workload ($rho = .430$); and between Resource Availability and
Administrator Support (\(rho = .509\)). These correlations are also all significant at the .01 level, indicating a significant nonlinear relationship between variables.

These findings suggest that when Culture and Climate are greater; Resource Availability, Administrator Support, and Workloads are also perceived to be better. Similarly, the data suggests that when Resource Availability is better, Workloads and Administrator Support are also perceived to be better. While these incidental findings do not have a direct relationship with teacher happiness, they are important factors for building administrators to consider when supporting the well-being of their teachers.

Chapter Five will provide a conclusion for this study. This includes a summary of the findings, along with discussion regarding how they impact teachers, systems, and school leaders. Chapter five will also provide an overview of study limitations, recommendations for future research, and recommendations for school leaders.
Chapter 5: Summary, Discussion & Conclusions

The intent of this research study was to identify whether or not investing in teacher happiness could be a meaningful way to build teacher resilience in order to manage the stress of teaching and help teachers remain in the field long term. It was my goal that by examining the relationships between teacher happiness, resilience, and retention; and by exploring what happy teachers do differently, I could find some supports or indicators to help build resilience and boost teacher retention. If evidence can be found to support my hypothesis that happier teachers are more resilient and more likely to remain in their current role, this evidence could be used to support initiatives that invest in teacher happiness and well-being. My final research question seeks to find immediate takeaways that building and district leaders can use to promote teacher happiness in their school communities.

Participants in this study were K-12 public school teachers holding a standard or master teaching license from across Iowa. Participants were chosen at random and invited to participate via email in an electronic anonymous survey. 167 teachers chose to participate in the 24-item survey. Data were analyzed using Pearson and Spearman correlation coefficients, frequency distributions, and descriptive analysis. Findings are reported, summarized, and discussed via each of the five research questions below. Conclusions, limitations of the findings, future research recommendations, and recommendations for school leaders follow to wrap up the paper.
Research Question 1

What are the subjective happiness levels of K-12 teachers in Iowa public schools as measured by the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS)? To answer this first question, all participants completed the SHS via the survey. Scores were tabulated and distributed into categories of Low Happiness (1.00-3.99), Moderate Happiness (4.00-5.30), and High Happiness (5.31-7.00). These categories were created by the researcher as the authors did not provide cut-off scores or categories for the scale. Scoring categories followed the same range and pattern of cut scores for the BRS. Assigning these labels occurred following the statistical analysis and allowed the researcher to identify patterns and describe findings. Overall, this study found that Iowa teachers reported themselves as happy. Fifty-two percent of participants scored in the High happiness range, while another 40% scored in the Moderate happiness range. Only 8% reported Low levels of subjective happiness. The average score was 5.32, which falls just within the threshold of High happiness.

Finding that 92% percent of the participants had moderate to high levels of happiness was quite surprising given the current state of stress and burnout in the field of education. A review of the literature on teacher burnout shows that between 5 and 30% of teachers show distinct symptoms of burnout at any given time (Blazer, 2010). Similarly, a poll of American teachers in 2019 found that half of the 556 teachers polled had considered quitting in the past two years (Gewertz, 2019). The primary reasons for their state of discontent were reported being underpaid, overworked, and underappreciated. Chronic stressors such as these may lead to teachers leaving the field.
at a much faster rate. Teachers in the trenches of chronic stress report many negative feelings including emotional exhaustion, negativity, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Blazer, 2010; Klusmann et al., 2008; Maslach et al., 2001). If the literature is reporting that teachers are stressed, frustrated, and at their breaking point, why and how is this group of 167 Iowa educators apparently so happy?

Several factors may have contributed to this finding of widespread teacher happiness. The first two factors to consider are the timing of the survey and those who elected to participate. Given that surveys were distributed in late May, most Iowa teachers were in the final weeks or days of the school year when they received their invitation to participate. Speaking from personal experience, most school staff members are in good spirits during the final weeks of school. Teachers may be focused on summer break and anticipating the much-needed time to relax, rewind and reconnect.

Furthermore, it is also possible that teachers who were still managing great deals of stress were less likely to take the time to complete an online survey. Because of these two factors, it is possible that participants were more likely to be viewing the past school year through rose-colored glasses and/or teachers who were feeling unhappy were less likely to take the time to complete the survey.

However, a third factor may be the most important to consider. This is the concept of resilience. Resilience is an adaptive response to adversity that indicates an ability to bounce back or recover from stress (Smith et al., 2008; Soer et al., 2019). Teachers who possess moderate to high levels of resilience are more likely to manage and overcome the many stressors of teaching, allowing them to maintain their passion
and joy for the work (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019). Resilience acts as a protective factor that helps teachers to maintain their subjective well-being despite the many hardships around them. Could it be that Iowa teachers are experiencing the same levels of stress and burnout, but their higher levels of resilience allow them to maintain greater levels of personal happiness? The following section will explore this question in further detail.

**Research Question 2**

What are the resilience levels of K-12 teachers in Iowa public schools as measured by the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS)? To answer this second question, all participants completed the BRS via the survey. The BRS is a reliable means of assessing resilience as the ability to bounce back or recover from stress (Smith et al., 2008). This made it an excellent tool for examining teachers, who deal with high levels of workplace stress on a daily basis. BRS scores were tabulated and distributed into categories of Low Resilience (1.00-2.99), Normal Resilience (3.00-4.30), and High Resilience (4.31-5.00). These cutoff scores were set by the authors of the survey. Overall, 81% of participants rated themselves as having Normal to High levels of resilience. The average score was 3.60, which falls within the Normal range. Scores followed a normal bell curve distribution with 19% of participants falling in the Low range, 64% in the Normal range, and 17% in the High range.

The literature review in Chapter 2 provided ample evidence to suggest that resilient teachers have many characteristics, traits, and positive habits in common. For example, educators with higher levels of resilience typically perform better under pressure, respond more positively to setbacks and maintain productivity while under
stress (Kohll, 2017). Teachers with high levels of resilience have also been found to exhibit other character strengths that support their work and act as protective factors. These include a strong sense of vocation, perseverance, persistence, altruism, self-efficacy, confidence, and intrinsic motivation to teach (Beltman et al., 2011; Gu & Day, 2007; Mansfield et al., 2012). Such strengths likely also support a teacher’s subjective happiness despite their stress or work demands.

Another possibility for this finding of high levels of resilience is that Iowa teachers may receive or participate in a number of supportive practices that help them maintain their positive emotions. There are many things that school leaders can do to increase the resilience of their teachers. Furthermore, research has shown that spending time and resources to enhance protective factors is far more effective than reducing risk factors when aiming to improve resilience (Lee et al., 2013). Some examples include cultivating a positive culture and climate of your school, building and maintaining trusting relationships between administrators and teachers, facilitating mentoring programs between colleagues, providing opportunities for shared decision-making, fostering social networks at school, and maintaining reasonable workloads (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019; Beltman et al., 2011; Blazer, 2010; Mansfield et al., 2012). An exploration of supports and practices that encourage teacher resilience will be further discussed below in relation to research question five.

Research Question 3

What relationship (if any) exists between teacher happiness and teacher resilience? To answer this question, BRS scores were compared to SHS scores using
Pearson’s correlation analysis. A moderate significant relationship was found between the two \( r = .474, p < .01 \), suggesting that happier teachers tend to be more resilient and vice versa. This finding was also supported by a descriptive analysis that found 92% of participants who reported High levels of happiness also had Normal to High levels of resilience. Only one participant (7%) who reported Low happiness also reported High resilience. This positive linear relationship suggests that as teacher happiness increases, so does teacher resilience.

These findings are consistent with the field of positive psychology, and more specifically, the PERMA theory of well-being that was discussed in Chapter 2. In the PERMA theory, Dr. Martin Seligman maintains that anyone can optimize or improve their personal happiness by learning about and practicing the building blocks of well-being (Seligman, 2011). These building blocks include positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011). The PERMA theory aligns closely with the research literature on the impact of resilience as well as how leaders can support and cultivate resilience in their teachers. It appears that the findings from this study also align with the PERMA theory in that resilient teachers are happier despite experiencing the same number of stressors as their colleagues.

This finding was important to me and should be helpful to all school leaders as many times the factors impacting chronic teacher stress feel outside of our control. We can’t choose the students or parents who attend our schools or the needs and challenges they bring with them. School leaders can’t directly control the budget they are allotted from the state or the expectations being passed down from district
administration. We also can’t control the curveballs that life throws our way such as personal or family illness, accidents, or changing family dynamics. However, these findings support the fact that school leaders can take steps to support teacher happiness and resilience while they are at school. Increased levels of happiness and resilience may bolster their ability to adapt and respond to adversity at work.

**Research Question 4**

**How do happiness levels of teachers with high retention differ from those with low retention?** To answer this question, I first defined teacher retention as one’s continuing annual employment in their current school district in a teaching role. I then measured district retention by asking each participant how many years they have been teaching and how many years they have been teaching in their current district. To determine who had high levels of district retention, I looked for teachers whose years of teaching experience matched their years teaching in their current district. Fifty-seven percent of participants reported having high levels of district retention.

Next, I compared teachers with high levels of district retention with their subjective happiness scores. I found that 54% of participants with high levels of subjective happiness also had high levels of district retention. In addition, 91% of participants with moderate to high levels of subjective happiness also had high levels of district retention. Only 9% of participants who reported low levels of subjective happiness also reported high retention rates. When comparing the mean happiness scores of participants with high district retention versus low district retention using an independent-samples t test, no significant difference was found ($t(165) = -.385, p > .05$).
This finding led the researcher to explore the relationships between teacher retention and teacher perceptions of the workplace. Data suggests that working conditions, along with culture and climate are the two strongest predictors of teacher retention (Hughes, 2012). However, no significant correlations were found using Spearman’s or Pearson’s correlation coefficients to compare teacher district retention data to climate/culture, workload, resource availability, or administrative support. This may be due in part to the very narrow definition of retention used for this paper. Being able to monitor teacher retention in the field as a whole, rather than just within each participant’s current district may have led to more robust findings in this area.

Next, I explored the relationship between happiness and attendance. I was curious to know if happier teachers were more or less likely to miss work than unhappy ones. What I found was that, on average, Iowa teachers report very good attendance at work. A sizable 72% of all participants had High to Very High self-reported levels of attendance in the current school year, meaning they missed 3 or fewer days of school in the entire 2021-22 academic year. Similarly, 72% of participants who reported High levels of happiness, also had High to Very High levels of attendance. Only 12% of the total participant population reported Low to Very Low attendance, while 10% of participants with high happiness reported similar levels. These differences, as well as the lack of a statistically significant correlation between happiness and attendance, are negligible and indicate that happiness does not play a significant role in work attendance for Iowa teachers.
Research Question 5

What supports and practices do happy teachers receive or engage in at school? To answer this question, the researcher created six additional survey questions. Questions focused on each participant’s professional and social supports at work as well as their perceptions of workloads, resource availability, culture and climate, support from building administrators, and time spent socializing with colleagues outside of work. Correlational and descriptive analyses were completed to identify trends or patterns in the data. The most frequently selected professional supports were Collaborative Teams with 128 (77%) teachers participating and Common Planning Time with 86 (51%) teachers taking part. The most frequently selected personal supports were Staff Celebrations with 119 (71%) teachers participating and Eating Lunch with Colleagues with 92 (55%) of teachers taking part. The least selected supports and practices overall were Learning Labs and Staff Wellness Programs with 13% and 17% reported.

The mean number of supports and practices that teachers participated in were compared between individuals with high, medium and low levels of subjective happiness. What was found was that teachers with high happiness participated in more supports and practices at work on average (4.2) than those in the medium (3.6) and low (3.1) happiness categories. Spearman’s correlational analysis was completed to determine if a relationship was present between happiness and the number of supports that participants engaged in. A weak but statistically significant positive correlation was found (rho (165) = .206, p < .01). This finding suggests that a positive relationship exists between happiness and supports at school.
The one practice or support that teachers receive at school that had a significant correlation with subjective happiness was Staff Celebrations. A weak but statistically significant positive correlation was found ($\rho (165) = .210, p < .001$). This finding indicates that teachers who participate in Staff Celebrations tend to have higher levels of subjective happiness. However, it was also interesting to note the many relationships between supports and practices found in the results. Staff Celebrations, for example, had the highest number of relationships with other supports and practices.

This is important to highlight because the research literature suggests that putting such supports in place can increase other aspects of teacher satisfaction, even if happiness wasn’t significantly related. Weak, but statistically significant positive correlations, were found between Staff Celebrations and Common Planning Time ($\rho (165) = .192, p < .005$); Social Committee Participation ($\rho (165) = .179, p < .005$); Eating Lunch with Colleagues ($\rho (165) = .224, p < .001$); Staff Wellness Programs ($\rho (165) = .163, p < .005$); and participating in Gratitude Practices ($\rho (165) = .212, p < .001$).

Although these relationships were small, they were significant, indicating that engaging in Staff Celebration practices may be a good way to encourage other positive practices such as eating lunch with colleagues, practicing gratitude and planning together.

Similarly, several weak but significant relationships were found between teachers who engage in Common Planning Time and other practices. These relationships include a correlation with participation in Leadership Teams ($\rho (165) = .155, p < .005$); Collaborative Teams ($\rho (165) = .214, p < .001$); Eating Lunch with Colleagues ($\rho (165) = .338, p < .001$); Staff Celebrations ($\rho (165) = .192, p < .005$); and Gratitude Practices
(\textit{rho} (165) = .181, p < .005). Research shows that any time leaders can put positive practices into place, they increase the protective factors a teacher has to boost their resilience and manage stress (Maslach et al., 2001). School and district leaders can utilize this data to put simple but efficient routines, procedures, and expectations into place that foster a positive working environment for everyone.

Overall, only one teacher perception factor was found to have a statistically significant positive correlation with happiness. This was school Climate/Culture ($r = .193$). This relationship is weak and suggests that the variables have a small, albeit meaningful impact on one another. When teachers are happier, their real or perceived school climate and culture are also greater.

While the only statistically significant correlations found between happiness and support were weak ones, there were a few other significant correlations found between variables that are worth noting. These include the relationships between Culture/Climate and Resource Availability ($r = .547$); between Culture/Climate and Administrator Support ($r = .619$); between Culture/Climate and Workload ($r = .349$); between Resource Availability and Workload ($r = .431$); and between Resource Availability and Administrator Support ($r = .502$). These correlations are all moderately significant at the 0.01 level, indicating a significant linear relationship is present.

These findings suggest that when Culture and Climate are greater; Resource Availability, Administrator Support, and Workloads are also better. Similarly, the data suggests that when Resource Availability is better, Workloads and Administrator Support are also perceived to be better. If Resource Availability and Culture/Climate are
directly related to teacher happiness and Administrator Support and Workloads are significantly correlated to them, it is fair to surmise that these factors are also important ones for school leaders to consider as they can become mediating variables impacting teacher well-being.

While the significant correlations with happiness are small, they still provide school leaders with meaningful ways in which to support teacher well-being in their buildings: take steps to improve culture and climate and ensure that teachers have the resources and materials they need to effectively do their jobs. Such findings may motivate school leaders to examine their spending habits or budgets as well as their professional development activities to determine if they are efficiently utilizing their resources of money and time. Perhaps instead of changing curriculum and teaching strategies more frequently, budgets could be better spent on ensuring teachers have enough books, technology, training, and materials to execute the standards and practices they are already utilizing. An audit of resources might be a terrific place for school leaders to start when investigating how to better support their teachers.

Limitations of Findings

A number of limitations should be noted in these findings. The first limitation is that while the distribution of demographic data and resilience scores were normal, there was not an equal distribution of happiness scores. The number of teachers with high levels of happiness were six times that of teachers with low levels. Therefore, the analyses completed in this paper are somewhat biased toward the highly happy teachers. Their data is likely more reliable and valid because there is a larger number of
them compared to the teachers with lower levels of happiness. This could also lead to findings related to teachers with low happiness being less reliable than they actually are. This was an unexpected finding. Once this finding was noted, it was too late to try to recruit more participants as summer break had begun. As a result, findings related to teachers with low happiness should be interpreted with caution.

A second limitation that has been mentioned throughout this paper is the timing of the surveys. Surveys were administered at the very tail end of the 2021-22 school year. This timing could have impacted teacher scores based on the excitement of the upcoming summer break. The timing of the surveys may have allowed teachers to reflect on the school year in a more positive light. It is also possible that teachers could have forgotten events or feelings they experienced at the beginning of the school year because they happened so long ago.

A third limitation of the survey came not from who did participate, but who may have opted out of participating. It is likely that teachers currently experiencing burnout or high levels of stress and unhappiness would not have taken the time to participate in this voluntary survey. This may have created participation bias. In the future, offering an incentive for participation may help to recruit a more diverse sample of participants. Another opportunity for more diverse sampling could have come from targeting entire school districts and approaching participants to complete the survey in person, during a staff meeting or professional development opportunity. This way, participants would still have a choice whether or not to participate, but would not have to give up their personal time to do so.
Finally, a number of smaller limitations were noted throughout this paper. These included the challenge of obtaining the correct email addresses for participants and then some getting stuck in spam filters. While this limitation did not appear to change the outcomes of the study, it did bring the response rate into question, which could impact the representational validity of the study. Next, it was noted that utilizing such a narrow definition of district retention likely impacted the breadth and depth of conclusions that could be made regarding retention. Retention is such a multifaceted concept that can be measured in any number of ways. Relying solely on district retention likely limited the generalizability of findings. Last, but certainly not least, was the impact of COVID-19 on teacher experiences. While the teachers who participated in this study were surprisingly happy, the additional duties teachers had to take on during the COVID-19 pandemic surely had an impact on their perceptions and stress levels.

**Conclusions**

Based on the results of this study, it is reasonable to conclude that positive changes in school systems may lead to positive changes in teacher happiness and resilience. There is a positive relationship between the two indicating that as one variable increases, so does the other. Teachers who are more resilient may be better equipped to remain in this ever-changing and ever-challenging field. Ensuring that teachers have supports and practices in place to help them do their best; working to develop a positive workplace climate/culture; and celebrating successes, milestones, and progress with your staff are three ways that school leaders can support teacher happiness and contribute to their success. While significant findings were not found
connecting happiness and district retention, there is still evidence to suggest that investing in happiness may help teachers to bounce back from the stressors of teaching.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study brought about a number of exciting possibilities for future research in the field of teacher happiness. The first follow-up study that could be highly impactful would be a study of the happiness interventions that are most impactful and applicable to teachers. An experimental study that identified two to four evidence-based happiness interventions and implemented them in various school settings while monitoring the happiness levels of teachers before, during, and after would be a wonderful next step in the research. This could be challenging because school districts typically have a limited amount of time and budget for professional learning each year and many necessary topics to cover. However, the outcomes could benefit teachers in multifaceted ways; from personal well-being and happiness to productivity, job satisfaction, and retention in the field. Additionally, findings from such research could be applied to a variety of work settings both in the field of education and beyond.

A second future research project that could be considered a continuation of this study would be to compare the happiness and resilience levels of Iowa teachers to those throughout the rest of the country. Are Iowa teachers truly happier than those in other states? What supports and practices do teachers engage in and value in other parts of the country? It could be very interesting to do this type of comparison and then compare findings to the educational outcomes of students in each state. Do happier teachers produce happier and/or more academically successful students? The study
could also be downsized to compare happiness levels and outcomes by district or broadened to compare them by region.

A final idea for future research related to health and happiness would be to dive deeper into the self-care routines of teachers, specifically in the area of taking time away from work. Because a small number of participants in this study indicated very high levels of happiness and very low levels of attendance (missing 10 or more days of work due to feeling physically or mentally unwell), I wondered if an evocative follow-up question might be, *Does taking more “mental health days” off of work relate to having high levels of happiness?* It is possible that some people's self-care routines are more inclusive of taking time off of work when they need it and this leads to higher levels of happiness. Also, do mental health days work more effectively when taken proactively rather than waiting until you can no longer function? I would also be curious to know if happier people are healthier people. Does having higher levels of happiness mean that you do not get sick as often? Looking into the reasons why people miss work might be a highly impactful way to explore the relationship between happiness and mental and/or physical health.

**Recommendations for School Leaders**

School leaders have a critical role to play in helping to improve teacher happiness and resilience. This task can feel daunting, particularly with the seemingly endless additional responsibilities of building and district administrators. However, I hope this research study can provide a few simple takeaways to help principals and other school leaders feel more prepared to support teacher happiness.
The first takeaway is that you don’t have to remove every stressor of public education in order to improve teacher happiness. Instead, you can take care of teachers by providing other supports and practices for them to engage in at work. Some of the most common practices that teachers reported participating in in this study were also the simplest. These include eating lunch together with colleagues, having common planning time with your team, and engaging in staff celebrations. Other frequently selected supports, such as participating in a collaborative teams or building leadership teams, may require more preparation and engagement from school administrators. The most important thing to remember is that the more supports you can put in place for teachers to choose from, the better. There is a positive relationship between the number of supportive practices teachers engage in and their happiness levels.

The next important takeaway would be a reminder that happier teachers are also more resilient ones. This is a win-win for everyone involved and an investment in your entire system. The literature review in this paper listed a multitude of strengths associated with higher levels of happiness and resilience. These included better physical and mental health, greater creativity, flexibility, productivity, acuity, and problem-solving abilities to name a few. We want these strengths for our teachers, but also for our students. When we feel better, we do better. Taking time to help teachers feel happy is time well spent because it benefits all parts of our educational systems.

A final takeaway for school leaders is that sometimes the most powerful thing you can do for your teachers is not a thing at all. You don’t need an increased budget or another grant to make an impact. Taking the time to build relationships with and among
your staff is a terrific way to increase teacher happiness. Similarly, being purposeful about creating a school culture that feels supportive and caring creates a big impact. In this study, descriptive analysis noted that happier teachers tended to have higher perceptions of culture, climate, resource availability, and administrator support in their buildings. The literature review also noted that supportive school leaders and strong social connections among colleagues can help teachers to feel more resilient and capable of bouncing back from stress. Taking the time to listen, check-in, and have fun with your people is worth the effort.
References


https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2006.06.006


https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103425


Will, M. (2018, June 19). To make ends meet, 1 in 5 teachers have second jobs.


Appendix A: Teacher Survey

Part One

Q1. I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times.

1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree

1  2  3  4  5

Q2. I have a hard time making it through stressful events.

1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree

1  2  3  4  5

Q3. It does not take me long to recover from a stressful event.

1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree

1  2  3  4  5
Q4. It is hard for me to snap back when something bad happens.

1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree

1  2  3  4  5

Q5. I usually come through difficult times with little trouble.

1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree

1  2  3  4  5

Q6. I tend to take a long time to get over setbacks in my life.

1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree

1  2  3  4  5

Part Two

Q7. In general, I consider myself:

1 = not a very happy person, 7 = a very happy person

1  2  3  4  5  6  7
Q8. Compared to most of my peers, I consider myself:

1 = less happy, 7 = more happy

1  2  3  4  5  6  7

Q9. Some people are generally very happy. They enjoy life regardless of what is going on, getting the most out of everything. To what extent does this characterization describe you?

1 = not at all, 7 = a great deal

1  2  3  4  5  6  7

Q10. Some people are generally not very happy. Although they are not depressed, they never seem as happy as they might be. To what extent does this characterization describe you?

1 = not at all, 7 = a great deal

1  2  3  4  5  6  7
Part Three

Q11. Which of the following activities or supports did you participate in at school during the current school year? (please check all that apply)

- Building or District Leadership Team
- Collaborative Teams
- Regular Common Planning Time with grade level or content area
- Peer Mentoring (either as a mentor or mentee)
- Social Committee
- Staff Wellness Program
- Learning Labs/Learning Walks/Other organized opportunities to learn from your peers
- Eating lunch together with colleagues
- Staff Celebrations
- Gratitude Practices (writing down or verbalizing things you are thankful for on a regular basis)
Q12. How would you rate your workload on a typical day this school year?

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<tr>
<td>A little heavy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manageable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just right</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too easy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q13. How often does your school or district provide you with the resources you need to effectively do your job?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q14. How would you rate the culture and climate of your school on a typical day this school year?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Terrible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q75. How supported do you feel by your building administrator(s) on a typical school day?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Terrible - never supportive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor - minimally supportive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average - not supportive or unsupportive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good - mostly supportive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent - always supportive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q16. How often do you spend social time with your school colleagues outside of work?

- Never
- Occasionally (1-2 times per school year)
- Sometimes (1-2 times per semester)
- Often (1-2 times per month)
- Always (1-2 times per week)

Part Four

Q28. What is the size of the school district you currently work in?

- Less than 500 students
- 501 - 1,000 students
- 1,001 - 2,000 students
- 2,001 - 4,000 students
- More than 4,000 students

Q19. What gender do you identify with?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / third gender
- Prefer not to say
Q29. What is your race? (select all that apply)

- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- White

Q20. What grade level(s) do you currently teach? (please select all that apply)

- K
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
Q21. What specific content area do you currently teach? (i.e. special education, reading, science, etc.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-6 Classroom Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Science or Coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History or Social Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music (Vocal or Instrumental)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Education (PE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q22. How many years have you been a teacher?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 20 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q23. How many years have you taught in your current school district?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- More than 20 years

Q24. How many days of school have you missed during this current school year due to feeling physically or mentally unwell?

*This would not include days missed for mandatory quarantine due to a COVID-19 exposure, if you did not feel unwell.

- 0-1
- 2-3
- 4-6
- 7-9
- 10 or more

Thank you so much for completing this survey! I appreciate your help and your dedication to public education. You are amazing. Have a great day!
Appendix B: Teacher Email Invitation to Participate in Study

Dear Teacher,

I am conducting a research study at the University of Northern Iowa about teacher well-being. This study involves completing an online survey, which will take 5-10 minutes. The study is completely voluntary. Participants may refuse to participate or may discontinue participation at any time during the survey without penalty. Participants should be current K-12 Iowa public school teachers who hold a standard or master teaching license. The study risks are minimal, although you may feel some discomfort answering questions about your feelings or behavior. There will be no compensation for your time, and there are no direct benefits to you, but I believe the study will potentially help to improve the working conditions for teachers in Iowa.

This survey is anonymous and confidential. I will not request your name, the name of your school/district or any other direct identifying information. However, I will ask for some demographic information such as your gender, race, years of teaching, etc. Also, because the survey is on the internet, I cannot guarantee that the data will not be intercepted by others, although this seems unlikely. Individual survey responses or results will never be shared with anyone. Grouped results will be shared in articles and presentations. I may also use the data again later in other research studies, and may share the de-identified datasets with other researchers interested in the topic.

If you have questions about the study, please contact the lead researcher, doctoral candidate, Jill Hayes White, at jhwhite@uni.edu. If you have questions about the rights of research participants, contact the UNI IRB Administrator at lisa.ahern@uni.edu. If you are interested in completing the survey for current K-12 Iowa Public School Teachers, please read the statement below and click on the survey link. If not, you may simply close your browser.

By clicking on the link to begin the survey, you are providing your informed consent to participate in this study. In doing so, you agree to the following statement: “I
acknowledge that keeping a copy of this email will serve as my copy of this statement for my records. I further acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older.”

Access the survey Here.

Thank you so much,
Jill Hayes White