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Beyond Burnout: How Elementary Teachers Cope and Flourish in a Pandemic-Era School

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Beyond Burnout:
How Elementary Teachers Cope and Flourish in a Pandemic-Era School

By
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A culminating thesis submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education

Dominican University of California

San Rafael, CA

May 2022

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Abstract

Many studies describe the pervasiveness of burnout in underserved schools and the factors that lead to burnout, but those studies rarely utilize the voices and lived experiences of teachers (Camacho et al., 2021). Many studies also describe reasons why teachers leave the field, but few explore why teachers remain in the field and what coping strategies they use to persevere through burnout (Turner & Theilking, 2019). These gaps in the literature are particularly pressing as rates of teacher burnout and attrition have reached alarming levels (Kamenetz, 2022).

Through in-depth interviews with four teachers at an underserved school in the Bay Area, this study sought to answer the following research questions: (1) How do teachers at underserved schools perceive their experiences of burnout? (2) What coping strategies do teachers use? The findings show that teachers have experienced unprecedented changes since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and those changes have led to an acutely stressful period in teaching. Most described this year as the most stressful in their careers. Despite extensive stressors, teachers are coping through mindfulness, intentional self-talk, boundaries, and community.

Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“Can I do this for another 30 years?” is a refrain that I’ve heard often at my school. It’s said jokingly, to release the tension of the school day, but beneath it lies a startling truth. Teachers who identified as career educators are reconsidering their future, and this shift has become more extreme in recent years. In February 2022, the *National Education Association* found that 86% of poll participants have seen colleagues leaving the profession earlier than expected since the beginning of the pandemic (Kamenetz, 2022). This migration out of teaching impacts students and teachers who remain. The Bureau of Labor and Statistics found that “there are 567,000 fewer educators in America's public schools today than there were before the pandemic” (Kamenetz, 2022). Teachers who remain are asked to fill in the gaps left by their missing colleagues, taking in extra students, working through preparation periods, or picking up extra job duties. Prior research has suggested that burnout can be contagious, spreading from one exhausted teacher to another (Kim et al., 2017). Have we become so focused on one pandemic that we ignored another?

Statement of Purpose

Prior research has explored burnout and the conditions that contribute stress for teachers (Chambers Mack et al., 2019; Corbin et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2017; McLean et al., 2019). Studies have found that teachers at underserved schools tend to have higher rates of burnout due to the greater presence of stressors such as overcrowding, challenging student behavior, and lack of resources (Camacho et al., 2021; Christian-Brandt et al., 2020). Studies have also explored how burnout can impact students’ academic and behavioral outcomes, and specifically how it can have a greater impact on students at underserved schools (Camacho et al., 2021; Christian-Brandt et al., 2020;

Herman et al., 2017). Although the field of research dedicated to understanding teachers' coping strategies is more limited, it does point to ways that teachers manage and alleviate stress (Buonomo et al., 2021; Chambers Mack et al., 2019; Corbin et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2017; McLean et al., 2019; Torres, 2020).

Despite this prevalence of research on burnout and stress for teachers, there are few studies that use a qualitative approach to understanding the topic. Prior research therefore misses the opportunity to use teachers' language to better understand their thoughts, experiences, and perspectives on burnout. The research on teachers' coping strategies also fails to privilege teachers' language around how they cope with stress, thus decentering teachers. Few studies also place the subject of burnout within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has caused major shifts within the field of education and has contributed to heightened stress for many teachers.

This research project seeks to fill those gaps in the research by studying specifically how teachers perceive their experiences with stress, burnout, and coping within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Teachers' voices and words are used to better understand the subject through a humanized lens. In doing so, this project taps into an underutilized source for understanding how to support teachers through exceptional stress: teachers within the field.

Overview of the Research Design

The researcher is a teacher at a suburban TK-5 school in Northern California. The school is designated as a Title I school, and over 96% of students qualify for free- and reduced-price breakfast and lunch. Although some students are fluent English speakers, most are English Learners whose primary language is Spanish. All students live in the

surrounding neighborhood, which is mostly populated by immigrant families from Central America.

Although the students at this school are mostly Hispanic and Latinx, the teaching staff is mostly white and monolingual. Most teachers live outside of the community. The participants in the study were chosen because they had indicated that they had experienced symptoms of burnout and were willing to discuss their experiences with stress and coping in the classroom. They include three female teachers and one male teacher. All are white. The participants teach a variety of grade levels, from 1st grade to 5th grade. All have been teaching for at least five years, so they have surpassed the early years of teaching in which many teachers leave the profession.

In order to understand the experience of burnout from a teacher's perspective, this study used a qualitative research approach. Participants were interviewed either in their homes or their classrooms in sessions that ranged from 45 minutes to 1.5 hours. After the interviews were complete, the transcripts were analyzed to determine important codes. Those codes helped the researcher determine the overarching themes of the data. Throughout the research project, the researcher sought to answer the following questions: (1) How do teachers at underserved schools perceive their experiences of burnout? (2) What coping strategies and resources do teachers use to mitigate burnout?

Significance of the Study

The results of this study provide insight into how teachers perceive and cope with stress. Although not all teachers experience burnout, most experience the heightened stress that, left unmanaged, can lead to burnout. It is therefore vital to understand how we can intervene on the path to burnout and support teachers in coping with stress.

Unlike previous studies, this study uses the language of teachers to understand coping and stress. While the study found that teachers have and use many effective coping strategies, it also found that there are some barriers that make it more challenging for teachers to implement coping strategies. It also found that there are significant systemic stressors that contribute to exceptional stress during this period of teaching.

One significant finding of this study was that many teachers associate stress with feeling overwhelmed, and specifically, feeling overwhelmed by changes and uncertainty. Although teachers are familiar with change—they regularly meet new students, change curricula, and experience a revolving door of colleagues and administrators—the 2021-2022 school year brought unprecedented change. Teachers have watched as global change spilled over into the classroom, changing basic structures of their classroom such as how close students can sit to one another or whether a cough signifies a 10-day quarantine from school. These changes have pushed many teachers further along the path from stress to burnout.

Another significant finding of this study was that teachers find the most support from their community, both within and outside of school. This finding suggests that teachers need not suffer from stress alone—rather they can work to create strong and supportive communities that help them relieve stress and find joy in teaching. Although teachers do thrive in community, some of the changes of the last few years, such as heightened academic pressure due to “learning loss” and mounting demands for documentation, have made it more challenging for teachers to find the time and space to build and lean on community.

Research Implications

In order to alleviate teacher stress and retain high-quality teachers, policymakers should turn to teachers, who are the best experts on teachers' frustrations, hopes, and needs. The findings from this study provide a starting point for understanding teachers' perspectives on stressors in education. They show that reducing class sizes and providing more counseling and mental health support for students would reduce teachers' stress and help them feel more supported. Teachers also indicated that change and uncertainty due to the Covid-19 pandemic have increased their stress, so policymakers and administrators should consider a more conservative approach to curricular, scheduling, and policy changes. Teachers, like students, need more consistency in order to thrive. Administrators should also consider asking teachers how they can best be supported through stressful periods. Teachers indicated that top-down attempts to reduce stress often leave them feeling burdened and patronized. Instead of attempting to instruct teachers on how best to cope with stress, administrators should give teachers more space and time to implement coping strategies they already find helpful. This could look like more grade-level problem-solving and planning time, greater curricular freedom, and greater respect for teachers' contractual work hours.

This study also has implications for teachers. The findings showed that teachers have the knowledge and motivation to cope with heightened stress, but they often struggle to take ownership over coping strategies. The findings also showed that teachers feel most supported by other teachers, especially their grade level teams. Teachers should consider how they can build and strengthen workplace relationships in order to maximize social capital. Within the safe space of those relationships, teachers

can share coping strategies and encourage one another to draw firmer boundaries between their personal and work lives.

This research has implications for more than just the adults who work in education. When teachers have lower stress levels, they teach more effectively and respond more appropriately to student behaviors. This shift has the greatest impact at underserved schools, where students are already more likely to have burnt out teachers. The findings from this study therefore impact more than just teachers—they also show a path towards more joyful and equitable classrooms for all students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to understand the perception of burnout for teachers at underserved schools. Many studies have described the pervasiveness of burnout in underserved schools and the factors that lead to burnout within those schools (Camacho et al., 2021; Christian-Brandt et al., 2020). Despite this research, few studies have explored how teachers of underserved students perceive and make sense of their own experience with burnout and what teachers perceive to be the main causes of that burnout. Many studies also describe the reasons why teachers leave the field, but few explore why teachers remain in the field and what coping strategies they use to persevere through burnout (Buonomo et al., 2021; Chambers Mack et al., 2019; Corbin et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2017; McLean et al., 2019; Torres, 2020). Understanding burnout for teachers at underserved schools is particularly important because burnout can lead to worse academic outcomes for students, and studies have shown that the effects of burnout have a particularly large impact on underserved students, such as non-dominant language speakers (Herman et al., 2018; Klusmann et al., 2016).

This research aims to understand the experience of burnout from the perspective of teachers at underserved schools. It will examine how teachers perceive their own experience of burnout – what they believe to be the causes and effects of that burnout, as well as how they are able to use coping strategies to mitigate burnout and move into a state of flourishing. Finally, this research will ask whether the experience of burnout and the efficacy of coping strategies have changed during the Covid-19 pandemic. Burnout has always been a pressing concern for those interested in making teaching a

sustainable career (Zimmerman, 2018). This has become especially concerning as demands of teachers rise in the changing landscape of the Covid-19 pandemic.

This literature review will begin by defining burnout and examining the relevant theories of how people derive stress in the workplace. This first section will illustrate the mechanisms of stress – how it builds up, how it can be mitigated through coping strategies, and how it can culminate into burnout. These theories provide a framework for the subsequent conversation about burnout within education.

The literature review will then zoom in on stress and burnout within education. It will discuss the current state of burnout within education, including the levels of burnout amongst teachers, the levels of teacher attrition, and how those measures differ for teachers at underserved schools. With that context, the literature review will then provide a discussion about the factors that contribute to burnout in teachers, such as access to resources, student-teacher relationships, and professional networks. It will also discuss how burnout impacts instruction and student outcomes.

The final section of the literature review will introduce the concept of flourishing, which is a state of optimal wellbeing, and which can be considered the opposite of burnout. This section will include a discussion about our current understanding of how teachers cope with workplace stress and cultivate positive wellbeing, despite challenging circumstances.

Stress and Burnout

Stress and burnout are often used interchangeably, but they actually refer to distinct physiological and psychological experiences. Burnout is an occupational phenomenon in which a person experiences chronic, unmanageable stress (WHO, 2019). Whereas stress can be the result of an isolated event, burnout occurs after a

long period of “repeated exposure to stressful events” (Fiorilli et al., p. 2, 2019). Furthermore, stress can be managed through coping strategies, but burnout occurs when an individual has unsuccessfully coped with chronic stress and can no longer persist (Kim et al., 2017; McLean, 2019). Maslach identified three essential components of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a low sense of accomplishment (Maslach et al., 2001). Many studies have determined that emotional exhaustion or fatigue is the most essential dimension of burnout (Eslamieh & Davoudi, 2016; Herman et al., 2018; Klusmann et al., 2016; McLean et al., 2019). Workers who experience emotional exhaustion tend to be less productive, less effective, and more emotionally and cognitively distanced from their work (Klusmann et al., 2016). People who experience burnout can also have physiological and mental symptoms such as headaches, cardiovascular disease, anxiety, and depression (Camacho et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2017).

Several theoretical frameworks address the phenomenon of stress and burnout. Two of those frameworks will be discussed in this literature review, including the Jobs Demands-Resources Theory and the Conservation of Resources Theory.

Jobs Demands-Resources Theory

The Jobs Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory posits that working conditions can be seen as either demands or resources. An imbalance of demands and resources can contribute to stress and burnout (Camacho et al., 2021). If a person perceives that they have high demands with few resources, they will experience stress. If they perceive that they have low demands and abundant resources, they will feel motivated. These resources or demands could be contextual, such as class sizes,

student behavior, or administrative support. They could also be personal resources or demands, such as feelings of resilience or self-efficacy (Camacho et al., 2021).

According to Buonomo et al., job resources can “spark a motivational process in employees,” (p. 2) encouraging them to feel more motivated and engaged with their work, thus leading to greater achievement. The adverse effect is also true. Workers who perceive a lack of resources may feel unable to cope with their job demands and may accumulate stress, which puts them at risk for burnout. Studying a person's workplace resources or demands can therefore be used to predict levels of burnout (Camacho, 2020).

Conservation of Resources Theory

According to Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, people seek out and protect resources (Kim et al., 2017). If people have an abundance of resources, they will feel more motivated to maintain and cultivate new resources. According to Friere et al. (2020), this “spiral of positive gains” (p. 4) can lead to greater wellbeing and lower levels of burnout. Within the workplace, this means that workers who have abundant access to resources will become more positive and efficient workers because they believe they have positive associations with work and have greater self-efficacy (Buonomo et al., 2021). According to Buonomo and colleagues (2021), resources can come from a person's personal life or work life and those distinct resources “are reciprocal and foster one another” (p. 3). Conversely, if people have a scarcity of resources, they will be less motivated and less able to obtain more resources (Kim et al., 2017). If this resource loss persists, people become vulnerable to stress and then burnout.

Stress and Burnout in Education

There is ongoing concern about stress and burnout among teachers. A Gallup poll found that 46% of K-12 teachers in the U.S. reported feeling high levels of daily stress at work, a figure that is consistent with other high-stress careers, such as nursing (Gallup, 2013). The poll also found that less than one-third of K-12 teachers in the U.S. were engaged with their work, and average engagement levels dropped for teachers in their first few years of teaching (Gallup, 2013). Other research has found that 25% of teachers experience burnout symptoms during their first year in teaching (Zimmerman, 2018). These statistics are consistent with attrition rates among new teachers, as some studies report that half of all teachers leave within their first five years of teaching (Herman et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2017; Sanetti et al., 2021). These statistics are even more drastic at schools that serve underserved students (Camacho et al., 2021; Christian-Brandt et al., 2020).

Due to the pervasiveness of burnout in schools, researchers have been interested in the factors that contribute to workplace stress for teachers and how those factors can be addressed to lower attrition rates (Chambers Mack et al., 2019; Herman et al., 2018; McLean et al., 2018; Torres, 2021).

Burnout in Teachers at Underserved Schools

Current research defines underserved schools as those that serve students from low-income or minority families (Christian-Brandt et al., 2020). According to some research, teachers at underserved schools are more likely to suffer from burnout (Camacho et al., 2021; Christian-Brandt et al., 2020; Cummings et al., 2018). They also have higher rates of attrition, which contributes to higher turnover rates (Camacho et al., 2021; Christian-Brandt et al., 2020; Cummings et al., 2018).

Some studies attribute this heightened and chronic stress to overcrowding, challenging student behavior, and lack of resources (Camacho et al., 2021). According to JD-R theory, if a teacher experienced overcrowding and challenging student behavior without access to resources, that imbalance of demands and resources would lead to stress. One would therefore expect that the greater contextual challenges that a teacher at an underserved school faced would make them more vulnerable to chronic stress and burnout. Other studies suggest that teachers whose students have experienced trauma tend to have higher rates of burnout (Christian-Brandt et al., 2020; Cummings et al., 2018). Those teachers must respond to the emotional and behavioral manifestations of trauma in their students and could become overwhelmed by that emotional burden. Some develop conditions related to burnout, such as Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) Syndrome or Vicarious Trauma (VT) (Christian-Brandt et al., 2020; Cummings et al., 2021). STS refers to a stress reaction that mirrors Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and is experienced by people in helping professions who are exposed to students' or patients' stories of trauma (Christian-Brandt et al., 2020). VT is a similar condition in which a helping professional experiences emotional and cognitive changes after being exposed to students' or patients' trauma (Cummings et al., 2018). Both conditions lead to adverse mental health outcomes for teachers.

Impact of Burnout on Schools

Although there is concern over how burnout can lead to higher attrition, other research has focused on the impact of burnout on those who stay (Herman et al., 2018; Klusmann et al., 2016; Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016). According to current research, the implications of burnout extend beyond teacher mental health and work

engagement, affecting student outcomes and organizational health. Research has shown that students whose teachers have high burnout with low coping skills have lower academic and behavioral outcomes (Herman et al., 2018). The relationship between teacher emotional exhaustion and student achievement is even more significant for teachers whose students are low-income and non-dominant language speakers (Klusmann et al., 2016). This suggests that teacher burnout has an even greater impact on students who already face barriers to achievement and have fewer resources.

Studies have found several explanations for why teacher burnout impacts students. First, burnout can impact a teacher's ability to build relationships with students. One component of burnout is depersonalization, which can decrease a teacher's feelings of closeness with students. Without that closeness, teachers may not have the motivation or emotional reserves to effectively respond to students' needs and improve relationships with students (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016). When teachers perceive having conflict with their students, they experience greater emotional exhaustion (Corbin et al., 2019). This suggests that burnout can be cyclical; greater burnout can lead to poor behavior management and worse student behavior which can damage student-teacher relationships and perpetuate more burnout.

Some studies have also suggested that burnout can affect students on a physiological level. Oberle and Schonert-Reichl (2016) found that students whose teachers experienced high levels of burnout were more likely to have higher cortisol levels. Cortisol is a hormone that the body produces in response to stressful environmental conditions (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016). Studies have found that students who experienced conflict with their teacher, exclusion from peers, or academic

insecurity tended to have higher cortisol levels (Lisbonee et al, 2008; Peters et al., 2011; West et al., 2010). According to Oberle and Schonert-Reichl (2016), researchers can use children's cortisol levels to determine whether there are stressors in the classroom environment. In their study, Oberle and Schonert-Reichl measured teachers' burnout levels and student cortisol levels throughout the day and found a significant relationship between both factors. Those results suggest that students whose teachers are experiencing burnout are more likely to have physical stress and emotional dysregulation and could be at risk for poorer mental health outcomes (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016).

Burnout can spread beyond teachers and students, impacting the wider school community. Some studies have found that burnout can be contagious, spreading from one struggling teacher to the next (Kim et al., 2017; Zimmerman, 2018). Kim et al. (2017) used the COR theory of stress to explain how burnout contagion can impact new teachers. They argued that experienced teachers can serve as resources for new teachers by teaching them how to be productive and how to solve instructional or behavioral problems. With the support of veteran teachers, new teachers can be propelled into a resource gain spiral, gathering motivation and expertise needed to tackle workplace problems (Kim et al., 2017). Conversely, if veteran teachers are experiencing burnout, they will be unable to support new teachers and will contribute to a scarcity of resources for new teachers. Thus, new teachers who are in close working relationships with burned out veteran teachers may be more likely to experience burnout themselves (Kim et al., 2017). This suggests that burnout can have an organizational impact rather than simply an individual one.

Using Coping Strategies to Flourish

Prior research has examined how teachers cope with heightened stress in the classroom. According to Kim et al. (2017), “stress itself does not lead to burnout; instead, having no means to deal with negative stress in the long term may lead to burnout” (p. 2). If workers have sufficient coping strategies to manage stress, they can avoid slipping into burnout. It is therefore crucial to study the ways that teachers cope with heightened stress and cultivate positive wellbeing. The conditions that lead to stress in education are difficult to change and often out of teachers’ control, so coping strategies that are within teachers’ control may be more accessible means to combat burnout and create sustainable careers in education.

Coping Strategies in the Classroom

Prior research has explored how teachers cope with heightened stress in the classroom. Beltman and Poulton (2019) studied teacher-reported strategies and categorized them into four groups: *Waiting*, *Assessing*, *Problem-Solving*, and *Being Proactive*. The first group of strategies, *Waiting*, included self-awareness, mental and physical removal, and breathing. This step allowed teachers to calm themselves while being exposed to a stressor. The next group, *Assessing*, included self-reflecting on emotions, getting perspective, drawing on empathy, and generally assessing the situation. Teachers then moved to *Problem-Solving*, which included sharing their experiences with other teachers and talking through the problem. Finally, teachers employed *Proactive* strategies, such as self-care, meditation, exercise, and planning, to alleviate future moments of heightened stress. According to Beltman and Poulton (2019), these strategies help teachers cultivate emotional regulation, which is an essential part of developing resilience.

Beltman and Poulton explored the concrete actions and behaviors teachers use to mitigate stress, but other research has examined the personal qualities that teachers can develop to better manage stress and buffer against burnout (Buonomo et al., 2021; Fiorilli et al., 2019; Freire et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2017). These qualities include emotional intelligence, psychological capital, and a quiet ego. Emotional intelligence refers to a set of abilities that allow a person to identify, process, and integrate emotional information (Fiorilli et al., 2019). It includes general wellbeing, self-control, emotionality, and sociability. Emotional intelligence can help cope with stress, which leads to less burnout, and can serve as a mediating factor that allows people to better perceive the social support and resources that are available to them (Fiorilli et al., 2019). Psychological capital is a similar set of emotional skills and includes efficacy, optimism, hope, and resiliency (Freire et al., 2020). Prior research has concluded that psychological capital serves as a resource for teachers to cope with workplace stress (Freire et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2017). Finally, quiet ego refers to “a self-identity in which concerns for the self and others are balanced, and both one’s own and others’ growth is promoted” (Buonomo et al., 2021, p. 2). Teachers often become emotionally exhausted from the demands of caring for students’ emotional and mental wellbeing (Christian-Brandt et al., 2020; Cummings et al., 2021). Having a quiet ego could allow teachers to manage the stress of those demands, thus mitigating burnout. Buonomo and colleagues found that teachers who had a quiet ego were able to develop more compassion satisfaction, which is a “sense of accomplishment and reward related to the compassionate care given to others” and which can make people more engaged with their work (2021).

This research suggests that professional development aimed at widening

teachers' emotional toolkit could serve to mitigate burnout and should be explored as an intervention in promoting teacher wellbeing.

Schoolwide Coping Strategies

Burnout often impacts schools on an organizational level, so many researchers have been interested in how school leaders can improve the wellbeing of teachers and mitigate burnout. Prior research points to two leadership styles that may be particularly helpful in achieving those goals: ethical leadership and transformational leadership.

An ethical leader defines ethical standards, reinforces those standards, and communicates openly with employees (Buonomo et al., 2021; Eslamieh & Davoudi, 2016). Ethical leadership has a positive relationship with work engagement (Buonomo et al., 2021). According to JD-R theory, work engagement could serve as a resource that offsets the stress of workplace demands and helps teachers manage stress to avoid burnout. If ethical school leaders can cultivate work engagement among their teachers, they could create a healthier school climate with less burnout.

A transformational leader exhibits four leadership behaviors that instill intrinsic motivation in followers and provide workers with a sense of shared purpose (Tao Gong et al., 2013). These behaviors include inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. According to Tao Gong and colleagues, transformational leadership can help people find a sense of calling, which can also serve as an emotional resource that buffers against rising demands and helps teachers avoid burnout. Both transformational leadership and ethical leadership show how burnout could be addressed from an organizational standpoint.

Numerous studies identified professional and social support as predictors of burnout, which suggests that building relationships with colleagues can serve as a powerful coping strategy (Camacho et al., 2021; Fiorilli et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2017; Turner & Theilking, 2019). Colleagues can serve as resources, providing instructional expertise or emotional support (Kim et al., 2017). On an organizational level, leaders could implement staff bonding or mentorship to encourage teachers to develop professional networks.

Moving Towards Flourishing

Although most of the literature in this review focuses on coping with stress, the field of positive psychology offers an alternative view of stress in the workplace. In 2011, Dr. Martin Seligman introduced the concept of flourishing, which refers to a state of optimal wellbeing. People and organizations that flourish are highly adaptive and can both prevent and reduce pathological states (Freire et al., 2020). According to Freire and colleagues, flourishing includes living comfortably and living in line with values and potential. This suggests that we can do more than avoid mental illness; we can achieve positive mental health.

According to Seligman's PERMA Theory of Wellbeing, a person can flourish if they have a high level of positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Turner & Theilking, 2019). People can cultivate these qualities by using strategies such as using character strengths in the workplace, leaning on social support, developing a positive work-related attitude, and focusing on positive aspects of work.

Studies suggest that PERMA strategies can be a powerful tool for teachers to move into a state of flourishing. Turner and Theilking (2019) found that teachers who

employed PERMA strategies were more positive, calm, and engaged with their work. They also reported greater instructional efficacy. They developed better relationships with students, provided more positive feedback to students, created more meaningful learning experiences, and more readily recognized students' needs. These instructional changes led to positive changes in students' behavior and attitudes (Turner & Theilking, 2019).

Burnout and Flourishing in the Context of the Pandemic

Although there is extensive research on burnout in education, few studies have explored the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on teachers' reported stress levels, coping attempts, and development of burnout. This gap in research is likely due to the speed at which Covid-19 spread and disrupted the educational landscape. Although there will likely be much more research into how Covid-19 affected teacher burnout and wellbeing in the future, some researchers have already begun to examine the topic.

In a mixed-method study with elementary teachers, Chan and colleagues studied the demands and resources that teachers reported during the pandemic (Chan et al., 2021). They found that many teachers experienced ambiguity concerning their job duties, a demand that was negatively related to job satisfaction, as well as high-task related stress. Of the teachers surveyed, over half reported feeling emotionally exhausted. Chan and colleagues also looked for resources that were positively related to teacher wellbeing and named school connectedness, teaching autonomy, and teaching efficacy as significant resources.

Other studies have suggested that workplace demands related to behavior management and instructional planning decreased during the initial periods of the

pandemic (Herman et al., 2021; Hilger et al., 2021; Kim & Asbury, 2020), but those studies fail to capture the longer-term implications of school closures and worldwide uncertainty on schools and teachers. Further research is needed to understand the experience of teachers throughout the pandemic, particularly in underserved schools.

Conclusion

Many studies have explored the causes of burnout among teachers, as well as the impact of burnout on teacher wellbeing and instructional efficacy. Prior studies have also demonstrated that burnout can be more pervasive at urban and underserved schools, where teachers have less access to resources and support. Finally, the field of positive psychology has widened the conversation around how teachers can cope with stress to avoid burnout and move into a state of flourishing.

Despite these strengths, few studies offer a qualitative view of teacher burnout, and few studies privilege the voices of teachers. There are few studies that discuss teachers' perceptions of their own experience of burnout—what they think contributed to their stress, how they felt about their accumulating stress, and how they make sense of the phenomenon of burnout. Most studies also focus on white, female teachers rather than a diverse group of educators. Many studies focus on why teachers burn out and leave the field rather than focusing on the coping skills that allow teachers to cultivate sustainable teaching careers. Finally, there is little research on the effect of the pandemic on teacher burnout and the efficacy of coping strategies.

The purpose of this study is to understand how teachers perceive their own experience of burnout and what coping strategies they use to relieve stress. This study will also seek to compare the experience of burnout pre-Covid 19 and post-Covid 19 in

order to understand what effect the pandemic has had on teachers' stress levels and commitments to the field.

Chapter 3: Methods

Many studies explore the causes and effects of burnout in teachers, particularly in underserved schools where teachers have less access to resources (Camacho et al., 2021; Chambers Mack et al., 2019; Christian-Brandt et al., 2020; Herman et al., 2018; Klusmann et al., 2016; Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016). However, there are few qualitative studies that give teachers space to share their experiences with burnout in their own words (Torres, 2020; Turner & Theilking, 2019). Furthermore, while there is growing research into coping strategies and ways in which teachers flourish, there are few qualitative studies in which teachers explain how they are able to move beyond burnout and cultivate sustainable teaching careers (Beltman & Poulton, 2019; Buonomo et al., 2021; Friere et al., 2020; Turner & Theilking, 2019). Thus, there is a need for qualitative research that illustrates teachers' perceptions of burnout and flourishing. This study explored how teachers perceive their own experience of burnout and the coping strategies they use to mitigate that burnout. This study also placed the phenomena of burnout and flourishing within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, which altered the landscape of teaching. I designed the following study with the belief that teachers should be the primary source on their experiences of burnout and the ways in which teachers can cope with burnout.

Research Questions

This study focused on responses to two series of questions, both presented in interview form. Teachers were also asked to consider individual reflection questions that were meant to add more depth to the interview responses. To this end, interview questions and reflection questions were formed based on the following central research questions:

1. How do teachers at underserved schools perceive their experiences of burnout?
2. What coping strategies and resources do teachers use to mitigate burnout?

Description and Rationale for Research Approach

This project sought to center the voices of teachers. For this reason, I used a qualitative approach to my research that relied primarily on phenomenological interviews with participants. Much of the research on teacher burnout has been quantitative, using surveys such as the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) or the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) to quantify the experience of burnout. Although these surveys provide valuable information, they do not allow teachers to share their perspectives on burnout and to name their own experiences. I used a simple Google Form survey to screen possible participants, but beyond that initial survey, I was in conversation with my participants so that I could tease out a narrative of their experiences. In my study, I used phenomenological interviewing. The purpose of a phenomenological interview is to “have the participant reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study” (Seidman, 2013, p. 14). Through these interviews, researchers can take a complex topic and study “the concrete experience of people in that area and the meaning their experience had for them (Seidman, 2013, p. 15). Researchers can also explore the richness of a topic by looking at it through a humanized lens that prioritizes relationships (Paris & Winn, 2014). In focusing on how my participants make sense of their own experiences of burnout and coping strategies (or lack thereof), I collected more nuanced data that could be used to illustrate a humanized picture of burnout.

This study was grounded in a constructivist philosophical worldview. According to Creswell (2014), a constructivist researcher believes that “subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically” (p. 8) and is interested in understanding the social, cultural, and historical contexts of their participants. I believe that the context of the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted the experience of burnout for teachers, so my study reflected that historical moment. A constructivist researcher also intends to “make sense of (or interpret) the meaning others have about the world,” (Creswell, 2014, p. 8), which is a primary purpose of this study. I was not solely interested in burnout, but rather teachers’ experiences and perception of burnout.

In my study, I hoped to move from a damage-centered perspective to a desire-centered perspective. According to Eve Tuck, a damage-centered research project documents people’s suffering in order to portray them as “defeated and broken” (Tuck, 2009, p. 412). In contrast, a desire-centered research project would offer a more complex view of a community, focusing on their wisdom, desires, and challenges. The purpose of this study was not to victimize teachers or to show how they are failing to meet expectations. Rather, this study illustrated the challenges that push teachers towards burnout, and how teachers can draw on their own resilience, creativity, and community to persevere through increasingly challenging teaching contexts. In doing so, I also illustrated how valuable teachers’ insights are in the conversation about mitigating burnout.

Research Design

Research Site and Entry into the Field

This research was conducted at a suburban elementary school in Northern California, which will be referred to as Buena Park Elementary School. To maintain

confidentiality, I will refer to the research site, its staff members, and its students using pseudonyms. Buena Park Elementary was purposefully chosen because I have been a teacher at the school for the last three years. I therefore have pre-existing relationships with the staff and am familiar with the school environment. I invited 27 certificated staff members to participate in the screening survey and chose four interview participants based on the survey results.

Buena Park Elementary School is a Title I school that serves students who live in the surrounding neighborhood. The neighborhood itself sits on the edge of an affluent county and serves a small enclave of mostly immigrant families. Buena Park Elementary has multiple transitional kindergarten through fifth grade classes, as well as an on-site preschool and an on-site Family Center that coordinates resources for students' families. There are 573 students enrolled at Buena Park in the 2021-2022 school year. Of those students, nearly all are categorized as Hispanic and English Learners whose primary language is Spanish. Over 96% of the students qualified for free- or reduced-price breakfast and lunch.

Participants and Sampling Procedure

Teachers at Buena Park Elementary School were recruited for the study. There are 27 certificated classroom teachers at Buena Park, most of whom are women and white. The teachers have varying levels of experience in education, ranging from 1 year to 25+ years.

To recruit participants for the study, I sent a survey to all teachers at the school. The survey listed the symptoms of burnout and asked teachers to indicate whether they had experienced those symptoms. This survey also asked teachers to indicate whether their mental health had declined, improved, or remained stagnant over the last two

years. After analyzing the results of the survey, I reached out to teachers who indicated that they had experienced symptoms of burnout and asked them to participate in the study. I explained the purpose and methods of the study, as well as the time commitment expected of participants. Then I received both verbal and written informed consent from the participants who were interested in proceeding in the study. After receiving consent from participants, I scheduled the interviews.

Methods for Collecting Data

I collected data through qualitative, in-depth interviews. The interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 1.5 hours in length and were video recorded using a phone camera. Interviews took place at the school site and at participants' homes.

During the interviews, I asked participants background information about their teaching career (see Appendix B for interview questions). I asked them to describe what led them to teaching, how many years they had taught, and to talk about the different school environments in which they had taught. I then explained that we would be discussing stress and coping. I asked them to tell me a story about a time they had been particularly stressed while teaching. This reconstruction of a stressful event helped me see the series of events that occurred, as well as the important details that participants remembered about those events. I was therefore able to see how participants perceived and made sense of that experience (Seidman, 2013). I also asked participants to share when during a typical school day they begin to notice stress and when that stress becomes strongest. This question was meant to help me understand how much of the school day teachers spent in a state of heightened stress and whether their stress ebbed and flowed throughout the day. It also helped me understand what teachers perceived to be significant stressors.

I then shifted the conversation towards coping strategies. I asked participants to share coping strategies they used during the workday, as well as strategies they used outside of school. These questions helped me gauge whether participants were proactively preparing for stress, responding to stress in the moment, or both. While we discussed coping strategies, I asked participants to share how their administrators had addressed stress to see whether they had administrative support in coping with stress.

Next, I asked my participants to think over their whole teaching career. I asked them to tell me about a period of time when their stress felt highest and a period of time when it felt lowest. I then asked them to tell me about how their stress had changed throughout the course of the pandemic. I asked them whether different teaching contexts (i.e., remote teaching, hybrid teaching, or in-person teaching) elicited more stress, and how this period of teaching compared to other periods of their teaching career. I also asked participants to discuss larger, structural issues that they believe should be addressed in order to reduce teacher stress. This portion of the interview helped me understand how teachers perceived stress on a larger scale.

Finally, I asked participants to share their greatest source of satisfaction at work. While discussing moments of satisfaction, participants shared when they felt the most joy and highest efficacy at work. This question helped me understand whether and when teachers felt they were flourishing.

Data Analysis Methods

I collected data through qualitative, in-depth interviews. Prior to interviewing participants, I wrote down a list of anticipated codes, such as stress, exhaustion, demands, resources, coping strategies, and satisfaction. As I interviewed participants, I looked for responses that related to these codes, as well as meaningful phrases that

might be used as additional codes. This openness helped me to have a more authentic and inquiry-based interview process. I recorded the interviews using my phone camera so that I could capture non-verbal data such as body language, facial cues, or tonal changes. Immediately after interviewing participants, I wrote analytic memos based on the conversations to capture my initial impressions and facilitate my analysis of the interviews (Maxwell, 2013). Then, I rewatched and transcribed each interview to have a verbatim account of the conversation.

After reading the transcripts in their entirety, I hand-coded the transcripts to organize the data into meaningful themes. I used an open-coding method, so I anticipated certain codes but also developed codes based on the themes that emerged from the data (Maxwell, 2013). This open-coding process allowed me to remain open to the words and phrases my participants used, rather than just the responses I expected. While coding the data, I added several additional codes, such as community, change and uncertainty, boundaries, and systemic stressors. Once I had finalized a list of codes based on my anticipated responses and my initial reading of the transcripts, I then used focused coding to categorize the interview responses. I combed through the responses, adding predetermined codes into the margins, as well as my initial interpretations of those quotes. After coding all my transcripts, I inputted quotes into a spreadsheet based on the assigned code. I used this spreadsheet to categorize data and begin developing a narrative of the interview responses.

After coding and categorizing the data, I used concept mapping and analytic memos to further flesh out the data. The concept maps helped me see connections between codes, as well as any gaps that existed in the data. During and after making concept maps, I wrote analytic memos to further analyze the connections between codes

and to interpret the data. These analytic memos helped me to think about how my data fit into the larger conceptual framework of my study.

Validity

I am the coworker of my participants, and my positionality and relationships with colleagues presented several threats to the validity of this study. First, I share students, facilities, and leadership with my participants, so I might have pre-existing ideas about what their experiences with burnout are like, based on my own experiences. I could have assigned meaning to quotes in order to support my perception of our school context. Second, I rely on coworkers for collaboration and support. They may have felt uncomfortable sharing feelings of stress, exhaustion, and dissatisfaction because they did not want to disrupt our professional relationship. In order to mitigate the risks of these validity threats, I used a few strategies, outlined in the following section.

First, I used lengthy interviews and observations to collect rich data. I took notes while interviewing participants, so I could gather my own initial impressions of important themes. As I rewatched the interviews and wrote transcripts, I noted any observations of body language, facial cues, or physical responses that participants have to my questions. These notes helped me add more depth to the verbatim transcripts I collected and helped me avoid creating conclusions based on bias or limited data.

Second, I asked my participants to confirm the meaning of their responses through member checks. After I transcribed interviews and coded the data, I sent participants direct quotes, as well as my analysis of those quotes, so they could tell me if I misinterpreted what they said. These member checks helped me identify any biases that may be affecting my interpretation (Maxwell, 2013). This strategy also helped me avoid misinterpreting responses and confirmed that my results were accurate (Creswell,

2018).

Finally, I am a teacher at my research site, so I spent prolonged time immersed in the context of my participants. This time allowed me to create relationships with participants and build the trust needed for honest, in-depth interviews (Creswell, 2018). Spending extensive time with my participants also helped me better understand their experiences and the stressors they discussed. I had many conversations with participants prior to conducting interviews, so I was able to determine internal consistency between the responses (Seidman, 2013). That consistency affirmed the validity of my participants' responses.

This study used qualitative interviews to illuminate how teachers of underserved students perceived their experiences of burnout and their attempts at coping with stress. It also compared teachers' perceptions of burnout and coping prior to the pandemic and during the pandemic to assess whether perceptions had changed. Qualitative, in-depth interviews provided a rich picture of how teachers perceive their own attempts to manage stress and flourish in stressful teaching contexts.

Chapter 4: Findings

This qualitative research project sought to answer the following questions: (1) How do teachers at underserved schools perceive their experiences of burnout? (2) What coping strategies do teachers use? After analyzing interview transcripts and researcher notes, three main themes emerged. First, teachers described their own perceptions of stress, revealing that stress is a physical and emotional experience that is felt in the body and mind. Next, teachers homed in on the 2021-2022 school year and attributed heightened stress to a constantly changing environment at school. Finally, teachers discussed a wide range of strategies they use to cope with work-related stressors, as well as how they believe larger stress-inducing issues could be solved by policymakers and administrators. Through these themes, the teachers involved in this study provided a window into how they perceived and coped with the stress of an exceptional period in teaching.

Participants from this study were all teachers at Buena Park Elementary School, a large, suburban elementary school in Northern California that serves mostly English Learners from low-income households. Participants were chosen based on information from a survey sent to all teachers at Buena Park. In the survey, teachers were asked to indicate whether they had experienced symptoms of burnout. Participants were chosen from the pool of teachers who self-identified with symptoms of burnout. Sandra teaches 5th grade and has been teaching at Buena Park for 13 years. Prior to teaching at Buena Park, she taught preschool for many years. Brian, who teaches 3rd grade, has been teaching for 15 years. He has taught several upper-elementary grades, as well as middle school math. Leah, a 2nd grade teacher, and Kathleen, a 1st grade teacher, have both been teaching for 5 years. All participants are tenured teachers at Buena Park.

Perceptions of Stress

All participants indicated that they had experienced symptoms of burnout, such as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization (indifference towards work), and a low sense of accomplishment. Despite this self-identification, during the individual interviews, most participants did not use the word “burnout” to describe their experiences. The language they *did* use provides insight into their experiences with stress. Two participants used the word “overwhelmed” to describe these feelings of stress. Sandra described stress as feeling “like you're so overwhelmed, you feel frozen, like you can't do anything.” Another participant, Leah, parsed out the difference between manageable stress and unmanageable stress:

I think when you're stressed, you can still be happy and find happiness and find joy and stuff. And maybe that's because there's still hope. But when I felt the stress that I was feeling at the beginning of the year, I think I was more hopeless. And then there was no joy even mixed in with the stress.

Implicit in Leah’s explanation is the idea that stress can be managed if there is hope for relief. When there is no hope for relief, the stress can feel joyless and hopeless.

While discussing stressors, some common threads emerged. Most participants said that their stress derives mainly from the non-teaching portion of their job. Leah noted, with a laugh, that her stress comes from “any adult interaction.” She went on to explain that her stress is highest during meetings or when an administrator or coach comes into her classroom to observe. Brian said, “Usually stress on this job revolves around deadlines for me.” Sandra echoed a similar thought, saying that paperwork and documentation were her greatest source of stress. She explained, “It's like death by a million cuts. Like you know, it all is piling up, piling up, piling up and that part of it is

like, to me way more stressful than the kids.” One notable exception was Kathleen, who is also the only participant with plans to leave the classroom for another role in the district. Kathleen said that her greatest stressor at work was her students.

Some participants described feeling stressed from insufficient curriculum or from curriculum that cannot be taught in the allocated time. At Buena Park, teachers often adapt curriculum to meet the needs of their students, most of whom are English Learners and for whom the district-supplied curriculum is often not appropriate. Sometimes these adaptations can be minor adjustments; other times, adapting the curriculum means throwing it out entirely. Kathleen shared, “It is very stressful knowing that you're making so much of it up all on your own to some degree.” Although this stressor is common for teachers, it is felt more deeply at underserved schools because curriculum writers often do not create materials for exceptional students like English Learners. Brian described feeling stressed when he missed a piece of curriculum from time constraints, noting that, “now kids just might not know it. And that kind of stresses me out, like, ‘Well, how am I going to get that in or not get it in?’” When Brian discusses this stressor, he reveals that he cares deeply about meeting students’ needs. When he cannot meet the academic needs of his students, he feels stressed. Although this connection feels obvious, it is worth noting that teachers’ stress is often a result of caring deeply for their students.

Most participants referred to change and uncertainty as significant stressors. Leah explained, “Even changing like a schedule, or you know, it just makes me uneasy. And just knowing that there are probably going to be more changes. It makes me very stressed.” Change and uncertainty can be particularly stressful when participants do not have a clear authority to lean on. Kathleen mentioned that earlier in her career, “There

was always someone who knew the answer. And now I feel like just no one knows the answer.”

While describing how stressful change can be, most participants referred to themselves as change-adverse people. Brian said, “I’m a real consistent guy” and mentioned that constantly changing schedules make him “freaking pissed.” After reflecting for a moment, Leah said, “I’m not very good with change. Personally, I just don’t like change. Even if it’s for the positive, I just have a hard time adjusting. I like being comfortable and knowing what to expect.” Sandra agreed, saying, “I am a person that gets set in my ways and change is so fearful.” Although classroom teaching requires a great amount of flexibility, as children and schools are anything but predictable, these teachers connect personally to a need for repetition and routine. Brian described the consistency he tries to create in his classroom and noted, “I need that repetition as much as the kids do.”

Stress Amplified Within the 2021-2022 School Year

Although participants had been teaching for five to twenty years in a variety of classroom settings, all referred to the 2021-2022 school year as an exceptionally stressful year. Some said that it was the most stressful in their career, even more stressful than their first-year teaching. When asked why they thought this year was particularly stressful, most participants attributed that stress to changes in Covid-19 protocols, schedules, and curriculum. Sandra noted, “It’s crazy to put my finger on the ups and downs of it and the unpredictability and I feel like we’re changing so much and back and forth so much.” Brian pinned the changes to changing public health directives, as well as pressure to be more “academically capable.” He said those changes have led to a lack of concern over consistency.

Several of the participants said that these changes have given them a sense of dread over the future. Sandra described her stress as being “like a what's-going-to-happen-next type of feeling, like when will the shoe drop?” Echoing that sentiment, Leah said, “I get nervous checking my email, or even running into people in the copy room, and I shouldn't feel that way. But just like, oh, what news are they gonna have?” This sense of dread reflects Leah’s idea that unmanageable stress is hopeless stress. Dread is a fear over the future, and when we fear that the future will bring negative change, we can feel stressed over the future. Kathleen had an interesting take on how looking forward can affect stress. She explained:

When you have an end in sight, it makes dealing with the stress easier because you know it's coming to an end sooner. I think that actually is like, for sure true for me that just knowing there's an end makes a difference in dealing with that stress.

Part of Leah and Sandra’s dread over the future comes from not knowing whether the overwhelm of the 2021-2022 school year will end.

Several participants compared this year to their first year of teaching. Sandra said, “Sometimes I feel like, okay, I'm a brand-new teacher,” and Kathleen noted, “There's a lot that feels like new teacher status.” Leah took the comparison a step further, claiming that the 2021-2022 school year had been more stressful than the first year. She explained:

The first year was very stressful, but I could almost write it off as like ‘I'm a first-year teacher, this is okay. This is what it’s supposed to be like.’ But I think this year. I just, I don't know if it's like having more expectations for myself and being like, I shouldn't be struggling as much. So, I think this is my most stressful year.

For Leah, her expectations made it harder to cope with the challenges of an exceptional school year. She put pressure on herself to perform at normal levels even amidst abnormal circumstances. According to Sandra, that pressure is also coming from district leaders, administrators, and society at large. She described a “mind frame or a thinking that we're in a 911 type of situation.” She says the pressure to overcome pandemic “learning loss” has put administrators into “a space almost like a triage.” That pressure inevitably trickles down to teachers, who are expected to help make up for academic losses of the last two years. Kathleen suspected that this pressure may be felt more strongly for experienced teachers with higher expectations for themselves. She noted, “When you know more, and you know you could be doing better you feel like you should be doing better.”

Although some participants were hesitant to explicitly name the change, several referred to a change in leadership at the school site. Teachers started the year with a new principal after many years of consistent leadership. Any change in administration will create a ripple effect of changes, especially when the administrator is eager to make improvements and manifest a vision. This was the case at this school site. For many participants, that change in leadership amplified the many other changes in progress.

Coping with Stress

Burnout occurs when a person endures ongoing stress and is unsuccessful in coping with that stress. Although all these teachers had experienced symptoms of burnout, they also successfully utilized a wide range of coping strategies to manage stress. Some of the strategies were reactive, in-the-moment tools that teachers employed while at school. Other strategies were more proactive and involved maintaining healthy stress levels outside of the workday.

Mindfulness and Breathing

All participants referred to intentional breathing as a strategy for coping with stress during the school day. Most said they use this strategy with their students in moments of high stress. Kathleen said, “I take three big breaths and make my students do it with me. They don't know it, but I do that because I feel stressed.” Sandra also referred to breathing with students: “At school, I kind of do the same things that we tell them [students], taking deep breaths.” Leah demonstrated several breathing exercises that were connected to hand movements, adding, “I know that it’s super simple, but it is helpful.” Both Kathleen and Leah initially referred to taking breaths jokingly, as if it were too simple a strategy to discuss seriously, but both later referred to breathing and other meditative activities as tools that they use *outside* of the classroom to manage stress. This suggests that breathing may be a widely used and underestimated tool for managing teacher stress.

When asked how they cope with stress outside of the classroom, all participants mentioned exercise. Brian goes for runs and exercises at a climbing gym. Sandra explained that she takes daily walks with her dog in nature, a habit that has multiple benefits. It allows her to disconnect from work, connect with nature, and move her body. She said that she is regimented with exercise in order to proactively manage stress, and even compared exercise to a 12 Step Program meant to treat addiction. She noted, “It's just therapy to get out and just maybe walk like two miles with the dog.” Both Kathleen and Leah said that it can be a challenge to find time to exercise with work and family commitments.

Participants also mentioned stress-reducing hobbies, such as crocheting, needlepoint, cooking, and working on puzzles. Leah explained that these tools help her

reduce stress because they are mindful in nature. They require presence of mind. She explained, “I think it's kind of like breathing. Like you're focused on something, so then your brain isn't wandering.” Although only Sandra mentioned mindfulness explicitly as a tool she practices and uses, all participants alluded to hobbies that help them tap into mindfulness.

Metacognition and Self-Talk

During our conversations, participants demonstrated metacognition, or an understanding of their thought patterns and processes. They use this metacognition to shift their mindset during particularly stressful parts of the school day. For example, Leah noted that on Monday mornings, a particularly stressful time for her, she will pause and intentionally put herself in a positive headspace. She explained: “I’m like, “Hey, go take a breath.” Not like you put on a fake face, but it's like, I gotta get it together for my kids and I should be happy to greet them.” Sandra also intentionally addresses her headspace before bringing students into the classroom after lunch. She explained that she dreads that time of the day because students are often rambunctious and tired. In order to manage her own stress during that time, she works to have a more positive attitude, explaining, “I tell myself, if you go in with the expectation of that, then that's how it's going to be and so I really tried to change my thoughts around it.” Both Leah and Sandra showed that understanding and shifting one's thoughts can be a powerful tool in stressful situations.

One specific example of metacognition is utilizing a growth mindset, which is the belief that you can grow through persistence and hard work. As Sandra discussed the challenges of the 2021-2022 school year, she explained:

I'm learning everything from the start, and maybe that's a good thing... I'm

hoping it's one of those things where you have to almost be thrown into a fire or catapulted in and you're just like, you didn't want to do it, but you have to do it and then you come out with some lesson from it. Maybe it's not the lesson I'm expecting in my head.

Throughout this quote, Sandra uses the language of growth. “Learning” and “lesson” imply that she is not simply trudging through the year, but rather growing through it. Later in the interview, when asked about what brings her joy at work, Sandra mentioned that she loves learning with and from her students. Her focus on learning shows that she has internalized a growth mindset and applies it to her workplace stress. During my conversation with Brian, he also demonstrated a growth mindset. He explained that during his first few years of teaching, he taught middle school math to students of varying ability and learning style. He noticed that during each lesson, some students would be successful, and some students would not be successful. His main takeaway was: “It's a bit of validation for you as a person, you know, that was a bad lesson, or that lesson didn't work, or that lesson wasn't accessible to these kids. That doesn't make me a bad teacher. That means maybe the lesson choice wasn't so great.” In separating himself and his value from the success of a lesson, Brian can persevere through stressful periods of teaching. He can learn from his mistakes rather than being overwhelmed by them.

Boundaries

Participants did not explicitly mention boundaries, but most alluded to ways they set boundaries with work. Sandra referred to “limit setting” with work, meaning that she sets explicit limits for how much time she spends at work. For Sandra, it is important to get to work early and leave early so that she has time to walk her dog and do an exercise class in the evening. These activities help her disconnect with work and transition into

her free time. For Leah and Brian, their “limit setting” happened more naturally. Both have children, and balancing work and family time forced them to draw boundaries.

Brian explained:

I could not take stuff that happened at the middle school home with me and still provide the energy that was required of my children. And I knew it. It's like, nope, that game is over. Close that door. Because right now, I have to deal with the kid in the backseat that's falling asleep. And if she falls asleep, she will not wake up for dinner, and then she'll be hungry. And then I will be up all night. That was way more important than anything that happened up until 3:30 in the afternoon.

Brian toggled between the priorities of his work life and his home life. When his workday was over, he shifted his priorities over to his children, which required him to stop thinking about work. Although his children are older and no longer live at home, he still maintains boundaries with work, prioritizing instead his free time. He added: “And if I want to drink wine and watch Netflix, that's my priority.”

Although participants drew boundaries with work, some said that doing so could be challenging. Both Leah and Sandra discussed how teaching can become an all-consuming career. Leah described the perception that “Teachers are here to just give themselves 100% all day long for the rest of their life to everyone else,” noting that “that idea just has to stop.” She said that idea is perpetuated by teachers themselves, who tend to be giving and sacrificial, and by the broader school culture that has high demands for teachers. Sandra echoed that sentiment, comparing her work to that of her sister, who is a nurse. Although Sandra often works outside of her contractual hours without additional compensation, her sister does not. Emily explained, “She's not taking work home with her and she's definitely not going in on her days off.” Although Sandra does

draw boundaries with work, she described those boundaries with a guilty tone, as if she was breaking the rules by leaving at the end of her contractual workday and not coming in on the weekend. Her tone illuminated the pressure teachers feel to give to their work and blur the lines between work time and personal time.

Community

When asked about how they coped with stress, participants were quick to mention community, both outside of school and at school. All participants mentioned that spending time with and talking with family helps them relieve stress. Leah said that she sometimes calls her mom on her lunch break to get her mind off school or to process what has happened during the day. Sandra said that since returning to school post-Covid-19-shutdown, she has prioritized spending free time with family and friends on the weekend. She mentioned, “I think that helps with stress, getting that time with your loved ones.”

While discussing their school community, most participants referred to their grade-level teams as important support systems. Sandra gushed, “I really am so grateful. And I tell my team that, like oh my gosh, I'm so grateful for my team like yeah, the support system from them. It's like I feel so, so supported.” Kathleen said that this support system can be particularly helpful during periods of high stress. She explained:

If one person on my team is super stressed out this week, for whatever reason, someone else could take on a little bit more of the slack for that week... I think that being honest and open about that stuff usually tends to make people's lives easier.

Brian added that when he talks with his team, “I'm not alone. I'm not so stressed if they're not stressed, you know? Or, like, if all three of us are behind on something that

I'm feeling like, okay, that's a relief." Communicated stress helps Brian put it into perspective and find support.

Within school, participants rely on colleagues for venting, a practice that helps them relieve stress. Leah referred to a time she had dinner with another teacher and explained, "As much as we don't want to talk about work, we just went out to dinner and so much of the time we just bitched about work [laughs]. And it felt so good." As Leah talked about her experience, she visibly relaxed her body, showing the ease that venting provides for her. She went on to explain that venting with colleagues helps her to see that her problems are not unique. According to Leah, after venting:

I don't feel so alone in my classroom. Because our job is different from working in an office where your cubicle is right there, and I can pop in at any time. It's just very different, where we're just isolated in our classrooms for such a majority of our day... It is nice to see you guys even for that 10 minutes to discuss what's going on.

Through venting, teachers can share common experiences and create bonds that help them feel a sense of community.

Kathleen brought up an important benefit of venting with colleagues: venting can lead to problem solving. Although she agreed that venting helps her process stress, Kathleen noted that venting can become unhelpful when it turns into complaining. She noted: "That can feel stressful. listening to other people complain about stuff." For Kathleen, healthy venting involves a balance of releasing stress and coming up with solutions to address the stressors. Sandra and Leah echoed that thought in their interviews. Sandra said:

Sometimes it's like, oh my gosh, like I'm feeling totally overwhelmed. I don't

know if I can do this. And then we're like, well, actually if we think about it, we've already done like, A, B, and C. And all we have to do are these parts.

For her, colleagues help her put problems into perspective and come up with a path forward. Leah also relied on colleagues to “bounce off of and get ideas from.” This collaboration helps her manage frustration with curriculum and planning. Brian explained that talking with colleagues about his problems helps him understand them better. He said, “I try to talk through my scenarios. You know, like, okay, well, what am I stressed about?” In discussing the problem, he can identify the underlying stressor and approach it more strategically.

For some participants, community within the classroom helped relieve stress. Leah explained, “They [students] can be a very good distraction from other feelings.” Beyond simply distracting her from stress, students also help Leah feel joy. When asked what brings her the greatest satisfaction at work, Leah said, “Seeing them happy makes me feel the most satisfied. I think another reason is because everything's so unsteady for them. But if they have a little bit of joy, it makes you feel good.” Sandra also derives joy from working with students, adding, “Getting to work with them, that truly is like the biggest joy, and I have to remember like, that's why we got into this.” Brian added an interesting perspective. During the summer of 2020, he taught summer school in-person. Although this was his first experience teaching in-person post-shutdown, he found it comforting. He explained, “It kept me from being so stressed. Why? Because I finally got to be in the place I want to be, which is in this building with these kids.”

Addressing Structural and Systemic Causes of Stress

Although participants discussed many coping strategies, they also pointed out that larger systemic issues cause them persistent stress. These stressors can feel less

manageable because they are outside of teachers' control. Kathleen noted,

We should love what we do and continue to love what we do, not want to do something and then realize we can't do it, because we just hate so many aspects of it because it's just too draining and too tiring.

For Kathleen, some of the structural aspects of teaching make it an unsustainable profession. When asked how administrators or district-leaders could relieve stress, participants were quick to note that acknowledgement of stress was not enough. Leah said with a smirk, "That doesn't give me much." Instead, participants shared concrete solutions that could be taken to reduce their stress. Although these solutions are not simple, they are tangible.

Participants believe their stress could be alleviated by reducing class sizes or hiring aides for classrooms. Some participants referred to the 2020-2021 school year, in which the cohort model allowed teachers to teach in smaller class-sizes. At Buena Park, classes were split into two groups of 12 students to reduce Covid-19 transmission. Students came to school either in the afternoon or in the morning. All participants shared that they were able to teach more effectively and better meet students' needs while teaching smaller groups of students. This increased sense of self-efficacy reduced participants' stress levels. Although these drastically reduced class sizes may not be possible, participants shared that hiring aides could help teachers utilize more small group instruction and feel more supported in the classroom.

Participants also shared that hiring more counselors could reduce their stress. Sandra explained, "I think we truly need more counselors to help the kids cope with all that they've gone through." For Sandra, counselors who serve students' mental health needs would help teachers cope with heightened emotions in the classroom. Kathleen

further explained the benefit: “When kids do need help, we are not the psychologist and the counselor and the teacher and the mom and the food provider.” Kathleen’s comment illuminates the many demands that are placed on teachers when schools do not have enough staff to meet students’ needs. At Buena Park and other underserved schools, many students have undergone trauma and there are often not enough counselors to meet their therapeutic needs. The burden falls on teachers to help students cope, which can make it more challenging for teachers to cope with their own stress. According to the teacher participants involved in this study, hiring more counselors would ease that burden and give teachers more space to focus on instruction.

Conclusion

Existing literature discusses teacher burnout from a quantitative and problem-centered perspective. This study sought to take a more humanized approach to the topic, using teachers’ language to illuminate their experiences with burnout and reveal how they perceive and cope with their stress. In doing so, this study aimed to acknowledge that teachers are the experts of their own experiences.

The first research question asked, *How do teachers at underserved schools perceive their experiences of burnout?* The findings show that teachers experience burnout as persistent stress and a sense of overwhelm. All participants described feeling a sense of dread over an unmanageable and uncertain future. When asked about the sources of their stress, teachers referred to administrative demands, such as the shifting of schedules and school protocols. Most teacher participants also shared that they feel stressed by the non-student portions of their days, such as meetings and observations. They also derive stress from a lack of resources and insufficient curriculum to meet the needs of their students. Although teachers had varied experiences within the earlier

portion of the Covid-19 pandemic, nearly all participants shared that the 2021-2022 school year has been particularly stressful, mainly due to constant changes and rising demands.

The second research question asked, *What coping strategies do teachers use?* The findings revealed that teachers use a wide variety of coping strategies. Some of those strategies are proactive (such as exercise, boundary setting, and community building). Teachers use these strategies to prepare for expected stressors, knowing they will be able to cope better with stressors in the moment if they have a buffer of physical and social-emotional wellbeing. Other strategies, such as breathing, mindfulness, and venting, are reactive. These coping strategies are used for unexpected stressors that may threaten a teacher's sense of emotional wellbeing throughout the school day.

The findings of this study show that teachers are acutely aware of their stress. They can describe the experience with rich language and point to sources of their stress. Although teachers, at times, experience unmanageable levels of stress, they found and implemented effective strategies for responding to that stress. They are not victims of burnout; rather, these teachers are actively and consciously working to fight against it. Findings from this study also revealed that teachers understand and name the structural and systemic issues that cause them stress. These teachers do not want administrators or district leaders to acknowledge or show pity for their stress. Rather, they want educational leaders to listen to their concerns and use their influence to enact changes that will help teachers work more effectively and make teaching a more sustainable profession.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The findings from this study illuminate how teachers at an underserved school perceive and cope with stress. They provide language for the experience of stress, revealing that teachers experience stress as a state of overwhelm and dread over the future. Their experience of stress is also closely tied to uncertainty and change, both of which contribute to a sense of hopelessness. The findings also reveal that teachers intentionally and proactively use research-supported coping strategies to manage stress. Despite high demands and stress levels, teachers are still able to find joy and flourish.

In the following discussion, I will explain how findings are aligned with the literature review, including prior research on the Job Demands-Resources Theory, coping strategies for stress, and flourishing. I will then discuss how the findings diverge from prior research to provide new insights into the experience of stress for teachers at underserved schools throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. Then, this discussion will outline implications for teachers, administrators, and policymakers. Finally, I will discuss the limitations of this study and offer suggestions for future research on how teachers perceive and cope with stress.

The findings for this study correspond with many themes from the literature review. First, the findings align with the Job Demands-Resources Theory, which posits that an imbalance of demands and resources can lead to stress and burnout (Camacho et al., 2021). Participants in this study felt overwhelmed by demands related to teaching, especially those that increased in the last several years. Participants discussed the expectation that schools would return to normal following Covid-19 related school shutdowns. They felt pressure to ramp up academics to make up for “learning loss.” Several also mentioned increasing demands for paperwork and documentation.

Although participants feel that demands on teachers have increased, they have not seen a commensurate increase in resources. Many shared that they felt overwhelmed by inadequate curriculum that did not meet the needs of students. This lack of curricular support added another demand: writing and adapting curriculum. Participants also reported a lack of counseling resources. At Buena Park Elementary, there is one counselor for over 600 students. Participants shared that the lack of counseling resources had put more pressure on them to meet the heightened emotional needs of their students. Overall, this imbalance of demands and resources has created an untenable level of stress for participants, supporting the Job Demands-Resources Theory (Camacho et al., 2021).

The findings also aligned with prior research on teachers' coping strategies. Beltman and Poulton (2019) assigned four categories to coping strategies: *Waiting*, *Assessing*, *Problem Solving*, and *Being Proactive*. Although the participants in this study did not use those terms, their suggested coping strategies could fall into those four categories. All participants mentioned taking deep breaths, which aligns with the *Waiting* category. *Assessing* strategies participants mentioned include self-talk and perspective shifting. All participants also discussed *Problem Solving* through conversations with colleagues. Finally, participants used *Proactive* strategies to reduce their overall stress level, including exercise, meditative activities, and drawing boundaries between their work and personal lives. This alignment suggests that teachers understand research-supported coping strategies and will use those strategies when given the proper space and time to do so.

Another similarity with the research is that participants find joy and success while working within their values. Friere et al. (2020) explained that flourishing is an

optimal state of wellbeing in which people live within their values. All participants described moments in which they experienced joy while teaching, and those moments aligned with implicitly shared values. This suggests that participants are finding moments of flourishing within the school day. For most participants, those moments included helping students find joy through art or science or helping students become more responsible and respectful people. Participants value their students' emotional and social wellbeing, so they flourish when they can teach in that value.

Implications for the Literature

This study has several implications for the literature on teacher burnout. Unlike prior research, this study was qualitative and used teachers' language to describe the experience of burnout. It therefore provided insight into how teachers think about their own experiences of burnout. Prior research also focused on the causes of burnout, but this study homed in on the coping strategies that teachers use to manage stress and avoid burnout. It identified several specific strategies that teachers find effective. Finally, prior research is limited to a pre-pandemic context. This study explores how teachers have experienced burnout and stress throughout the current Covid-19 pandemic.

This study revealed how teachers perceive and make sense of their experience of burnout. Although all teachers in the study indicated that they experienced symptoms of burnout, none used the word "burnout" to describe their experience. Rather, they used words like "overwhelmed" and "frozen." This language suggests that stress can be a physical experience for teachers, something that is felt in the body as well as in the mind. It also suggests that these teachers still find their stress manageable, or at least have hope that they will be able to manage their stress. One participant shared that

stress feels manageable when coupled with hope and joy. The true feeling of burnout comes from a lack of hope and joy. The omission of the word “burnout” from participants’ interview responses also suggests that teachers can experience heightened stress and symptoms of burnout long before they identify with burnout. One could therefore think of unmanaged stress as a road that leads to burnout. When teachers successfully use coping strategies or when administrators or policymakers enact change that relieves teachers’ stress, teachers can shift their direction towards a new destination: wellbeing.

This study revealed that for teachers, stress is closely related to uncertainty and change. Teachers are often asked to accommodate changes in curriculum or scheduling, as well as their job duties. Despite these constant changes, teachers shared that they were generally change-averse. They thrive in consistency, and notably, they know that their students thrive in consistency as well. Changes to the school system therefore require that teachers become a stabilizing figure for their students, softening the blows of inconsistency. This can be a challenge when teachers are already feeling emotionally raw and overwhelmed by change.

The Covid-19 pandemic precipitated many changes in education. Teachers changed their methods of instruction, teaching online and then later, in a socially distanced classroom. They also had to take on additional job duties, managing students’ symptoms and quarantines, as well as helping students work through the trauma of a completely disrupted school year. Although the 2021-2022 school year seemed to reflect a return to normalcy, teachers found it was exceptionally stressful. Changes to curriculum, schedules, and Covid-19 safety protocols left them standing on uncertain ground.

Implications for Practice and Policy

This study has several implications for teachers who are experiencing overwhelming levels of stress. First, participants unanimously agreed that supportive personal and professional relationships with colleagues helped them manage stress. Through venting or collaborating to solve problems, teachers can lift one another out of the trenches and stave off feelings of isolation or hopelessness. Although teachers may not always feel a close connection with their colleagues, building a support network within schools is essential to improving teachers' wellbeing. Next, participants shared that community within their classroom helped them alleviate stress and feel more joy. This suggests that investments in activities that promote joy in the classroom are important for creating a more positive working experience for teachers. Finally, consistent and proactive coping strategies helped teachers better respond to stressful situations that arose in the classroom. Teachers reported that exercise, meditative and creative hobbies, and time with loved ones all helped them reduce stress. Although mindfulness is often offered up as a hollow coping strategy, all participants shared that deep breathing helped them manage acute stress. This suggests that simple strategies could be powerful tools for teachers who feel overwhelmed.

This study also has implications for administrators and policy makers, both of whom have a stake in making teaching a sustainable profession. The findings revealed that teachers do not respond well to top-down attempts to reduce stress for teachers. Although administrators and education leaders often acknowledge teachers' stress, that acknowledgement can feel hollow when it is not followed up with meaningful change. Instead, administrators and policy makers should look to teachers to learn how they best cope with stress. The findings from this study showed that teachers are

intentionally using coping strategies and are therefore aware of best practices for reducing stress. They also showed that teachers feel unsupported in using those strategies. Administrators and policy makers should therefore give teachers the space and time to use them adequately. That could look like giving teachers unstructured time with colleagues to plan, debrief lessons, and build relationships with one another. Teachers often have too many demands and too little time to build meaningful communities, so providing them with the space to do so could allow them to better support one another and reduce their stress.

Participants overwhelmingly agreed that change and uncertainty increased stress. Although change can be important and some uncertainty is unavoidable, administrators should try to be thoughtful and strategic about change. Teachers may need more advanced warning before changes or greater consultation before changes are made. Administrators should also consider the time cost of curricular changes and provide teachers with the time and space needed to adjust. Just like students, teachers need consistent routines to thrive. Administrators should prioritize consistency to promote the wellbeing of their teachers.

Teachers also shared a clear understanding of the structural issues that make teaching more challenging. Large class sizes, limited access to counselors, and mountains of paperwork all make it harder for teachers to focus on teaching. Furthermore, when policy makers ignore teachers' pleas for those essential structural changes, they deny teachers' basic needs and show they do not respect the professional opinions of teachers. This leaves teachers feeling disrespected and unsupported, which further contributes to stress. Policy makers who want to make meaningful changes that will reduce stress and burnout should listen to teachers and prioritize those systemic

changes. Otherwise, they may further alienate the people who are at the heart of education.

Prior research has shown that teachers at underserved schools tend to experience higher levels of stress and burnout. Teacher burnout also leads to disproportionately worse academic and behavioral outcomes for underserved students. Participants in this study were no exception. They shared that having limited resources and greater exposure to trauma has impacted their students and made teaching more stressful. Addressing these inequities may be essential to reducing stress for teachers, thus making them better equipped to teach underserved students and promote greater equity for all children.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations to this study exist. First, the study had a limited number of participants and only included participants who were willing to discuss their experiences. It therefore did not reflect the experiences of teachers who are too overwhelmed by stress to discuss or make sense of their stress. Next, all participants had been teaching for at least five years, so they did not reflect the experiences of first-year or inexperienced teachers. Teachers newer to the profession may have been able to shed light on the accessibility of coping strategies for inexperienced teachers. Finally, this school site had a new administrator in the 2021-2022 school year. That change in leadership may have contributed to heightened uncertainty and stress for these teachers and may have been an under examined factor in this study.

My own bias and positionality are relevant to this study as my research motivations are inextricably tied to my personal motivation to sustain and enrich my career in education. I am a teacher at the school site used in this study and have

experienced the overwhelming stress that can lead to burnout. I have watched my coworkers reconsider their future in education and seen how a lack of faith in the education system can spread through a school site. I therefore feel a pressing need to understand burnout and share teachers' desperate pleas for support.

Directions for Future Research

This study highlighted some potential gaps in the research on teacher burnout. Future research should explore how administrators perceive and cope with stress. Just as students feel and absorb their teachers' stress, so too do teachers feel the impact of their administrators' stress. Studies in administrator stress could therefore provide helpful information that could benefit teachers and school systems. They might also point to structural issues that policy makers should focus on to improve working conditions for all those who work in schools. Future research might also explore how administrator style and administrator transitions contribute to stress for teachers. Almost all participants shared that leadership style alleviated or contributed to their stress, so this would be a fruitful area for better understanding teacher burnout. Finally, future research might investigate how teachers set boundaries at work and whether they have the language and agency to do so.

Conclusion

Burnout is an urgent concern for teachers and stakeholders in education. Students whose teachers are burned out tend to have worse academic and behavioral outcomes than those whose teachers effectively manage stress, and those outcomes are disproportionately worse for underserved students. Burnout also leads to staffing shortages, which can make teaching more challenging for teachers who remain.

This study sought to understand how teachers perceive stress and to find effective coping strategies for that stress. Although policymakers and administrators often acknowledge stress, that acknowledgement rarely leads to meaningful changes, leaving teachers feeling unsupported and misunderstood. In order to tackle burnout, we must turn to teachers and recognize that they are the experts in their own experiences. Their language and their stories provide the greatest insight into how teachers can reduce stress and thrive.

Although teachers can become overwhelmed by stress, they also have a clear sense of how to manage stress. Teachers thrive when they intentionally and proactively use coping strategies such as exercising, spending time on meditative and creative hobbies, and spending time with loved ones. Teachers also thrive when they have a community of supportive colleagues who can help them work through stress and collaborate to solve problems. Despite this wealth of coping strategies, teachers often find themselves without the time and space to implement them. Leaders in education should consider how they can reduce demands for teachers and give teachers the time and space to be agents in their path to flourishing.

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APPENDIX A:
CONSENT FORM TO BE A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

1. I understand that I am being asked to participate as a participant in a research study designed to examine feelings of burnout and coping strategies. This research is part of Valerie Cherbero's Master's Thesis research project at Dominican University of California, California. This research project is being supervised by Dr. Katie Lewis, Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Dominican University of California.
2. I understand that my participation in this research will involve taking part in one 45-minute interview, which will include a personal life history, career history, and current mental well-being.
3. I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and I am free to withdraw my participation at any time.
4. I have been made aware that the interviews will be video recorded. All personal references and identifying information will be eliminated when these recordings are transcribed, and all participants will be identified by pseudonym; the master list for these pseudonyms will be kept by Valerie Cherbero in a password-protected file, separate from the transcripts. Coded transcripts will be seen only by the researcher and her faculty advisors. One year after the completion of the research, all written and recorded materials will be destroyed.
5. I am aware that all study participants will be furnished with a written summary of the relevant findings and conclusions of this project. Such results will not be available until May 1, 2022.
6. I understand that I will be discussing topics of a personal nature and that I may refuse to answer any question that causes me distress or seems an invasion of my privacy. I may elect to stop the interview at any time.
7. I understand that my participation involves no physical risk, but may involve some psychological discomfort, given the nature of the topic being addressed in the interview. If I experience any problems or serious distress due to my participation, Valerie Cherbero will provide contact information for mental health services.
8. I understand that if I have any further questions about the study, I may contact Ms. Cherbero at valerie.cherbero@students.dominican.edu or her research supervisor, Dr. Lewis, at katherine.lewis@dominican.edu. If I have further questions or comments about participation in this study, I may contact the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants (IRBPHP), which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHP Office by calling (415) 482-3547 and leaving a voicemail message, by FAX at (415) 257-0165, or by writing to the IRBPHP, Office of the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dominican University of California, 50 Acacia Avenue, San Rafael, CA 94901.
9. All procedures related to this research project have been satisfactorily explained to me prior to my voluntary election to participate.

I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND ALL OF THE ABOVE EXPLANATION REGARDING THIS STUDY. I VOLUNTARILY GIVE MY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE. A COPY OF THIS FORM HAS BEEN GIVEN TO ME FOR MY FUTURE REFERENCE.

Signature

Date

APPENDIX B:
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How long have you been an educator? What grades have you taught?
2. We're going to be talking about stress in education. Tell me about a time recently when you felt particularly stressed at work.
3. Think about a typical school day. When do you begin to notice stress? When does the stress feel strongest?
4. What coping strategies do you use to manage stress during the school day?
5. What coping strategies do you use to manage stress outside of school hours?
6. How (if at all) has your administration addressed stress?
7. Do you talk about stress with colleagues?
8. Think about your teaching career. Was there a period of time when your stress levels felt highest? Lowest?
9. How did your overall stress level change (or not change) during the course of the pandemic?
10. Does the stress of teaching feel manageable to you? Was there a time when it did not feel manageable?
11. What do you think is the greatest source of stress for you at work?
12. What do you think is the greatest source of satisfaction for you at work?
13. Have you considered leaving teaching? When you consider leaving teaching, what feelings do you experience?
14. What do you think could be done to lower stress for teachers?