

Workload Woes: The Dynamics of Teacher Workload on Job Satisfaction and Turnover

by

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Abstract

Teacher workload and work intensification are increasingly recognized as key contributors to job dissatisfaction, burnout, and turnover in K–12 education. Yet, research has not fully captured the complexity of how workload affects teacher wellbeing and retention. This dissertation, structured as three articles, explores the relationship between workload, job satisfaction, and attrition. The first article presents a systematic literature review, highlighting consistent links between excessive demands, burnout, and turnover. The second study uses qualitative content analysis to compare teacher contracts in unionized and non-unionized states, revealing disparities in how workload and protections are addressed. The third study applies the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model to survey data, confirming significant relationships between workload, burnout, and intent to leave. Together, these studies offer a multifaceted understanding of teacher workload and its implications, providing practical insights for policymakers and educational leaders seeking to improve working conditions and address teacher shortages.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my father, William Charles Smith, who left this earth way too early. I promised him I would go as far as I could in my education since, he never had the chance to do so in his, and I did...partly for me, but a great deal for him.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgments.....	3
Dedication	4
Table of Contents	5
List of Abbreviations	11
Workload and Work Intensification in Teaching	14
Overall Purpose of the Study	15
Study 1: “Teacher Workload and Work Intensification: A Systematic Review of the Current Literature”	16
Overview	16
Approach.....	17
Impact	19
Study 2: "Contract Chaos: Navigating Working Conditions and Workload Expectations in Union and Non-Union Teacher Contracts"	20
Overview	20
Approach.....	21
Impact	22
Study 3: “The Weight of the Work: Examining K-12 Teachers’ Perceptions of Workload, Intensification, and Job Satisfaction”	22
Overview	22
Approach.....	23
Impact	23

Conclusion	24
Chapter 2: Teacher Workload and Work Intensification: A Systematic Review of the Current Literature.....	
Introduction.....	26
Method	29
PRISMA Model for Inclusion.....	31
Results.....	32
Conceptualizing Workload in Education	34
Workload and Working Conditions	35
Workload and Burnout.....	38
Factors Leading to Workload Increase	40
Workload and Retention	42
Strategies for Addressing Workload	44
Conclusion	48
Policy Recommendations	50
Future Research	52
References.....	54
Chapter 3: Contract Chaos: Navigating Working Conditions and Workload Expectations in Union and Non-union Teacher Contracts	
Introduction.....	61
Background and Literature	63
Method	69
Sample	70

Analysis	72
Results.....	73
Union State Workload	74
Oregon.....	74
Vermont	79
Massachusetts	81
Kansas	84
Louisiana.....	86
Non-union Board Policy	87
North Carolina	87
Texas	88
Georgia.....	90
Arkansas.....	91
South Carolina	92
Discussion	93
Implications	98
Conclusion	99
References:.....	101
Chapter 4: The Weight of the Work: Examining K-12 Teachers' Perceptions of Workload, Intensification, and Job Satisfaction	105
Introduction.....	105
Purpose and Objective	106
Literature Review	108

Guiding Framework	111
Sample and Approach	112
Sample.....	113
Survey	115
Construct Descriptions	116
Analytical Approach	118
Ethical Considerations	119
Limitations	119
Data Analysis	121
Results.....	122
Association Between Workload and Job Satisfaction	126
Role of Union Status	127
Most Prevalent Factors	128
Discussion	131
Implications for Policy and Practice	134
Conclusion	135
References	137
Chapter 5: Synthesis, Implications, and Recommendations.....	155
Introduction.....	155
Synthesis of Findings.....	155
Implications for Policy and Practice	161
Limitations and Future Research	163
Conclusion	164

List of Tables

Chapter 2

Table 2.1 Terms of Literature Search	28
Table 2.2 PRISMA Model for Inclusion.....	30
Table 2.3 Summary of Literature Search.....	31
Table 2.4 Specific Strategies for Addressing Workload.....	48

Chapter 3

Table 3.1 Ranking and Page Count/Number of Policies of Selected State Contracts	70
Table 3.2 Coded Definitions Found in Contracts/Board Policies.....	92
Table 3.3 Key Takeaways from Contract Analysis	93

Chapter 4

Table 4.1 Survey Constructs, Questions, & Descriptions.....	114
Table 4.2 Survey Item by Construct	116
Table 4.4 Means for Questions, by All Respondents, Union, and Non-Union Teachers	124
Table 4.5 Top Five Highest Correlations Amongst Workload Factors	125
Table 4.6 One-Sample t-Test Results for Teacher Workload Variables	127
Table 4.7 OLS Regression of Workload factors on Dissatisfaction.....	127
Table 4.8 OLS Regression of Workload factors on Intent to Leave	129

List of Figures

Figure 2.2 PRISMA Model for Inclusion	30
Figure 4.3 Agreement with Statements on Workload Survey	122

List of Abbreviations

(In order of Appearance)

RQ Research Question

K-12 Kindergarten through Twelfth Grade

NCES National Center for Education Statistics

QCA Qualitative Content Analysis

NCTQ National Council on Teacher Quality

JD-R Job Demands-Resource Model

IEP Individualized Education Plan

RTI Response to Intervention

TJSQ Teacher Job Satisfaction Questionnaire

IRB Internal Review Board

LASSO Least Absolute Shrinkage and Selection Operator

RMSE Root Mean Squared Error

VIF Variance Inflation Factor

Chapter 1: Introduction

Teaching is an essential pillar in shaping the world, and educators play a pivotal role in molding the minds and character of the next generation. At its core, teaching transcends the mere transmission of knowledge; it fosters critical thinking, empathy, and the acquisition of essential life skills. There is nary a person alive who cannot tell a story about their favorite teacher and how they made their experience in life more enjoyable or even bearable at times. Even sports stars, celebrities, media moguls, and technology geniuses will often tell stories of how their favorite teacher encouraged them to keep going to reach their dreams or that they could grow up to be anything they thought possible. Teachers, at their core, serve as the architects of societal progress, influencing the development of individuals who will eventually contribute to the betterment of communities, nations, and the global landscape. The impact of a great teacher resonates far beyond the confines of a school wall; it influences the trajectory of societies and communities. So, it goes without saying that teachers do far more than simply create and deliver lessons; they literally impact the world. As noted by Nelson Mandela, *“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”*

Yet, the promise of impactful teaching often goes unrealized. The day-to-day working conditions and politics surrounding the job can not only diminish the potential of a teacher’s impact, but they can leave even well-intentioned teachers demoralized, burnt out, or ready to leave (Li & Yao, 2022). Indeed, research has shown that it is often the most committed teachers who are the most unhappy with the current conditions of the profession (Pendola et al., 2023). With nationwide surveys reporting that over half of teachers are considering leaving early (Walker, 2022), it is clear that significant efforts must be made to improve conditions and

provide new ways for teachers to realize their potential. While there has clearly been considerable progress in research surrounding this area (e.g., Garcia & Weiss, 2020), the current rates of teacher turnover and shortages demonstrate that there is still more to be done.

It is from this space that research into teacher workload becomes critical. Despite numerous studies citing that workload demands are a major factor in teacher dissatisfaction, burnout, or turnover (e.g., Madigan & Kim, 2021; Li & Yao, 2022; Yin et al., 2019), and that aspects of workload have been intensifying (Walker et al., 2019), the research on workload is thin (see: Easthope & Easthope, 2000; Fitzgerald et al., 2019). The very nature of the teaching profession often demands not only classroom instruction, but an extensive array of administrative tasks, such as grading, lesson planning, extensive communication with caregivers and administration, tense relationships, student discipline and classroom management, and even extracurricular commitments (Gibson et al., 2015; Liston et al., 2006). As a result of these requirements, teachers often work long hours, frequently extending beyond the typical school day and outside of their paid, contracted hours (Jiang, 2023). This prolonged and intense workload can lead to chronic stress, emotional exhaustion, and a general sense of overwhelm (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2015). The constant juggling of responsibilities without adequate time for rest and recuperation, or time allocated during their workday to attend to tasks, takes a toll on their physical and mental wellbeing. Burnout becomes a looming threat, and the toll of overwork not only affects individual teachers but will also jeopardize the quality of education they can provide (Guin, 2004; Ronfeldt et al., 2011). Addressing the issue of excessive workload is crucial for the wellbeing of educators and for the overall health of the education system, providing longevity to the teaching profession and mitigation of the growing teacher retention crisis.

Workload and Work Intensification in Teaching

The complex relationship between teacher workload, job satisfaction, and retention sits at a critical juncture in the educational labor market. Elevated and sustained levels of workload—often called workload intensification- have emerged as a significant contributing factor to the alarming rates of teacher burnout, stress, and turnover (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2011). Workload intensification has a profound impact on the wellbeing of teachers, and the continuous surge in teacher workload has emerged as a pivotal factor contributing to the elevated levels of stress and eventual burnout within the teacher workforce (Fitzgerald et al., 2019).

Sustained, high levels of teacher workload present a multifaceted challenge that significantly contributes to the escalating issues of retention and burnout (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2015). Teachers, tasked with an ever-growing array of responsibilities, find themselves grappling with an unsustainable workload. This persistent demand not only infringes upon their personal time but also compromises their ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance, all of which can have an impact on their teaching ability as well as the school community itself (Johnson and Birkland, 2003). As teachers consistently navigate this overwhelming workload, they become susceptible to burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, reduced efficacy, and a waning commitment to their profession, leading to a desire to exit the profession or their placement (Leithwood & McAdie, 2007). The relentless demands imposed on educators create an inhospitable environment and poor working conditions, ultimately dissuading many from pursuing a long-term career in teaching completely.

By investigating the causes of teacher workload and work intensification, educational stakeholders can seek to mitigate the issues presented within the classroom, causing an unsustainable amount of work, removing one of the main sources of burnout (Santavirta et al.,

2007) and stress (Kyriacou, 2001). Reducing teacher workload could be paramount for fostering a sustainable mitigation solution to this issue. Workload reduction could not only preserve teachers' wellbeing and job satisfaction but also contribute significantly to improved teacher retention (Creagh et al., 2023). By reducing the burnout and stress levels associated with excessive work demands, teachers can dedicate more time and energy to effective teaching strategies, student engagement, classroom management, and furthering their professional development, ultimately creating a positive and conducive learning environment (Kyriacou, 2001) By addressing rising attrition rates, educational stakeholders can improve their teacher candidate quality and reduce turnover and costs associated with turnover.

Although research is emergent on the topic of teacher workload and workload intensification in the United States (see: Gicheva, 2021), a more comprehensive body of literature on the topic exists outside the field of education (e.g., Zeytinoglu et al., 2007; Dwinijanti et al., 2020; Xiaoming et al., 2014; Qureshi et. al, 2013). I therefore investigated literature on workload, work intensification, and time poverty beyond the educational research landscape, examining the fields of business, human resources, and nursing. These yielded additional insights that may translate into the field of education.

Overall Purpose of the Study

Given the gaps in the literature and the potential for practical and meaningful improvement in teacher conditions, I conducted this dissertation research through three connected, but stand-alone articles. Each article addresses a different, major research question:

RQ1: How has extant research addressed workload intensification and its impacts, specifically for K-12 teachers?

RQ2: How have workload expectations been defined and operationalized between union and non-union states?

RQ3: How do teachers currently perceive workload expectations and demands in relation to job satisfaction?

This three-article dissertation adds to the body of knowledge by (1) addressing the gap in the literature with the systematic literature review, providing insight into the workload and work intensification of teachers and how this may impact them; (2) providing investigations into the contracts and verbiage of teachers, giving insight into the workload of unionized versus non-unionized teachers; and (3) investigating the perceptions of workload expectations and demands in relation to teacher job satisfaction. Below, I outline the plan of each article.

Study 1: “Teacher Workload and Work Intensification: A Systematic Review of the Current Literature”

Overview

The first article aimed to address the research question: *How has extant research addressed workload intensification and its impacts, specifically for K-12 teachers?* To address this question, I conducted a systematic review of literature on the topic of workload and work intensification of K-12 educators, examining the verbiage and history of teacher workload and workload intensification, specifically noting how the concept has evolved in the teaching profession, and what its impacts have been on the profession. There is a gap in the literature on how workload and workload intensification directly affect teacher satisfaction, working conditions, burnout, and turnover. Improving workload and workload intensification can serve as a mitigating factor to burnout factors that lead to turnover, improving the teacher shortage. By

limiting our understanding that workload has on teacher satisfaction, teacher turnover and the growing crisis can potentially continue to grow.

By conducting a systematic literature review of the relevant works thus far concerning workload, workload intensification, and their subsequent relationship with teacher turnover, I gathered, analyzed, and synthesized the relevant research findings to better inform the scope of the issue for education. Having defined the research question to address the gap in the literature and given the potential for practical and meaningful improvement in teacher conditions, a systematic review of the literature to address workload and work intensification can be beneficial to address the importance of teacher workload and its impact on job satisfaction and retention.

Approach

A review of the current literature was performed, looking at the ways teacher workload intensity has been addressed in the literature thus far. I first established inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the selection of pertinent studies captured the genesis of the phenomenon. Database searches of JSTOR, Ebsco, Google Scholar, and various journals within these research databases were utilized to carefully craft search criteria. The identified articles then underwent a systematic screening process based on titles, abstracts, and full texts, adhering to the methodology of systematic reviews found in *Systematic Literature Review: An Introduction* (Lame, 2019). This framework gives guidance on the procedures to follow for an appropriate systematic literature review process and is used in guiding the development of the research. From this work, Lame (2019) informs the researcher that "[the] standard process for developing, conducting, and reporting systematic reviews in these topics in clinical disciplines is as follows:

1. Formulate review question: why is this review necessary? What question needs answering?

2. Define inclusion and exclusion criteria: set criteria for the topic, the methods, the study designs, and the methodological quality of studies to be reviewed.
3. Locate studies: develop a search strategy aimed at covering the broadest possible range of sources relevant to your research question. Sources include databases like Scopus or Web of Science, but also study registers, academic repositories for theses, reference lists and citation lists of included articles, books, communications with experts, and possibly searching the 'grey literature'.
4. Select studies: assess the studies identified by your search strategy to decide if they meet the inclusion criteria. This step is usually performed in two stages: a first stage where reviewers screen titles and abstracts (often thousands of them), and a second stage where they screen the full texts that were not excluded in the first stage.

Usually, at least two reviewers carry this task, and a procedure is set in case they disagree on a study (often a third reviewer stepping in). A reason is identified for all studies excluded.
5. Assess study quality: use a pre-defined method for assessing the quality of included studies. Various tools exist for this stage (Crowe and Sheppard, 2011). Again, usually two reviewers assess each article in parallel, and their level of agreement is monitored.
6. Extract data: use a pre-defined form to extract the data of interest from each included study. Again, usually performed by two reviewers in parallel.
7. Analyse [sic] and present results: use a pre-defined method to analyze the data and synthesize the information from included studies. Perform sensitivity analysis if

possible. If the results of all studies are pooled together in a quantitative analysis; this is called meta-analysis.

8. Interpret results: consider the limitations of the review, the strength of the evidence it surfaced, how the research question is answered, and what areas for future research have emerged.” (Lame, 2019, pg. 1635).

In addition to Lame (2019), I supplemented the methodological approach and build off of the work of Creagh et al. (2023) *Workload, work intensification and time poverty for teachers and school leaders: A systematic research synthesis*. In this piece, the authors present a synthesis of research literature concerned with teachers’ and school leaders’ experiences of workload and work intensification in Australia. Forty papers met the inclusion criteria for the research synthesis. A similar synthesis of the literature was followed to find literature for inclusion in this literature review. Throughout the process, transparency and reproducibility were be maintained, and any potential biases were addressed utilizing the techniques in the abovementioned pieces. More details are included in the full study. By following this methodological framework, the systematic literature review aims to provide a comprehensive and unbiased overview of the current state of knowledge on workload intensification, job satisfaction, and teacher retention.

Impact

Following the systematic review, this study adds to the body of literature on teacher working conditions (e.g., Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2011; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2015), but also helps broaden the literature on teacher workload in the United States (Torres, 2011), giving insight into the phenomenon of increasing teacher workload (Leithwood and McAdie, 2007; Liston et al., 2006; Geiger and Pivovarov, 2019; Gicheva, 2021); and the implications of this issue, potentially providing mitigation techniques to interested stakeholders.

Study 2: "Contract Chaos: Navigating Working Conditions and Workload Expectations in Union and Non-Union Teacher Contracts"

Overview

There is little doubt that the definition and operationalization of workload expectations play a fundamental role in shaping the experiences of educators (Pendola & Smith-Murphy, 2024). However, a significant gap exists in our understanding of how these expectations are delineated and implemented across different states, particularly in the context of union and non-union environments (Don et al., 2013). The question of how workload expectations have been defined and stated in contracts between union and non-union states emerges as a critical area for investigation. This knowledge gap is consequential, as it has implications for the professional experiences of teachers, the negotiation of working conditions, and the overall dynamics within educational institutions. The lack of clarity regarding the variances in defining and operationalizing workload expectations hinders the development of targeted policies, support systems, and professional development initiatives.

Therefore, in my second research article, I conducted a document analysis (Bowen, 2009) to answer the research question: *How have workload expectations been defined and operationalized between union and non-union states?* Addressing this research question is essential for fostering transparency, equity, and effective workforce management in the field of education. By unraveling the nuances associated with workload expectations in union and non-union states, this research seeks to contribute valuable insights that can inform evidence-based decision-making, shape educational policies, and ultimately enhance the working conditions for educators nationwide.

Approach

To address this research question, I compared union contracts as opposed to non-union contracts, seeking to analyze the verbiage of both groups for language on working conditions and workload that may be prevalent following the approach of qualitative content analysis (QCA) as the method can also be applied for coding documents (Gläser-Zikuda, M., Hagenauer, G., & Stephan, M., 2020). By comparing the contractual expectations of both groups—one where teacher voice is ostensibly well represented—I was able to observe the differentiated working conditions and have a better understanding of workload equity and diffusion across various stakeholder groups, as well as how these conditions impact retention and attrition in the teaching profession.

To complete this analysis, I collected contracts from various states and followed a conceptual framework analyzing teacher contracts in unionized versus non-unionized settings, examining various aspects related to teacher employment terms, working conditions, and the overall relationship between teachers and their employers, which may impact retention and working conditions. To conduct this, I utilized QCA to address the following domains of workload, following the approach to QCA:

1. Key Aspects of Workload:
 - a. Working Conditions:
 - i. Working hours, class sizes, and workload expectations
 - ii. Contractual clauses addressing teacher workload and classroom management

These domains were then put to a comparative analysis to systematically compare the policies and provisions between unionized and non-unionized teacher contracts.

Impact

I aim to provide a comprehensive explanation of the importance of contractual language in teacher retention by analyzing these documents for verbiage and comparing language that explicitly describes the working conditions expected of teachers within their contractual duties. Doing so can help policymakers observe the differentiated working conditions and have a better understanding of workload equity and diffusion across various stakeholder groups.

Study 3: “The Weight of the Work: Examining K-12 Teachers’ Perceptions of Workload, Intensification, and Job Satisfaction”

Overview

The question of how teachers currently perceive workload expectations in relation to job satisfaction also emerges as a focal point for investigation. Despite the pivotal role teachers play in shaping the future of the students they serve, there exists a gap in the understanding of the intricate interplay between teacher workload expectations and job satisfaction. The complexity of the teacher relationship with workload demands and job satisfaction is compounded by factors such as changing standards, technological integration, student discipline, and societal changes. An examination of teachers' perspectives on their workload expectations is essential for informing policies, creating support systems that can enhance overall job satisfaction and, consequently, improving the quality of education. Addressing this gap in knowledge will contribute to the creation of a more supportive and conducive work environment for educators, ultimately benefiting both teachers and the students they serve. Historically, workload has not been heavily studied as a remedy to the growing teacher shortage, so this study would add to the body of literature on retention methods. Therefore, for my final article, I intend to conduct a quantitative analysis of workload on job satisfaction, utilizing the Job Demands-Resources

model (JD-R) and a correlational survey analysis to answer the research question: *How do teachers currently perceive workload expectations and demands in relation to job satisfaction?*

Approach

To address this question, I distributed a survey and performed a quantitative analysis on current K-12 educators to examine the relationship between teachers' workload perception and their level of job dissatisfaction. Employing a survey containing questions from the Job Demands-Resource Model (JD-R) (Bakker et al., 2014; Bakker et al., 2004; Demerouti et al., 2001), a quantitative study of the relationship between workload and teacher job dissatisfaction, and how work intensification impacts teachers' job satisfaction and turnover intentions was performed. The study utilized functional voluntary sampling (Murairwa, 2015) targeting currently employed K-12 teachers. The survey was distributed via Qualtrics on various social media platforms, including Reddit, X (formerly Twitter), and Facebook. Survey results were then analyzed for interrelationships between aspects of intensification and (1) job dissatisfaction and (2) intent to leave. Given the large number of covariates and exploratory nature of the research, descriptive statistics, correlation, and LASSO regression techniques were utilized to explore the relationships between workload and job dissatisfaction.

Impact

As policymakers and educational stakeholders strive to address the growing issue of teacher retention, an understanding of the relationship between workload and its impact on job satisfaction and retention becomes imperative for the development of effective strategies to promote teacher retention and longevity in the profession. Excessive workload is causing an alarming amount of teacher turnover, which is a significant concern due to the impact on the

overall quality and stability of education systems. When experienced educators leave their positions, it disrupts the learning of students and can lead to a loss of institutional knowledge.

Also, the recruitment and training of new teachers can cause a substantial financial cost to schools and districts. The lack of continuity and consistency in teaching staff can contribute to an unstable learning environment, impede the implementation of long-term educational strategies, and ultimately compromise the quality of education that students receive. This study thereby aims to contribute to an understanding of how teachers perceive and navigate workload expectations, shedding light on the intricate interplay between workload and job satisfaction in the educational context, potentially contributing to mitigating factors in the exacerbated teacher shortage. By addressing the unsustainable workload and work intensification that teachers experience, which can lead to burnout levels impacting the desire to vacate a placement or leave the profession completely, stakeholders can seek to challenge these issues and better combat teacher attrition and turnover.

Conclusion

Through the above three articles, this dissertation aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on teacher workload. It is essential to comprehend the connection between workload and its influence on job satisfaction and retention. This understanding is crucial for devising effective strategies that foster the prolonged retention of teachers in the profession. This study aimed to address workload from three angles: First, to address a gap in the literature by conducting a systematic review, shedding light on the workload and work intensification experienced by teachers and its potential impact on them. Second, to delve into the contractual aspects and language used for teachers, offering insights into the workload disparities between

unionized and non-unionized educators. And third, to explore perceptions of workload expectations and demands in connection with teacher job satisfaction.

Chapter 2: Teacher Workload and Work Intensification: A Systematic Review of the Current Literature

Introduction

Teaching has traditionally been characterized as an occupation with high levels of attrition compared to other professions (Sutcher et al. 2016). Research has shown that teachers are leaving the profession by the thousands every year, with the national average approaching approximately 37,000 vacancies as of the 2021-2022 school year (Nguyen et al., 2022). Despite research and knowledge of this phenomenon concerning teachers leaving the profession dating back to the 1980s (Sutcher et al., 2019; Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll, 2003), the body of research and major interventions are still wrestling to address the problem.

In analyses of national data, researchers long found that teacher shortages are not primarily the result of an insufficient production of new teachers (Ingersoll, 2001). In contrast, data has shown that school staffing problems are, to a significant extent, the result of a “revolving door”—whereby large numbers of teachers depart teaching long before retirement (Ingersoll, 2001). While there is no doubt that new teacher recruitment may be one way to remedy to staffing issues caused by teacher turnover, the research also shows a considerable decline in the number of students entering teacher preparation programs, which leaves gaps in the profession when older teachers retire or when teachers vacate their positions (Garcia and Weiss, 2020). A recent study conducted by National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2018) found that the total number of students completing teacher preparation programs has fallen steadily over the past decade, declining from nearly 214,000 in the 2010-2011 academic school year to 160,000 ten years later. This decline in completers indicates a drop of more than 25%.

With the growing drop in teacher preparation enrollment and the rising attrition rates, it is clear that improving satisfaction of existing teachers to aid in retention is a central leverage point in the teacher shortage puzzle.

High turnover not only disrupts the continuity of education but also poses a daunting challenge to the cultivation of a stable and experienced teaching workforce within a placement, which impacts student learning (Podolsky et al., 2016; Hanushek and Rivkin, 2016; Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond, 2019). There are also financial benefits to reducing teacher turnover within a placement that could be experienced by simply reducing workload as the cost of replacing a teacher can cost a school anywhere from 10-30 thousand dollars (Barnes et al. 2007; Watlington et al., 2010).

Research has shown that the primary factor behind the rates of teacher attrition stems from stress and burnout (see: Li and Yao, 2022). While there are many factors leading to stress and burnout, the most commonly cited is the elevated and sustained levels of working expectations in the teaching profession (Iancu, 2018)—referred to as workload intensification. K-12 teachers worldwide are increasingly working beyond the scope of their contracts and training, at a more intense pace, and for longer hours than their predecessors (Sandmeier et al., 2022). A recent Gallup Panel Workforce Study indicated that K-12 teachers were the most burned out of the over 12,000 full-time respondents surveyed, at a staggering 52% (Agrawal & Marken, 2022). Indeed, high contact professions such as nurses, physicians, social workers, and teachers turn out to be highly susceptible to burnout, however, teachers have repeatedly been shown to report the highest levels of burnout (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014). With the ever-evolving climate within the educational landscape, this statistic comes as no surprise as current

teachers are required to undertake an increasing number of discrete, monitored, and evaluated tasks every day in addition to their core teaching load (Yin et al., 2019).

Workload intensification therefore has a profound impact on the wellbeing of teachers, and a key antecedent to burnout (Yin et al., 2019). There is little doubt then that the continuous increase in teacher workload contributes to elevated levels of stress and eventual burnout amongst educators, which then acts as a key driver of dissatisfaction, turnover, and ultimately shortages (Fitzgerald, 2019).

The job-related duties of a modern-day teacher often do not include the countless hours spent outside of the classroom working on lesson plans, classroom design, emails, and other administrative responsibilities, in addition to extracurricular commitments. All these small tasks create an intricate tapestry of obligations that have both grown in quantity and shortened in expected turn-around time (Liston et al., 2006; Leithwood & McAdie, 2007). This is particularly true for under-resourced and underserved school environments, where reduced resources and structural inequalities place additional burdens on teachers (Collie & Mansfield, 2022). As teachers grapple with these complex obligations, the collective effect of the job itself coupled with the stress of an unsustainable workload can erode job satisfaction and contribute to a sense of professional burnout. As one can imagine, this increase in the number of tasks and job-related demands is leading to a surge in workload and rise in stress (Leithwood & McAdie, 2007) which in turn is leading to more burnout and higher rates of turnover (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011; Russell et al., 2020), exacerbating the teacher shortage.

While we have a wealth of research on how to intervene when it comes to burnout and stress (e.g., reflections, mentoring, mindfulness) (Bottiani et al., 2019; Rajendran et al., 2020; Räsänen et al., 2020, Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016), much less research has specifically focused on

workload itself as a factor that can be modified to reduce stress. Indeed, considering the body of research that points to workload as a primary stressor, it seems to be an overlooked factor that may sit at the core of the issue. To address this gap in the literature, this systematic literature review aims to address the gap in the current research by asking: RQ1: *How has extant research addressed workload intensification and its impacts, specifically for K-12 teachers?* This article thereby aims to add to the body of literature on teacher working conditions, while also helping to broaden the literature on teacher workload in the United States. As policymakers and educational stakeholders strive to address the growing issue of teacher retention, an understanding of the relationship between workload and its impact on job satisfaction and retention becomes imperative for the development of effective strategies to promote teacher retention and longevity in the profession.

Method

To address the above research question, this study follows the approach of (Lame, 2019) for conducting systematic reviews, outlined in Table 2.1 below. First, a broad review of the current literature was performed looking at the ways teacher workload and work intensity has been addressed in the literature, including vocabulary and terminology. This was used to establish inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the selection of pertinent studies is attained. Second, Database searches of JSTOR, Ebsco, Google Scholar, and various journals within these research databases was conducted using carefully crafted search strings, as well as wildcards (e.g., workload intensification*) so that different phrasing was captured. Key search terms are listed in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1

Terms of Literature Search

Teacher workload intensification	Teaching workload factors	Teacher wellbeing and workload
Workload stress in education	Professional demands on teachers	Teacher wellbeing and workload intensification
K-12 Teacher Workload	Educational administration and workload	Teacher wellbeing and work demands
Teaching demands and stress	Classroom demands on teachers	Teaching workload intervention strategies
Educational work pressure	Teacher time management	Teacher attrition and workload
Teacher burnout	Teaching workload and job satisfaction	Teacher workload and turnover
Job demands in education	Educational policy impact on teacher workload	

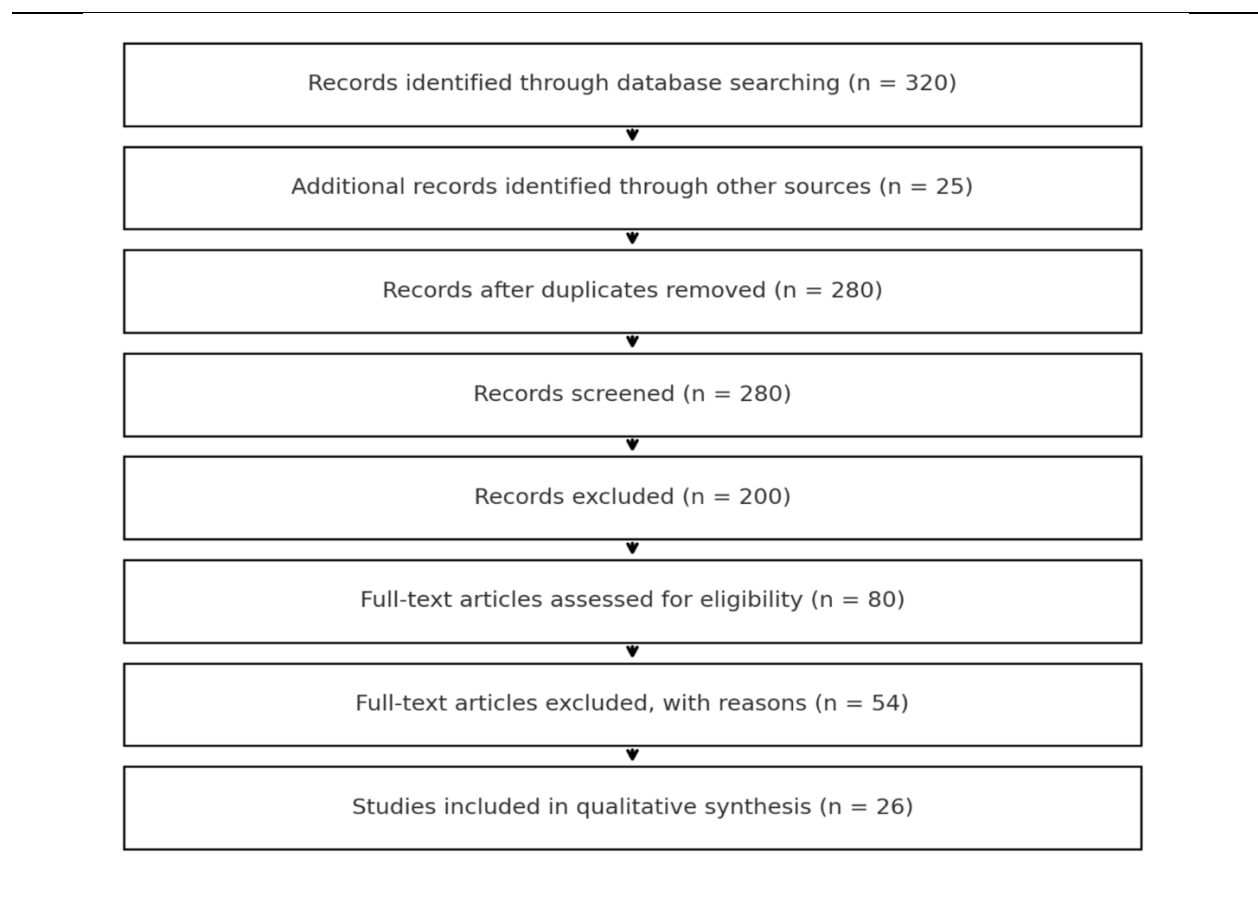
Third, the identified articles underwent a systematic screening process based on titles, abstracts, and full texts to extract categorizing data. Data extraction was performed to compile key information, such as study design, sample characteristics, as well as terminology inclusion.

Fourth, although a formal quality assessment tool was not used, studies were critically appraised based on relevance, methodological transparency, and alignment with the review's research question. Priority was given to peer-reviewed empirical studies with clearly reported methods and data. This synthesis involved categorizing findings, identifying patterns, and drawing overarching conclusions. Throughout the process, transparency and reproducibility were maintained by keeping records of each step of the coding process, and any potential biases were addressed. To organize and analyze the findings from the systematic literature review, I developed a coding framework aligned with recurring themes identified across the selected studies. Each article was entered into a spreadsheet and coded according to key focus areas,

including workload, working conditions, planning time and breaks, burnout and stress, workload intensification, and job duties. This categorical coding allowed for thematic synthesis across studies and facilitated the identification of patterns related to how teacher workload impacts job satisfaction and retention. By following this methodological framework, the systematic literature review aimed to provide a comprehensive and unbiased overview of the current state of knowledge on workload intensification, job satisfaction, and teacher retention. Figure 2.2 presents the PRISMA (Page et al., 2021) process model for study inclusion and the number of articles that were selected based on these criteria.

Figure 2.2

PRISMA Model for Inclusion



Results

Following the above process for identifying research in the field, results from the literature search are presented below. To provide a broad overview, Table 2.3 provides details on each study utilized, including the author(s), location of the study, main method, general sample, and a brief summary of the research takeaways as they apply to workload intensification. After the table, the research on workload is organized into major themes.

Table 2.3
Summary of Literature Search

<i>Author(s) & Location</i>	<i>Method</i>	<i>Sample</i>	<i>Summary</i>
Sandmeir et al., 2022, Switzerland	Quantitative, Survey	Primary, Secondary	To analyze the relationships between teachers' work overload, prolonging working hours as a coping strategy, autonomy, and exhaustion.
Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014, Belgium	Quantitative, Secondary data analysis	unknown	To analyze how four interpersonal relationships (students, colleagues, supervisors, and parents), teaching-related and non-teaching-related workload (e.g., paperwork), and autonomy are related to teacher burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment).
Carlo et al., 2013, Europe	Mixed methods, Literature and document reviews, surveys, online questionnaires, field interviews	Nursery, Primary, Secondary	To identify the factors influencing the attractiveness of the teaching professions in Europe and the extent to which such factors have been or could be influenced by policy initiatives.
Leithwood & McAdie, 2006, Canada	Literature Review	unknown	An analytical review of the literature on teachers' working conditions to advance the understanding of the issues concerning teachers' working conditions.
Torres, 2016, USA	Quantitative, Secondary Data Analysis	K-12	Investigate a claim that an unsustainable workload is the primary cause of teacher turnover at Charter Management Organizations (CMOs).
Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018	Mixed Methods	K-12	Analyzed three years of retention data to understand the relationship between attrition patterns, perceived working conditions at teachers' schools, and the characteristics of the schools where they were employed.
	Quantitative,	Secondary	

Lawrence, 2019, Australia	Survey		To investigate teachers' experiences of work intensification and wellbeing.
Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011, Norway	Quantitative, Questionnaire	Primary, Secondary	Examined the relations between school context variables and teachers' feeling of belonging, emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, and the motivation to leave the profession.
Toropova et al., 2019, Sweden	Quantitative, Secondary Data Analysis	Secondary	To investigate the relations between teacher job satisfaction, working conditions, and teacher characteristics for 8 th grade math teachers.
Dibbon, 2004, Canada	Mixed Methods, Survey, open-ended questions, time diaries	Primary, Secondary	A report on the workload of teachers and the impact of workload on teachers and students.
M. Brown & R. Wynn, 2009, USA	Empirical Inquiry, Interviews	K-12	To better understand the leadership styles of principals who lead schools that have low attrition and transfer rates.
Sorensen & Ladd, 2020, USA	Quantitative, Secondary Data Analysis	Middle School	To determine school responses to turnover across different policy environments and macroeconomic climates.
Allen et al., 2021, England	Quantitative, Secondary Data Analysis	Primary, secondary	Analyzed teachers' working hours using four data sets.
Creagh et al., 2023, Australia	Systematic Research Synthesis	Nursery, Primary, Secondary, K-12	A synthesis of research literature concerned with teachers' and school leaders' experiences of workload and work intensification.
Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009, Belgium	Qualitative, Case Study	Primary	To research how primary school teachers experience their working conditions, under the conditions of work intensification.
Easthope & Easthope, 2000, Australia	Qualitative, Focus group/interview	Secondary, Upper School	Investigating whether workload intensification justifies the perceptions teachers had of their work, the role of professional commitment, and the actions teachers look to deal with increasing workload demands.
Fitzgerald et al., 2019, Australia	Qualitative, Interviews	Primary, Secondary	To explore changes in work demands experienced by teachers in the context of OECD reports of these teachers working in or near the statistical

			category of “very long working hours”.
Gavin et al., 2021, Australia	Quantitative, Secondary Data Analysis		To synthesize large scale surveys of teacher workload data.
Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016, Norway	Quantitative, Questionnaire	Senior High School	The purpose of this study was to explore how seven potential stressors predicted senior high school teachers’ experiences of teacher self-efficacy, emotional stress, emotional exhaustion, engagement in teaching, and motivation to leave the teaching profession.
Buskila & Chen-Levi, 2021, Israel	Quantitative, Survey	Primary, Secondary	To find sources of stress in teacher workload.
Pendola, A. & Smith-Murphy, K., 2024, USA	Mixed Methods, Interviews, Surveys	K-12	To give teachers a voice in recognizing root-cause value conflicts leading to dissatisfaction and align potential building level solutions.
Hirsch et al., 2007, USA	Quantitative, Secondary data Analysis	K-12	To demonstrate that teaching and learning conditions are critical to increasing student achievement and retaining teachers
Hixson et al., 2013, USA	Mixed Methods, Literature Review, Survey	K-12	A study of instructional planning periods pursuant to West Virginia State Code.

Conceptualizing Workload in Education

Over the last roughly half a century the term “workload” has gained momentum in the research community (Cain, 2007; Huey and Wickens, 1993; Lysaght, Hill et al., 1989; Jex, 1998). Various fields have their own aspects of workload and what that terminology may mean. According to Huey and Wickens (1993, p. 54) “operational definitions of workload from various fields continue to disagree about its sources, mechanisms, consequences, and measurement”, which makes research on the subject sometimes difficult.

According to Cain (2007) the terminology concerning workload can be defined as “aspects of workload seem to fall within three broad categories: the amount of work and number

of things to do; time and the particular aspect of time one is concerned with; and the subjective psychological experiences of the human operator.” (p. 4-1) For the purpose of this systematic literature review, the aspect of workload will be concerned with the amount of work and number of things to do, specifically the workload of a typical primary and secondary grades teacher within the kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) setting.

Notably, the term “working conditions” can return pages of articles discussing a diverse range of subjects on the matter, however this is generally a broader concept that also includes aspects like building quality, access to resources, and morale, and school climate (Ladd, 2011). Most of the research that has been conducted on teacher workload in the United States has been centered on working conditions with mentions of workload or workload related aspects. While working conditions can include workload, they often entail various other factors such as the climate of a school, the work culture, the student body, including discipline and racial identities or socioeconomic status, collegial relationships, and administrative relationships. Carlo et al. (2013) describes “working conditions” as a variety of factors that can affect a teacher’s overall job as well as their daily job duties, specifying that these items can range from physical and material characteristics to student behavior, coworker collegiality, supervisor support, all the way to outside tasks. Therefore, while these are distinct concepts, workload is generally seen as a facet of working conditions.

Workload and Working Conditions

Research has shown that working conditions are reciprocally related with workload. Leithwood and McAdie (2007) discussed workload volume and complexity in the school atmosphere in Canada, and the impact these can have on teacher motivation and student achievement. In *Teacher Working Conditions That Matter: Evidence for Change* (2007), the

Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario contracted Kenneth Leithwood to perform an analytical review of the current literature on teachers' working conditions in the hopes that the revelations would provide insight into teacher working conditions and their impact on student learning conditions. Through their analysis, the authors ascertained that at the classroom level, "both the volume and complexity of teachers' workloads have important consequences for them" (Leithwood and McAdie, 2007). Leithwood found that "teachers work an average of 50 to 53 hours per week performing a long list of tasks" and that only "about half of that time is devoted to actual classroom instruction" (Leithwood and McAdie, 2007, pg. 43). Considering that the common contract for teachers would require their presence in the building for roughly eight hours per day, five days per week, this would mean that teachers are working on average ten to thirteen hours of what is to be assumed as unpaid overtime weekly to complete workload related tasks. This large amount of unpaid overtime and increased workload has shown to lead to increased stress over the course of a teacher's career, even if working conditions are perceived as favorable (Nguyen & Springer, 2023).

The phenomenon of workload's impact on teacher satisfaction or retention is not isolated to public schools. In a 2011 study, A. Chris Torres, then an Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership at Montclair University, conducted an empirical analysis of teacher turnover at Charter Management Organizations (CMOs) using survey data administered anonymously by the central office. The author analyzed mid-year survey data from the 2010-2011 school year that had been administered to twenty-five charter schools within their management area. The specific survey was to be used by principals in the charter schools to better understand working conditions as there was a "self-identified culture of high expectations and long working hours required to create successful, college preparatory schools for low-income children of color"

(Torres, 2016, p. 7). The researchers were seeking to ascertain if the survey data would provide insight into perceived working conditions and workloads by the teachers, which may account for higher rates of turnover experienced by the CMOs in certain teacher groups. Torres found that the study “supports the idea that workload is a strong predictor of teacher turnover, though some of this effect can be alleviated when teachers perceive working conditions and school leadership to be strong.” (Torres, 2016, p. 15).

While the study did mention several aspects of workload, Torres (2016) clearly notes that one limitation surrounding the idea was the need to gather more insight into the different characteristics of workload, including the number of hours worked by a teacher. The study found that about one out of three teachers who rated their workload as “unmanageable” on their survey left their respective school, compared with one in ten who did not rate their workload “unmanageable” on their survey (Torres, 2016). Although the data mentions the importance of a teacher’s *perceived* workload and how that impact changed with leadership influence and professional growth, Torres found that after controlling for those variables, discipline became the deciding factor on retention within a placement.

Workload can have impact on a teacher’s working conditions, whether perceived or experienced, which can impact retention. Geiger and Pivovarova (2018) used a mixed-methods approach to examine the factors that cause teacher attrition in Arizona Public Schools. The researchers were specifically investigating factors that would relate to working conditions, and what would correlate to “good” working conditions according to the teaching base. Using three years of Arizona public schools’ teacher retention data and using both quantitative and qualitative measurable working conditions survey data to better understand the association between attrition, the working conditions, and the culture of schools they were investigating,

Geiger and Pivovarova (2018) compared attrition rates in schools with different student demographic compositions and related these differences to working conditions as perceived by teachers in these schools.

Their findings showed that teachers were more likely to stay in schools with higher poverty and minority student enrollments than those with lower enrollments if the working conditions were favorable such as placements where teachers were given more time to work at school during hours on school tasks, and with mentors, showed more likelihood to keep educators at their respective schools (Geiger and Pivovarova, 2018). The researchers were able to point out that despite what would be perceived as harsher working conditions considering the student population, teachers would remain if the working conditions were favorable.

Workload and Burnout

Excessive teacher workload poses a significant problem as it can lead to burnout, heightened stress levels, and a diminished quality of education (Lawrence et al., 2019). Overburdened teachers may struggle to provide the necessary attention to lesson planning, individualized student support, and professional development. Therefore, appropriate workloads and working conditions are important. When investigating teacher stress, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2016) observed how teacher stress and self-efficacy were related to emotional exhaustion, engagement in teaching, and motivation to leave the teaching profession. This can lead to heightened levels of burnout. Burnout can have both psychological and physiological symptoms, and is characterized as a “persistent, negative, work-related state of exhaustion that results from a misfit between personal intentions and motivations on the one hand and actual on-the-job experiences on the other” (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014).

In their mixed methods study, Van Droogenbroek et al. (2014) assessed the impact of four interpersonal relationships (students, colleagues, supervisors, and parents) and teaching-related and non-teaching-related workload on burnout among Flemish senior teachers (those 45-65 years of age). The researchers felt that it was important to pay special attention to this age group as previous research has indicated that burnout is related to attrition and early retirement, and this combined with the already intensified teacher shortage, would exacerbate the issue. The researchers saw that burnout is a multidimensional construct that is often considered the end stage in a chain of reactions to chronic occupational stress (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014). When it comes to burnout and workload, it is noted that there is a difference between teaching-related workload, as in tasks involving teaching itself like preparing lessons, and non-teaching-related workload, as in administrative tasks like paperwork and meetings, and that both would have an impact on a teacher's emotional exhaustion, leading to eventual burnout and or turnover.

Similar studies have found that that non-teaching-related workload was a stronger predictor of burnout than teaching-related-workload (Lawrence et al., 2019). Lawrence et al. (2019) investigated the effects of intensification on burnout using the Job Demands-Resources model as a framework, observing the relationship between work intensification, satisfaction with workload, perceived organizational support, and burnout. Using 215 Australian high school teachers, each completed a confidential and anonymous online survey after which the multiple regression analyses indicated that non-teaching-related workload (extra tasks such as duties and meetings) was a stronger predictor of burnout than teaching-related-workload. Results showed that "non-teaching-related workload (e.g. meetings; communicating with parents, management, and colleagues; supervising playgrounds, detentions, student clubs, and organisations [sic]; preparing for and staffing school dances, trivia nights, fetes (parties), and overnight camps; etc.)

provided a highly significant unique contribution to all three dimensions of burnout whereas the contribution from teaching-related workload was significant for emotional exhaustion only” (Lawrence et al., 2019). The number of tasks required outside of the normal teaching capacity can exacerbate an already heavy teaching load. When educators find themselves adding extra responsibilities to their workload, this can increase the intensification, which can lead to burnout.

Finally, working conditions have also shown to impact workload, work intensification, and job satisfaction. Toropova et al. (2021) found in their quantitative study of teachers in Sweden, that there were three main variables that impacted working conditions and job satisfaction. The authors reported that when analyzed simultaneously, the three aspects of the working environment which were significantly related to teacher job satisfaction were student discipline, teacher cooperation, and teacher workload (Toropova et al., 2021). However, their results showed that teacher perceptions of their workload had a direct, significant association with teacher job satisfaction, yet workload was not correlated with other aspects of working conditions or with teacher characteristics. This also showed that teacher perceptions of their workload had a direct significant association with job satisfaction.

Factors Leading to Workload Increase

The rise in workload—real or perceived—can be attributed to many things. Teaching is a demanding job that requires a litany of choices, decisions, tasks, and duties. Work intensification, characterized by an increase in the quantity and pace of tasks without a proportional rise in resources or support has a profound impact on teachers (Apple, 2004). Research has shown that it contributes to heightened stress levels, exhaustion, and a sense of being overwhelmed (Beck, 2017). Teachers facing work intensification often find it challenging

to maintain a healthy work-life balance, leading to burnout and potential attrition from the profession (Nguyen & Springer, 2023).

In a 2004 workload study, 1,000 K-12 teachers in the geographical area of Newfoundland and Labrador were surveyed on their workload and working conditions. The authors cite several reasons for the increase in workload such as the changes in societal expectations and an increase in the complexity of teaching (Dibbon et al., 2004). Changes in society stem from the move toward a more industrialized civilization requiring parents to be out of the home more and encouraging children to stay in school longer. This changed the nature of education from more home based to more industrialized itself, with students requiring longer hours in classrooms and more interaction with educators (Dibbon et al., 2004). This shift saw a rise in discipline as students were experiencing some academic and social problems. Dibbon states that “for many teachers, this was the beginning of an era where they would have to spend more time dealing with social problems and learning to manage them within a classroom setting – even if it was at the expense of other students’ academic achievement and a decline in the quality of their own work life” (2004). There is also the ever-present need of students for guidance and social counseling that falls on teachers in the classroom. The researchers discuss the issues teachers face when dealing with students who are facing poverty, family structural issues, and migrating parents (Dibbon et al. 2004). The workload and intensification these factors bring increase the stress teachers face, impacting their efficacy in the classroom. When teachers are stressed, overworked, or overburden, this can hinder their self-efficacy in the classroom, and their interactions and relationships with their students are likely to suffer (Breeman et al., 2015).

Moreover, the profession itself has also become more demanding and complex. The evolving and diverse needs of students, ranging from individualized learning plans to student

centered-learning to addressing socio-emotional wellbeing, have contributed to teacher work intensification (Dibbon et al, 2004). This study also spoke to the effects of work intensification, particularly where pedagogy and lessons are involved. The study states, “Teachers noted that while they and their families pay a personal price for all of the correcting and reporting, there are also consequences for students in their classrooms” (Dibbon et al, 2004). While this was a heavily quantitative approach, there were spaces left for open-ended answers. Many teachers wrote that they felt unprepared for the rest of the day or felt as if they did not have the adequate time to prepare for the next day’s lessons when their workload was intensified with interruptions or duties. There was indication that teachers prepare and teach differently on days when they have some type of supervision duty (Dibbon et al, 2004). It would be understandable that when a teacher has some type of supervision duty in the morning, classes to teach, a lunch duty, more classes after that, perhaps their planning has been interrupted with a supervision, and then another afternoon requirement of a meeting, that their teaching quality may have an impact.

Workload and Retention

Work intensification in the classroom not only strains educator wellbeing but also compromises the quality of teaching as educators may have less time for thoughtful lesson planning, professional development, and fostering positive student-teacher relationships. Addressing work intensification is crucial for sustaining a motivated and effective teaching workforce and ensuring the delivery of high-quality education.

Reducing workload is important for all retention, but it is especially important for novice teachers. Ingersoll and Smith (2003) found that as many as 50% of beginning teachers will leave within the first five years of entry into the profession. With teacher preparation programs struggling to recover, retaining teachers who have completed their training is imperative.

Depending on the amount of support they receive and the quality of the help they encounter in their first teaching job, new teachers can either develop into highly competent educators, or the lack of interventions and adverse interactions may cause them to leave the profession altogether. Successful induction programs found that reducing the workload for novice teachers in addition to other interventions such as mentoring and observing veteran teachers was highly effective in retaining new teachers, often keeping them in the profession at a rate of more than twice those who did not receive similar supports (Podolsky et al., 2016; Podolsky et al. 2017).

Retaining teachers is a cost-effective benefit for both a school and the nation as teacher turnover is a costly issue. The average spent on teacher turnover is an estimated \$8 billion annually (Learning Policy Institute, 2018). Not only is this a financial strain on communities and our national economy, but this issue also has a negative impact on the school where student achievement, school climate, and teacher quality are concerned. When a teacher leaves, there are many steps that must be taken to find a replacement using both budgetary resources and time (M. Brown and R. Wynn, 2009). Moreover, there are also adverse effects to the teaching quality and to the student achievement. M. Brown and R. Wynn (2009) performed an empirical inquiry of teacher retention issues to better understand the leadership styles of principals who lead schools that have low attrition and transfer rates. During the course of their study, the researchers found data that suggested the amount a teacher vacancy costs a school district, “in Texas, the annual turnover rate of 15.5%, including a 40% attrition rate for teachers in their first three years, costs the state at least \$329 million annually for recruitment and training. This equates to at least \$8,000 per candidate who leaves in the first few years of teaching” (M. Brown and R. Wynn, 2009).

While the financial implications are high, the learning implications are even greater. Sorensen and Ladd (2020) conducted a study on the effects of turnover on mathematic and ELA teachers in North Carolina. The study revealed that, between the late 1990s and 2016, increased teacher turnover in North Carolina middle school mathematics and English Language Arts classrooms contributed to a higher proportion of educators who lacked subject-specific certification, full licensure, and prior teaching experience. What is more concerning, is that the researchers discovered significant drops in the students' math and reading scores as a result of the turnover of math and ELA middle school teachers in North Carolina during that period (Sorensen and Ladd, 2020).

Working conditions, work intensification, and their counterparts can all have a profound impact on workload. Many studies have found that tasks beyond the scope of teaching, such as administrative tasks, add to the work demands of job duties. Some researchers have found that these duties extend working hours in excess of 50 hours per week, usually spilling into weekends and other personal time (Allen et al., 2021; Creagh et al, 2023). Several studies observed that workload had increased because of the demands of tasks beyond the scope of teaching that have spilled into the expected work of teachers (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009; Easthope & Easthope, 2000; Fitzgerald et al., 2019; Gavin et al., 2021; Lawrence et al., 2019).

Strategies for Addressing Workload

With such at stake, retention remains vital. Reducing workload by means of protecting time can be beneficial in this matter. Many teachers who leave or are considering leaving the profession cite a lack of time within the workday or too many tasks to complete without enough time as one of their most common sources of stress (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2016). By not allowing for time within the workday to complete vital tasks, teachers are then required to

complete job related functions outside of their contract hours for no compensation (Stoddard and Kuhn, 2008), leading to feelings of burnout and frustration. By allowing teachers more work hours within their contracted day to complete tasks, research suggests teachers may be more able to manage tasks in a manner that maintains a healthier balance and increases satisfaction.

For example, a study conducted on Israeli schools cited workload and lack of appropriate breaks as a primary source of stress for all levels of teachers (elementary, middle, and high school). Buskila and Chen-Levi (2021) performed a mixed-methods study to investigate teachers' perception of the sources of stress in schools and to compare the sources of stress in elementary school, middle school, and high school teachers. The authors surveyed 321 teachers working in the Ministry of Education in Israel to hypothesize that the demands and the workload to improve scores in standardized tests increase the need of teachers to take work home. When discussing appropriate breaks in their findings, the researchers noted “We demonstrated that an intense teaching schedule with insufficient breaks is the major source of stress in teachers in the entire sample and at each level” (Buskila and Chen-Levi, 2021). The second factor found to cause stress was the need to take work home due to the lack of appropriate work time for the middle and high school level teachers, causing conflict between work demands and home/life balance (Buskila and Chen-Levi, 2021).

While research is still emergent on the issue of protected time for teachers, a recent study conducted on Alabama public school teachers found that a practical intervention for retention in their placement would be to “protect planning periods from class coverage, other meetings, or specific tasks” (Pendola, A. and Smith-Murphy, K., 2024). It is customary for placements to allow for one student-free period to permit teachers time to perform school related functions, for instructional planning (Thompson, 2000). However, it is also customary for teachers to be

required to give up their instructional planning time to cover for other classes in the need for emergency substitution (Liu et al., 2022) as many schools are finding it difficult to find the appropriate coverage for teachers who are out or who have given up their positions. When teachers are required to give up their only student-free working time during the day to focus on other tasks, their work will automatically be deferred to non-contract hours or must wait until another time, again contributing to stress and burnout.

Providing teachers with dedicated time for instructional planning is crucial for fostering effective and enriching educational experiences. Instructional planning is the cornerstone to delivering high-quality instruction, allowing educators to carefully design lessons, tailor learning experiences to the unique needs of their students, and integrate innovative teaching strategies. When teachers are unable to work on their contracted duties, those items are left to their non-contracted hours, which can lead to higher levels of stress and eventual turnover. Hirsch et al. (2007) used data from the respondents of the voluntary North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey with more than 66 percent of school-based licensed educators (more than 75,000) responding. An astonishing 85 percent of the state's schools (1,985) reached the 40% minimum needed to afford the valid data, delivering vital information needed to gauge the areas of success and the areas of concern within the school communities. Their findings showed that providing sufficient planning time "is the key ingredient to stemming teacher attrition" (Hirsch et al., 2007, p. 20). Their statistical model showed that the non-instructional time teachers received significantly related to turnover (Hirsch et al., 2007, p. 19).

Perhaps what was most notable from this study, was that the researchers found that less than half of their respondents felt that the non-instructional time they received to work was sufficient enough to help them meet the needs of their students and improve instruction. An

astonishing 51% percent of teachers reported having less than three hours of non-instructional time per week for planning or collaboration with peers while more than 77% received five hours or less per week. Hirsch et al. (2007) noted that the respondents reported working frequently outside of their contracted hours on work related tasks due to this lack of instructional planning time, finding, “57% percent of educators report working at least five hours a week, on average, on school related activities and almost 29% report averaging ten hours or more” (p. 34). By recognizing the importance of giving teachers the adequate time to plan, educational institutions invest in the continuous improvement of teaching methods, curriculum development, and ultimately contribute to the overall success and growth of both educators and students.

Hixson et al. (2013) undertook a mixed methods study in 2013 of instructional planning periods to assess for the appropriate length of instructional planning periods per grade level and schedule type. Their quantitative findings showed similar instances to Hirsch et al. (2007) in that a large majority of teachers surveyed at all levels reported spending considerable time planning outside of their regular contract hours. The results showed that, on average, teachers were working between an approximate 60 to 75 additional minutes per day outside of their regular working hours on planning (Hixson et al. 2013). Within their qualitative data, the researchers found data to support the need for increased instructional planning time, citing “the sentiment among educators that instructional planning is vitally important to providing effective instruction and that more rather than less planning time is necessary to produce good student outcomes” (Hirsch et al., 2007, p. 30).

Their results showed that duties beyond instructional planning often take their planning time, leaving them little time to work during the day. Over 40% of the comments provided by the teachers within the survey cited that these types of administrative tasks must be completed

during the daily planning period as it is the only time available to complete such work. These tasks included contacting parents, participating in various meetings, completing school level administrative tasks, completing grading and or record keeping, interaction and or intervention with individual students, and providing coverage in various capacities such as substitute for an absent teacher, and bus, lunch, or hall monitoring. Perhaps the most interesting from the qualitative data in this study was the impact on job satisfaction. Hixson et al. (2013) noted that the limited planning time available to educators may contribute to job dissatisfaction, stress, burnout, and retention.

Teaching is a demanding profession that requires careful preparation, creativity, and adaptability. When educators are constantly pressed for time, the risk of burnout increases significantly. Providing dedicated and adequate instructional planning time allows teachers to manage their workload more effectively, reducing the stress associated with last-minute lesson preparation and administrative tasks. This, in turn, helps create a healthier work-life balance, preventing feelings of overwhelm and exhaustion.

Conclusion

The implications for a high workload due to work intensification are concerning. As stated earlier, this can have an impact on student learning within the classroom but can also negatively impact teachers both physically and mentally. Teachers' work stress and burnout is longitudinally associated with serious mental health problems, including suicide, higher depression rates, and anxiety (Choi, 2018) in addition to higher rates of turnover and attrition within the profession (Rajendran et al., 2020; Smethem, 2007).

The findings from this systematic literature review revealed a consistent and growing concern among scholars regarding the intensification of teacher workload and its detrimental

effects on job satisfaction, mental health, and retention. Even across diverse educational contexts, the studies highlighted how teachers are increasingly expected to manage a wide array of responsibilities beyond classroom instruction, including administrative tasks, individualized student support and behaviors, and technology integration. This expansion of duties—often without corresponding increases in time or resources—was linked to heightened stress, burnout, and feelings of professional inadequacy. Notably, the literature emphasized that workload intensification disproportionately affects early-career teachers and educators in under-resourced schools, exacerbating existing equity issues in the profession. This review adds to our understanding of teacher workload by synthesizing a fragmented body of literature and drawing attention to the systemic nature of workload intensification in K–12 education. While individual studies have previously explored aspects of teacher stress, burnout, or job dissatisfaction, this review connects those pieces to structural and policy-level contributors, such as expanding expectations, lack of contractual clarity, and insufficient administrative support. Ultimately, this work contributes to the field by framing workload not as a teacher’s personal failing or time management issue, but as a professional condition rooted in organizational design—shaping future discussions about equity, teacher retention, and meaningful policy reform.

Table 2.4

Specific Strategies for Addressing Workload

<u>Strategy</u>	<u>Supporting Author(s)</u>	<u>Summary of Evidence or Recommendations</u>
Protect planning periods from coverage duties	Pendola & Smith-Murphy (2024); Liu et al. (2022)	Teachers often lose planning time to cover other classes, leading to deferred work and increased stress. Protecting this time helps reduce burnout.

Provide sufficient instructional planning time	Hirsch et al. (2007)	Adequate planning time is key to reducing attrition. Teachers with more planning time report better job satisfaction and instructional quality.
Increase non-instructional time during the workday	Hirsch et al. (2007); Hixson et al. (2013)	Teachers report working outside contract hours due to insufficient planning time. More non-instructional time supports better instruction and retention.
Reduce administrative and non-teaching duties during planning periods	Hixson et al. (2013)	Teachers use planning time for administrative tasks, reducing time for lesson planning. This contributes to stress and job dissatisfaction.
Recognize the importance of planning time for teacher wellbeing	Hixson et al. (2013)	Limited planning time is linked to stress, burnout, and retention issues. Teachers need adequate time to manage workload and maintain work-life balance.

Policy Recommendations

The findings from this systematic literature review make one thing clear: teacher workload is not just about time management or personal resilience—it’s a structural issue, shaped by policies, expectations, and support systems (or the lack thereof). The studies reviewed show that teachers are being asked to do more with less—less time, less support, and less clarity. If schools are serious about retaining quality educators and improving student outcomes, we must rethink how workload is defined, distributed, and supported at every level of the system.

First, school districts and policy makers need to clearly define what “teacher workload” actually means. Right now, the term is vague and often only includes instructional hours, leaving

out the planning, grading, data entry, parent communication, and extra duties that pile up quickly. Setting clear and reasonable expectations in contracts and policy documents would give teachers a better understanding of their responsibilities—and give leaders a better tool for supporting them. Second, planning time must be protected. Teachers need consistent, daily time during the school day to plan lessons, assess student work, and handle administrative tasks without doing it all before or after hours. Policies that guarantee protected planning time—without pulling teachers for coverage or meetings—can go a long way in reducing burnout. Third, districts should also rethink how non-instructional duties are assigned. Teachers are routinely asked to take on extra roles that could be handled by clerical or support staff. Lunch duty, bus duty, constant data reporting, and committee work all add up. These responsibilities should be reduced or compensated appropriately, and leadership should regularly assess how workload is distributed to ensure fairness, equity, and sustainability. Fourth, districts and leaders should give early career teachers special consideration. Policies should provide targeted support during the first few years, including mentorship, manageable schedules and student loads, and relief from excessive duties. Too many promising teachers leave before they even get their footing because the workload is overwhelming from day one. Finally, teachers need a seat at the table. If workload is going to be addressed meaningfully, educators must be involved in shaping the policies that affect their daily work. That includes decisions about scheduling, duty assignments, planning time, and the rollout of any new initiatives. When teachers are included in those conversations, policies are more realistic, more effective, and more likely to stick.

Addressing workload through thoughtful, teacher-informed policy is a necessary step toward improving job satisfaction and keeping experienced educators in the classroom. The research is clear—teachers want to stay, but they need the system to work *with* them, not *against* them.

Future Research

It is clear there is an abundant body of work on teacher turnover, burnout, and stress, but there is much work to be done on workload and work intensification. Several avenues for future research have emerged from the gaps and limitations identified in the existing literature. First, there is a need for the development of a standardized and validated measure of teacher workload. Across studies, definitions of workload varied significantly—some focusing on hours worked, others on emotional or cognitive demands—making it difficult to draw consistent comparisons. A comprehensive tool that captures both objective workload demands, and subjective experiences would help improve the quality and consistency of future research. Further, researchers should investigate how workload is distributed across different types of schools and teacher populations. Teachers in high poverty or under resourced schools may experience heightened expectations and with fewer supports, which may exacerbate feelings of overload. Examining workload equity through that lens—considering factors such as race, gender, caregiving responsibilities, and career stage—would deepen our understanding of how workload impacts different groups of educators. Finally, future research should explore how teacher voice in decision-making can influence workload perception and job satisfaction. Studies that center teacher input in scheduling, duty assignments, or school level policy decisions could uncover important links between various leadership models and improved working conditions. Taken together, these directions can build on the findings of this review and support the creation of more sustainable, equitable, and effective work environments for educators.

The intensifying workload of K-12 teachers is a complex and multifaceted issue facing the educational landscape today. It impacts not only the teachers working in the schools themselves, but policymakers, parents, and students as well. There is a need to look across a

wide spectrum of differentiating influences, causalities, and implications to trace and understand the phenomenon of work intensification more fully. The unsustainable workload of teachers is exacerbating the already dire teacher shortage and causing stress and turnover at high rates. Without proper intervention through a more equitable and sustainable workload, teacher burnout will continue to rise, causing more turnover within the profession. By acknowledging and addressing the importance of reducing workload and work intensification, providing proper instructional planning time, and protecting that planning time, administrators and stakeholders demonstrate a commitment to the wellbeing of their teachers, fostering a positive and sustainable teaching environment that ultimately benefits both teachers and their students.

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Chapter 3: Contract Chaos: Navigating Working Conditions and Workload Expectations in Union and Non-union Teacher Contracts

Introduction

Employment contracts are essential for teachers, as they often outline expectations, rights, and responsibilities such as salary, working hours, and benefits (Malcomson, 1999). Contracts can also define professional obligations related to lesson planning, classroom management, and even extracurricular activities (Bowers, 2023). Well defined contracts not only safeguard teachers' rights but also promote a positive work environment by reducing ambiguity and potential conflicts (Freedland et al., 2016). In education, clear contractual agreements are foundational, enhancing professionalism, stability, and teaching effectiveness. However, when contracts lack clarity, issues may arise.

When workload expectations are clearly articulated in employment contracts, they serve as a critical mechanism for managing teacher wellbeing and retention. Ambiguity around duties such as instructional planning, grading, supervision, and extracurricular involvement can lead to inconsistent demands across schools and districts, often resulting in burnout and attrition (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2019). In contrast, contracts that explicitly define reasonable workload parameters help establish sustainable working conditions, which are essential for attracting and retaining qualified educators. This clarity not only supports teacher morale but also contributes to a more stable and experienced workforce, which research consistently links to improved student outcomes (Kini & Podolsky, 2016). Thus, the degree to which workload expectations are formalized can have far-reaching implications for the overall quality of the education system.

Despite the centrality of employment contracts in shaping teachers' professional experiences, there is surprisingly limited research comparing how these contracts differ across contexts—particularly between unionized and non-unionized states. Much of the existing literature focuses on broad labor outcomes or union impacts on wages and benefits, leaving a gap in our understanding of how specific contractual elements, such as workload expectations, are negotiated and enforced. Unions often play a pivotal role in formalizing and clarifying these expectations, advocating for manageable workloads and protections against excessive non-instructional duties and ostensibly acting as a direct voice for teachers in constructing contracts (Bascia, 2005). In unionized settings, collective bargaining can lead to more detailed and enforceable workload provisions, which may not be as robust or even present in non-unionized contexts. This disparity raises important questions about equity, teacher satisfaction, and the sustainability of the profession across different labor environments (Bascia, 2005).

To address these concerns, this study is aimed at addressing the research question: *How do workload expectations differ between unionized and non-unionized states?* To do so, it utilizes Comparative Document Analysis (Bowen, 2009) to isolate the contractual expectations of both groups. This method allows for systematic, contextualized comparisons of formal policy language that analyze the content, structure, and specificity of workload related provisions. It is particularly effective for identifying differences in contractual clarity, scope, and enforceability—factors that are often influenced by the presence or absence of collective bargaining.

This paper begins with a comprehensive review of the existing literature on teacher contracts, collective bargaining, and workload expectations. Following this, the methodological approach is detailed, focusing on a comparative document analysis of five union negotiated

contracts—previously evaluated by the Fordham Institute—and five non-union board policy documents. The analysis centers on how each set of documents articulates workload related provisions and working conditions. The results section presents key findings from this analysis, highlighting both similarities and differences between unionized and non-unionized contexts. Finally, the discussion explores the implications of these findings, emphasizing the importance of equitable workload distribution and the role of contractual language in shaping teacher experiences and workforce stability.

Background and Literature

The history of teacher contracts can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries when organized labor movements gained momentum in the United States (Protsik, 1996; Angus, 2001). Prior to this period, teachers often worked without formal agreements, leading to uncertain working conditions and limited employment protections (Protsik, 1996). The emergence of teachers' unions in the early 20th century marked a pivotal moment in the establishment of contractual arrangements. These unions advocated for fair wages, reasonable working hours, and improved working conditions (Zwerling & Thomason, 1995). Over time, collective bargaining became a key mechanism for negotiating teacher contracts, granting educators a stronger voice in shaping the terms of their employment. Collective bargaining can be defined as “the process through which parties representing the interests of school districts and local teacher associations negotiate provisions for a host of issues, such as salaries and benefits, working conditions, evaluation procedures, teacher assignment policies, and reductions in force (layoffs) policies” (Ingle & Wisman, 2018). There are thirty-two states that require local school boards to bargain collectively with their teachers, fourteen states who permit local boards to do this, and five states that prohibit collective bargaining altogether: Georgia, North and South

Carolina, Texas, and Virginia (Winkler, Scull, & Zeehandelaar, 2012). However, since the publication of that research, these circumstances have changed. As of 2024, in North and South Carolina, public sector collective bargaining is banned. In Georgia and Texas, only members of the police force and firefighters have the right to collectively bargain (Center for Labor and a Just Economy, 2024a). Arkansas prohibits any type of collective bargaining as of 2021 for public sector employees under Senate Bill 341 (ACT 612 of the regular session). A law was passed in 2020 and enacted in 2021 that permitted Virginia public school employees the right to negotiate contracts with school divisions for the first time since 1977 (Title 40.1. Labor and Employment).

Research shows that in the states that permit collective bargaining, there are more advantages for teachers concerning contract areas (Cohen & Walsh, 2010). Teacher unions can inform policy making by contributing to candidates that are supportive of union interests at the federal and state level (Ingle & Wisman, 2018). At the local level, there is evidence that union strength varies from district to district and that stronger teacher unions were associated with more restrictive contracts, which benefits their teacher members (Strunk & Grissom, 2010).

Building off previous research done on bargaining agreements in which the National Center on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) gathered and codified the bargaining agreements and teacher contracts for all fifty states, Cohen et al., (2008) examined the governance of the teaching profession, revealing that state legislators and other state-level policymakers, rather than local negotiators, are responsible for establishing some of the most crucial regulations and rules affecting teachers. Through their analysis of the data, the authors found that state laws, and even courts and labor relations boards, often fill the gaps that are left open in teacher contracts. The researchers discovered that regardless of collective bargaining or not, every state has a law that

sets the number of years a teacher must serve to gain tenure, provides a similar amount of sick or personal days, and gives a similar amount of lesson planning time.

Additionally, state laws frequently set requirements for policies regarding teacher evaluation, what is appropriate for teacher dismissal, class sizes, and salary. So, it seemed that obscurities within bargaining agreements do not give way to autonomy in teacher contracts. The research also showed that states without collective bargaining have similar policies when it comes to various contract or benefit policies. The authors state “we learned that the absence of a collective bargaining agreement may simply mean that the provisions often found in contracts are embedded elsewhere, such as local school board policies (usually the result of informal consultation with the local teachers’ association) or, critically, in state laws and regulations” (Cohen et al., 2008).

In Kentucky, Ingle and Wisman (2018) sought to understand if key provisions of teacher contracts change over time. Using document analysis, they examined negotiated contracts in Louisville, Kentucky schools from 2013-2018 and found that it is far more likely for the provisions in contracts to remain substantively unchanged across Kentucky school districts, with some districts more active in negotiating substantive changes than others. The researchers also found that teacher seniority rights generally diminished in teacher assignment and transfer provisions, except where reduction in force decisions were concerned.

Perhaps what was most interesting was their finding regarding negotiations on working conditions. The authors note “Negotiated changes in teaching load provisions were clustered in more recent contracts. These tended to provide safeguards against inflating the number of course preparations a teacher is assigned, at least without due diligence of the principal in making assignment decisions (Ingle & Wisman, 2018, pg. 357). They further reported that five districts

in Kentucky negotiated for improvements in duty hours, stating: “These changes tended to be wide-ranging, negotiating items such as the provision of a duty-free lunch, protections for opening and closing days, ensuring teachers receive time to prepare for the school year and close the school year, and allowing evening parent–teacher conferences to count toward the maximum annual meeting time for meetings occurring outside of the regular school day” (Ingle & Wismnan, 2018, pg. 357).

Cowen and Fowles (2013) present a historical content analysis/case study of every contract in Louisville, Kentucky since 1979, focusing on several areas such as salary schedules, transfer and assignment policies, teacher evaluation, dismissal, and working conditions. What these researchers found in their study shows the benefits of collective bargaining, primarily where workload and working conditions are concerned. The authors note “Among the first 10 sections on teaching load, we observe one major change: each contract provided teachers with an increase in paid preparation time in minutes, if not the number of academic periods” (Cowen & Fowles, 2013, pg. 21). They additionally noted “The major change in teacher working conditions is the doubling of paid preparation time (from 100 minutes in 1979-84 to 200 per week in 2005-10)” Cowen & Fowles, 2013, pg. 23). Despite the potential advantages collective bargaining can bring to teachers, there is pushback for the right to unionize in states.

As noted above, at the time of this writing, five states do not permit collective or bargaining or have limitations on their rights, restricting the rights of teachers to unionize. Some states also limit the abilities of collective bargaining. For example, Tennessee uses a “collaborative conferencing” system (National Education Association, n.d.). Through this system, Collaborative Conferencing still requires administrators to meet with unions that represent teachers to discuss pay and working conditions. As Donn et al. (2014) noted, “This

system still requires school managers to meet with unions that represent their teachers to discuss pay and working conditions. Such meetings can result in memoranda of understanding, but not in collective bargaining agreements, and the school district is free to refuse to sign a memorandum of understanding. Finally, any issues not explicitly covered by a memorandum of understanding can be determined unilaterally by the school district.” Perhaps what is most frustrating about this system is that these school managers can then maintain that unilateral control over any issue in its dealings with teachers just by refusing to sign a memorandum of understanding covering that issue as Donn et al. (2014) notes in their research. This can directly impact workload as a school can simply leaving that stipulation out or by stating it vaguely and allowing for any type of interpretation by the leadership.

Elevated and sustained levels of working requirements and expectations are developing as a significant contributing factor to the alarming rates of teacher burnout, stress, and turnover. K-12 teachers worldwide are increasingly working beyond the scope of their contracts and training, at a more intense pace, and for longer hours than their predecessors (Sandmeier et al., 2022). Research has shown that workload can have an impact on a teacher’s working conditions, whether perceived or experienced, which can impact retention. In a previously published article, Geiger and Pivovarova (2019) used a mixed-methods approach to examine the factors that cause teacher attrition in Arizona Public Schools. The researchers were specifically investigating factors that would relate to working conditions, and what would correlate to “good” working conditions according to the teaching base. Using three years of Arizona public schools’ teacher retention data and using both quantitative and qualitative working conditions survey data to better understand the association between attrition, the working conditions, and the culture of schools they were investigating, Geiger and Pivovarova (2019) compared attrition rates in

schools with different student demographic compositions and related these differences to working conditions as perceived by teachers in these schools.

The findings from this inquiry showed that teachers were more likely to stay in schools with higher poverty and minority student enrollments than those with lower enrollments if the working conditions were favorable, such as placements where teachers were given more time to work at school during work hours on school tasks, and with mentors (Geiger and Pivovarova, 2019). These results showed that despite what would be perceived as harsher working conditions considering the student population, teachers would remain if the working conditions were favorable.

An excessive workload for educators poses a significant problem as it can lead to burnout, heightened stress levels, and a diminished quality of education (Lawrence et al., 2018). Overburdened teachers may struggle to provide the necessary attention to lesson planning, individualized student support, and professional development. Therefore, appropriate workloads and working conditions are important. Studies have found that non-teaching-related workload was a stronger predictor of burnout as opposed to teaching-related-workload (Lawrence et al., 2019). In Lawrence et al., (2019), the authors investigated the effects of intensification on burnout using the Job Demands-Resources model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007) as a framework. This study investigated the relationship between work intensification, satisfaction with workload, perceived organizational support, and burnout. Using 215 Australian high school teachers, each teacher completed a confidential and anonymous online survey after which the quantitative data from the multiple regression analyses indicated that non-teaching-related workload (extra tasks such as duties and meetings) was a stronger predictor of burnout than the teaching-related-workload. Results showed that “non-teaching-related workload (e.g.

meetings; communicating with parents, management, and colleagues; supervising playgrounds, detentions, student clubs, and organisations [sic]; preparing for and staffing school dances, trivia nights, fetes, and overnight camps; etc.) provided a highly significant unique contribution to all three dimensions of burnout whereas the contribution from teaching-related workload was significant for emotional exhaustion only” (Lawrence et al., 2019). The number of tasks required outside of the normal teaching capacity can exacerbate an already heavy teaching load. When educators find themselves adding extra responsibilities to their workload, this can increase the intensification, which can lead to burnout.

Contracts can significantly improve a teacher’s workload and workload equity, job satisfaction, and improve retention by clearly defining expectations and responsibilities, thus reducing any ambiguity. By including provisions like manageable class sizes, adequate time for lesson planning, and reasonable working hours, contracts can improve working conditions and help ensure that teachers are not overwhelmed which can lead to burnout and turnover. When teachers feel that valued and that their working conditions are manageable, they feel more satisfied in their job and are more likely to remain in their positions, fostering a more stable and effective educational environment.

Method

To address the above research question, I compare union contracts to non-union board policies, seeking to analyze the concepts, verbiage, and role definitions of both groups. Using Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA), which includes “embedding data in the communication context, a rule-guided and systematic procedure of analysis, development or application of categories, quantifying the categories if theoretically reasonable, and quality criteria” (Gläser-Zikuda, M., Hagenauer, G., & Stephan, M., 2020), I am able to observe the differentiated

working conditions to have a better understanding of workload equity and diffusion across various stakeholder groups, and how this impacts retention and attrition in the teaching profession. Below I detail my sampling method and analytic approach.

Sample

Selecting contracts for analysis was based on a national ranking of union power within each state. Samples were chosen using the Fordham Institute's *How Strong Are U.S. Teacher Unions? A State-By-State Comparison* (2012). According to the Fordham Institute (2012), "this study is the most extensive evaluation ever done on the strength of American teacher unions". It ranks all fifty states, and the District of Columbia, based on various criteria across five categories: Resources and Membership, Involvement in Politics, Scope of Bargaining, State Policies, and Perceived Influence. The analysis considers factors like union membership, financial resources, bargaining laws, political activities, and stakeholder perceptions. It categorizes the jurisdictions into five tiers based on the strength of their teacher unions and offers detailed profiles for each. Using this research, a table was created by the Fordham Institute, ranking teacher union strength by tier. There were five tiers, ranked strongest to weakest by their union involvement in the above-mentioned criteria. For this study, I evaluated the top five ranked choices within the tiers, signifying the strongest union involvement. To provide a broad and balanced perspective on union strength, I selected one state from each tier of the ranking system—Oregon, Vermont, Massachusetts, Kansas, and Louisiana—ensuring coverage of all levels of union strength as well as regional diversity for a more robust analysis. Next, after

selecting the top five states, I chose a school from the largest district by student enrollment in each state for analysis.¹

Next, Non-union contracts were taken all from either tier four or tier five of the Fordham Institute's ranking. Those states chosen for analysis, in order of ranking were North Carolina, Texas, Georgia, Arkansas, and South Carolina. As of 2024, the non-union contracts chosen were either unable to collectively bargain or had limits on collective bargaining rights for workers in that state. Again, the largest district in each state was chosen for analysis. Both union and non-union contracts were collected from available sources, including labor union websites, legal databases, and industry-specific repositories.

Table 3.1

Ranking and Page Count/Number of Policies of Selected State Contracts

¹ Although Hawaii is chosen as first according to the Fordham Institute, since it is a single district and is unique in the U.S., it is therefore not comparable to other contracts. I was unable to move forward with my analysis design and had to move to number two which is Oregon.

Union Contracts

State	Ranking	# of pgs. of Contract
Oregon	2	152
Vermont	11	38
Massachusetts	21	286
Kansas	32	83
Louisiana	42	6

Nonunion Board Policies

State	Ranking	# Of Policies
North Carolina	40	335
Texas	44	564
Georgia	45	186
Arkansas	48	270
South Carolina	49	288

Analysis

The unit of analysis for this study was the clause and/or section within each contract that explicitly addresses working conditions and workload. The analysis followed a structured comparative document analysis approach, drawing on Bowen's (2009) framework for qualitative document review. The process began with an initial reading of all ten documents—five union-negotiated contracts and five non-union board policy documents—to identify sections explicitly addressing teacher workload and working conditions. These included provisions related to areas such as instructional time, planning periods, non-instructional duties, supervision, and extracurricular responsibilities. A preliminary codebook was developed based on this initial review, incorporating both deductive codes informed by existing literature and inductive codes that emerged from the data. Codes were refined through iterative cycles of reading and re-coding, allowing for the identification of nuanced language and latent themes. Each document

was then systematically coded using this finalized codebook, with attention to both the presence and specificity of workload-related language.

Following coding, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring patterns, contrasts, and omissions across the union and non-union samples. Themes were compared across the two groups to assess the degree of contractual clarity, the scope of workload protections, and the extent to which expectations were standardized or left ambiguous. Special attention was given to how workload was framed—whether as a negotiable right, a managerial directive, or an undefined expectation—and how this framing varied by labor context. This comparative approach enabled a deeper understanding of how institutional structures, such as union presence, influence the articulation of teacher workload in formal policy documents.

Results

When comparing the contractual obligations of unionized teachers, it is important to point out that all were able to collectively bargain, giving them more comprehensive rights and a more equitable and manageable working conditions. When comparing the categories within the contracts, axial coding was performed, and twelve categories were created: **workday, planning, workload, class size(s), lunch, subbing, lesson plans, behavior, extracurricular/after hours, duty, preps, and miscellaneous:**

Workday is defined as the hours a teacher works within their contracted day. Planning is defined as the time allotted within the contracted day for a teacher to work without students to supervise on their administrative or planning duties (commonly known as a “planning period”).

Workload is defined as the workload expected of a teacher within their contracted duties.

Class Size(s) are the sizes of the classes a teacher should be permitted to teach per the contract.

Subbing is defined as the requirements of a teacher to cover classes, duties, or substitute teach for another teacher or role within the school in a shortage or absence.

Lunch is defined as the ability to have a duty-free lunch during the contract day or a non-duty-free lunch. *Lesson Plans* are the requirements to submit or have ready lesson plans for review by parents or administration or have them submitted by a certain date or time.

Behavior is described as any intervention, paperwork, home contact or other type of clerical or other work associated with student behavior.

Extracurricular/After hours are the requirements stipulated for after contract hours such as PTO meetings, sporting events, or festivals.

Duty is the requirement to perform such actions as lunchroom monitoring, morning, or afternoon bus duty, or any of those types of obligations.

Preps is defined as the contractual language around the number of preparations a teacher may have – the number of classes they must prepare for.

Miscellaneous stands for elements of contracts that had verbiage that constituted some type of workload or working condition, but the verbiage did not fall into a preconceived category such as extra time given to preplan at the beginning of a school year or grading requirements.

After creating the categories, the contracts were analyzed until saturation had been achieved with the coding and categorization. Below, the ways in which codes were applied within each state's contracts are described, starting with union states and followed by non-union states

Union State Workload

Oregon

A large district in Oregon was chosen for analysis and the contract was readily available online via the district's website. Of the twelve categories created for this analysis, this contract had verbiage in eleven of twelve categories, missing just preps. For the *workday*, this particular district requires their teachers to be present for eight hours, however, High School teachers are contracted for seven hours and forty-five minutes. Their remaining fifteen minutes is reserved for individual planning time for professional educators, with the exception of one day of the week, when they hold educator professional learning. On that day, the last fifteen minutes of time during the workday is used as the first part of their 90-minute staff meetings. What was interesting to note, is that this contract stipulates that "The workday for professional educators in the building shall begin at least fifteen minutes before the student day and shall extend at least fifteen minutes beyond the student day." It also noted that "Professional educators shall not be required to perform duties for more than seven-and-one-half minutes of the fifteen minutes immediately before and/or for more than seven-and-one-half minutes of the fifteen immediately after the student day. No professional educators shall be required to report prior to 7:45 a.m. or remain later than 4:30 p.m." This specifies that teachers cannot be required to arrive prior than fifteen minutes before the school day begins and cannot be required to perform morning or afternoon supervision duties for longer than 7 ½ minutes prior to the start of the school day. It is often a complaint of teachers that the requirement to be on campus prior to the start of their contract hours and remain later because of student supervision necessity results in unpaid overtime hours.

Planning within this contract specifies that teachers are given both days and time within their day to work on administrative and planning duties. This contract states that teachers will be given a minimum of one and a half days planning prior to the first student day in the fall to "to

set-up and plan for the beginning of the year”. These teachers also are allotted one day at the end of their third quarter for planning. It is specified that no voluntary training, mandatory training, professional development, or meetings may be scheduled for educators on these planning days. These teachers are also allotted one grading day scheduled at the end of each quarterly grading period for a total of four days.

Regarding daily planning periods, high school teachers (grades nine through twelve) are given not less than the equivalent of one standard class period per day as their designated student-free planning period. Middle Schools (grades 6-8, except self-contained grade classes) are also given not less than the equivalent of one standard class period per day. However, starting with the 2024-25 school year, this contract specifies that the middle schools will receive not less than the equivalent of one standard class period per day and no less than 410 minutes (6.83 hours) per standard work week and not less than 320 minutes (5.33 hours) per standard work week. It is also noted that grade level classroom teachers (e.g., K-5) at the elementary school level at this district also received no less than two hours of discretionary planning time per month of least 30 consecutive minutes at a time during the teacher workday to be used to complete professional responsibilities as deemed necessary by the teachers.

Statements regarding *workload* were vague, simply stating that the workload of educators shall be generally comparable to that which existed in a previous school year.

Class sizes were discussed in detail within this contract. This district stated that it would make a good faith effort to establish an enrollment and staffing process that ensured the class size, teaching load, and caseload did not exceed a certain threshold listed within the contract itself, except as otherwise stated within the contract under other terms. Regarding the sizes themselves, a chart was provided that gave a threshold for the amount a teacher was required to

have within their class. This showed that Kindergarten is 1: 18 (24 = overload), 1st is 1:20 (overload = 26), both 2nd and 3rd are 1:22 (overload = 26), 4th-5th and self-contained 6th are 1:22 (overload = 28), Middle School Professional Educators are 1:125 (overload = 150), High School Professional Educators are 1:135 (overload = 160), MS/HS PE = 1:175 (overload = 220). Should they reach a certain overload number, there were several options to remedy the problem and alleviate the teacher of the workload issue. Those remedies were, within a two week period, a) move the students who caused the overage to meet the set limit, b) provide an educational assistant for an elementary general education classroom, or a paraprofessional for a special education classroom. It was also noted that the educational assistant or paraprofessional assigned to these classrooms to address the overages cannot not be used for other building needs, except in the case of an emergency. The teacher however could decline having the additional coverage and select a stipend, and at the same time refer the matter to a committee process. Should this situation arise, it would be required to pay any educator over a threshold a stipend over their salary per semester that there remained and overage. That looked like an increase in salary by 3% (1.5% each semester) per five students over the threshold triggered by the first student overage.

For *lunch*, this contract stipulates that any teacher working a full day will receive a 30-minute duty-free lunch. It was further stated that any time in which teachers had direct responsibility for students it would not be part of their duty-free lunch period. When it comes to *subbing*, or, covering for other teachers or professionals in the building, this contract states that it will make every effort to employ substitute teachers to cover classes of absent teachers and that except in true emergency situations like an illness or injury of a teacher and when no building administrator is available to respond, teachers will not be required to substitute teacher for other

teachers in the building. Regarding *lesson plans*, there was no language for the requirement to provide them, however, the contract did specify that teachers whose role required to conference for 504 plans would be afforded time to allow for such meetings to occur within the workday. If a teacher volunteers to attend a 504 conference outside of their normal workday, the teacher would be compensated at their per diem hourly rate for conferences that take place beyond the contract day. A teacher who chooses to conference during their individual planning time, including the fifteen minutes at the end of the workday mentioned earlier, would be allowed to essentially make up that fifteen minute of planning time outside of the workday and be compensated at their hourly rate for the length of the conference. The contract further states that teachers who are required to write student plans other than IEPs, including such as 504 plans or gifted plans, would be given the option of either release time or compensation at their per diem hourly rate at one hour for each student plan.

With *Extracurricular/After hours* obligations, these teachers may be required to participate in up to three evening school events per school year. The contract does claim, however, that, principals will make a reasonable effort to see that professional educators are not required to attend more than two evening events a year. There are stipulations in place regarding the evening events. They cannot last more than two hours and must end by 9:00 p.m. on evenings falling Monday through Thursday. They cannot be held on a Friday, or a holiday recognized on their district calendar. Events also cannot be held on an evening preceding a recognized district holiday. Teachers must be given two week's written notice prior to their participation. For the parent/teacher conferences, teachers were permitted a 60-minute duty-free lunch. The two consecutive evening conferences must be scheduled after the planning day that follows the end of the first quarter and the next calendar day after the last conference day cannot be a workday.

These conferences cannot last longer than three hours and must conclude by 8:30 p.m. As a result of these two evening conferences, these teachers are given one paid day off in return.

With behavior, teachers are required to develop individual, independent in-class expectations, rules, and plans for student classroom management and student-centered interventions that work in conjunction with the school's rules and climate. The contract does specify that professional development time should be allocated to complete these plans. *Duty* within this contract was not clear, but states that all duty assignments will ensure that at least two teachers, administrators, or adults would be assigned for student safety and that at no time would the number of assigned adults create a circumstance where students can be out of the line of sight of an adult.

Vermont

A large district in Vermont was chosen for analysis. Of the twelve categories created for this analysis, this contract had verbiage in six of twelve categories, missing workload, class size, subbing, lesson plans, behavior, and nothing was noted for the section concerning miscellaneous.

With *workday*, this contract specified that supervisory time in K-5 with students should not exceed 5.5 hours on average with the only exception being the occasion when an additional recess supervision is necessary due to indoor recess, however that time should not exceed 5.75 hours. High school teachers who are full-time are assigned no more than 7.5 hours of instructional time over a two-day period. This school uses a 4x4 block schedule in each quarter with four, 70-minute blocks of the same classes each day.

Planning time is given to teachers regularly in this district. The contract states that teachers should be provided time to plan and prepare for instruction during their assigned workday and that this planning period shall be scheduled during the student day for classroom teachers. It further states that during this planning time teachers should not be assigned any other

duties. For this district, teachers at the elementary and middle school grade level are given no less than 45 consecutive minutes per day of planning time during their workday. It is also noted that grade level classroom teachers (e.g., K-5) at the elementary school level also received no less than two hours of discretionary planning time per month of least thirty consecutive minutes at a time during the teacher workday to be used to complete professional responsibilities as deemed necessary by those teachers. For high school teachers, no less than 80-minutes of planning time per day was granted with at least 40- minutes of which could be team planning time. Again, high school uses a block schedule. It was noted that additional planning time could be granted at the discretion of the principal.

Lunches for teachers in this district specifies that each teacher shall have a duty-free lunch period if the students' lunch period is in the same school, but it should be no less than 25-minutes. With regard to *extracurricular* or after hours events, this contract specifies that it is expected that teachers would also attend and participate in meetings and that events might take place beyond the workday specified in a paragraph in the document. The text notes that the events included but were not limited to situations such as faculty or team meetings scheduled by the building principal which could be up to one meeting per week and could be scheduled on a regular basis, IEP/504/CPT/EST or other student related meetings, team meeting or planning times as scheduled by the teachers, any voluntary participation in committee meetings, parent conferences distinct from those scheduled on a school calendar, and open houses.

For *duty*, this district stated that within their resources, reasonable efforts would be made to minimize supervisory duties for grade level elementary classroom teachers (grades K-5). Concerning *preps*, this contract specifies that when practical to do so, all reasonable effort will

be made to schedule no more than three preparations for each teacher each marking period. It is assumed that this is concerning middle and high school teachers.

Massachusetts

The next contract analyzed came from a large district in Massachusetts. Of the twelve categories created for this analysis, this contract had verbiage in ten of twelve categories, missing only extracurricular/after hours and behavior.

With *workday*, this contract does not specify actual working hours for the district, assuming that is left up to the individual schools, but does state that teachers must only arrive ten minutes before the day's bell and stay ten minutes after the day's bell. Regarding *planning*, the contract notes that teacher planning and preparation is critical for student success and that whenever possible, the district will work to ensure that teachers have adequate time to unit and lesson plan collaboratively, including for accommodations and modifications. Elementary teachers in this district receive four 48-minute planning periods per week, but it specified that no teacher would be scheduled for more than two such periods per day. However, teachers who meet the requirements for IEPs, ESL, or special education will be afforded one additional 48-minute period per week for special education paperwork. All elementary teachers also receive an additional 48-minute common planning period each week that is administratively directed. All teachers in the middle and high schools in this district are scheduled for 240-minutes of planning per week. The contract specifies that teachers will have planning time each day and will be scheduled in blocks/periods of continuous time that are no less than 40-minutes in duration. This equates to about four hours per week without student supervision to work on administrative tasks.

For *workload*, the only verbiage within this contract stated that teachers would have a “normal teaching load” and would not be required to work longer than 165-minutes without a lunch break, planning period, or administrative duty. For *class sizes*, the contract states that their desire of achieving optimum teaching and learning conditions by assuring “workable class sizes”. This district provides a table that gives a threshold for the number of students a teacher was required to have within their class. As this school does differ on thresholds based on IEP rates and other factors, to protect anonymity, I am providing the general threshold for the district. Kindergarten through 2nd grade is 1:22, grades 3-5 are 1:25, grades 6-8 are 1:28, grades 9-12 are 1:31. It was also noted that one class cannot have more than 50% of students on an IEP. These numbers decrease with an IEP increase. Further, it was noted that in an elementary school where there is only one regular education class in a grade level, the threshold may exceed the class size maxima by one or two students. In this event, the teacher would receive an additional pay stipend. For one student over the class size maxima, the teacher would receive \$1,500 and for two students \$3,000. In middle and high schools where there is a singular regular education course offering, the threshold may exceed the class size maxima by one or two students as well. In this case, for one student in excess, the teacher would receive \$300 per class and for two students, \$600 per class.

Lunches in this contract differed by school level. For example, every elementary teacher received a duty-free lunch period of at least 40-minutes. It was also noted that elementary teachers’ duty-free lunch would be held at “regularly scheduled lunch periods”. Secondary teachers in this district also receive a duty-free lunch, but the time limit is only 25-minutes. There is no specification on the time of day they are to receive this lunch period. With *subbing*, this contract claims that a teacher would not be required to be the substitute in a class except for

an emergency situation or implementation of the building emergency plan. Regarding lesson plans, this contract states that teachers are required to maintain up-to-date written evidence of adequate prior lesson preparation and will be required to put their lesson plans in a book that is accessible to principals and supervisors during the day when not being used and during classroom observations.

Concerning *duties*, this contract differentiates between elementary and secondary duty requirements. With elementary, the contract states the recognition and desirability of relieving teachers of non-teaching duties such as lunch duty, traffic duty, any copying, and collecting money. The contract further states that elementary teachers will not have morning or afternoon bus duty. For middle schools, the contract notes that teachers will not be required to perform any type of street duties where police protection is considered necessary, but it is not available, and teachers are not required to perform traffic patrol. It further states that secondary teachers relieved by paraprofessionals of administrative assignments shall not be assigned to teaching duties in lieu of those assignments.

With *preps*, these teachers receive a form early in the school year where they can list the preference of what they would like to teach the next year. Prior to the end of the school year, the teachers will receive another form notifying them if they are receiving their preference for a change or if they are staying in their current placement. The form also contains the subjects and grades of the subject they will be teaching the next year and any special information about those classes, as well as the grade and type of their homeroom. This contract goes even further into preps by stating that five days prior to the end of the school year teachers would know the number of their preps as well as the periods and rooms of their assignments. It further stated in the contract that teachers should be assigned to have a minimum of lesson preparations (preps),

especially for beginning teachers and teachers having home room classes with maximum teaching loads. It also stated that teachers should be assigned to teach in their area of certification, should not have more than three consecutive teaching assignments, and no more than four consecutive working assignments except for those who are normally working in those conditions (an example of this would be physical education). This contract further denotes that the number of different rooms in which teaching assignments occur should be kept to the “absolute minimum” and that “equitable standards” should be applied within each school for exemption from homerooms and building assignments.

For *miscellaneous*, this contract does specify that some teachers will be required to have an administrative period such as a homeroom or other period in which they are required to supervise students. It is noted that every effort would be made to relieve a teacher of this period if they were required to cover a class during their planning period.

Kansas

In Kansas, the district chosen for review had eight of the twelve categories created for this analysis, missing only workload, class size, behavior, and preps. With *workday*, for the particular school year and district analyzed, the school day was seven hours and ten minutes after the beginning time. This contract stated that teachers would need to be present during those hours when they have an assigned responsibility.

For *planning*, this contract specifies that each full-time classroom teacher and special education teacher would have a schedule which normally provides at them with at least 225-minutes per five-day week of planning and conferencing time (average of 45-minutes per day). Additionally, one week per month, elementary teachers would receive an additional 45 minutes of planning time. For grades one through five and full-time kindergartens, the contract specified

that the planning period would occur in not less than a 30-minute periods. For half-day kindergartens and prekindergarten, the contract specified that the planning period would occur in not less than a 20-minute period. Secondary teachers in grades six through twelve who operate on a block schedule would be provided with 450 minutes per two consecutive five-day weeks, but no less than 180 minutes per week (roughly 36 minutes per day). This contract did further specify that when any class assigned to a teacher does not meet for any reason, that teacher could be assigned other professional duties during that time.

For *lunches*, the contract states that all teachers would be guaranteed at least one 40-minute, duty-free lunch period per day. With *subbing*, this district maintains that except for an emergency, teachers for which a personnel shortage requires a portion of those services to be contracted out, are not required to serve as a temporary substitute nor are required to supervise students during lunch, recess, passing periods, assemblies, study hall or before or after school. *Lesson plans* are to be conforming with the standards applicable to the state and available to the administrator upon request. The contract further specifies that parties agree that whenever possible, lesson plans should be prepared in advance, but they also recognize that appropriate instruction may occasionally require adjustments or modifications to lesson plans that sometimes those cannot reasonably be completed prior to the presentation of the plans. For *extracurricular/after hours* requirements, the contract states that teachers shall attend student and parent conferences when necessary, including reasonable requests from a student or parent and are required to attend three evening events that are “beneficial to the school community” but are not required to stay longer than two hours. Concerning *duty*, teachers are required to be present in and around their building for a minimum of ten minutes before and after the school day. The contract states that the time should be used for the purpose of preparations, conferences, and the

supervision of students as directed by the principal. For *miscellaneous*, teachers are given three uninterrupted days to work in their classrooms prior to the start of the school year. They are also given an entire day of uninterrupted work time the end of each grading period to post grades.

Louisiana

In Louisiana, the district chosen for review had eight of the twelve categories created for this analysis, missing workload, lesson plans, extracurricular, behavior, and preps.

Concerning workday, the district and year chosen for analysis included a workday that was seven and a half hours long. For *planning*, teachers are given the equivalent of the length of a daily class period. The period is to be duty-free unless circumstances clearly make it unfeasible. Regarding *class sizes*, this contract stated that it was to comply with a certain document, for anonymity's sake, I have left the name out but will share the results. In grades K-3, class sizes are restricted to 26, except in cases where there is only one teacher, then the ration change to 20:1. In grades 4-12, class sizes are restricted to 33 students. The contract does state that these sizes are in exception of certain types of classes in which the teaching approach and the materials and equipment are appropriate for large groups (i.e. gym, art, theater). For *lunches*, teachers are to receive an uninterrupted 30-minute duty-free lunch period each full day workday. The contract further states that on days when students are not in attendance at lunch time (such as an exam day), teachers would then receive an hour-long lunch. Regarding *subbing*, this district will compensate any teacher who is required to sub at any time during their planning period at \$17.50 per 30-minute increment. Concerning *duty*, this district notes that teachers who are not serving duty (but there is no specific verbiage on duties) must report ten minutes before the beginning of the school day and may leave no sooner than five minutes after the close of the

school day. For *miscellaneous*, teachers are to be given time to prepare their classroom prior to the start of the school year.

Non-union Board Policy

For this portion of the analysis, school board policy was analyzed. It is important to note that although several non-unionized contracts were obtained for analysis, their contents were too general and vague for comparison, often having only compensation amounts and dates of contractual hire. For the sake of the research, school board policies were chosen as they are the regulating entity for the local schools within that district, setting such procedures as working time, class sizes, confirming the master schedule, and even planning times. While general procedures can be individual to a school such as when a teacher must have an afternoon bus duty or can go to lunch, certain policies and procedures are decided upon by the local school boards making these documents the best course of action for this portion of the analysis.

North Carolina

A large district in North Carolina was chosen for analysis and the policies were readily available online via the district's website. Of the twelve categories created for analysis, this district had verbiage in five categories, missing workday, subbing, lesson plans, behavior, preps, and nothing was noted for miscellaneous.

For *planning*, there was verbiage found under an improvement plan stating that there is a plan to provide duty-free instructional planning time for every teacher, with the goal of providing an average of at least five hours of planning time per week. It is unknown if this plan is currently in place or if this is a goal of the district. *Workload* for this district was a bit confusing as in addition to the workload of a typical day, this particular district had in their policies a statement that the teacher shall perform in a manner that meets certain "Standards and Elements". Those

standards and elements included such items as “teacher demonstrates leadership” and “leads in their classroom” and “teacher communicates vision to the students” and “teacher empowers students” but this verbiage also included such elements as “teacher participates in hiring process”, “teacher strives to improve the profession” and “teacher assists in determining school budget and professional development.” For *class sizes*, this district has a policy code in place that maintains that when within budgetary limitations, class sizes would be held to optimum levels, and statutes and regulations regarding class sizes would be followed. There were no class size thresholds listed.

With *lunches*, this policy notes another school improvement plan which will include a plan to provide all full-time assigned classroom teachers a duty-free lunch period on a daily basis. Per the language, the lunch period need not necessarily correspond to the length of an instructional or lunch period for students but should be of “reasonable length”. The policy also stated that the teacher should not be assigned duties regularly without their consent, except that their principal may assign duty from time-to-time when the safety and proper supervision of students is required. Again, it is unknown if this plan is currently in place or if this is a goal of the district. For *extra-curricular/after hours* duties, this district has policy that states that the assignments of non-instructional and extra-curricular duties to all teachers should be limited to the extent possible under federal, state, and local laws, rules, and policies, and should be distributed equitably among school employees. For *duties*, this district simply defined what non-instructional duties were and gave examples (monitoring the cafeteria, hallway and student transportation pick-up and drop-off), but there was no discussion of what this would entail within the scope of the job.

Texas

A large district in Texas was next observed. Of the twelve categories created for this analysis, this district had verbiage in seven of twelve categories, missing workload, subbing, extracurricular/before or after hours, duty, and preps.

Regarding *workday*, this policy maintains that the notice of work schedules will be distributed each school year. With *planning*, teachers are entitled to at least 450 minutes in each two-week period for instructional preparation, but it is stated that this does include parent-teacher conferences. The policy further notes that a planning period may not be less than 45 minutes within the instructional day and that during that time teachers may not be required to participate in any other activity. For *class sizes*, this policy notes that this particular district shall limit class sizes to 22 students, kindergarten through 4th grade, except when allowed by an educational board member. The policy states further that this district would employ enough certified teachers to maintain an average student to teacher ratio of 20:1.

Concerning *lunch*, each teacher is entitled to at least a 30-minute lunch period free from all duties and responsibilities connected with the instruction and supervision of students and the requirement of that lunch period may not result in a lengthened school day. It is noted that a district may require a classroom teacher to supervise students during lunch, if necessary, because of a personnel shortage, extreme economic conditions, or unavoidable or unforeseen circumstances, but this should not occur more than one day per week. *Lesson plans* are required of every teacher to facilitate “efficient and effective instruction of the curriculum”. The policy notes that the plans will serve as a means of “administrative monitoring of the instructional program” and that in the event of a teacher’s absence they will also provide as a substitute teacher a guide for presenting the daily lessons and activities. With *behavior*, policy notes that a teacher may remove a student who has been documented to interfere “repeatedly” with

instruction. Finally, for *miscellaneous*, this district allows the addition of a specific academic class in the course of study of the “parent's child” in keeping with the required curriculum if sufficient interest is shown in the addition of the class to make it economically practical to offer the class. This district also allows the “parent's child” be permitted to attend a class for credit above the child's grade level, whether in the child's school or another school, unless the board or its designated representative expects that the child cannot perform satisfactorily in the class. Note that the language did not include the discretion of the teachers.

Georgia

In Georgia, a large district was chosen for analysis. This district’s board policies were readily available online. Of the twelve categories created for this analysis, this district had verbiage in just four of the twelve categories, missing planning, workload, class size, subbing, lesson plans, extracurricular/before or after hours, behavior, and preps.

Concerning *workday*, these policies require a full-time work schedule that includes eight hours per day and the equivalent of 40 hours per week. This policy further noted duties that would be included within the workday for which the base salary would be paid that included such duties as teaching, preparation for teaching, staff meetings, conferences with students and parents, planning such conferences, developing IEPs, and other extra class responsibilities. Concerning *lunch*, this language stated that every teacher in grades K-5 who teaches for more than half of the class periods of the regular school day would have a duty-free daily lunch period of not less than thirty consecutive minutes. There was no language included for secondary schools. Regarding *duties*, the policy states that for the function of the school operation, both supervisory and clerical responsibilities are necessary. When it comes to who should perform these duties, the principal of each school assigns or designates whatever responsibilities are

necessary for the smooth, efficient operation of the school to professional personnel as part of their teaching responsibilities. Now, the policy does state that supplemental pay may be provided for personnel whose duties require them to work an extended school day or school year, but that duties for which supplemental pay is provided are beyond the usual duties required as part of the regular school day. As stated earlier in workday, it was stated that within the workday were “other extra class responsibilities”. It is unknown if this includes teachers and their duties for such events as carpool, bus duty, or other student supervision.

With *miscellaneous*, it was noted that there are requirements for regular staff meetings. The verbiage stated that staff meetings are a necessary part of the school operation. Each school shall have a schedule for staff meetings on a regular basis and all staff members are required as part of their teaching responsibilities to attend any or all such meetings as designated by the principal.

Arkansas

Within Arkansas, a large district was next observed. This district also had all the board policies available via the school board website. Of the twelve categories created for analysis, this district had verbiage in two of the twelve created categories, missing workday, workload, class size, lunch, subbing, lesson plans, extracurricular, behavior, preps, and nothing was noted for miscellaneous.

For *planning*, this district ensures each teacher receives 40-minutes of planning and specifies that this planning time is for the purpose of scheduling conferences, instructional planning, and class preparation. This policy further states that each teacher will have the ability to schedule these activities during his/her designated planning time. For *duties*, this policy maintains that from time-to-time extra duties may be assigned to licensed personnel by the

school principal or the superintendent as circumstances dictate. It is important to note while there were no specifics on lunch, it was noted in a policy that the superintendent is responsible for ensuring master schedules are created which determine the timing and duration of each teacher's planning and scheduled lunch periods. This would indicate that teachers in this district do receive some sort of a lunch period, but it is unknown if this period is duty-free or what the duration of that period is.

South Carolina

Lastly, a large district in South Carolina was chosen for analysis. Their board policies were also readily available online via the school board's website. Of the twelve categories created for analysis, this district also had verbiage in five categories, missing workday, lunch, lesson plans, extracurricular, behavior, preps, and nothing was noted for miscellaneous.

With *planning*, these teachers receive a daily allotment of thirty "unencumbered" minutes per day. This time cannot not include any conferences, bus duty, IEP and 504 meetings, team meetings, or professional development activities that are not self-directed. Also, this time must not include managing or supervising the transition of students to and from activities, classes, lunch, recess, or any other activities. This time cannot be achieved by extending their workday. Concerning *workload*, the verbiage had an interesting statement that claimed, "the professional tasks of teachers involve considerably more time than that devoted to actual class instruction at all levels of teaching". The policy then stated the general tasks of teachers such as content knowledge, lesson planning, and parent conferences. For *class sizes*, this district's current ratios are 1:25 for kindergarten (with an assistant); 1:21.5 for grades 1st-3rd; 1:25.5 for grades 4th-5th; 1:21 for middle school, and 1:22 for high school. Should ratios go over their allotment number established for the respective grade, administration can choose the best option by which to

relieve the overcrowded class and reduce teacher burden. In K-5, these options include reassigning some students from the overcrowded class to an existing, less crowded class, providing an instructional assistant to support teaching and learning in the overcrowded classroom, or creating a new class when budget and personnel permit. For middle and high school grades, instances in which the number of students in a core class exceeds the ratios by two or more students would be addressed by the board on a case-by-case basis. For *subbing*, the policy notes that the principal or a department head has the responsibility to secure substitutes for absent employees as needed. However, the policy for that unencumbered time does note that administration may only withhold or reduce a teacher's unencumbered time in each school day because of extreme or unavoidable circumstances such as an insufficient number of staff and substitute teachers to maintain instruction in the school. This does indicate the need to cover classes which would take away a teacher's time for instructional planning. With *duties*, policy notes that the administration should take positive steps to eliminate clerical and non-teaching tasks from the teachers' duties.

Table 3.2

Coded Definitions Found in Contracts/Board Policies

State	Workload Element											
	Workday	Planning	Workload	Class size	Lunch	Subbing	Lesson Plans	Behavior	Afterhours	Duty	Preps	Misc.
<i>Union</i>												
OR	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
VT	X	X			X				X	X	X	
MA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X
KS	X	X			X	X	X		X	X		X
LA	X	X		X	X	X				X		X
<i>Nonunion</i>												
NC		X	X	X	X				X	X		
TX	X	X		X	X		X	X				X
GA	X			X	X							X
AR		X								X		
SC		X	X	X		X				X		

Discussion

This study reveals substantial variation in how teacher workload is conceptualized and codified across unionized and non-unionized contexts. The findings highlight inconsistencies in the inclusion of fundamental workload provisions—such as planning time, lunch breaks, substitute coverage, and class size limits—underscoring the fragmented nature of teacher policy across states. It comes as no surprise that union contracts tended to offer more explicit protections in certain areas, while non-union board policies occasionally emphasize broader professional expectations without corresponding workload safeguards. These patterns raise important questions about equity, teacher wellbeing, and the role of policy in shaping sustainable teaching environments. Below, key takeaways are listed, followed by a more in-depth discussion of each.

Table 3.3

Key Takeaways from Contract Analysis

Teacher contracts and board policies vary widely across states, reflecting diverse local priorities and educational conditions.	Course preparation limits are rarely addressed, despite their significant impact on teacher workload.
Basic workload protections such as planning time and lunch breaks are inconsistently included, even in unionized contexts.	After hours responsibilities are frequently uncompensated, contributing to teacher dissatisfaction and attrition.
Union contracts more consistently include explicit protections for planning time, substitute coverage, and workload limits.	Behavior management language is largely absent, despite its relevance to teacher workload and stress.

Non-union policies often emphasize broad professional expectations but lack enforceable workload protections.

Workload is framed differently across contexts—some aim to alleviate it, while others reinforce work intensification.

Overall, results indicate the diversity within the role of the profession, showing that teacher contracts and board policies exhibit significant variation across different regions of the country, often reflecting diverse local policies, economic conditions, and educational priorities. While each district was unique in their number of categories, a broad takeaway is that no one district—either union or non-union—had results in each coding category, suggesting not only considerable variation between states and policy contexts, but also the uneven conceptualization of the concept. It is also interesting to note that categories that would be assumed as a guaranteed category, such as a planning period or a lunch, were also not found in every district/state. These results show that there is much to be done in terms of defining workload policy for teachers.

While there were observed more occurrences for such codes as workday, planning, and lunch – these were seen in every union state – the non-union board policies did have more occurrences in class size and a comparable number of occurrences in planning, lacking only a mention from one state, Georgia. Previous research indicates how important dedicated planning time can be for the improvement of workload for teachers, especially when there are multiple roles and preparations included (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014; Iannucci, MacPhail, Richards, 2019). A second takeaway was the occurrence of subbing in the union contracts. All states with the exception of Vermont have language regarding the condition in which a teacher would have to be the substitute for another teacher in their absence during their planning or some other break period. Much of this language stated that this would only arise in the event of an emergency,

however, Louisiana stated that any teacher required to provide substitute coverage would be compensated. In the non-union board policies, subbing is only mentioned once, in South Carolina.

The language in this board policy notes that teachers get thirty minutes of “unencumbered time” each day for preparations that is student free. However, further board policies state that principals have the responsibility to find substitute coverage, and should an extreme or unavoidable circumstance arise, such as an insufficient number of staff, a principal may withhold that unencumbered time to maintain the instruction of the school day. Georgia was missing language in their board policies for both planning and subbing, so it is unknown if coverage is required during this time period by those teachers for an insufficient number of staff.

A surprising analysis is the lack of mention in preps from all contracts. There were only mentions of two in all districts, both union and non-union from just Vermont and Massachusetts. Having multiple course preparations can greatly increase the workload of a teacher (Lawrence et al., 2019; Iannucci, MacPhail, Richards, 2019). Vermont requires that there be no more than three preparations for each teacher in a marking period and Massachusetts requires that teachers have the minimum of lesson preparations, especially for beginning career teachers and those who have maximum teaching loads. This district also specifies that teachers should be assigned courses in their area of certification.

A large indicator of workload intensification can be class size (Easthope and Easthope, 2010). The comparisons of union to non-union were comparable. The board policies mentioned class size in three of five districts, missing only Georgia and Arkansas where the union teacher contracts also had language in three of five, Oregon, Massachusetts, and Louisiana. Increases in class sizes and student to teacher ratios can create more work for teachers, even in the areas of

workload discussed in this research including planning, lesson plans, and behavior. While some districts have contingency plans for overages on student to teacher ratios such as removing students or providing additional aides. Some districts even provide additional pay per student overages such as Oregon and Massachusetts.

Many teachers cite the after hours workload and lack of pay for this time as a reason for leaving the profession (Pressley et al., 2025). The analysis showed that just three districts in the union contracts, Oregon, Vermont, and Kansas, and only one in the non-union board policies, North Carolina, had language concerning these roles for teachers. While all these districts had language in place stating there would limits on the amount of time these events would require and the number of events that would take place, there was no language in place for any overtime pay or compensatory time that would be allocated for the after hours work done by teachers beyond their contractual hours.

It was surprising to only see language on behavior from two districts – one in a union contract and one in a non-union board policy – as behavior can have such an impact on teacher workload. Oregon requires teachers to develop expectations and rules for classroom management but does allocate professional development time for such development. North Carolina mentions behavior stating that a teacher can remove a student who interferes with learning but only who has been documented to interfere repeatedly with instruction.

Workload had comparable language in union contracts and non-union board policies. Oregon and Massachusetts both describe workload differently. Oregon simply states that it should be comparable to a previous school year, Massachusetts maintains teachers would have a normal working load and would not be required to work for a certain amount of time without a lunch, planning, or administrative duty. In North Carolina, rather than giving stipulations that

maintain a comfortable workload, this state gave teachers policies with language as to what duties a teacher should perform in addition to their typical workday such as “demonstrates leadership”, “leads in their classroom” and “teacher participates in the hiring process”. South Carolina also had language adding to workload making statements such as the professional tasks of teachers involve “considerably more time than that devoted to actual classroom instruction”. These differences in perception – one attempting to alleviate workload and one adding to or maintaining a level of work intensification – is interesting to observe.

Implications

Workload and job duties can impact the roles of teachers in profound ways. The roles of teachers are much more than delivering lessons and grading papers, they are complex and ever changing. High workload can lead to burnout and fatigue, which may affect the quality of teaching. Teachers may struggle to prepare engaging lessons, provide individualized attention, or implement innovative teaching strategies due to time constraints. Excessive workload can encroach on personal time, leading to challenges in maintaining a healthy work-life balance. This can impact teachers’ wellbeing and job satisfaction and potentially increase turnover rates.

If teachers are overwhelmed, they might find it harder to manage classroom behavior effectively, which can impact the overall learning environment and further affect student behavior. An increase in administrative duties, such as grading and paperwork, meeting attendance, and student observation duties can reduce the time available for direct teaching and interaction with students, leading to more busy work and a decrease in quality instruction. Removing planning time and the amount of time allotted for teachers to work during the day on their administrative tasks leaves little time for this to be completed during the workday, resulting in unpaid overtime outside of the contractual hours. This can lead to job resentment and

turnover. Chronic stress from a high workload can affect teachers' physical and mental health, leading to increased absenteeism and decreased overall effectiveness.

Policy Recommendations

The analysis of union and non-union teacher contracts revealed significant inconsistencies in how workload expectations are articulated, defined, implemented, and supported across districts. Many contracts—particularly in non-unionized settings—lacked explicit language addressing non-instructional duties, planning time, or protections against workload intensification. This ambiguity creates opportunities for uneven enforcement, role overload, and ultimately contributes to dissatisfaction and turnover. As such, state or national policy guidelines should promote clear, minimum workload standards that apply regardless of local bargaining structures or board policy. Codifying these elements would provide a more consistent framework for managing teacher workload and holding school systems accountable for working conditions. Similarly, contracts and board policies should be required to define substitute coverage expectations explicitly, including when teachers may be asked to cover for colleagues and whether compensation or recovery time is provided. This protects valuable planning time and improves transparency. Additionally, several policies can target specific drivers of workload intensification. Limiting the number of course preparations—especially for early-career teachers—can reduce cognitive strain and improve instructional quality. Finally, it is critical to promote equitable workload distribution across staff and to regularly monitor and revise contract language to reflect evolving job demands.

Conclusion

Teaching is a complex and multifaceted profession that extends well beyond the delivery of subject-specific instruction. Teachers routinely engage in a wide range of responsibilities,

including planning, supervision, extracurricular involvement, and administrative tasks. The presence of clearly articulated contractual or policy language that defines these responsibilities is essential for promoting transparency, fairness, and equity in the workplace. When teachers have access to well defined documents outlining their rights, duties, and working conditions, they are better equipped to navigate their roles with confidence and clarity.

This study underscores the importance of explicit workload policies in shaping teacher experiences. Clearly defined contracts and board policies can enhance workload management, reduce ambiguity, and support more efficient task prioritization. Such clarity not only contributes to a more balanced distribution of responsibilities but also mitigates stress and burnout—factors closely linked to teacher satisfaction and retention. Moreover, when workload expectations are framed in supportive and structured ways, teachers are more likely to perceive their work environment as equitable and conducive to professional growth. Ultimately, well-crafted contractual language plays a critical role in fostering positive school cultures and improving outcomes for both educators and students.

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Chapter 4: The Weight of the Work: Examining K-12 Teachers' Perceptions of Workload, Intensification, and Job Satisfaction

Introduction

The teaching profession has become increasingly demanding in recent years due to a confluence of educational, social, and technological changes (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009). Teachers are now expected to address a wider range of student needs, including those related to learning differences, mental health challenges, and socioeconomic disparities, all while meeting rigorous academic standards and accountability measures (Nguyen et al., 2020). The integration of technology into the classroom—while offering new opportunities for instruction—has also introduced additional responsibilities such as digital literacy instruction, increased online communication with families, increased classroom management challenges, and the management of virtual learning platforms. Additionally, societal expectations have expanded a teacher's role beyond simply academic instruction to include mentoring, counseling, and even active shooter training (Marshall et al., 2025; Dailey et al., 2023). These evolving demands have increased the complexity and intensity of the teaching profession, often without a corresponding increase in support, resources, or compensation, thereby contributing to heightened levels of stress, workload demands, burnout, and turnover (Easthope & Easthope, 2000; Fitzgerald et al., 2019; Gavin et al., 2021; Lawrence et al., 2019). While there is a growing consensus that generalized factors such as 'workplace stress' and 'overload' have been connected with the recent surges in teacher shortages, research remains unclear to what extent the actual duties of the job are associated with aspects of teacher dissatisfaction, burnout, and turnover.

It is well documented that workload and burnout are on the rise within the teaching profession, which is well linked with lower job satisfaction (Skaalvik and Skaalvik 2015; Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014; Lawrence et al., 2019). However, despite identifying the antecedents and conditions of stress and burnout, research often misses the ways in which specific workload expectations, interfere with job satisfaction. Beyond delivering effective instruction, teachers are expected to manage classroom behavior, adapt to constantly evolving curriculum standards, integrate technology, communicate with parents, provide administrative building assistance, and even provide emotional support to students. These multifaceted duties contribute to an increasingly demanding workload that often extends well beyond contractual hours. The perception of this workload imbalance, compounded by administrative mandates, standardized testing requirements, and insufficient institutional support, has emerged as a critical source of occupational burnout which can lead to turnover (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009). Over time, such factors may lead to adverse outcomes including emotional exhaustion, diminished job satisfaction, and elevated rates of teacher attrition, underscoring the necessity for systemic reform and the establishment of more sustainable professional expectations and workload demands.

Purpose and Objective

Understanding how teachers perceive workload expectations in relation to job satisfaction is crucial for addressing job dissatisfaction and turnover. Despite their vital role in shaping students' futures, the link between workload and satisfaction remains underexplored. Examining teachers' perspectives of workload can help inform policies and support systems to enhance job satisfaction and improve education quality if specific elements are identified and addressed. While we have a large body of research on teachers' job satisfaction, providing information on

how satisfaction is likely shaped by a range of factors including working conditions, the respect they receive in society, professional autonomy, and salary (Toropova et al., 2021; Grissom, 2011; Lopes & Oliveira, 2020). Given that workload has not been widely studied as a solution to teacher shortages, this study aims to contribute to teacher retention research. As a result, I seek to answer the following research questions: *RQ1: How do teachers currently perceive workload expectations and demands in relation to job satisfaction?*; and *RQ2: To what extent does the policy environment alter the perception of workload?* To address these issues, this study utilizes a quantitative analysis of survey data collected from currently employed K-12 teachers, focusing on their perceptions of workload, levels of job dissatisfaction, and intentions to leave the profession. The survey was distributed voluntarily using a functional sample and included Likert-scale items designed to measure constructs related to workload perception, burnout, administrative support, stress, and turnover intention. Data analysis was conducted using Jamovi and included descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, one-sample t-tests, and multiple regression analyses. These methods were selected to provide a comprehensive understanding of how perceived workload contributes to dissatisfaction and potential attrition among K-12 educators.

Addressing K-12 workload as a factor in job dissatisfaction and turnover is both urgent and necessary. Research shows teachers today work beyond their training and contracts, at a more intense pace, and for longer hours than previous generations (Sandmeier et al., 2022). A Gallup Panel Workforce Study found K-12 teachers experience the highest burnout rates among over 12,000 full-time workers surveyed, at 52% (Agrawal & Marken, 2022). Given the evolving demands of education, this is unsurprising. Workload intensification significantly effects teacher wellbeing, with rising demands fueling stress, burnout, and turnover. Teachers consistently

report some of the highest burnout levels among high-contact professions (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014). As workload increases, stress and burnout erode job satisfaction, exacerbating retention challenges. We know also that job satisfaction can also have an impact on important outcomes, including teacher transfer and quit rates (Madigan & Kim, 2021).

Literature Review

The ongoing rise in teacher workload is widely recognized as a major contributor to increased stress and eventual burnout, which in turn fuels job dissatisfaction, higher turnover rates, and teacher shortages (Fitzgerald, 2019), with workload and workload intensification being shown to also have an impact on the wellbeing of teachers (Yin et al., 2019). To make matters worse, the official job description of today's teachers often excludes the extensive hours spent outside the classroom on lesson planning, classroom setup, responding to emails, and completing administrative tasks—all compounded by extracurricular obligations. These accumulating responsibilities form a complex web of demands that have not only increased in volume, but also in the urgency of their completion (Liston et al., 2006; Leithwood & McAdie, 2007). As teachers navigate an increasingly complex set of responsibilities, the cumulative impact of the job—combined with the pressure of an unsustainable workload—can significantly diminish job satisfaction and contribute to professional burnout. This escalation of duties and expectations has led to rising stress levels (Leithwood & McAdie, 2007), which in turn has intensified burnout and accelerated turnover rates (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011; Russell et al., 2020), further exacerbating the ongoing teacher shortage.

The definition and operationalization of workload expectations significantly shapes the experiences of educators (Pendola & Smith-Murphy, 2024). Previous research has shown that non-teaching related tasks and workload have a stronger predictor of burnout than teaching-

related tasks and workload (Lawrence et al., 2019). Burnout itself is associated with high attrition rates (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009; Gavin et al., 2021). However, when teachers are overburdened with non-instructional duties and workload, this can cause a decline in their teaching abilities and result in poor performance and exacerbate burnout factors (Lawrence et al., 2019). Many studies have found that tasks beyond the scope of teaching, such as administrative tasks, add to the work demands of a teacher's job duties. Some researchers have found that these duties extend working hours in excess of 50 hours per week, usually spilling into weekends and other personal time (Allen et al., 2021; Creagh et al., 2023). Several of these studies had noted that the demands of teaching beyond instructional duties had increased the workload demands of teachers Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009; Easthope & Easthope, 2000; Fitzgerald et al., 2019; Gavin et al., 2021; Lawrence et al., 2019).

Retention remains an issue. Many teachers who leave or are considering leaving the profession often cite a lack of time within the workday or having too many tasks to complete without enough time as one of their most common sources of stress (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2016) and the after hours workload to be a source of turnover intention (Pressley et al., 2025). When teachers are not allotted enough time within their workday to complete work-related tasks, they are then required to complete job related functions outside of their contract hours for no compensation (Stoddard and Kuhn, 2008), leading to feelings of burnout and frustration and even turnover (Buskila and Chen-Levi, 2021). Research has also shown that having multiple preparations can greatly increase the workload of a teacher (Lawrence et al., 2019; Iannucci, MacPhail, Richards, 2019). This requires teachers to prepare multiple lessons and curriculum formats in addition to the increase in grading and planning requirements.

Giving teachers adequate time within their workday to complete their non-instructional tasks can be instrumental for improving workload related stress. Previous research from Hirsch et al. (2017) found that providing sufficient planning time “is the key ingredient to stemming teacher attrition” (p. 20). Their statistical model also showed that the non-instructional time teachers received significantly related to turnover (Hirsch et al., 2007, p. 19). These same researchers noted in their study that less than half of their survey respondents felt that the non-instructional time they received to work was sufficient enough to help them meet the needs of their students and improve instruction. An astonishing 51% percent of teachers on this survey reported having less than three hours of non-instructional time per week for planning or collaboration with peers while more than 77% received five hours or less per week. This lack of time during the workday results in a disruption in the work-life balance when tasks are required to be done outside of contract hours. Another study from Hixson et al. (2013) noted that the limited planning time available to educators may contribute to job dissatisfaction, stress, burnout, and retention.

Administration can also have a profound impact on workload expectations. Building level administrators can control the majority of a teacher’s day-to-day working conditions (Burkhauser, 2017). In a 2003 study from Blasé and Blasé, the researchers conducted an 18-month long study involving 50 teachers concerning abusive building administrators. Results found that it was not unusual for administrators to assign unruly students to an uncooperative teacher or to give the most unliked duties such as far away bus route duties to a disliked teacher. Grissom (2011) conducted a study on the link between principal effectiveness to teacher satisfaction and turnover in hard-to-staff environments. The results found that principal effectiveness was an especially important component of teacher working conditions, as the

average teacher ratings of principal effectiveness shown in the study were strong predictors of teacher job satisfaction and one-year turnover probability in the average school surveyed (Grissom, 2011). Leadership that gives teachers support such as providing resources, buffering teachers from disruptions, allowing teachers discretion over classroom decisions and discipline, and providing ample time for planning have greater influence on a more positive teacher self-efficacy and lower stress and burnout levels of teachers in their schools (Leithwood, 2006).

The consequences of increased workload are deeply concerning. As previously noted, these demands not only affect student learning outcomes but also take a significant toll on teachers' physical and mental wellbeing. Chronic work-related stress and burnout among educators have been linked to serious mental health issues, including elevated risks of depression, anxiety, and even suicide (Choi, 2018). Additionally, these stressors contribute to higher rates of teacher turnover and attrition from the profession (Rajendran et al., 2020; Smethem, 2007). Given these risks, addressing teacher workload is not only a matter of improving working conditions, but also a critical step toward protecting educators' mental health and ensuring stability in the profession. Without meaningful intervention, the cycle of burnout and attrition will likely continue—undermining both teacher wellbeing and student success. Districts and policy makers need policies aimed at reducing workload and supporting teacher resilience must be prioritized in any effort to strengthen the educational system.

Guiding Framework

This study utilizes the Job Demands-Resource Model (JD-R) of employee satisfaction and turnover (Bakker et al., 2014; Bakker et al., 2004; Demerouti et al. 2001). The JD-R was introduced in 2001 by Demerouti et al. and has since become one of the most popular and widely published frameworks for understanding employee health and job performance. The Job

Demands-Resources (JD-R) model explains how job demands (like workload or emotional strain) and job resources (like support or autonomy) interact to influence employee wellbeing and performance. High demands can lead to burnout if not balanced by sufficient resources, while ample resources can boost engagement and motivation even in demanding jobs. What makes the framework most useful in this application is that it has been shown to be useful in understanding the occupational experiences of teachers, and in shedding light on the nature of attrition and retention in the teaching profession. The JD-R model “predicts that (high or unfavorable) job demands are primarily and positively related to exhaustion, whereas job resources are primarily and negatively related to disengagement from work” (Demerouti et al., 2001). This makes this framework the most logical for use in this type of research design. In this context, JD-R conceptualizes workload as a job demand that would contribute to stress and burnout, ultimately influencing job dissatisfaction and turnover intentions. By utilizing this framework, the study sought to understand how workload expectations impacted teachers’ overall wellbeing and career decisions.

Sample and Approach

To address the research question, this study utilizes a quantitative analysis of survey results from on current K-12 educators to examine the relationship between teacher’s workload perception and their level of job dissatisfaction. The study utilizes functional voluntary sampling (Murairwa, 2015), targeting currently employed K-12 teachers across the country. The survey was distributed on various social media platforms including such sites as Reddit, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and Facebook. Data collection was conducted through an anonymous online survey hosted on Qualtrics, and quantitative analysis methods, including correlation and

regression analysis, were applied to explore the relationships between workload and job dissatisfaction. Details on the sample and methodological approach are provided below.

Sample

This study employs a quantitative, correlational research design to examine the relationship between K-12 teachers' perceptions of workload and their job satisfaction. To gain the broadest grasp possible, we employed a nationwide survey utilizing voluntary functional sampling approach was used to recruit full-time K-12 teachers across the United States. Voluntary functional sampling is a non-probability sampling method where participants self-select to be part of a study. With this method, instead of the researcher selecting participants randomly, individuals who are interested and willing to participate volunteer to do so (Murairwa, 2015). Participants were sourced from educator-specific communities and professional networks on social media platforms, including Reddit, Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter). These participants self-selected from subreddit groups such as r/Teachers, Facebook groups such as Teachers: Resources, Teaching Tips, Teaching Articles, Teachers- sharing ideas and resources for the classroom!, Teachers Ask Teachers, personal Instagram pages of researchers, and personal X pages of researchers. A power analysis determined that a minimum of 175 participants is required to achieve 80% statistical power at an alpha level of 0.05, assuming a medium effect size ($r \approx 0.3$) for correlation analysis. However, due to the nature of the study and the uncertainty of online participation, this sample size was not reached, with 36 full respondents. This will be discussed further in the limitations section.

Posts inviting participation to the survey were shared within these groups, providing a brief explanation of the study's purpose, an assurance of anonymity, and a link to the survey (Appendix A). Inclusion criteria specified that participants must be currently employed as K-12

teachers in any subject area or grade level. The rationale for this sampling methodology comes from several places. First, the use of web-based surveys has several advantages. They are cost effective, quick, reach a larger population, and are easy to create and modify (Nayak, M. S. D. P., & Narayan, K. A., 2019). Second, given the content of the survey may introduce some perception of risk to school administrators, an outside source of elicitation was used to (1) ensure that teachers knew responses would not be connected with their employer, and (2) ensure that district and school officials did not coax or block survey requests. The use of voluntary sampling itself can then lead to snowball sampling with educators sharing the link in group chats and emails, allowing for a larger sample size, making the sample even larger (Flynn, J. P, 1973).

Data were collected through an online survey hosted on Qualtrics which was distributed through the abovementioned social media networks. The survey included demographic questions (e.g., years of experience, grade level, and school type), workload measures (e.g., instructional hours, planning time, and additional duties), job satisfaction measures (e.g., overall job satisfaction, burnout levels, and turnover intentions) using the Teacher Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (TSJQ) (Lester, 1982), and perceptions of work intensification (e.g., how teachers perceive increasing demands over time).

The TSJQ is a 77-item questionnaire that was developed to assess job satisfaction in teachers. Such criterion as supervision, colleagues, working conditions, pay, responsibility, the work itself, advancement, security, and recognition are assessed using the instrument. Following a study of concepts, theories, and methodologies related to job satisfaction, an initial list of 120 job characteristics thought to represent job satisfaction was generated. The TJSQ was designed with a 5-point Likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). For unfavorable responses the scoring is reversed, so a low score represents low job satisfaction, whereas a high

score represents high job satisfaction. The questionnaire has been widely used by administrators to gauge job satisfaction in the profession (Ariffin and Sueb, 2013).

For this study, a 29-question survey (Appendix B) was developed based on the TSJQ to analyze factors such as job satisfaction, workload perception, burnout factors, and turnover intentions in addition to demographics. The questions were scored on a 4-point or 5-point Likert scale depending on the question where a rating of 1 denotes a positive reaction and a rating of 4 or 5 denotes a negative reaction.

Survey

In alignment with the Job Demands-Resource Model (JD-R) of employee satisfaction and turnover (Bakker and Demerouti 2017; Demerouti et al. 2001) survey items were categorized and designed to evaluate various components of K-12 teacher workload, burnout, satisfaction, and turnover intentions based on the literature referenced above (Fitzgerald, 2019; Yin et al., 2019; Liston et al., 2006; Leithwood & McAdie, 2007; Pendola & Smith-Murphy, 2024). These various groupings allowed for an analysis of how different aspects of workload contribute to various teacher outcomes. Table 1 represents each construct, the associated survey questions, and a description of how each group reflects various theoretical dimensions of the study.

Table 4.1

Survey Constructs, Survey Questions, and Descriptions

<u>Construct</u>	<u>Survey Questions</u>	<u>Description</u>
Workload Perception	Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q7, Q8, Q9, Q11, Q17, Q32	Measures perceptions of time demands and responsibilities, including hours worked, task overload, preps, additional duties, and planning time.

Burnout and Stress	Q14, Q16, Q20	Assesses psychological strain from workload, including emotional exhaustion, stress, and impact on mental wellbeing.
Job Satisfaction	Q13, Q15, Q18, Q19, Q25	Captures emotional and evaluative responses to job conditions, including satisfaction with work-life balance, workload, and support.
Turnover Intentions	Q21, Q31	Evaluates the extent to which workload influences thoughts about leaving the current role or profession.
Support & Resources	Q22, Q23, Q24	Assesses the availability of institutional, administrative, and resource support to manage workload.
Demographics & Context	Q26, Q27, Q28, Q29, Q29(a)	Provides background on teaching context including grade level, experience, employment status, and union membership.

Construct Descriptions

Workload Perception. Q1 through Q32 (including Q1-Q5, Q7-Q9, Q11, Q17, and Q32) were used to assess how teachers perceive the volume and nature of their workloads. These included quantitative estimates (e.g., hours worked outside school) and qualitative judgments (e.g., feeling overwhelmed, having enough prep time), capturing a multi-faceted view of workload demands.

Burnout and Stress. Q14, Q16, and Q20 directly measured frequency of burnout and overall workload-related stress. These questions align with the emotional exhaustion component of burnout in the JD-R model (Demerouti et al. 2001).

Job Satisfaction. Q13, Q15, Q18, Q19, and Q25 were grouped to evaluate job satisfaction from multiple angles, including overall satisfaction, satisfaction with support, and perceived impact of workload on personal life. These items were adapted from components of the Teacher Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (Lester, 1982).

Turnover Intentions. Q31 and Q21 assessed whether teachers were considering leaving their current role or the profession altogether, specifically as a result of workload factors.

Support and Resources. Q22, Q23, and Q24 evaluated teachers' perceptions of institutional and logistical support, including administrative help, professional development opportunities, and availability of resources like assistants or technology.

Demographics and Context. Questions Q26 through Q29(a) captured demographic and contextual factors such as grade level taught, years of experience, union status, and typical class size. These variables were used to explore subgroup comparisons and moderate effects.

Table 4.2

Survey Items by Construct

<u>Construct</u>	<u>Survey Item (Q#)</u>	<u>Question Description</u>
Workload Perception	Q1	Hours per week spent on work outside school
Workload Perception	Q2	Frequency of feeling overwhelmed by tasks
Workload Perception	Q3	Overall manageability of workload
Workload Perception	Q4	Perceived change in workload over past 3 years
Workload Perception	Q5	Workload interference with work-life balance
Workload Perception	Q7	Number of different preps taught weekly
Workload Perception	Q8	Number of additional duties assigned weekly
Workload Perception	Q9	Impact of number of preps on workload
Workload Perception	Q11	Interference of additional duties with teaching tasks
Workload Perception	Q17	Frequency of not having enough time for expected tasks

Workload Perception	Q32	Time given during school day for planning/admin tasks
Burnout and Stress	Q14	Frequency of experiencing burnout
Job Satisfaction	Q13	Overall satisfaction with teaching role
Job Satisfaction	Q15	Extent workload contributes to job dissatisfaction
Burnout and Stress	Q16	Level of stress due to workload
Job Satisfaction	Q18	Satisfaction with current work-life balance
Job Satisfaction	Q19	Impact of workload on personal life
Burnout and Stress	Q20	Workload impact on mental health and wellbeing
Job Satisfaction	Q21	Whether reducing workload would improve satisfaction
Turnover Intent	Q31	Consideration of leaving position/profession due to workload
Support & Resources	Q22	Satisfaction with admin support in managing workload
Support & Resources	Q23	Frequency of receiving PD/resources to manage workload
Support & Resources	Q24	Perceived impact of additional staff/resources on workload
Job Satisfaction	Q25	Overall impact of preps and duties on job satisfaction
Demographics & Context	Q26	Grade level primarily taught
Demographics & Context	Q27	Years of teaching experience
Demographics & Context	Q28	Employment status (full-time/part-time)
Demographics & Context	Q29	Number of Students in Class
Demographics & Context	Q29(a)	Union membership status

Analytical Approach

To address our research questions, two stages of analysis are presented. First, descriptive are presented, including correlations and two-way t-tests are used to identify broad trends between workload perceptions and job satisfaction

Ethical Considerations

This study prioritized the ethical principles of anonymity, informed consent, and voluntary participation. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. No identifying information was collected, and all data was stored securely in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher. The study protocol was reviewed and approved by Auburn University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). All study procedures adhered to ethical guidelines and have received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Auburn University. Participants were provided with informed consent before participation, and all responses will remain anonymous. Individuals had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. By ensuring confidentiality and voluntary participation, this study aims to protect the wellbeing and privacy of all participants while contributing valuable insights into the impact of workload on teacher job satisfaction and retention.

Limitations

There are several limitations that must be acknowledged within this study. First, and most prevalent, is that the sample size ($N = 36$) was relatively small and recruited through voluntary response sampling on social media platforms. This limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of K–12 teachers, particularly those who may not engage with these platforms or who may have different experiences than those who chose to respond. Moreover, the small sample size presents limitations for the use of inferential statistical analyses.

Small samples reduce statistical power, increasing the likelihood of Type II errors and limiting the ability to detect meaningful effects (Mertler, 2024). They also result in less precise estimates, with wider confidence intervals and greater susceptibility to the influence of outliers. Major assumptions underlying inferential tests—such as normality and homogeneity of variance—are more difficult to verify and more likely to be violated in small samples. This limits the robustness and generalizability of inferences drawn from the data, particularly when looking at differences between sub-groups (Mertler, 2024). Second, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causation between workload and job dissatisfaction. Because data were collected at a single point in time, it is not possible to determine the directionality of the relationship or account for potential changes over time. For example, it remains unclear whether high perceived workload contributes to dissatisfaction, or whether dissatisfied teachers are more likely to perceive their workload as burdensome. Longitudinal research is needed to better understand the temporal dynamics and potential causal pathways between these variables. Third, the study relied on self-reported survey data, which may be subject to response bias, including social desirability and inaccurate recall. While anonymity was preserved, the possibility remains that participants answered in ways they believed were expected or acceptable. Third, the survey instrument was a modified version of the Teacher Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (TJSQ) and included additional items aligned with the Job Demands-Resources Model. While content validity was grounded in theory and relevant literature, the adapted instrument has not undergone full psychometric validation, limiting the reliability and validity of certain constructs. Fourth, the distribution of participants across grade levels, union status, and other demographic groups was uneven, with particularly small representation in the union group ($n = 5$). This imbalance limits the robustness of subgroup analyses, such as comparisons between unionized and non-unionized teachers.

Finally, the study did not account for all possible contextual or school-level variables (e.g., leadership style, school funding, community factors) that may influence perceptions of workload and satisfaction. These omitted variables could introduce bias into any inferences drawn from the data (Mertler, 2024).

Data Analysis

This study employs survey data to examine how K-12 teachers perceive workload expectations and demands in relation to job dissatisfaction and turnover intentions. The analyses were framed by the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Demerouti et al., 2001), which posits that job demands such as workload and time pressure can lead to strain and burnout, particularly when resources are limited. To address the main research question, RQ1: *How do teachers currently perceive workload expectations and demands in relation to job satisfaction?*, we begin with an overview of the descriptive characteristics of each survey item to identify which areas are perceived as most prevalent. These are presented for all participants, as well as those in union and non-union states. Next, results of correlation and independent samples t-tests are to be presented to see the major associations between workload factors. These are used to help address RQ2: *To what extent does the policy environment alter the perception of workload?* by analyzing if there are differences between union and non-union policy contexts.

Finally, to gain an understanding of which workload perceptions matter most (RQ1)—and if union status matters (RQ2)—two separate LASSO (Least Absolute Shrinkage and Selection Operator) regressions are performed: one with level of dissatisfaction as the dependent variable, and one with intent to leave as the dependent variable. Both regressions include union status as a predictor variable. This approach is well suited for survey data that includes multiple,

potentially correlated predictors (Hastie et al., 2015). LASSO utilizes machine learning to run a panel of every possible combination of variables, optimizing for the ideal fit between model complexity and explanation. In doing so, it performs both variable selection, which helps address multicollinearity and enhances model interpretability by shrinking less relevant coefficients to zero—effectively ‘removing’ them. In short, it identifies the most statistically explanatory set of predictors and eliminates those that are not explanatory, to identify the optimal ‘signal’ from ‘noise.’ By eliminating colinear covariates and selecting the ‘best’ predictor amongst clusters of correlated variables, it is well suited for survey-based research with high-dimensional or similar predictors (Hastie et al., 2015). After using LASSO to select the combination predictor variables with the best explanatory power, a ‘informed’ standard OLS regression is then run with the selected predictors to provide more interpretable coefficients (Hastie et al., 2015).

All data were collected via anonymous Qualtrics survey distributed through various social media networks. The survey instrument, adapted from the Teacher Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (TJSQ; Lester, 1982), involved 29 items measuring constructs including workload intensification, burnout, administrative support, job dissatisfaction, and turnover intent. Items were scored using four or five-point Likert scales, with higher values generally indicating more negative perceptions (e.g., higher stress or dissatisfaction).

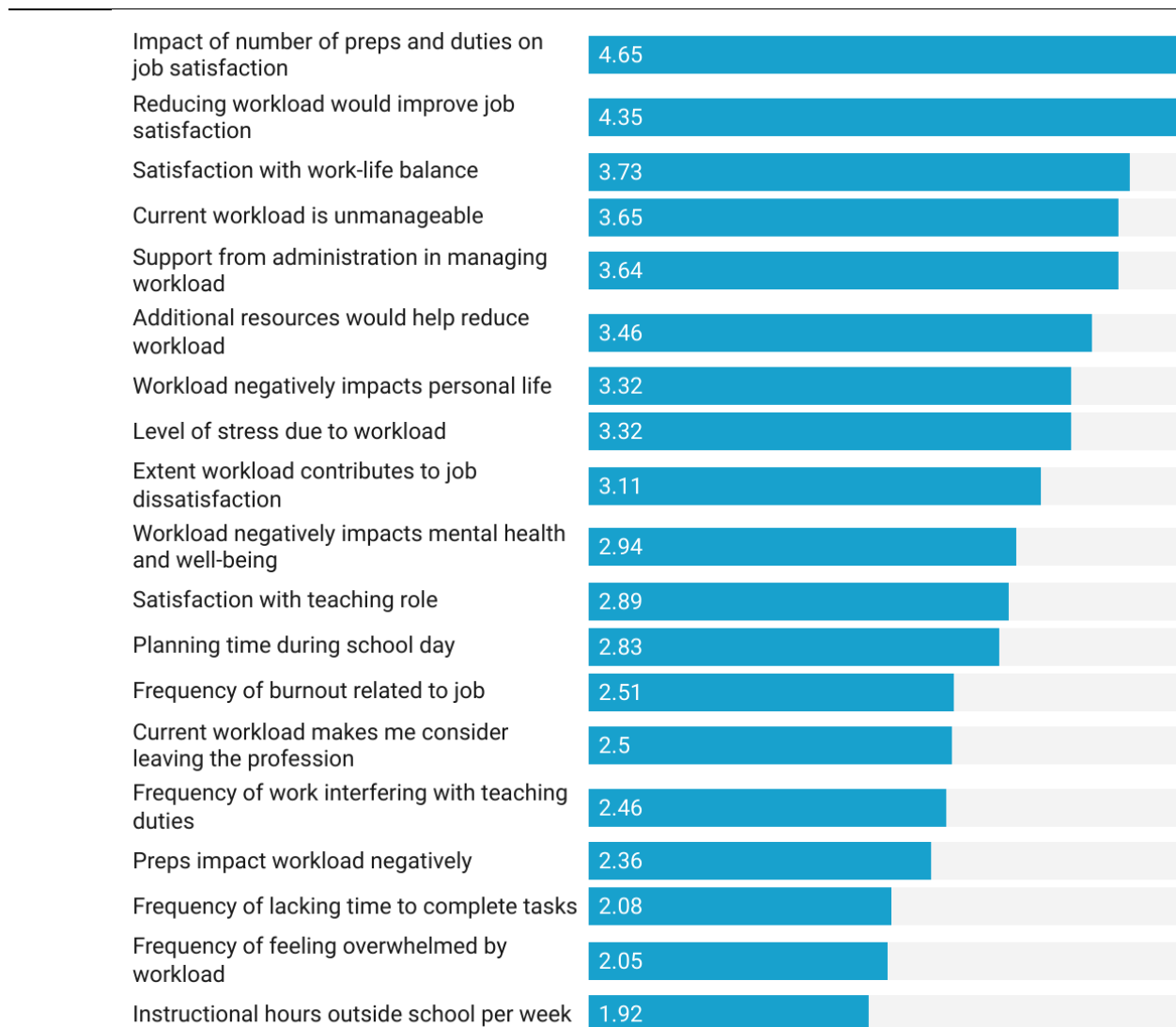
Results

Results of this research highlight several important findings into the relationship between teacher workload perceptions, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions. Across the analyses, key findings have emerged regarding the impact of workload, burnout, and administrative support on K-12 teachers' job satisfaction and their turnover intentions.

To begin, Figure 4.3 presents aims to visualize how participants rated each item on the survey. These descriptives allowed for identification of which concerns (e.g., burnout, stress, lack of time) were most commonly reported by teachers. Items were sorted by mean values in descending order, where higher scores reflect greater concern, dissatisfaction, or negative impact. The item with the highest mean was the impact of the number of preps and duties on job satisfaction ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 1.13$), followed by the perceived improvement in satisfaction if workload were reduced ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 0.59$). Teachers also indicated strong agreement that additional resources would reduce workload ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.28$). Stress, burnout, and dissatisfaction items also had elevated means, indicating significant emotional and logistical strain associated with teacher workload. These findings suggest a clear trend of concern among respondents regarding workload intensity and its impact on job satisfaction and retention.

Figure 4.3

Agreement with Statements on Workload Survey



For more specificity, Table 4.2 presents the means and standard deviations of each question. It also presents the means and standard deviations of non-union and union teachers, as well as the overall results from the major question categories, including Workload Perceptions, Burnout & Stress, Satisfaction, Turnover Intent, and Support & Resources. Notably, results are fairly similar between Union and Non-union teachers (t-test differences shown in Table 4.3). Again, it should be noted that the low response from union teachers means comparisons are not robust.

Table 4.4*Means for Questions, by All Respondents, Union, and Non-union Teachers*

<i>Constructs</i>	<u>All Respondents</u>		<u>Union</u>		<u>Non-union</u>	
	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>
Workload Perceptions (max 20)	18.94	4.16	19.40	3.36	18.87	4.32
Burnout & Stress (max 10)	5.84	0.69	5.60	0.55	5.84	0.69
Satisfaction (max 20)	18.77	1.94	18.80	1.79	18.77	1.99
Turnover (max 5)	2.50	1.06	2.40	0.89	2.52	1.09
Support & Resources (max 15)	10.05	2.67	10.40	2.51	10.00	2.77
<i>Items (max 5)</i>						
Overwhelm	2.05	0.74	2.2	0.45	2	0.77
Manageability	3.35	1.06	3	0.71	3.39	1.12
Workload Increase	1.65	0.59	2	0	1.58	0.62
Work Life Balance	2.3	0.85	2.4	0.55	2.23	0.84
Number of Preps	4.65	1.13	3	1.22	4.82	1.35
Additional Duties	2.72	1.67	2.2	1.1	2.81	1.74
Preps Interfere	2.36	0.83	2.2	0.84	2.39	0.84
Duties Interfere	2.46	0.77	2.2	0.84	2.45	0.72
Satisfaction if Workload Reduced	4.35	0.9	4.1	0.89	4.54	0.93
Level of Burnout	2.51	0.73	2.6	0.55	2.48	0.77
Workload Dissatisfaction	3.11	0.82	3	0.71	3.13	0.85
Level of Stress	3.32	0.71	3	0	3.35	0.75
Not Enough Time	2.08	0.69	2.6	0.55	2	0.68
Time On Tasks	2.83	0.7	2.8	0.84	2.84	0.69
Satisfied Work Life Balance	3.64	0.99	4	0	3.58	1.06
Workload Personal	2.89	0.85	2.6	0.55	2.94	0.89
Mental Health	2.94	0.95	2.8	0.45	2.97	1.02
Want To Leave	2.5	1.06	2.4	0.89	2.52	1.09
Improved Satisfaction	1.65	0.48	2	0	1.58	0.5
Admin Support	3.46	1.28	3.6	0.55	3.45	1.39
P.D. for Workload	2.92	0.95	2.8	0.84	2.97	0.98
Resources	3.46	1.16	4	1.22	3.1	1.15
Preps On Satisfaction	2.8	1.13	2.6	0.55	2.83	1.21
<i>Teacher Characteristics</i>						
Grade	2.51	0.87	2.2	0.84	2.55	0.89
Years Teaching	12.75	6.95	13.4	2.41	12.65	7.45
Full Time	0.97	0.17	1	0	0.93	0.18
Union	-	-	1	0	0	0
N	36		5		31	

Association Between Workload and Job Satisfaction

The data suggests that teacher workload is a critical factor in shaping job satisfaction. To address this association, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among variables related to the constructs of teacher workload, stress, burnout, and turnover intentions, shown in Table 4.2. Given the large number of survey questions, only the top five strongest correlations are presented. As noted above, these correlations cannot be taken as causal relationships. The strongest correlation was observed between feelings of burnout and job dissatisfaction due to workload, $r(34) = .76, p < .001$. Stress level due to workload was also significantly correlated with job dissatisfaction due to workload, $r(34) = .72, p < .001$, and with burnout, $r(34) = .72, p < .001$. Additionally, turnover intention due to workload was significantly associated with burnout, $r(34) = .72, p < .001$, and with dissatisfaction due to workload, $r(34) = .71, p < .001$. These findings suggest strong and consistent relationships among burnout, stress, dissatisfaction, and turnover intentions.

Pearson correlations were also conducted between planning time provided during the school day and dissatisfaction due to workload. The correlation was not statistically significant, $r(34) = -.22, p = .205$, although it suggested a small negative relationship indicating that more planning time may be associated with slightly lower dissatisfaction.

Table 4.5

Top Five Highest Correlations Amongst Workload Factors

<u>Survey Item 1</u>	<u>Survey Item 2</u>	<u>r</u>	<u>p</u>
Feelings of burnout	Job dissatisfaction due to workload	0.76	< .001
Stress level due to workload	Job dissatisfaction due to workload	0.72	< .001

Stress level due to workload	Feelings of burnout	0.72	< .001
Considering leaving the profession	Feelings of burnout	0.72	< .001
Turnover intention due to workload	Job dissatisfaction due to workload	0.71	< .001

Role of Union Status

Despite prior literature suggesting that unionized teachers might experience better working conditions due to negotiated contracts (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018), this study found no significant differences between union and non-union teachers on key outcomes such as job dissatisfaction, burnout, stress, or turnover intentions. Independent samples t-tests revealed no significant differences between these groups, indicating that union status did not play a major role in influencing the perceptions of workload or the outcomes associated with job dissatisfaction and turnover intentions in this sample. This result might suggest that factors beyond union membership, such as administrative support or workload demands, are more influential in determining teacher satisfaction and retention.

To examine potential differences between unionized and non-unionized teachers, independent samples t-tests were conducted on five outcome variables: job dissatisfaction due to workload, burnout, turnover intention due to workload, workload-related stress, and administrative support. An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare union vs. non-union teachers on key outcomes. No statistically significant differences were found between groups on job dissatisfaction, burnout, turnover intent, stress, or admin support, all $p > .30$. Results indicated no statistically significant differences between union and non-union teachers across any of the variables: job dissatisfaction, $t(34) = -0.32$, $p = .749$, $d = -0.16$; burnout, $t(34) = 0.32$, $p = .749$, $d = 0.16$; turnover intent, $t(34) = -0.23$, $p = .823$, $d = -0.11$; stress, $t(34) = -$

1.04, $p = .306$, $d = -0.50$; and administrative support, $t(34) = -0.23$, $p = .816$, $d = -0.11$. These findings suggest that union membership alone was not significantly associated with differences in perceptions of workload, dissatisfaction, or related outcomes.

Table 4.6
One-Sample t-Test Results for Teacher Workload Variables

<u>Variable Description</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>p</u>	<u>Cohen's d</u>
Job dissatisfaction due to workload	-0.32	34	.749	-0.16
Feelings of burnout	0.32	34	.749	0.16
Turnover intention due to workload	-0.23	34	.823	-0.11
Stress due to workload	-1.04	34	.306	-0.50
Admin support	-0.23	34	.816	-0.11

Note. Negative t and Cohen's d values indicate lower than average perceptions on the measured scale.

Most Prevalent Factors

As a final assessment of the association between teacher workload and (a) level of dissatisfaction and (b) intent to leave, Tables 4.3 and 4.4 present LASSO-informed regressions, as described above.

Table 4.7
OLS Regression of Workload factors on Dissatisfaction

	LASSO Informed Model
<i>Workload Factors</i>	
Not Enough Time	0.286 (0.164)
Preps Interfere	0.235 (0.119)
Burnout	0.219 (0.194)
Good Work Life Balance	-0.064 (0.161)
Personal Workload	0.117 (0.173)
<i>Controls</i>	
Teacher Grade	-0.031

	(0.120)
Number of Students in Class	-0.178
	(0.142)
Years of Teaching	0.020
	(0.015)
Full Time	-0.513
	(0.663)
Constant	6.978**
	(1.372)
Observations	36
Mean VIF	1.82
R-squared	0.686
BIC	84.60
<i>LASSO CV Goodness of Fit</i>	
Lambda	0.092
Out of Sample R ²	0.231
RMSE	0.487

Table 4.4 presents the results of the LASSO-informed regression of workload factors on teacher level of satisfaction. To understand the quality of the model selection, we start at the bottom of the table with the LASSO goodness of fit statistics. First, the Out-of-Sample R² of 0.23 explains a relatively low amount of variability compared to out-of-sample data through cross validation. Part of this is likely attributable to the low number of observations, making cross validation weak. The root mean squared error (RMSE) shows that the squared difference between the predicted and actual dissatisfaction scores is 0.487, which is relatively small given it is on a scale of 1-5, suggesting stronger fit. In terms of regression fit, we see that the mean variance inflation factor (VIF) of the selected model is good, with an average of 1.82, suggesting very low collinearity, below 3 (O'Brien, 2007), and an adjusted R² of 0.67, suggesting that 67% of the variance in Satisfaction is explained by the model.

Substantively, we see that none of the covariates have a significant, independent bearing on teacher satisfaction. Although no covariates themselves have a directional impact on

satisfaction, given the results of the initial LASSO selection, there is a suggestion that not having enough time, having interference with preps, feeling burnout, having a strong work life balance, and having a larger personal workload are the most important aspects of all those in the survey. It should also be noted that given the very low sample size, finding an independent effect is unlikely.

Table 4.5 presents a similar LASSO-informed regression with intent to leave as the dependent variable. The Out of Sample R^2 again shows a low amount of variability explained between the training and testing data through cross validation. The RMSE shows a slightly worse fit of the model, with an average error of 0.61 (out of 5). VIF is once again low, and R^2 is fairly high at 0.76, suggesting 76% of the variance is accounted for by the model.

Unlike Table 4.4, we see that a workload increase is associated with a roughly half-point increase in intent to leave a school, out of a 5-point scale. Additionally, having professional development to address workload may reduce intent to leave by 0.413 points, out of 5. Notably, Burnout is indicated in both Table 4.4 and 4.5 as being associated with both dissatisfaction and intent to leave. Also, presence or absence of union membership was not significant in either model.

Table 4.8
OLS Regression of Workload factors on Intent to Leave

	Informed Model
<i>Workload Factors</i>	
Workload Increase	0.495* (0.234)
Burnout	0.379 (0.196)
P.D. for Workload	-0.413** (0.126)
Stress	0.105 (0.225)
<i>Controls</i>	
Teacher Grade	0.184

Number of Students in Class	(0.126) -0.352*
Years of Teaching	(0.165) -0.000
Full Time	(0.016) -0.111
Constant	(0.721) -0.045 (2.192)
Observations	36
Mean VIF	1.66
R-squared	0.760
BIC	89.50
Lambda	0.146
Out of Sample R ²	0.329
RMSE	0.610

Discussion

This study aimed to examine the relationship between K-12 teachers' perceptions of workload expectations and demands in relation to job satisfaction and turnover intentions. By utilizing the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker et al., 2014; Bakker et al., 2004; Demerouti et al. 2001), the study sought to identify how different components of teacher workload impact burnout, job satisfaction, and the likelihood of teachers leaving the profession. The results reveal significant findings that contribute to the understanding of how workload impacts K-12 teachers' job satisfaction and turnover intentions, as well as the role of administrative support in mitigating these effects.

The findings of this study highlight the central role of workload in shaping teacher job satisfaction. From correlation results, teachers who had increased feeling of burnout and stress, particularly as a result of their workload, expressed greater dissatisfaction with their jobs (Fitzgerald, 2019). Workload was also associated with feelings of burnout, as well as intention to leave the job. This comports with a large body of research showing that teachers who are

overwhelmed by the demands of the job are more likely to experience emotional exhaustion, leading to disengagement and dissatisfaction with their work (see: Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011; Nguyen et al., 2020).

While the findings confirm that aspects of workload are significantly associated with dissatisfaction (Nguyen et al., 2020), they also add to this literature by highlighting the importance of specifically addressing multiple workload components that contribute most to teacher dissatisfaction, such as the number of preps and additional duties. The study's regression analysis demonstrated that while independently factors don't have a directional bearing on dissatisfaction, aspects related to time, preps, and personal workload all contribute to overall dissatisfaction, suggesting that perhaps no single aspect matters as much as a combination of factors. Following descriptions of teacher dissatisfaction much of this may be driven by the sense of overwhelm from too many workplace demands. Here, given limited sample size, further research is warranted but the suggestion is that a multi-pronged approach may be best for addressing the overall level of teacher dissatisfaction (Leithwood & McAdie, 2007)

Workload increase also emerged as a key factor in turnover intentions. This result is consistent with the JD-R model, which suggests that placing teachers in a situation where demands outstrip resources—both material and psychological—will lead to exits (Bakker and Demerouti 2017; Demerouti et al. 2001). As workload intensification continues, these emotional and physical tolls on teachers contribute to a growing sense of disillusionment with the profession (Lawrence et al., 2019). The study found that the perception of workload increase significantly associated with higher turnover intentions, highlighting the critical need for strategies aimed at reducing burnout in order to retain teachers. This adds to the literature noting

that workload is more than a static characteristic, but one that appears to—or is perceived as—intensifying amongst teachers.

This finding points to the urgent need for policy reforms that can help reduce teachers' workload and increase their professional support systems. The role of administrative support should also not be overlooked in relation to satisfaction and future intent. Support from administration in managing workload was one of the most highly rated factors in the survey (See Figure 4.1 and Table 4.2.) However, specific interventions were also found to be important. Indeed, from the first regression on teacher dissatisfaction, providing more planning time and reducing the number of preps may alleviate some of the dissatisfaction that contributes to teacher attrition. In terms of specific aspects that may address intent to leave, providing professional development to help manage workload, possibly through new technology, efficiency strategies, or to clear up role confusion, may help address the issue of high turnover.

Despite previous research suggesting that unionized teachers may experience more favorable working conditions due to negotiated contracts (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018), this study found no significant differences between union and non-union teachers in terms of job dissatisfaction, burnout, or turnover intentions. This may be partly explained by differences in implementation of policies, whereby the increased workload protections in union environments are not carried out in a way that reduces actual workload, or that new forms of work are created in the absence of others. Another explanation may simply come from 'reference dependence'—where perceptions of workload are always to a relative reference point, rather than an absolute difference (Tversky, 2003). Taking this point of view, this highlights a caveat to JD-R, whereby demands and resources may be bounded by reference dependence. It also highlights that policy differences may not always manifest into the street-level differences intended (Spillane et al.,

2002; Young & Lewis, 2015). Regardless, this result challenges the assumption that union status is a major determinant of teacher satisfaction and retention. The lack of significant differences between union and non-union teachers may reflect the increasing similarities in working conditions across states, particularly in terms of workload expectations and administrative support. The absence of significant findings related to union status suggests that other factors, such as administrative support and workload distribution, may have a more direct impact on teachers' wellbeing than union membership alone

This finding underscores the need for systemic reforms that address the root causes of workload stress, regardless of union affiliation.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings from this study have important implications for educational policy and practice. First, the results suggest that workload intensification is a critical factor contributing to teacher dissatisfaction and turnover. Policymakers and school administrators should prioritize strategies to reduce workload burdens on teachers, such as increasing planning time, reducing the number of preps, and providing additional support resources. Addressing workload related stressors could be an effective way to enhance teacher job satisfaction and reduce turnover intentions.

Second, the role of administrative support in mitigating burnout and turnover intentions shows the importance of leadership in fostering a supportive work environment. Schools should invest in training for administrators to help them better support teachers' wellbeing, whether through emotional support, professional development, or practical assistance in managing workload.

Finally, while union membership did not significantly influence teacher outcomes in this study, it remains important to consider the broader context of teachers' working conditions. The findings highlight that, regardless of union status, teachers' workload and the support they receive from administrators are key factors in determining their job satisfaction and retention. As such, unions and school leaders should work together to advocate for policies that prioritize teacher wellbeing and create a sustainable and equitable work environment.

Conclusion

The results of this study offer important insights into the challenges facing K-12 educators as they navigate increasing workload demands within the broader context of the teaching profession. The findings from the research demonstrate that elevated perceptions of workload are closely associated with increased feelings of burnout, heightened job dissatisfaction, and greater consideration of leaving the profession. These outcomes reflect the continued intensification of teacher responsibilities and underscore the critical need for systemic approaches to address workload concerns.

The application of the Job Demands-Resources Model provided a useful theoretical lens to frame these findings, illustrating how excessive job demands—when not balanced by sufficient resources such as administrative support, adequate planning time, and professional autonomy—can erode teacher wellbeing and contribute to turnover intentions. In particular, administrative support emerged as a significant predictor of job satisfaction, highlighting the pivotal role school leaders play in shaping supportive work environments.

From a policy perspective, these findings suggest that efforts to address teacher shortages and improve retention must extend beyond traditional recruitment strategies and compensation adjustments. Policies must prioritize workload management, including clearly defined role

expectations, protected planning and collaboration time, limits on non-instructional duties, and stronger administrative support structures. Additionally, greater attention must be paid to professional development for school leaders to equip them with the skills necessary to recognize and respond to workload-related stress among staff.

Addressing workload as a policy lever represents a potentially high impact, underutilized strategy in the broader conversation surrounding teacher retention and educational workforce stability. Future research should continue to explore these relationships longitudinally and across diverse educational contexts, while policymakers, district leaders, and school administrators must consider how organizational structures can better support teachers in sustaining long-term, fulfilling careers in education.

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Appendix A

Survey Instrument

RQ1: How do teachers currently perceive workload expectations and demands in relation to job satisfaction?

Q 1 How many hours per week do you spend on average outside of school hours for work-related tasks (grading, lesson planning, meetings)? *please estimate to the nearest whole hour

Q 2 How often do you feel overwhelmed by the number of tasks you need to complete?

- ☐ Always (1)
- ☐ Often (2)
- ☐ Sometimes (3)
- ☐ Rarely (4)
- ☐ Never (5)

Q 3 How would you rate the overall manageability of your workload?

- ☐ Very manageable (1)
- ☐ Manageable (2)
- ☐ Somewhat manageable (3)
- ☐ Somewhat overwhelming (4)
- ☐ Overwhelming (5)
- ☐ Very overwhelming (6)

Q 4 Do you feel that your workload has increased over the past three years?

- ☐ Significantly increased (1)
- ☐ Slightly increased (2)
- ☐ Stayed about the same (3)
- ☐ Slightly decreased (4)
- ☐ Significantly decreased (5)

Q 5 How often do you find that your workload interferes with your ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance?

- ☐ Always (1)
- ☐ Often (2)
- ☐ Sometimes (3)
- ☐ Rarely (4)
- ☐ Never (5)

Q 7 How many different preps (classes or subjects) are you responsible for teaching each week?

Q 8 How many additional duties (lunch duty, bus duty, extracurricular activities) do you have each week, besides teaching?

² Some questions were deleted prior to publishing this survey instrument which created an interruption in the numbering sequence as observed above.

Q 9 How often do you feel that the number of preps (different classes or subjects) you teach impacts your workload negatively?

- ☐ Always (1)
- ☐ Often (2)
- ☐ Sometimes (3)
- ☐ Rarely (4)
- ☐ Never (5)

Q 11 How often do you feel that your additional duties (supervising students, extracurricular responsibilities) interfere with your ability to complete your teaching tasks?

- ☐ Always (1)
- ☐ Often (2)
- ☐ Sometimes (3)
- ☐ Rarely (4)
- ☐ Never (5)

Q 13 How satisfied are you with your current teaching role?

- ☐ Extremely satisfied (1)
- ☐ Somewhat satisfied (2)
- ☐ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (3)
- ☐ Somewhat dissatisfied (4)
- ☐ Extremely dissatisfied (5)

Q 14 How often do you experience feelings of burnout related to your job?

- ☐ Always (1)
- ☐ Often (2)
- ☐ Sometimes (3)
- ☐ Rarely (4)
- ☐ Never (5)

Q 15 To what extent do you feel that your workload contributes to your job dissatisfaction?

- ☐ Not at all (1)
- ☐ A little (2)
- ☐ Moderately (3)
- ☐ Significantly (4)
- ☐ Extremely (5)

Q 16 How would you rate your level of stress as a result of your workload?

- ☐ No stress (1)
- ☐ Low stress (2)
- ☐ Moderate stress (3)
- ☐ High stress (4)
- ☐ Extreme stress (5)

Q 17 How often do you feel that you do not have enough time to complete all the tasks expected of you (grading, lesson planning, meetings, emails)?

- ☐ Always (1)
- ☐ Often (2)
- ☐ Sometimes (3)
- ☐ Rarely (4)
- ☐ Never (5)

Q 32³ How much time are you given on average during the school day student or duty-free to prepare for lessons, grade, or perform other administrative tasks?

- ☐ None (1)
- ☐ Less than 1 hour (2)
- ☐ 1 hour (3)
- ☐ 2-3 hours (4)
- ☐ Over three hours (5)

³ Some survey questions are misnumbered due to the editing process on the Qualtrics website prior to publishing.

Q 18 How satisfied are you with your current work-life balance?

- ☐ Very Satisfied (1)
- ☐ Satisfied (2)
- ☐ Somewhat satisfied (3)
- ☐ Somewhat dissatisfied (4)
- ☐ Dissatisfied (5)
- ☐ Extremely dissatisfied (6)

Q 19 How much does your workload affect your personal life (time with family, hobbies, self-care)?

- ☐ None at all (1)
- ☐ A little (2)
- ☐ Moderately (3)
- ☐ Significantly (4)
- ☐ Extremely (5)

Q 20 To what extent do you feel your workload negatively impacts your mental health and wellbeing?

- ☐ Not at all (1)
- ☐ A little (2)
- ☐ Moderately (3)
- ☐ Significantly (4)
- ☐ Extremely (5)

Q 31 To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "My current workload makes me consider leaving my current teaching position or the profession altogether."

- ☐ Strongly agree (1)
- ☐ Somewhat agree (2)
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- ☐ Somewhat disagree (4)
- ☐ Strongly disagree (5)

Q 21 Would reducing your workload improve your overall job satisfaction?

- ☐ Yes, significantly (1)
- ☐ Yes, slightly (2)
- ☐ No change (3)
- ☐ No, slightly worse (4)
- ☐ No, significantly worse (5)

Q 22 How satisfied are you with the support you receive from administration in managing your workload?

- ☐ Very satisfied (1)
- ☐ Satisfied (2)
- ☐ Somewhat satisfied (3)
- ☐ Somewhat dissatisfied (4)
- ☐ Dissatisfied (5)
- ☐ Extremely dissatisfied (6)

Q 23 How often do you receive professional development or resources that help you manage your workload?

- ☐ Always (1)
- ☐ Often (2)
- ☐ Sometimes (3)
- ☐ Rarely (4)
- ☐ Never (5)

Q 24 Do you feel that additional staff or resources (teaching assistants, technology support) would help reduce your workload?

- ☐ Not at all (1)
- ☐ A little (2)
- ☐ Moderately (3)
- ☐ Significantly (4)
- ☐ Extremely (5)

Q 25 How would you rate the overall impact of the number of preps and duties you have on your job satisfaction?

- ☐ Very negative impact (1)
- ☐ Somewhat negative impact (2)
- ☐ Negative impact (3)
- ☐ No impact (4)
- ☐ Somewhat positive impact (5)
- ☐ Positive impact (6)
- ☐ Very positive impact (7)

Q 26 What grade level do you primarily teach?

- ☐ Elementary (K-5) (1)
- ☐ Middle School (6-8) (2)
- ☐ High School (9-12) (3)
- ☐ Other (Please Specify) (4) _____

Q 29 How many students are typically in your class?

- ☐ Less than 15 (1)
- ☐ 15-20 (2)
- ☐ 21-30 (3)
- ☐ 31+ (4)

Q 27 Including the current school year, how many years have you been teaching?

Q 28 Do you work part-time or full-time?

☐ Full-time (1)

☐ Part-time (2)

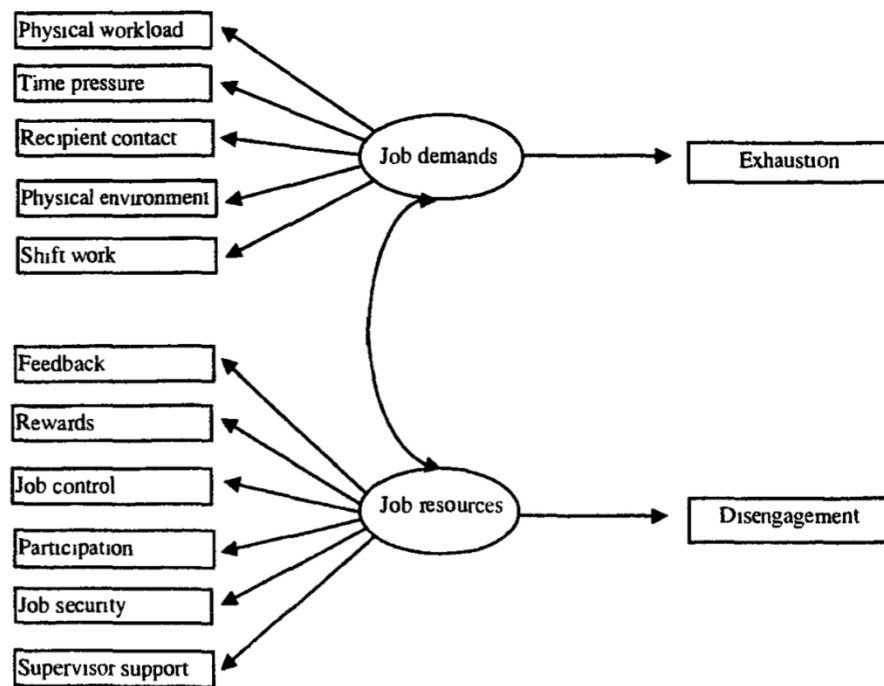
Q 29(a) Do you belong to a workforce union in your state?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

Appendix B

The Job Demands-Resources Model of Burnout



Chapter 5: Synthesis, Implications, and Recommendations

Introduction

The goal of this three-article dissertation was to explore how teacher workload expectations and demands contribute to teacher dissatisfaction, burnout, and turnover intentions. This study was grounded in several methodologies including a systematic literature review, a qualitative content analysis, and a quantitative data analysis. This chapter provides a synthesis of the findings across the three independent but connected research studies of the dissertation which were: (1) a systematic literature review investigating how extant research addressed workload intensification and its impacts for K-12 teachers, (2) a qualitative content analysis comparing how workload expectations have been defined and operationalized between union and non-union states and (3) a quantitative survey exploring how teachers currently perceive workload expectations and demands in relation to job satisfaction. Across all three studies, workload consistently emerged as a major factor influencing teacher job satisfaction. While each article approached the topic from a slightly different angle—existing literature, contract policy language, and current teacher perceptions—the findings together tell a clear story: teacher workload is complex and multi-faceted, often excessive, and has very real consequences for job satisfaction and teacher retention.

Synthesis of Findings

Article I, *K-12 Teacher Workload and Work Intensification: A Systematic Literature Review*, reviewed existing literature on teacher workload and workload intensification investigating the research question: RQ1: *How has extant research addressed workload intensification and its impacts, specifically for K-12 teachers?* The findings showed that while

we know teacher workload is increasing, few studies have broken down exactly what portions of that workload are growing most intensely or how those components specifically impact satisfaction or attrition. Workload intensification occurs not only because of increased instructional expectations, but also because of expanded non-instructional duties like data collection, student monitoring, meetings, additional duties, professional development, and parental communications (Fitzgerald et al., 2019). To put it simply, teachers are not just managing classrooms—they are performing numerous roles and duties that extend far beyond the original scope of their contracts and job descriptions (Gavin et al., 2021; Lawrence et al., 2019; Easthope & Easthope, 2000). The research also illustrated how chronic overload from demands leads to higher stress, emotional exhaustion, and burnout, which are closely tied to job dissatisfaction and teachers' intentions to leave the profession (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014). While some studies hinted at administrative support or school culture as protective factors (M. Brown and R. Wynn, 2009), workload was consistently highlighted as a root cause of dissatisfaction.

This research directly supports the problem of practice by demonstrating that workload intensification is not only widespread but is also not as widely addressed in current research and even policy discourse. While there is plenty of evidence of rising burnout rates (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014; Li and Yao, 2022) limited studies explore how the specific duties and tasks teachers perform contribute to dissatisfaction and turnover. Most studies focus on generalized constructs such as "stress" or "burnout" without a closer analysis of the specific work tasks that contribute to those outcomes. This gap leaves policymakers with insufficient guidance on how to address workload concerns effectively. The findings from this review validate the need for more close research, including studies that seek the exact elements of teachers' daily

workload that contribute to dissatisfaction — an effort that directly informed the design of Articles 2 and 3 in this dissertation.

Furthermore, this review emphasized that workload must be seen not just as a logistical issue, but as a policy lever for improving teacher wellbeing and retention. By better defining workload expectations and operationalizing their measurement, future research can offer actionable insights for leaders seeking to stabilize the educational workforce. This first article laid the foundation for the subsequent studies in this dissertation by demonstrating both the urgency and complexity of addressing workload intensification within the broader context of teacher turnover and dissatisfaction.

Article II, *Contract Chaos: Navigating Working Conditions and Workload Expectations in Union and Non-Union Teacher Contracts*, focused on contractual and policy language across union and non-union states to determine how workload expectations are officially defined and whether those definitions provide teachers with protections or guardrails against workload intensification through a qualitative content analysis with the research question RQ1: *How do workload expectations differ between unionized and non-unionized states?* Analyzing teacher contracts and board policies revealed notable differences in how clearly workload expectations are articulated. While unionized contracts often contained more explicit language addressing issues such as planning time, duty-free lunches, class sizes, and even duty obligations, many areas remained either vague or absent altogether. In several contracts, workload was defined in broad or subjective terms such as "comparable to previous years," offering little concrete protection against intensifying job demands. At the same time, some union contracts provided detailed language on key workload areas—for example, setting caps on class sizes, clearly defining planning time, and limiting required non-instructional duties. Non-union contracts, on

the other hand, frequently were too vague and often deferred to general board policies or district guidelines rather than formal contractual guarantees. In many non-unionized districts, provisions on workload expectations were minimal or discretionary, with administrators retaining considerable control over daily work assignments. One surprising finding across both types of contracts was the inconsistent mention of preps (preparations) and after hours duties—two workload categories teachers commonly cite as highly burdensome (Iannucci et al, 2019). These omissions suggest that even well negotiated contracts may not fully capture the true complexity of modern teaching demands when it comes to the contractual obligations.

This article’s findings strongly reinforce the conclusions of the literature review. While workload intensification is a well-established problem (Sandmeier et al., 2022; Torres, 2016; Toropova et al., 2019), formal employment agreements often fail to provide sufficient guardrails to limit its expansion. Even in unionized contexts where bargaining exists, protections are often uneven and frequently reactive rather than proactive (Bascia, 2005). Many contracts lack comprehensive language that anticipates the growing non-instructional demands teachers frequently face, such as increasing duties related to student behavior, the ever-changing technology integrations, parent communication, or safety preparedness (Bowers, 2023). Without more deliberate and consistent contractual language, workload expectations will remain fluid and subject to administrative interpretation, contributing to the ambiguity and intensification that teachers often report.

This analysis underscores the importance of clear contractual language in fostering workload equity and workload diffusion—two constructs that are central to teacher job satisfaction and retention. As the job description and responsibilities of teachers continue to expand beyond simply instructional duties, contract language needs to evolve as well to reflect

the true scope of a teacher's work. Transparent, enforceable workload provisions are critical not only for protecting teacher wellbeing, but also for fostering accountability and fairness across schools and districts.

Ultimately, this second article highlights the policy level levers that could be utilized to address workload intensification proactively. Formal agreements—whether in the form of collective bargaining contracts or detailed board policies—represent an underutilized mechanism for setting clear expectations and limits on teacher workload. Addressing the gaps identified in this analysis could offer a powerful strategy for improving teacher satisfaction and reducing turnover, adding important nuance to the problem of practice.

Article III, *The Weight of the Work: Examining K-12 Teachers' Perceptions of Workload, Intensification, and Job Satisfaction*, investigated the research question RQ1: *How do teachers currently perceive workload expectations and demands in relation to job satisfaction?* and quantitative survey data from practicing K-12 teachers to directly assess how they currently perceive their workloads and how those perceptions relate to job dissatisfaction, burnout, and turnover intent. Using a quantitative survey approach grounded in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker and Demerouti 2017; Demerouti et al. 2001), this study offered new empirical insight into the lived experiences of teachers navigating increasingly complex workload expectations. The analysis reinforced what was suggested in the previous articles: workload is strongly associated with job dissatisfaction (Gavin et al., 2021; Lawrence et al., 2019; Easthope & Easthope, 2000; Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014). The data revealed strong, consistent relationships between heightened perceptions of workload demands emotional exhaustion, job dissatisfaction, and turnover intent. Teachers who reported high levels of burnout—often tied to excessive preps, increasing non-instructional duties, and insufficient

planning time—were significantly more likely to express dissatisfaction with their jobs and to consider leaving the profession. Beyond establishing these broad relationships, this study also identified specific workload components that appear to contribute most directly to dissatisfaction. The number of course preparations teachers are responsible for, and the accumulation of non-instructional duties emerged as especially significant predictors of job dissatisfaction. This echoes the findings from both the literature review and contract analysis—while many discussions of workload focus on total work hours, it is often the fragmentation of teachers’ time across diverse and competing responsibilities that creates the most strain (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009; Rajendran et al., 2020; Pressley et al., 2025). When teachers are responsible for multiple preps, extensive student supervision, grading and data reporting, behavior interventions, parent communication, and administrative tasks, they often lack the protected time necessary to complete core instructional planning during the regular workday (Pendola and Smith-Murphy, 2024; Iannucci et al, 2019). And, as the demands of the job expand, much of this work spills over into their personal time, which then exacerbates burnout and leads to growing intentions to leave (Lawrence et al., 2019; Beck, 2017).

A particularly important finding in this study was the role of administrative support. Teachers who felt supported by their administrators—whether through schedule protections, assistance with duties, or emotional and professional support—were less likely to report turnover intentions, even when facing heavy workloads. This suggests that while workload intensification is a systemic problem, strong leadership can mitigate its negative effects by providing teachers with the resources, flexibility, and even validation they need to manage increasing workload demands.

Together, these three studies paint a consistent picture: K-12 teaching has evolved into a role that far exceeds traditional instructional duties. Teachers are experiencing significant workload intensification, with expectations that go well beyond the classroom, often without sufficient planning time, support, or clear policy protections. This intensification leads to burnout, job dissatisfaction, and turnover—three outcomes that deeply threaten the stability of the K-12 teaching workforce in an already exacerbated supply. Workload is embedded within broader organizational contexts. Policies that address workload management—such as limiting preps, clearly defining duties and limiting the non-essential ones, protecting planning time, and strengthening administrator support—could play a pivotal role in retaining teachers and sustaining a healthy, thriving workforce. These findings reinforce the need for multilevel policy solutions that extend beyond broad salary or accountability reforms and instead focus directly on the day-to-day working conditions that shape teachers’ experiences.

Implications for Policy and Practice

These findings have several implications for school leaders, policymakers, and educational organizations who are concerned about teacher retention and job satisfaction.

First, acknowledge workload as a central factor in retention. While salary and benefits are often emphasized in discussions about teacher shortages, workload deserves equal attention. Addressing the actual duties and expectations placed on teachers is critical to improving job satisfaction and retention. School systems need to take a hard look at all the non-instructional duties and expectations assigned to teachers—duties and expectations that have grown considerably over time and now contribute heavily to workload intensification. It is also important to ensure that building level professional development does not create additional workload.

Second, realize the importance of protected planning time. One of the clearest findings across both the qualitative content analysis and quantitative data analysis is the need for guaranteed, protected planning time during the school day. Teachers who have sufficient time during work hours to complete grading, lesson planning, data entry, and required administrative tasks are less likely to experience burnout and dissatisfaction. When planning time is eroded by meetings, extra duties, or lack of substitutes, or is insufficient in length, teachers are forced to complete those tasks after hours, often contributing to feelings of overwork and resentment.

Third, explore administrative support as a protective factor. Strong leadership matters. Administrators who are attentive to teacher workload, who listen to concerns, and who work to reduce unnecessary demands can make a significant difference in teacher satisfaction. Administrative support emerged as a consistent mitigating factor in this research. Providing school leaders with professional development on how to manage staff workload equitably should be prioritized.

Fourth, recognize that professional development at the building level must be designed and implemented with an awareness of its impact on teacher workload. When professional development initiatives require extensive time, documentation, or additional tasks outside of the school day, they risk intensifying the workload that teachers already identify as a primary source of stress and dissatisfaction. Rather than adding to teachers' obligations, effective professional learning opportunities should be integrated into the contractual workday, aligned with the instructional needs of teachers, and supported with adequate time and resources. Administrators should play a critical role in ensuring that professional development sessions are not merely compliance driven exercises, but meaningful opportunities for growth that do not come at the expense of personal time or wellbeing.

Fifth, provide clearer workload language in policy and contracts. The analysis in Article II showed that many contracts and board policies lack specificity on workload-related issues. Broad or vague language allows duties to increase unchecked over time. Policymakers should consider establishing more explicit language about limits on duties, class sizes, required preps, after hours expectations, and protected planning periods. Contracts and policies that clearly define these parameters create fairness, transparency, and shared expectations.

Finally, consider workload reduction as a retention strategy. If workload is directly linked to dissatisfaction and turnover, then reducing unnecessary workload should be viewed as a key retention strategy. Rather than focusing solely on recruitment to address shortages or giving small bonuses which are gone quickly, school systems should focus on keeping experienced teachers in the profession by improving their day-to-day work experiences. Targeted workload audits, task elimination, and redistributing non-instructional responsibilities to non-teaching staff may reduce burnout and reduce attrition.

Limitations and Future Research

While this dissertation contributes valuable insights into teacher workload, it is not without limitations. The survey sample from Article III was relatively small and self-selected, which may limit generalizability. Teachers who chose to participate may have stronger opinions about workload than those who did not respond. Future studies should aim for larger, more diverse samples across multiple districts and states.

Additionally, while this dissertation identified key workload components associated with dissatisfaction, further research is needed to explore solutions. Longitudinal studies following teachers over time would provide important insights into how workload intensification unfolds and whether interventions can reduce burnout and turnover over the long term. Future research

could also explore how specific administrative practices, school structures, and leadership approaches either contribute to or help alleviate workload stress and turnover.

Finally, while the contract and board policy analysis from Article II revealed significant variation, more work is needed to assess how those written policies are interpreted and enacted at the building level. Policies may exist, but their real-world implementation can vary extensively depending on administrative discretion, available resources, and school culture. It would also be beneficial to look at workload diffusion in smaller districts.

Conclusion

This dissertation underscores the central role workload plays in teacher satisfaction and turnover. Teachers are increasingly asked to balance instructional responsibilities with a growing list of administrative, technological, behavioral, and social emotional duties. When these demands are not supported by sufficient resources, protected planning time, and clear workload policies, burnout and even turnover becomes inevitable.

The data presented here suggests that educational leaders at all levels—school, district, and state—should view workload management as a critical policy lever for improving job satisfaction and curbing teacher attrition. Creating environments where teachers can focus on teaching, with realistic expectations and strong administrative support, will not only improve teacher wellbeing, but also positively impact student learning and overall school performance.

Workload matters and addressing it directly is one of the most promising pathways for creating sustainable, supportive, and thriving teaching environments. While the rhetoric of “students first” is often used to justify education reform, lasting improvement is unlikely unless teacher workload is addressed through thoughtful policy. Supporting students requires that we first support the teachers who serve them.

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