EXAMINING ONBOARDING PRACTICES IN SCHOOL SETTINGS: A SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

EXAMINING ONBOARDING PRACTICES IN SCHOOL SETTINGS: A SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY PERSPECTIVE

Gabriel Medina, Ed.D.
Department of Leadership, Educational Psychology and Foundations
Northern Illinois University, 2024
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This dissertation examines the onboarding practices implemented in several schools within a district and their impacts on teacher retention and the culture and climate of the schools. The theoretical lens of self-determination theory was used to determine areas of strength and growth of onboarding with respect to the three basic human psychological needs of autonomy, belonging, and competence. Drawing on this theory, the research aimed to reveal how onboarding practices support or hinder fulfillment of these basic psychological needs in a school setting. By examining how teachers perceive their onboarding experiences, the study sheds light on the relationship between the onboarding process and teacher motivation within the theoretical framework. The methodology involved qualitative data collection. In-depth interviews were conducted to capture qualitative insights into the subjective experiences of onboarding providers during the onboarding process in all three settings of a kindergarten–12th-grade school district: elementary, middle school, and high school. Findings reveal a greater need for relatedness and belonging in high school. In contrast, elementary and middle schools demonstrated a better balance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in their onboarding goals and practices.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my loving family, whose unwavering support and encouragement have been my guiding lights throughout this academic journey. To my incredible wife Andrea: Your boundless love, understanding, and encouragement sustained me through the challenges and triumphs of this doctoral pursuit. Your sacrifices and unwavering belief in my abilities fueled my determination.

To my parents, Sara and Francisco: Your lifelong commitment to education, hard work, and resilience have shaped me into the person I am today. Your example served as a constant source of inspiration, reminding me of the value of dedication, perseverance, and the pursuit of knowledge.

This dissertation is dedicated to you, my cherished family, for being the bedrock of my strength and the driving force behind my aspirations. Your love and support have been my greatest motivators, and for that, I am eternally grateful.

With heartfelt appreciation,

Gabriel Medina.
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Studies indicate that teacher turnover imposes costs and disruptions on districts akin to attrition. The financial burden of replacing each departing teacher is substantial, estimated at over $10,800 in rural districts, $13,200 in suburban districts, and $25,200 in urban districts (Bland et al., 2023). These investments do not pay their total dividends when teachers leave several years after being hired. The effectiveness of a school’s onboarding program must be investigated to find areas of strength and growth. Although studies have investigated how attrition influences overall teacher outcomes like job satisfaction and burnout, there is currently no research addressing the impact of a well-defined and thorough onboarding program, grounded in a theoretical framework, on enhancement of the retention of highly qualified teachers. Such an approach could positively influence the culture and climate within an educational institution.

The retention of highly qualified teachers is a topic of ongoing concern for school districts around the country. This turnover can impact organizational quality. Generally, employee turnover can have positive, negative, and mixed impacts; employee turnover can be influenced by employee, employer, and contextual factors. This is no different in educational systems. Teacher turnover has received consistent attention within education systems, given teachers’ critical role in shaping the quality of learning opportunities students can access. Research has focused on identifying various types of turnover in student learning and school culture/climate. Research has also examined ways in which unwanted turnover can be minimized, leading to improvements in teacher retention and the overall quality of the teaching
force, highlighting the role school and district practices can play in shaping teacher turnover. Given the resources committed to recruiting and hiring teachers, school- and district-based practices intended to support newly hired teachers and increase retention rates have received attention from practitioners and researchers alike.

**Structure of the Dissertation**

When entering an organization or social group, people want to feel a sense of belonging and relatedness. Therefore, organizations must foster supportive environments as individuals adapt to their new environments. Organizations can provide this path through employee onboarding. Employee onboarding is the organizational support of new hires to help them adjust to the social, operational, and performance aspects of their roles while building the personal tools necessary to contribute to large organizational goals (Bauer, 2010; Sharma & Klaas-Jan, 2020).

My dissertation focuses on how schools can preemptively decrease teacher attrition and increase retention, subsequently improving school culture and climate, through a comprehensive onboarding program grounded in self-determination and relationship building. A comprehensive onboarding program focused on relationship building, mentoring, and the principles of self-determination and social identity can ensure that teachers new to a school feel supported while understanding the professional expectations in the school. The following questions shaped my research and practice-based questions.

1. What does a research-informed, comprehensive onboarding process look like?
2. In what ways do comprehensive onboarding processes impact teacher retention?
3. How does the onboarding process of new staff members impact teachers’ self-determination?
4. What is the impact of an onboarding process on the culture and climate of a school? I answered these questions in three separate papers that make up my dissertation.

The first paper explores the impact of onboarding new teachers, self-determination theory (SDT), and the influence of culture and climate on teacher retention. This paper then discusses how teachers’ uncertainty in their new roles, social identity, and self-determination impact teacher job satisfaction. Additionally, I examined how onboarding programs affect teacher motivation, readiness, and instructional practices. Going beyond an orientation or getting-acclimated-to-the-school approach ensures that new staff members have the tools needed to engage students, create positive relationships with students and staff members, and create structured environments where they can reflect on the progress of their new journeys. A comprehensive, well-articulated onboarding program can ensure a positive transition into a teacher’s new role if it is grounded in a theoretical framework that encourages autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

The second paper continues the study of the onboarding process of several schools within a large Midwest suburban kindergarten–12th-grade (K–12) school district, the impact on teacher retention, and the culture and climate of each building within the district. While Lakewood School District maintains a retention rate of 95% compared to the state’s 90% rate (Illinois State Board of Education, 2024), this study aims to move the district buildings toward adopting and implementing more comprehensive onboarding programs—those induction programs that are theoretically informed and intensive, structured, and sequentially delivered. This study used a theoretical lens focused on teacher SDT to better understand current practice and identify improvement areas. In this paper, I also summarized the findings of my empirical study and interviews with building administrators regarding their onboarding programs and the goals of
their programs. I also shared findings related to what school leaders believe are important characteristics of onboarding practices. Finally, I identified areas for improvement and ways that district and building leaders can support comprehensive onboarding programs in the district.

Finally, the third paper shares a checklist and self-assessment questions for improvement of onboarding practices grounded in literature and local empirical evidence. This tool is applicable at all levels and contexts within this large Midwest suburban K–12 school district and other school districts looking to improve onboarding practices with the goal of retaining highly qualified teachers.

**Problem Statement**

Newberry and Allsop (2017) revealed that 30%–46% of new teachers quit teaching within the first 5 years, and nearly 8%–14% leave the profession in any given year. One cannot help but question the onboarding practices that cause teachers to leave the profession. While various factors may lead to burnout of novice teachers, teachers need more specific knowledge, skills, and tools for success in their first 5 years of teaching. Novice teachers enter the profession feeling self-confident about their content knowledge but unprepared regarding other aspects of being an effective teacher, such as behavior management, climate and culture, and individual student needs (Goddard & Kim, 2018; Zhan et al., 2023). The research gathered notes the effect of an effective and comprehensive onboarding process as a tool with which to retain and enculturate new staff members into a school district.

Employee onboarding is the organizational support of new hires to help them adjust to their roles’ social, operational, and performance aspects while building the personal tools necessary to contribute to significant organizational goals (Bauer, 2010). A comprehensive
onboarding program focused on relationship building, mentoring, and the principles of self-
determination and social identity can ensure that teachers new to a school feel supported while understanding the professional expectations in the school. Onboarding programs for new teachers are invaluable because they create a sense of organizational belonging and buy-in, aiding retention (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Moser & McKim, 2020).

Depending on the organization, onboarding can vary from simply providing time to complete new-hire paperwork through handing out district- and building-related to-do lists on the first day to offering multiple induction days to assist new employees in their transition to their new work environment. However, more comprehensive onboarding programs begin during recruitment, continue through hiring and orientation, and often include mentoring during an employee’s first year or beyond and checkpoints throughout.

**Onboarding Definition**

The onboarding process consists mainly of induction-related activities such as completing new-hire paperwork and introducing administration and staff to address workspace needs. Dixon et al. (2022) conclude that the main goals of induction are to define a new hire’s roles and responsibilities and provide professional development opportunities associated with the first days and months of the school year. While some educational organizations have expanded their onboarding programs to include mentoring for novice teachers in their first year or beyond, this is rare and, if available, is provided on a limited scale (Arnold-Rogers et al., 2008; Sierra, 2020). The definition of onboarding used for this study is the formal and informal practices, programs, and policies enacted or engaged in by an organization or its agents to facilitate newcomer adjustment; effective onboarding programs are considered the cornerstone of successful
organizations. They not only accelerate new employees on the path to productivity but also foster a sense of belonging and commitment, laying the foundation for long-term engagement and success (Klein & Polin, 2012). Onboarding programs consisting mainly of induction practices and little mentoring provide minimal guidance to new hires. Using existing research and theory, school districts can design and implement more beneficial, efficient onboarding programs for new employees to increase new hires’ autonomy, competence, and relatedness. As a result, there will be an increase in satisfaction, efficiency, and retention.

**Purpose and Significance**

The purpose of this study is to examine the onboarding practices of several schools within a district and their impacts on teacher retention and school culture and climate. While much research has been conducted to examine induction programs and mentoring, more research is needed to analyze how onboarding practices impact teacher retention and school culture and climate. Through the theoretical lens of SDT, research links the onboarding process to meeting the three basic human psychological needs of autonomy, belonging, and competence to build self-determination and, thus, improve professional practice (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Adding value to new teachers with positive onboarding will allow them to multiply it within their classrooms. A classroom climate that supports students’ basic psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness enhances the students’ autonomous motivation. This results in improved learning and achievement and more positive experiences than are possible in a pressured climate, leading to controlled motivation (Liu et al., 2016). The objective is to increase administrators’ knowledge by providing them with a theoretical approach to onboarding.
grounded in improvement of teacher retention while fostering positive school culture and climate.

**Intended Audience**

My dissertation targets building administrators responsible for executing the onboarding of new staff members and attempts to inform current school leaders, board members, district administrators, and university scholars about the importance of a well-articulated comprehensive onboarding process. The intended audience of my third paper is principals and administrators responsible for onboarding new teachers.

As it stands, building administration plays a vital role in onboarding new teachers and identifying the needs of new teachers, whether novices, movers, or career returners. The variables involved mean onboarding cannot be a one-size-fits-all process. Additionally, very few onboarding programs focus on fostering teachers’ self-determination to retain highly qualified teachers. Fostering an environment full of research-based practices increases belonging, relationship building, and self-determination, leading to an improvement in the culture and climate of a building.

The result of my work in Paper 3 is a framework of ongoing professional development for newly hired staff members that building leaders and current staff members can facilitate. The professional learning goal discussed in Paper 3 is to ensure that building leaders successfully motivate new teachers through interactions and professional development that cultivate autonomy, competence, and relatedness.
My Professional Setting

I have worked in school settings for several years, in various roles including teacher, department chair, and district supervisor of world languages. I have led and supervised 19 teachers in a high school setting and was responsible for evaluating, supervising, and providing professional development opportunities to staff. Additionally, I collaborated with professional learning community (PLC) leaders and language level leaders to achieve the goals of my district’s mission, the school improvement plan, the vision of our department, and the PLC department focus of the year.

Like every school district, my districts have discussed ways to attract and retain highly qualified teachers. Although there have been pushes toward investing in staff, unfortunately these plans often leave out onboarding while focusing on recruitment and professional development; the districts have yet to dedicate the resources and time needed to ensure that the onboarding process for a new staff member is comprehensive and includes research-based practices. This would assist the transition between recruitment and professional development. As building leaders, we assume that scheduling two or three induction meetings before the beginning of the school year and providing new staff members with a crash course on being a new staff member is enough. We often overlook the needs that newly hired teachers have, and, more importantly, we fail to give them the tools needed to allow them to have the freedom to make choices, feel effective, and connect with others. Building leaders is crucial to ensuring our newly hired teachers feel supported.

I am the leader that I am in my current role because of my past experiences. I am thankful for the time and the amazing leaders who mentored and guided me throughout my time in
previous districts. This study aims to provide additional feedback on the quest of districts to continue to commit to being innovative, experiential, and inclusive environments in which to enhance educational outcomes for their entire learning communities.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework guiding this research is Ryan and Deci’s (2020) SDT, based on the premise that individuals experience autonomous motivation by fulfilling three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Applying the concepts of SDT in a comprehensive onboarding program for newly hired teachers can provide the intrinsic motivation needed for a newly hired teacher to have the freedom required to make choices and decisions based on their interests and values. Also valuable is encouraging them to feel that they are effective in performing their daily critical tasks and in contributing to the consequences of their actions. Finally, newly hired staff members need to have a sense of belonging and connection. These three basic needs are discussed at length in Paper 2, as the research examines the relationship between SDT, retention, and positive building culture and climate.

**Positionality of Research**

I have worked in education for 23 years. In my first 15 years, I served as a classroom teacher, while in my last 6, I served as a department chair in a high school. This role of department chair of world languages and English language learning allowed me to supervise and lead 19 staff members while teaching one section of Spanish. The high school is located in the western suburbs of Chicago, with an enrollment of nearly 3,000 students.
Until the past few years, I had little knowledge of our school’s induction or onboarding practices. After losing a staff member midsemester because they were anxious and overwhelmed, I began reflecting on my practices and possible support systems that could have helped or avoided this abrupt exit. Experiences like these, and the onboarding of 11 new staff members in my 6 years in this role, have made me consider practices or procedures needed to ensure retention while building teacher autonomy, competence, and belonging.

**Summary and Organization of the Remainder of the Dissertation**

In conclusion, a significant number of novice teachers exit the profession within their initial 5 years of teaching. One potential contributor to this high turnover is the absence of onboarding programs that incorporate organizational socialization and adequately foster the development of knowledge and skills crucial for novice teachers during their initial teaching years.

The dissertation is structured as several chapters, adhering to common conventions. Chapter 2 focuses on reviewing the existing literature relevant to the study, with the aim of identifying gaps in our understanding of employee onboarding in educational settings. Chapter 3 outlines the theory and process that form the basis for the development of the onboarding intervention, along with the goals and practices. Chapter 4 delves into the methods used in the study, including the research design, setting, and procedures involved in the evaluation. Chapter 5 presents the study’s findings, while Chapter 6 offers a summary of these findings, along with a discussion of their implications for policy practice. The chapter also highlights the study’s limitations and provides suggestions for future research.
Key Terminology

- *Novice teacher*—a teacher with less than 3 years of experience (Barrett et al., 2002).

- *Onboarding*—the formal and informal practices, programs, and policies enacted or engaged in by an organization or its agents to facilitate newcomer adjustment; effective onboarding programs are considered the cornerstone of successful organizations. They not only accelerate new employees on the path to productivity but also foster a sense of belonging and commitment, laying the foundation for long-term engagement and success (Klein & Polin, 2012).

- *Induction programs*—activities like completing new-hire paperwork, initial introduction to staff, and addressing workspace needs (Hunter & Springer, 2022).

- *Self-determination theory*—a motivational theory declaring that people have basic psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Fulfilling psychological requirements is integral to people’s psychological health and development, autonomous motivation, optimal functioning, and self-actualization (Ryan & Deci, 2020).


- *Career returners*—teachers who have long gaps in employment, take extended leaves of absence, and leave teaching only to return later (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).
Teacher Effectiveness Matters

Teacher effectiveness is the effect of teaching on student learning and is quantified by the extent to which a teacher contributes to students’ academic progress (Chetty et al., 2014). Teacher effectiveness is the most critical component of the education process within schools for student attainment (Burgess, 2019). Students taught by highly effective teachers get significantly higher grades, and the effect is substantial and enduring (Chetty et al., 2014). Teachers become more effective as they accumulate years of teaching experience (Podolsky et al., 2019); when teachers leave a school, they take along their knowledge and expertise in instructional strategies, collaborative relationships with colleagues, professional development training, and understanding of students’ learning needs at the school, all of which may harm student learning and school operations and climate (Simon & Johnson, 2015).

Stability Matters

However, novice teachers turn over at a higher rate than experienced teachers, which negatively impacts students’ learning, which impacts the quality of instruction they receive (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Turnover takes a toll on schools and students, as schools often respond by hiring inexperienced or unqualified teachers, increasing class size, or cutting class offerings, all of which impact student learning (Podolsky et al., 2019). Many novice teachers leave the profession before their skills are honed through experience. In the United States, within 5 years of beginning teaching, about 20% of new teachers left teaching altogether, and another
10% changed schools. A shortage of teachers harms students, teachers, and the public education system. Lack of qualified teachers and staff instability that accompanies turnover threaten students’ ability to learn and reduce teachers’ effectiveness, and high teacher turnover consumes economic resources that could be better deployed elsewhere (García & Weiss, 2019).

Nationwide, 12% of new teachers (with 1–3 years of experience) left the profession within 2 years, and 23% left the profession within 5 years (Aud et al., 2010). Of teachers surveyed in 2007 in the United States, another 10% changed schools the following school year. Factors impacting teachers’ decisions to leave the profession are “limited initial teacher education, negative practicum experiences, work intensification, low pay, student misbehavior, and a lack of public respect” (Miller et al., 2021).

Acknowledging Areas of Growth Matters

Many studies of challenges faced by new teachers report issues such as inconsistent capacity to support students with special needs, lack of time to prepare classrooms or lessons, student misbehavior, and inadequate training in knowledge and skills necessary to be an effective teacher (Zhan et al., 2023). These challenges are compounded by the range of student needs, learning styles, behaviors, and student and teacher mobility in many places. These working conditions cause many beginning teachers to develop coping strategies to survive in the classroom, negatively impacting their instruction and student learning. These circumstances also contribute to high attrition rates and migration among novice teachers (Kulophas & Hallinger, 2020).

New teachers face many challenges in their initial years of teaching, such as establishing an engaging learning environment, planning instructional units and lessons, evaluating student
learning, and addressing individual and cultural differences. In addition to these expectations, teachers face a wide range of student needs, learning styles, and behaviors (Kulophas & Hallinger, 2020). These are some factors that lead newly hired teachers to leave the profession.

Establishing an engaging learning environment requires classroom management. This is defined as the action teachers take to create an environment that supports and facilitates academic and social–emotional learning (Wolff et al., 2021). To manage the classroom and create a positive and engaging learning environment, novice teachers must observe relevant cues and events, make sense of them quickly, monitor the progression of events, and ultimately make effective pedagogical decisions based on this information intake. An expert teacher can maintain a broad awareness of classroom scenes and events; however, novice teachers can be easily overwhelmed by the complexity of incoming information (Wolff et al., 2021). Also, novice teachers can be unaware of the behavioral and attentional cues experts pick up on to adaptively prevent disruptions or resolve troubles when they happen.

Planning is one of the instructional proficiencies necessary for good teaching. Teachers’ high aptitude for instructional planning makes learning more effective and promotes student learning (Koni & Krull, 2018). The study conducted by Koni and Krull (2018) revealed that experienced teachers’ thinking regarding instructional planning is more advanced than that of novice teachers. Novice teachers highlighted fewer events that could interfere with reaching long-term instructional objectives and were overwhelmed by other factors. Their main focus was immediate content, classroom management, timing, and provision of resources (Koni & Krull, 2018).

Another factor that newly hired teachers are overwhelmed by is evaluation of student learning. Novice teachers hold a less complex schema and focus on short-term planning. They
also tend to demonstrate few instructional strategies linked to a class’s abilities. Novice teachers cater to the level of class interest and knowledge. When interest and enjoyment decrease, novice teachers disregard the initial lesson plan and alter the activity to maintain classroom management (Wolff et al., 2021).

With an ever-changing classroom environment, newly hired teachers need to prepare to address individual and cultural differences to engage students and create positive student–teacher relationships. This, too, is a factor that results in many teachers leaving the profession (Kennedy & Preston Lopez, 2022). Culturally responsive instruction focuses on developing curriculum and classroom instruction more responsive to each child’s culture and background. Kennedy and Preston Lopez (2022) refer to “culture” as a standard set of beliefs, values, and language patterns of a social unit, often recognized through one’s ethnic identity. They argue that teacher education programs do not prepare new teachers to deal with parents, work with students individually, and handle problems that today’s students encounter. Being purposeful when selecting a student teaching assignment in an environment with students whose cultures and backgrounds differ would prepare teachers to have different perspectives and make them aware of the culturally responsive lens they need when planning.

Many novice teachers need help addressing discipline concerns in the classroom. Three factors influence novice teachers’ discipline practices: false expectations about what is going on in the classroom, personal matters regarding teaching, and lack of responsibility for their managerial decisions and actions (Podolsky et al., 2019). False expectations about what is going on in the classroom reflect the difference in perspective from when they were students to being teachers responsible for redirecting and engaging students and addressing student misconduct. Encountering a new and unexpected reality generates feelings of insecurity and anxiety.
Novice teachers are concerned with maintaining class control and being liked by students (Fuller & Brown, 1975). This creates a gray line between teacher and students because the teacher thinks, “If I control my students, they will not like me.” As a result, they take two drastic approaches: the “buddy–buddy” manner or the strictly harsh approach, which leaves the students resentful, the teacher angry, and the discipline problem unsolved (González-Calvo & Fernández-Balboa, 2018).

The last factor influencing novice teachers’ discipline problems is their lack of responsibility for their managerial decisions and actions. According to Gazdag et al. (2019), there is a connection between novice teachers’ success in their initial years and their discipline problems. As a result, they tend to blame students or the administration for such issues (Gazdag et al., 2019). For this reason, many beginning teachers leave teaching soon after their 1st year (Shanks et al., 2022; Simos, 2013).

**Support Matters**

Suppose the goal of a district is to hire good teachers. In that case, we must provide a well-articulated and comprehensive onboarding program for schools rooted in a theoretical framework to increase teachers’ autonomy, competence, and relatedness. To create an effective teaching force, we must provide teachers with the tools needed to increase their motivation and well-being as they acclimate to a new environment. Two areas appear to hold the most promise with regard to increasing teacher effectiveness: reforming hiring practices and contracts and reforming teacher training and development (Burgess, 2019). Providing support to novice teachers can influence their decisions to stay in their jobs.
Keeping New Teachers Is a Challenge Faced by Districts

All organizations face employee turnover. This turnover of employees can impact organizational quality. Employee turnover can have positive, negative, and mixed impacts; employee turnover can be influenced by employee, employer, and contextual factors. This is no different in educational systems. Teacher turnover has received consistent attention within education systems, given teachers’ critical role in shaping the quality of learning opportunities students can access. Research has focused on identifying various types of turnover in student learning and school culture/climate. Research has also examined ways in which unwanted turnover can be minimized, leading to improvements in teacher retention and the overall quality of the teaching force, highlighting the role school and district practices can play in shaping teacher turnover. Given the resources committed to recruiting and hiring teachers, school- and district-based practices intended to support newly hired teachers and increase retention rates have received attention from practitioners and researchers alike.

There are at least four ways educators enter a new school: directly after receiving a new degree, after exiting a different career, after transferring from another school or type of position in a school, and after a break from teaching. Newly hired teachers are classified into four categories (Warner-Griffin et al., 2016):

- A newly prepared teacher is a 1st-year teacher (no previous experience) whose main activity the year before was attending college or who earned their highest degree in the year before.
• A delayed entrant is a 1st-year teacher who, in the year before, engaged in other activities outside attending college and teaching and received their highest degree more than 1 year ago.

• A transfer is a teacher with previous teaching experience whose main activity in the year before was working in another school outside their new school system or in another sector (public or private school).

• A reentrant is a teacher with prior experience whose primary activity the year before was not K–12 teaching.

Although some methods of entry into the profession are associated with higher turnover rates, all turnover impacts a school’s culture and climate (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Teacher turnover is the change in the number of teachers in a particular setting from one year to the next (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). There are several types of turnover. Leavers are teachers who leave the profession. Movers are teachers who shift between schools. Movers and leavers create a negative effect on the schools that they leave, impacting the climate and culture of school buildings. When turnover contributes to teacher shortages, schools often respond by hiring inexperienced or unqualified teachers, increasing class sizes, or cutting class offerings, all of which impact student learning (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics’s 2011–2013 Schools and Staffing Survey, 84% of teachers reported that they stayed in the profession, while a 16% turnover rate was recorded. Those responsible for the turnover were divided into several categories: 37% were voluntary movers, 30% were voluntary preretirement leavers, 18% were retired, and 14% were the result of involuntary turnover. Most involuntary movers attributed their involuntary moves to budget cuts, school closures, reduced student enrollment, and school
transfers. As for movers, almost all go to regular teaching positions, become long-term substitutes, or take on other nontraditional teacher roles. Students who lose teachers during the school year have test score gains that are, on average, 8% of a standard deviation lower than those of students whose teachers remains for the entire school year, while end-of-year turnover has little effect on student achievement (Redding & Henry, 2019). The study conducted by Redding and Henry (2019) revealed that without affective attachments, new teachers might find the decision to leave in the middle of the school year easier to make, regardless of the impact on their students.

Aside from educators who retire, the top three occupation statuses of leavers are working for a school or district but not as a K–12 teacher, caring for family members, and working outside of education—leavers cite dissatisfaction with testing and accountability pressures as the primary reason for leaving the profession. Other sources of dissatisfaction include lack of administrative support, career, lack of opportunities for advancement, and working conditions. These sources of dissatisfaction were noted by 55% of those who left the profession and 66% of those who left their schools to go to other schools (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Employee onboarding is the first chance an organization has to create space for individuals to acclimate to their work environment and help them adjust to their social roles and operational and performance expectations while building the individual tools necessary to contribute to larger organizational goals. In education, school districts need to hire highly qualified candidates and ensure that those candidates are adequately prepared to assume their new teaching positions, thus improving their chances of becoming effective educators within their new districts and increasing their likelihood of staying. Developing efficient processes for administrative onboarding grounded in a theoretical framework focused on autonomy,
competence, and relatedness will help motivate new teachers to stay and steep in the building’s vision, core values, and norms.

To hire top talent and build the strength of organizations, employers expend significant resources like time, money, and personnel to identify, recruit, and secure highly qualified candidates for any given position (Hatva, 2012). This is also true for school districts that want to secure and retain highly qualified teachers. Once the talent is secured, employers must provide new hires with the information, direction, and support they need to succeed in their roles. This support system is frequently referred to as “employee onboarding.” Onboarding is the process of introducing a newly hired employee into an organization. It helps new teachers understand their new positions and professional obligations. It also communicates a school district’s values, explains people and professional culture, aligns expectations and performance, and provides employees with the resources they need to navigate their positions successfully. Onboarding builds rapport between new employees, the organization, supervisors, and coworkers (Kammeyer-Muller et al., 2023). Kammeyer-Muller et al. (2023) found that organized, early, and continued support had significant positive relationships with work outcomes. When support levels were high from team members and administrators, newly hired staff had greater organizational health and worked much harder. The inverse occurred when the opposite was offered, leading to unhappy and less effective employees who were likelier to leave their positions.

Additionally, research shows that the faster new hires feel welcome and equipped for their jobs, the quicker they successfully contribute to their organizations’ missions (Bauer, 2010). Bauer (2010) wrote the guidelines published by the SHRM Foundation, and she described onboarding using four distinct levels called the “Four ‘Cs’” for effective onboarding:
• Compliance is the lowest level and includes teaching employees basic legal and policy-related rules and regulations.

• Clarification ensures that employees understand their new jobs and all related expectations.

• Culture is a broad category that includes providing employees with a sense of organizational norms—both formal and informal.

• Connection relates to the vital interpersonal relationships and information networks that new employees must establish.

Culture and connections are associated with interpersonal relationships. Newly hired staff lack knowledge of a building’s culture, staff, and students. Providing new hires with effective instructional and engagement practices and the classroom management tools they need will allow them to build self-efficacy and adjust to their new work environment. A new staff member has low levels of self-efficacy at the start; onboarding is even more necessary to boost subsequent ability to cope and perform (Bauer, 2010). Four levels have been identified related to both job roles and social environment that can help new employees maximize their onboarding success.

Long-term outcomes of good onboarding include job satisfaction and organizational commitment of employees. Onboarding helps newly hired teachers adjust to their jobs by establishing better relationships, aligning their expectations with performance, and providing support to help curtail unwanted turnover. A comprehensive onboarding program leads to good retention rates.
**Why Stay?**

In education, onboarding is more critical due to the difficulties schools often have recruiting highly qualified teachers and retaining them after their 5 years (Newberry & Allsop, 2017). Newberry and Allsop (2017) report that when “it comes to leaving the profession, it has been found that up to 30–46% of new teachers quit teaching within the first five years, and nearly 8–14% of all teachers leave teaching in any given year.” Therefore, school districts need to hire highly qualified teachers and ensure they are adequately prepared to assume their new roles, thus improving their chances of becoming effective educators within their new districts.

One potential cause of early departures from the teaching profession may be ineffective onboarding programs. While many factors lead to novice teacher burnout, one is that teachers lack the specific knowledge and skills necessary for success in their first 5 years of teaching. Many teachers enter the profession feeling confident about their understanding of subject matter and content but unprepared to handle other elements that are a part of being an effective educator, such as behavior management, scheduling, climate and culture, and individual human resource needs (Pogodzinski et al., 2013).

Studies indicate that teacher turnover imposes costs and disruptions on districts akin to attrition. The financial burden of replacing each departing teacher is substantial, estimated at over $10,800 in rural districts, $13,200 in suburban districts, and $25,200 in urban districts (Bland et al., 2023). These investments do not pay their total dividends when teachers leave several years after being hired. The effectiveness of a school’s onboarding program must be investigated to find areas of strength and growth. The following are areas to explore when measuring onboarding effectiveness:
• Address new hire turnover: Review the data of new hires who quit during the onboarding, induction, or mentoring program. About 8% of teachers leave the profession every year; federal data have long shown (Loewus, 2021). Therefore, it is vital to consider whether an employee is a mover or a leaver and provide interventions to address these concerns proactively.

• Compare the performance of new hires and current staff: Evaluate the progress of newly hired staff members in the areas of autonomy, competence, and relatedness compared with current staff members. Completing this evaluation allows for adjustments to support or possibly increase opportunities.

• Use formal and informal evaluations to set goals: Consider evaluations to measure teacher quality, inform staffing decisions, plan professional development opportunities, and set goals. This will provide opportunities throughout the school year for either a supervisor or a mentor to check in.

• Consider new hires’ reflections: Review opportunities for honest and private conversations among the newly hired to reflect on their progress and areas where support may be needed—having a trusted adult or mentor to discuss concerns with will allow for open lines of communication and opportunities for growth.

• Provide opportunities for constructive feedback and 360° feedback: Provide opportunities for feedback from a combination of staff members connected to the newly hired, including themselves, direct supervisors, and peers.

• Assess effectiveness and length of new staff onboarding: Determine the topics covered and opportunities for personalization based on staff (novice teachers, movers,
and career returners). Does onboarding include opportunities to understand a building’s culture, a building’s mission statement, staff development needed to report student progress, expectations of student and parent communication, instructional practices focused on engagement, strategies needed to create a positive learning environment in the classroom, and positive teacher–student interactions?

Onboarding for newly hired teachers must extend beyond induction days before the beginning of the school year. With districts looking to attract and retain highly qualified teachers, it is crucial to look within and see what practices are embedded in a district’s onboarding program to foster, empower, and support newly hired teachers. Positive discipline practices need to be the staple of any onboarding process to help newly hired teachers. Nevertheless, it is essential to note that teachers can minimize many disruptions related to instructional methods to engage students and promote positive teacher–student relationships.

This being said, the current onboarding processes in most school districts need improvement. Despite being among the top employers recruiting talent, onboarding is limited in public school districts due to limited resources and capacity (Hunter & Springer, 2022). Ironically, according to Newberry and Allsop (2017), employers often spend a large portion of their resources identifying, recruiting, and securing highly qualified candidates, limiting the amount of time, effort, and financial resources available for onboarding programs.

Unfortunately, most onboarding programs consist mainly of induction-related activities like completing new-hire paperwork, initial introduction to staff, and addressing workspace needs. Hunter and Springer (2022) argue that the main goals of onboarding are to define a recent hire’s role and responsibilities, provide opportunities for learning and development related to the first few months of employment, and establish a positive work environment or induct the recent
hire into the culture of the educational organization. While some educational organizations have even expanded their onboarding programs to include mentoring for novice teachers in their 1st year or beyond, this is not common—or, if available, it is provided on a limited scale (Arnold-Rogers et al., 2008). Onboarding programs that consist mainly of induction practices and little mentoring provide only minimal guidance to new hires.

When asked which factors play the biggest role in keeping teachers in the teaching profession, teachers were most likely to point to love for students. Two in five teachers say this is the top season they stay. Caring for students is what draws many to the profession (Loewus, 2021). According to Loewus’s (2021) research, teachers shared that teaching students is wonderful. It is all the other work (committee meetings, individualized education plan meetings, PLC meetings, discipline, administrative support, etc.) that is exhausting. Using existing research and a theoretical framework, public school systems can design and implement more beneficial, efficient onboarding programs for newly hired teachers to increase new hire satisfaction, effectiveness, and retention.

**SDT: Theoretical Framework**

SDT is a motivational theory that declares that people have basic psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Fulfilling psychological needs is integral to people’s psychological health and development, autonomous motivation, optimal functioning, and self-actualization. Autonomy involves acting with a sense of volition and having the experience of choice. The demand for relatedness is the individual’s desire to maintain close, safe, and satisfying connections in their social environment and feel part of it. The need for competence is the individual’s need to experience themselves as capable of
realizing abilities, plans, and aims, which are not always achieved, and to feel a sense of efficacy (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Kaplan and Madjar’s (2017) study employed an SDT framework to explore preservice teachers’ perceptions of their professional training in relation to motivational outcomes. Although much of the study is based on the teacher–student relationships, there is a way to use this framework when fostering a supportive relationship between administrators and new staff members. A new teacher is striving to actively realize and exploratively form authentic and direction-giving values, goals, interests, and abilities to construct their identity (Kaplan & Madjar, 2017). According to the study, autonomy support includes administrative behaviors such as avoiding badgering, allowing opportunities for choice, clarifying the relevance of content, allowing open discussion, encouraging personal initiative, and recognizing each student’s perspective. Providing choice and fostering relevance enable teachers to perceive an administrator as understanding their feelings, values, and thoughts (Kaplan & Madjar, 2017).

Kaplan and Madjar (2017) point out that relatedness support includes administrators’ behaviors, such as expressing appreciation, dedicating time and resources, being willing to help, and establishing a noncompetitive and respectful learning environment. Explicitly creating instructional activities that foster relationship building and cooperative groups allows for execution of these practices.

Competence support allows administrators to set structure, explain clearly, and articulate how instructional activities connect to culminating assessments. The feedback provided to teachers is constructive and not judgmental. An administrator also shares strategies to apply if teachers struggle to understand certain concepts or expectations (Kaplan & Madjar, 2017). This
helps to build teacher efficacy while allowing opportunities for connection with students and peers.

Facilitating onboarding informed by SDT minimizes uncertainty and promotes the social identity of teachers through relatedness. One of the three basic human needs of SDT is relatedness, which allows connectivity to the culture and climate of a building. Facilitating an environment of competence, autonomy, and relatedness encourages teachers to stay.

**Teacher Workplace Commitment**

While SDT is a promising theoretical framework for improving the intrinsic motivation to teach among staff, it can also impact teacher workplace commitment. Organizational commitment is the degree to which an individual internalizes organizational values and goals and feels a sense of loyalty to their workplace (Chung, 2019). This commitment is related to building staff unity of purpose (SDT’s belonging) and an agreed-on school mission. Chung (2019) finds that commitment to student learning is equally important. This reflects teacher dedication to helping students learn, regardless of their academic difficulties or social background. Conceptually, a commitment to student learning speaks to increasing student engagement in learning and academic achievement (SDT’s competence), particularly for academically at-risk students. Teacher commitment has been related to the concept of internal motivation and linked to principal and peer support, clear expectations regarding roles and responsibilities (both initially and ongoing), promotion of shared vision and values, and high levels of teacher self-efficacy (SDT’s autonomy; Ware & Kitsantas, 2011).

To create an effective onboarding program designed to attract, develop, and retain highly effective teachers, executive leadership advises an onboarding team to follow a formative needs
assessment to better address areas of growth of new staff members while inculcating them with the culture and climate of their new workplace environment (One Clear Message Consulting, 2022). According to One Clear Message Consulting (2022), “QUEST” is a four-part framework designed to aid identification of needs while developing a theory of action for a personalized onboarding experience:

- **Question:** Collect information to identify a clear, deep, and rich understanding of the need or opportunity and address gaps. Testing understanding of a school’s mission and vision can allow for shared values and common beliefs.

- **Understand:** Take time to understand the individual needs of newly hired staff, their priorities, their interests, and their areas of strength and growth.

- **Engage:** Provide staff of a school with the relevant knowledge needed to build competence by prioritizing their needs, the school’s instructional mission, and interpersonal skills needed to create strong relationships with peers, students, and parents.

- **Share experiences:** Having colleagues at a school share their experiences throughout the year with peers going through the same onboarding process helps build rapport while allowing them to navigate the school and their different roles.

- **Track progress:** Reflect on the practices, conversations, and formats that allowed engagement, reflection, and growth. Ask newly hired staff to share their experiences and perceptions of the onboarding process.

A theoretical framework based on the pillars of SDT, understanding of commitment to an organization and learning, and a needs inventory for newly hired staff requires the support of a
mentor teacher. Mentors aren’t just friends—they are more than that. They are amazing practitioners who pass on their knowledge through informal conversation and everyday modeling. They push back and disagree with you. They help you develop your educational voice. They help hone your academic blade (Wolpert-Gawron, 2018).

**Peer Mentoring**

SDT and mentoring go hand in hand since the goal of mentoring is to combat feelings of isolation and promote a sense of fit and readiness among new staff members (Zambrana et al., 2015). Peer mentoring involves a process in which a mentor (i.e., a more experienced individual) guides a mentee (i.e., an inexperienced individual) in a new setting by providing role modeling, social support, guidance, and counseling to enhance both career/academic and psychosocial outcomes (Fisher et al., 2020).

Fisher et al. (2020) suggests how peer mentoring can be beneficial for both a peer mentor and their mentee. A peer mentor feels challenged, satisfied, and creative as they seek ways to provide guidance and developmental opportunities for their mentee. They also experience a sense of self-empowerment, confidence in their own abilities, and competence in their ability as peer mentor. Similarly, mentees describe becoming more self-confident (competence) and optimistic about their futures, as peer mentoring relationships support them in acquiring the critical academic and skills they need (autonomy) and help them acclimate to their environments (belonging).


Peer Mentoring and Retention

Mentorships are the most powerful ways to harness staff to increase productivity and retain highly qualified teachers. Existing teachers are filled with valuable skills and experience, while most new staff members are yearning to learn. Mentoring fosters mutually beneficial relationships that expand the development of all employees, engage highly qualified teachers, and increase retention. Young employees are craving mentorship opportunities, with a striking 79% of millennials believing that mentoring is crucial to their career success (Association for Talent Development, 2017). The same study acknowledges that when employers offer mentorship programs, employee engagement and retention increase by 50%. Employees surveyed who did not receive regular mentoring (35%) planned to look for a new job within the next 12 months.

Areas of Contribution

There is a wide variety of existing literature that offers insight and points of view directly applicable to the topic of onboarding newly hired teachers. I first examined literature about the purpose of onboarding, including definitions, models, and procedures. I later reviewed the theoretical framework (SDT)—which promotes autonomy, competence, and belonging—shown to improve retention and motivation. By adding a mentoring component designed around an assessment of needs, I hope to make a small contribution to the research gap.
Motivation

Motivation-related influences, such as those fulfilled in the three innate and universal psychological needs of competence, connection, and autonomy are important in the early success of newly hired teachers. SDT focuses primarily on internal sources of motivation, such as a need to gain knowledge or independence (intrinsic motivation). According to SDT, people need to feel a sense of autonomy, competence, and connection to achieve psychological growth. Fishbach and Woolley (2022) believe that intrinsic motivation involves people doing an activity because they find it interesting and derive spontaneous satisfaction from the activity. Workplaces that support employee autonomy, competence, and relatedness foster greater intrinsic motivation in employees (Ryan & Deci, 2020). According to Khun-inkeeree et al. (2023), the most important reason for lack of success in schools is low motivation among teachers and pupils. Teachers themselves state that they contribute sufficiently to their students’ learning; research reveals that motivation levels play a more critical role in student learning than does teachers’ professional competence. Furthermore, if teachers possess sufficient knowledge and skill regarding performance management and motivation, students’ performance will improve; teachers who do not have adequate knowledge of the subject of motivation and who are not motivated themselves will have difficulty motivating their students to learn (Khun-inkeeree et al., 2023). Therefore, an onboarding program should be designed and provided to fulfill the needs of preservice and in-service teachers in a way that can increase their motivation through autonomy, competence, and belonging.
Motivation and Belonging

As building leaders, we want teachers to feel empowered to make decisions in the classroom and know that they are supported. Deci et al. (2008) found that more autonomous forms of motivation are generally associated with more positive outcomes (e.g., self-regulation, persistence, commitment, and job satisfaction) and that autonomy support can promote autonomous forms of motivation. Strategies that support autonomy may be critical to fostering intrinsic motivation and identified regulation, which are forms of motivation most characterized by commitment, engagement, and employee well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Like motivation, belonging is essential to keeping good teachers. Connectivity and belonging constitute one of the three basic psychological needs of all humans, as defined by SDT. Korpershoek et al. (2020) define a sense of belonging as the degree to which people feel socially connected. For teachers, it is defined as the degree to which they feel integrated with colleges, administration, and students at school. It is important to note that if a teacher shares their school’s values and norms, they have a higher sense of belonging and job satisfaction (Richter et al., 2021). Therefore, for many teachers, engagement and job satisfaction may require their goals and values to be congruent with prevailing goals and values at the school.

According to Richter et al. (2021), job satisfaction is the strongest predictor of motivation to leave the teaching profession. By providing a comprehensive onboarding program grounded in a theoretical framework such as SDT, we can attract and retain highly qualified teachers. Teachers are often motivated by values, ethical motives, and intrinsic motivation (Richter et al., 2021), all of which are directly connected to autonomy, competence, and belonging.
CHAPTER 3. EMPIRICAL PAPER (PAPER 2)

Reframing of the Literature

This study aims to identify actions or processes for integrating new staff members into a school. The onboarding process is a valuable way to introduce and enculturate new staff members to the vision and mission of their new school. An extensive range of existing literature offers insight and perspectives directly applicable to this topic. I started by examining literature dealing with aspects of onboarding, including definitions, characteristics, and processes. Next, I examined the research associated with onboarding practices in the educational setting to understand the research and help to identify gaps and areas for potential contribution. I ended with a review of literature related to teacher preparedness (training, programs, knowledge, and skills) and its relationship to motivation to better understand what new teachers in a building need to be successful.

Onboarding has been defined in several ways, depending on the professional environment in which it is applied. Klein et al. (2015) describe onboarding as the process or outcomes for new hires. Onboarding is the formal and informal practices, programs, and policies enacted by an organization to facilitate newcomer adjustment (Klein & Polin, 2012). Some onboarding programs consist mainly of completing new-hire paperwork, initial induction of staff, and addressing workspace needs, which is insufficient for new employees (Frögéli et al., 2023). A comprehensive onboarding approach begins during recruitment, continues through hiring and orientation, and often includes mentoring during an employee’s 1st year or beyond.
Organizations whose visions include well-rounded and supportive onboarding processes tend to show increased employee engagement and retention over time (Mardjetko, 2023).

Many studies have concluded that having an onboarding program, no matter how minor, is better than having no process at all (Radosh, 2013). Onboarding is associated with positive outcomes that can reduce stress while increasing job satisfaction, retention, and smoothness of transition (Klein et al., 2015). Perspectives vary regarding the best, most effective strategies for onboarding. Klein and Polin (2012) studied the specific practices of 10 different organizations to learn which programs were the most effective. They found that most practices fall into three design categories: informational, welcoming, and guidance or direction (Klein & Polin, 2012). They concluded that regardless of gaps in organizational focus and employee perspective, having multiple and varied onboarding strategies is better than having a few focused ones (Klein & Polin, 2012).

Few studies relating to onboarding in education exist, and those that do are dissertations. They range from onboarding of public school teachers to onboarding of faculty and staff in higher education (Mardjetko, 2023). Several studies exist on the induction and support of novice teachers, including parts and pieces related to onboarding experiences and their influence on district contextual factors and mentoring new of teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Mardjetko (2023) claims that onboarding programs for new teachers are invaluable since they create a sense of belonging and buy-in, which aids retention.

Finally, teacher preparedness programs vary. Most programs aim to train teachers in content knowledge and pedagogical skills (classroom management and legal and professional knowledge) as part of the onboarding process (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). However, only some genuinely prepare novice teachers for their 1st year of teaching and the
professional responsibilities that accompany the job (Strom & Viesca, 2021). Steins et al. (2016) describe the same concern: Teacher preparation programs inadequately prepare teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to prepare them for the sudden transition into the classroom. College graduates disclosed that they felt incompetently prepared to lead a classroom of their own, despite their preservice training (Strom & Viesca, 2021). Many teachers enter the profession feeling confident about content knowledge and subject matter but in need of preparation to handle other components of the job: discipline, scheduling, climate and culture, and student needs (Goddard & Kim, 2018).

In conclusion, a few studies regarding teacher preparedness relate to novice teachers and onboarding programs. They are primarily doctoral dissertations that are either too specific (higher education) or are focused on coaching and mentoring. They also lack a theoretical framework guided by motivation. I plan to contribute to this phenomenon by adding to the scholarly literature regarding novice teachers while connecting the need for a theoretical framework to a comprehensive onboarding program.

**Problem Statement**

Newberry and Allsop (2017) reveal that 30%–46% of new teachers quit teaching within the first 5 years, and nearly 8%–14% leave the profession in any given year. One cannot help but question the onboarding practices that cause teachers to leave the profession. While various factors may lead to burnout of novice teachers, teachers need more specific knowledge, skills, and tools for success in their first 5 years of teaching. Novice teachers enter the profession feeling self-confident about their content knowledge but unprepared to address other aspects of being an effective teacher, such as behavior management, climate and culture, and individual
student needs (Goddard & Kim, 2018). The research gathered notes the effect of an effective and comprehensive onboarding process as a tool with which to retain and enculturate new staff members into a school district.

Employee onboarding is the organizational support of new hires to help them adjust to their roles’ social, operational, and performance aspects while building the personal tools necessary to contribute to significant organizational goals (Bauer, 2010). A comprehensive onboarding program focused on relationship building, mentoring, and the principles of self-determination and social identity can ensure that teachers new to a school feel supported while understanding the professional expectations in the school. Onboarding programs for new teachers are invaluable because they create a sense of organizational belonging and buy-in, which aids retention (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Depending on the organization, onboarding can vary from simply providing time to complete new-hire paperwork through handing out district- and building-related to-do lists on the first day to offering multiple induction days to help new employees transition to their new work environment. However, more comprehensive onboarding programs begin during recruitment, continue through hiring and orientation, and often include mentoring during an employee’s 1st year or beyond and checkpoints throughout.

The onboarding process consists mainly of induction-related activities such as completing new-hire paperwork and introducing administration and staff to address workspace needs. Dixon et al. (2022) conclude that the main goals of induction are to define a new hire’s roles and responsibilities and provide professional development opportunities associated with the first days and months of the school year. While some educational organizations have expanded their
onboarding programs to include mentoring for novice teachers in their 1st year or beyond, this is rare and, if available, is provided on a limited scale (Arnold-Rogers et al., 2008).

Onboarding programs consisting mainly of induction practices and little mentoring provide minimal guidance to new hires. Using existing research and theory, school districts can design and implement more beneficial, efficient onboarding programs for new employees to increase new hires’ autonomy, competence, and relatedness. As a result, there will be an increase in satisfaction, efficiency, and retention.

**Research Questions**

After the review of the literature, the empirical study contributed to a better understanding of how Lakewood School District can further develop a comprehensive onboarding practice that incorporates SDT. To learn about the current onboarding system, this study focused on the current onboarding processes or practices, the onboarding processes or practices as they exist, and how each building measures its impact. The empirical study is grounded in the theoretical framework of SDT, identified in the literature review as a fruitful theory with which to ground a comprehensive onboarding system. To do this, the study addresses the research questions described in the sections that follow.

**Research Question 1**

Research Question 1 is as follows: How do the current goals of teacher onboarding align with the components of SDT?

- How do the current goals of teacher onboarding align with developing teacher autonomy?
• How do the current goals of teacher onboarding align with developing teacher competence?
• How do the current goals of teacher onboarding align with developing relatedness?

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 is as follows: How do the current practices of teacher onboarding align with the components of SDT?
• How do the current goals of teacher onboarding align with developing teacher autonomy?
• How do the current goals of teacher onboarding align with developing teacher competence?
• How do the current goals of teacher onboarding align with developing relatedness?

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 is as follows: How do the measures of effectiveness of teacher onboarding align with the components of SDT?
• How do the current goals of teacher onboarding align with developing teacher autonomy?
• How do the current goals of teacher onboarding align with developing teacher competence?
• How do the current goals of teacher onboarding align with developing relatedness?
Research Question 4

Research Question 4 is as follows: How do the goals, practices, and measures of effectiveness vary between buildings?

- How do the current goals of teacher onboarding align with developing teacher autonomy?
- How do the current goals of teacher onboarding align with developing teacher competence?
- How do the current goals of teacher onboarding align with developing relatedness?

Discussion of Questions

Answering these questions identifies ways each building in Lakewood School District can improve how it onboards new hires, what it values, and how its onboarding processes or practices impact retention. The questions also allow for cross-building comparisons of teacher onboarding.

Methodology

The data collected were strictly qualitative. This research method allowed me to understand beliefs, behaviors, values, and perceptions within the environmental context. This method allows participants to express their thoughts and points of view openly with no limitations while allowing the interviewer to probe for understanding and clarity.

I held 50–60-min one-on-one interviews with building administrators from elementary, middle, and high school levels responsible for their schools’ onboarding processes or practices.
The interviews allowed me to connect with the participants more while having the opportunity to ask in-depth questions.

I asked all participants for their approval before recording the interviews. After the interviews, the recordings were transcribed and coded to make sense of the participants’ responses. Assigning codes to specific words and phrases in their responses helped capture their responses while allowing me to see patterns. The real-time and first-hand data allowed me to better understand their onboarding processes and their connections to STD.

**Setting and Target Population**

The study took place in several schools in a large Midwest suburban K–12 school district. In this dissertation, the school district under study is referred to as “Lakewood School District.” The district served over 27,000 students from multiple suburbs. The research questions allowed me to analyze consistencies, values, onboarding practices, and procedures.

The study’s target population consisted of building assistant principals assigned to onboarding of new hires and any staff members involved in this process. This task is usually assigned to assistant principals, who bring others into the group when planning for summer induction days. If an assistant principal was not tasked with this process at a school, the individual in the school with this duty was interviewed. Interviewing assistant principals from the three instructional levels (elementary, middle, and high school) allowed me to understand better their values and beliefs and their connection to STD.
Sampling Strategy and Sample Used

Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants who could provide in-depth and detailed information about the study within my current school district. The participants in the study were Lakewood School District building leaders and staff.

My final sample included at least two assistant principals from the three instructional environments: elementary, middle, and high school. Elementary teachers teach a wide age range of students. While some teach early childhood, others might teach preteens in fifth grade. The wide range gives teachers some flexibility in the degree of independence their students can function with. On the other hand, younger children require more structure, attention, and reengagement than a fifth grader, who is capable of working on independent tasks for a more extended period of time. Additionally, the elementary environment requires self-contained classes. In this setting, teachers are responsible for teaching all core areas within their classroom. Ensuring a structured environment for their students is vital for engagement, as they are together most of the day.

On the other hand, the middle school environment is highly departmentalized. Most teachers are responsible for one subject at one or two grade levels. Although this middle school structure decreases the volume of planning teachers have to do for their classes, it does increase the grading load. Elementary teachers may have a class of 30–35 students, while a middle school teacher can teach over 100 students a day. Middle school is a bridge between high school and elementary school. To assist students in crossing the bridge, middle schools like the ones in Lakewood School District follow the team approach. A group of students is assigned to a team of
four core teachers, allowing teachers to work together to manage student workloads, plan assessment schedules, and organize cross-curricular projects.

As in middle school, the high school environment is highly departmentalized, with most teachers teaching two to three different courses or levels. This requires more collaboration and guidance from department chairs and level or course leaders. The caseload remains similar to that of middle schools. The educational environment becomes more rigorous and tracked (advanced placement, honors, and general education). Building a new staff member’s competence and autonomy in the areas of planning for multiple courses or levels, adjusting class size, responding to an increase in parental involvement, and responding to student peer pressure must be areas of focus when onboarding.

By casting a wider net and interviewing assistant principals from all three levels, I hoped to better understand their values and onboarding practices and how they may vary from elementary through high school.

**Data Collection and Methods**

The data collection started with email to recruit participants. The communication to them included the title of the study, the purpose of the study, the study procedures, risks, benefits, confidentiality, and contact information. I followed up by phone to secure participation or answer any questions they had.

**Instrumentation**

The primary instrument was an interview protocol to measure the intended outcomes of onboarding practices and their connection to SDT. The target population consisted of assistant
principals or staff members tasked with onboarding new hires. These school administrators or staff responded to a set of questions outlining their current onboarding practices.

Assistant principals or staff members tasked with onboarding new staff members were interviewed to gain understanding and clarity regarding their onboarding practices in the elementary, middle, and high school settings. Responses were collected via note-taking and recorded by the interviewer. A total of six interviews were performed with two elementary, two middle, and two high school assistant principals or staff members whose duty it was to onboard new hires. Some of the interview protocol questions (Appendix A) used to assess the onboarding practices of new hires at Lakewood School District are as follows:

- “How does the onboarding process of new staff members impact teachers’ self-determination?”
- “What is the impact of an onboarding process on the culture and climate of a school?”
- “In what ways do comprehensive onboarding processes impact teacher retention?”
- “What does a research-informed, comprehensive onboarding process look like?”

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative coding was administered after the interviews were transcribed to systematically categorize excerpts in the data to find themes and patterns. The thematic analysis approach focused on identifying patterns and themes. Deductive coding was used to code the data collected. A set of codes was predefined (autonomy, competence, belonging, and relatedness). Memoing was also used to elaborate on concepts and themes identified in the coding process. I hoped to capture the buildings’ onboarding practices and expected outcomes using the research questions and data analysis plan.
Teacher onboarding is a critical activity school districts and buildings engage in when welcoming new staff members. The onboarding new teachers receive can shape their effectiveness, initial experiences, and, ultimately, their decisions to stay in their buildings or districts. This study examined whether schools within a single district used the same theory of action in their onboarding and whether the theory of action targets vital components of a well-evidenced theory (SDT) that aligns with decisions to remain in the profession and identify possible ways to improve the onboarding process in the district. Ultimately, this qualitative research study aimed to identify actions or processes for integrating new staff members into a school. Papers 1 and 2 provided a detailed introduction to the study, a thorough review of the literature, and the application of the chosen methodology. The purpose of Paper 3 is to provide an analysis of the data and interpretation. Additionally, Paper 3 provides insight into the role of the researcher and the sample population and summarizes the themes based on the thematic analysis of the collected data.

The study examined the onboarding practices of several schools within a single district and how their theories of action may be different or similar. Thirteen open-ended interview questions allowed the five participants to provide rich details about their experiences implementing their onboarding practices for their buildings. Table 1 describes the participants’ pseudonyms, positions, building grade levels, genders, and professional experience.

This study’s participants represented different instruction levels within the same district. Participants PHS1 and PHS2 were assistant principals tasked with onboarding new staff members, while PMS1 and PMS2 had different roles within the middle school learning environment. PMS1 was a middle school teacher charged with onboarding, and PMS2 was a building principal at one of the seven district middle schools.
Table 1

Description of Interviewed Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Building type</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Professional experience (years)</th>
<th>Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PMS1</td>
<td>Teacher leader</td>
<td>Middle school</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMS2</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Middle school</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHS1</td>
<td>Assistant principal</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHS2</td>
<td>Assistant principal</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Director of professional learning</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, PD, the director of professional learning, assisted elementary building administrators, teacher leaders, and mentors with onboarding new staff to the district’s 12 elementary schools.

The research questions focused on the understanding how autonomy, competence, and belonging were incorporated within onboarding practices in various schools. Within the questions, I used thematic data analysis, which led to the identification of three themes within each question. Using themes that supported the SDT factors helped to parcel out the experience further. The SDT factor of autonomy had three themes: confidence, empowerment, and choice. The SDT factor of competence had three themes: resources, mission and vision, and differentiation. The SDT factor of belonging had three themes: engagement, welcoming, and inclusion. Table 2 outlines the SDT factors and themes based on thematic analysis.
Table 2

Main Themes Related to Factors of Self Determination Theory in Onboarding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Autonomy</strong></td>
<td>Building confidence was mentioned rarely as an onboarding goal; however, it was mentioned more in practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>While one participant only mentioned empowerment as a “takeaway,” empowerment was a pattern in their practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Choice was seldom addressed as an onboarding goal; it was mentioned frequently as a practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Competence</strong></td>
<td>While resources were discussed as a key goal and practice, the definition of resources differed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Building competence through the use of the mission and vision of the district was universally identified goal and practice of onboarding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Differentiation was not mentioned as a goal but rather as a practice of the onboarding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Belonging</strong></td>
<td>Fostering belonging through engagement was not a goal but rather a practice of the onboarding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Providing a welcoming environment was a goal of onboarding for most and a practice of all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>While inclusion was discussed as a key practice and not a goal, the definition of inclusion differed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SDT Factor: Autonomy**

Having autonomy in onboarding practices would include efforts to develop the freedom of external control, which enables new staff members to take charge of their transitions and manage their time. This behavior would be part of both the goals of onboarding and the practices used to achieve those goals. While there was variation in responses, most onboarding goals and practices were not well aligned with developing all aspects of teacher autonomy amongst new teachers. The themes of confidence, empowerment, and choice emerged within that overarching story and are discussed further below separately.
Autonomy—Onboarding Goals

The first area of focus in the interviews was how autonomy was discussed as part of onboarding goals. Three themes emerged from the responses that aligned with the precursors of autonomy. The first was that developing confidence was an essential goal of onboarding. The second theme related to the development of autonomy was that interviewees sought to encourage teacher empowerment through onboarding. Finally, another goal was to make teachers feel like they could exercise choice in instructing in their classroom. Each of these themes is described in depth below.

PD, PMS2, and PHS2 did not connect autonomy to onboarding goals or takeaways. In contrast, PMS1 and PHS2 outlined promotion of autonomy as part of the onboarding process.

Theme 1: Building Confidence Was Rarely Mentioned as an Onboarding Goal

While I asked questions directly about autonomy as shown in their onboarding practices, only one participant identified it as a goal. PMS1 indicated:

Another takeaway (when completing new teacher onboarding) is that they feel confident that they know the workings of the building or who to go to get their job done. And then third, that they contribute to our building and community.

Theme 2: Empowerment Was Addressed Only by One Participant as a “Takeaway” or Goal

Although the research questions were designed to probe for autonomy and actions associated with it, it was only mentioned by one participant as a goal or takeaway, although there was evidence that empowerment was addressed in their practices. PHS2 shared, “Three takeaways, one that they are confident they can speak to our vision and mission, and are inspired
to continue to learn and grow.” Both hoped to use empowerment to build confidence, grow professionally, and contribute to the building.

**Theme 3: Choice Was Seldom Addressed as an Onboarding Goal**

Choice was discussed by many participants as a practice but rarely as a goal or takeaway. Only PHS2 addressed the theme: “One of the goals at the end of their first year is for the teacher to feel that there were elements of choice [professional development—PLC] that allowed them to become better teachers.”

**Autonomy—Onboarding Practices**

This section outlines Research Question 1 and explores the participants’ responses related to onboarding practices aligned with SDT components. The themes of confidence, empowerment, and choice resonated throughout most participants’ and in their practices.

All but PHS2 discussed autonomy in practice during the onboarding process in some manner during the interviews. While PD discussed the freedom teachers had within the curriculum and delivery of instruction, PMS1, PMS2, and PHS1 focused on autonomy through professional development and their overall leadership styles and expectations.

Although autonomy was not among their onboarding goals for some learning environments, most had practices embedded into their visions that promoted aspects of freedom, particularly with professional development and overall leadership styles within the buildings.
Theme 1: While Confidence Wasn’t Mentioned in the Goals, It Was Mentioned as a Feature of Onboarding Practice

PHS1 believed that by building competence, you create autonomy. This means that a teacher has to have the relevant internal capacities to feel in control of their own behaviors:

They are surrounded by what they need to be the best teacher or the best support staff that they can be. And so once they have what they need to do their work for students and with students, that’s what builds independence and autonomy in my opinion. So I think, just to rephrase, so coming back, I guess a little bit, how do, how do you build that competence to build the autonomy, I think through the training. (PHS1)

Theme 2: Although Empowerment Was Not Among the Onboarding Goals, There Were Several Examples in Their Practices

When describing curricular expectations, PD said, “I think that when a new teacher comes in, they have some freedom within the curriculum as long as they’re meeting the standards and answering those essential questions.” PMS1 and PMS2 described the choice and empowerment that new staff members were given during school improvement days or institute days.

Theme 3: Several Examples of Choice Were Addressed in Their Onboarding Practices

PMS1 reflected on how they provide choice here [at their school], and that’s through collaboration with administration, like on SIP [school improvement] days, where especially new teachers could learn instructional methods, like Kagan strategies, or classroom management strategies or differentiation. I do think we provide a lot of choice within our building. Administration really hones in on that too to help them pick and choose where they (new staff members) think they wanna learn more to apply to their role.
PMS2 outlined his professional development vision: “We want them to become the best educators that they can be, whether that be in-house training that we provide or sending the teacher out.” At the same time, PMS2 referenced his leadership style:

Teachers who come into our building would greatly like to think that they’re not feeling as though they’re micromanaged. We talk a lot about autonomy in our building and treating teachers as professionals, and I think that rubs off on the new teachers immediately.

**SDT Factor: Competence**

Competence in onboarding practices would include efforts to develop mastery of tasks and the skills needed for success, resulting in teachers feeling more likely to take action to help them achieve their goals. This behavior would be part of both the goals of onboarding and the practices used to achieve those goals. While there were differences in responses, most onboarding goals and practices were not well aligned with developing all aspects of teacher competence amongst new teachers. The themes of confidence, empowerment, and choice emerged within that overarching story and are discussed further below separately.

**Competence—Onboarding Goals**

The second area of focus in the interviews was discussion of competence as one of the onboarding goals. Out of the responses, three themes aligned with the precursors of competence emerged. The first was the use of resources to support and provide the professional development needed to build new teacher competence. The second theme related to the development of competence was the pointed effort to ensure that the school district’s mission and vision were acknowledged and formed the reason for many of the decisions made instructionally and professionally. Lastly, although differentiated onboarding was not expressed in depth among
onboarding goals, it was among onboarding practices. These themes are described thoroughly below.

All but PMS1 reported competence as a goal or takeaway during onboarding. Most of the conversations dealt with “living” the vision and mission of the district while providing new staff members with the support systems needed to help students. Although PMS1 did not explicitly have competence as part of their onboarding goals or takeaways, their onboarding practices promoted competence through the support of teacher leaders and mentors.

**Theme 1: Although the Definition of Resources Differed, It Was Discussed as a Goal and Practice**

Participants PMS2 and PHS2 were determined to build teacher competence through professional development and provide the resources needed to grow professionally. PHS2 shared the importance of “providing new staff members with the essential tools to succeed once they start those opening days.” PMS2’s second most important onboarding goal was “to ensure that teachers that we will do anything that we can to assist them in becoming the very best educators that they can be.”

**Theme 2: Building Competence Through the Use of the Mission and Vision of the District Was Universally Identified as a Goal and Practice of Onboarding**

PD expressed that one of the goals at the elementary level was to build a teacher’s competence through understanding of the vision and mission of the district:

The first layer we want our new teachers to have is a general understanding of what are our values in our district, down from some of the key components that we identify in our portrait of graduate to the competencies outlined in the CASEL [Collaborative for
Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, social–emotional learning, as well work equity, diversity, and inclusion in our district.

PHS1 outlined the importance of ensuring that new staff members learn to live the “LIFE” (live with integrity, inspire a passion for learning, foster positive relationships, and expect equity) statement:

One [of the onboarding goals] is to make sure that our new staff, including all of our teachers and support staff, get a sense of our mission, vision, and philosophy as a school community. So within that, obviously being immersed into our LIFE vision throughout our school community, in our classrooms, and outside of our classroom on the athletic field.

Competence—Onboarding Practices

This section discusses Research Question 2 and explores the participants’ responses regarding onboarding practices aligned with SDT components. The themes of resources, mission and vision, and differentiation were embedded in many participants’ responses about their onboarding practices. With that being said, new teacher induction was the district’s first attempt to build new teacher competence.

The district and individual buildings assigned and organized the three new teacher induction days. Day 1 was filled with a who’s who from the district office and teacher union leadership. They described their roles and responsibilities, and this was followed by an overview of the district’s vision and mission. New staff members returned to their home buildings in the second half of the day, and a building orientation occurred.

The home buildings hosted Days 2–3 and featured a day full of “housekeeping” items: Google, the learning management system, email setup, keys, parking passes, and laptop setup. Day 3 allowed for self-directed learning and opportunities to access the curriculum, teacher leaders, and mentors.
Theme 1: Although the Definition of Resources Differed, It Was Discussed as a Goal and Practice

PMS2 described a process introduced early on during the onboarding meant to engage new teachers soon after a recommendation to hire has been emailed to the district office:

We try to engage them in the variety of ways that is almost overwhelming. We share a number of places, tools, and resource they can have to access: resources for student learning, where the curriculum can be found, colleagues and PLCs work that’s already been done that could help them in making decisions in their classroom. To the teachers that they’ll be working with on a team, I can’t say enough about them, the school and staff. I know those folks are already reaching out to these new teachers and saying, “Hey, welcome aboard.” “Welcome to the team.” “Feel free to reach out to me with any questions.” “Here’s my email address.”

Although new staff members to the high school setting still had access to building mentors, PHS1 and PHS2 relied on department chairs and PLC leaders to provide the resources needed to build competence. According to PHS2, “much of what they [new staff members] need to know, they’ll actually gain from their PLCs and their departments”:

We try to really emphasize just the fact that they will continue to have that support from their department chair, from members of their PLC, then myself, and then the building mentor throughout the year as they get going.

In addition to the curricular support, PHS2 described the approach to building new staff members’ competence:

I think because our building is so huge, the first support is just making sure that they feel comfortable walking around the building and knowing where everything is, who people are, and where they go if they have a question. We typically, on the first day, do a scavenger hunt around the building just for them to be acclimated to different areas. For example, our high school has a class house system, so making sure that they’re aware of how the class house system works, who the different people in the supports are, and how our students can utilize those supports.

PHS1 also attempted not to overwhelm the new staff members, by building competence through building leaders, PLC leaders, and department chairs:
To be a new staff member can be pretty overwhelming. I think it is good to just have a few people that they feel very comfortable to go to, whether it be in their department, their department chair, or another colleague. They may just wanna ask like, “Where’s the copier and where is the bathroom, right? It’s kinda funny, but yeah, it’s not funny cause it’s like things we don’t even think about. I need to make sure they know who their go-to are and who your mentors are within your department, where the curriculum and instruction is located, and how you ask questions about the units of study.

The second layer consisted of teacher leaders and assigned mentors. Teacher leaders were those designated by a building administrator who were content experts and considered the go-to people to access curricular needs. Building mentors were also selected by a building administrator but underwent a more extensive process.

Building administrators recommend one building mentor for up to five new teachers. The building mentor does not need to be content/grade-level driven. Administrators were expected to check in with mentors and new teachers and support them as required. A stipend was dispersed in three installments, adding $500 to each’s compensation for their work.

Participating schools, in collaboration with the Lakewood School District’s teacher union, selected the building mentors. Selection should be based on teacher effectiveness and proven ability to build relationships and provide thoughtful guidance and support to new teachers. Responsibilities for building mentors included the following:

- Acclimate new teachers, recognize early signs of teacher trauma, and recommend supplemental help to teachers facing potential burnout.
- On average, dedicate 2 hr/week over the remainder of the school year, working with new teachers one on one, introducing them to the school’s and district’s cultural, organizational, and operational norms.
- Coordinate with administration and the teacher’s union to ensure the program’s high standards are rigorously applied.
• Implement possible calendar topics (building a culture of care, teacher evaluation/student learning objectives, grading/assessments/report cards, preparing for parent–teacher conferences, differentiation and support all students, staff wellness, technology, and ending the year strong).

All 1st-, 2nd-, and 3rd-year (new to the profession) teachers had to have access to a trained in-building mentor. The sole responsibility was to make each new teacher feel welcomed, supported, and connected in their new school. All teachers with 4 years of experience or more had to complete 14 hr of professional learning based on the union agreement.

**Theme 2: Building Competence Through the Use of the Mission and Vision of the District**

*Was Universally Identified as a Goal and Practice of Onboarding*

PD described the new teacher induction as an opportunity to help new teachers see the district’s “why?”:

Our first induction day when we’re there, our whole goal is that we have a welcoming atmosphere. We talk about we are a diverse, inclusive, equitable district. How that is a leading value for all of us. With that welcoming and inclusive attitude, we hope it trickles down to our students and their families.

The three learning environments predominantly focused on building competence through resources and a heavy focus on using the mission and vision of the district to drive instruction and decision making.

PD felt that it was imperative for the elementary staff to understand the district’s values, all of which would help promote initiatives like social–emotional learning, equity, and inclusivity. For that reason, much of the 14 hr guided by PD to the new elementary teachers focused on social–emotional learning and equitable practices.
While there was a more significant focus on the district’s mission and vision to build new teacher competence at the elementary level as a district staff member guided it, middle schools tended to take a different approach. Teacher leaders guided the middle school onboarding process, focusing on providing support through relationship building. PMS1 described how relationship building lowered the anxiety that new teachers felt:

You try to ease any of the unknowns or those anxieties of starting in a new place. So, some of that natural belonging of connecting to people happens throughout the year too, but you want to first give them a person, which is the role of lead teacher here. You know, they have a person, so that’s like human contact. But then also getting them familiar with the workings of the building, how things work, who to go to, and where things are. It sounds simplistic, but I think when some of those things can melt away anxiety. Then they have that sense of belonging and confidence as they start their role [as new teachers].

Theme 3: Differentiation Was Mentioned Not as a Goal but Rather as a Practice of Onboarding

Throughout the onboarding process, providers ensured differentiation when considering the themes and topics to be discussed during the initial 3 days of induction and 14 hr assigned throughout the year. PHS1 confirmed this:

One of the things that I’ve learned over the years is that we have really tried to differentiate our onboarding process for experienced teachers compared to new teachers because they have very different needs. … When I go through the evaluation process for my experienced teachers, I give them like an advanced version versus brand new teachers, where we focus a lot more on the Danielson Framework, where the documentation is located, and what they need to submit for an observation. For experienced teachers, I might go through, you know you’re proficient, and how do you move to excellent. Here’s how you can improve.

PHS2 believed that fewer “brand new teachers” had been onboarded: “We’re actually getting more veteran teachers who are moving in.” Great dialogue was generated when veteran teachers coming to the building could “share some feedback about what they’ve done at other
schools and what they’ve witnessed” (PHS2). This allowed PHS2 and the building mentor to get feedback from new and veteran teachers to plan for the additional 14 hr.

In the middle school setting, PMS2 mentioned that most new staff members recently hired tended to have prior experience; however, when a new teacher to the profession was onboarded, the main focus was on building the teachers’ competence in classroom management. According to PMS2, “veteran teachers new to the district have experience within another district and have developed classroom management skills.” Therefore, PMS2 tried to build new teacher competence by connecting to teachers’ prior knowledge and comparing their procedures or applications with those of their new school district: student information system, evaluation program, response to intervention procedures, and so on.

PMS1 acknowledged that in the previous 8 years, more new staff members had returned to the profession, were second-career teachers, or were coming from other school districts. Their needs seemed to be different, and building competence was more strategic. Veteran teachers may feel, “Well, I don’t really need too much help, right? Like, I’ve done this. It’s just a new place” (PMS1). PMS1 felt that there has to be a little bit more thought put into how building a teacher’s competence will be approached and maybe more effort put into the “goal of belonging.”

PD considered the participants’ experiences when building their competence: “We differentiate for that [career returners], depending upon how long they’ve been out of the system because there have been so many changes in education after so many years.” Generationally, PD had differentiated competence building recently with a crop of new staff members new to the profession: “I think some of the pieces that we’ve seen more recently over the years is the difference in how we communicate [with them], what we communicate, and what we perceive
that they know coming out of college.” Some assumptions were made about what they were acquiring in higher education and what they would expect new staff members to know:

A perfect example was during the pandemic. We all focused on platforms like Google Classroom and Google Meets. We made a really big assumption that kids coming to college had a ton of technology background, and we found out that they’ve never even used Google in the capacity that we have. So we really had to back up the bus and offer Google platforms.

Goals and practices differ from school setting to school setting; however, there appears to be a direct connection between competence building and autonomy. There is evidence of support systems and choice interwoven as part of onboarding practices that, although they are not formal goals, present themselves in their practices and expectations.

SDT Factor: Belonging

Relatedness and belonging in onboarding practices involve efforts to develop meaningful relationships and the feeling of connection with others. This behavior would be part of both the goals of onboarding and the practices used to achieve those goals. There was variation in responses; most onboarding goals and practices needed to be better aligned with developing all aspects of teacher belonging amongst new teachers. The themes of engagement, welcoming, and inclusion emerged within that overarching story and are discussed further below separately.

Belonging—Onboarding Goals

The final area of focus in the interviews was on discussion of belonging as one of the onboarding goals. Out of the responses, three themes emerged which were aligned with the definition of belonging: engagement, welcoming, and inclusion. Each of these themes are described in depth below. All but PHS1 highlighted belonging as a goal or takeaway.
Theme 1: Fostering Belonging Through Engagement Was Not a Goal but Rather a Practice of Onboarding

PD responded, “As an overall goal for all of us even at the very first touchpoint with a new hire is that new hire is feeling welcome and engaged not only at just the building level, but the district level.”

Theme 2: Providing a Welcoming Environment Was a Goal of Onboarding for Most and a Practice for All

PD shared that the goal was to provide a welcoming environment starting as soon as a candidate was hired. PD added that the goal was for “new staff members to feel supported, valued, and that they feel welcome where they are.”

PMS1 and PMS2 shared the same sentiments regarding the middle school environment. PMS1 responded to the questions by stating that “ultimately, the first goal would be feeling a belonging to the school. Achieving belonging right away allows to ease any of the unknowns or those anxieties of starting in a new place.” PMS2 also focused on belonging when responding to the goals and takeaways: “Number one, to make that teacher feel and know that they are now a part of our Hubbard Middle School family that they are welcomed and are now welcomed collaborative voice to our team.”
Theme 3: While Inclusion Was Discussed as a Key Practice and Not a Goal, Definitions of Inclusion Differed

In the high school setting, PHS2 mentioned, “My biggest goal is for them [new staff members] to feel a sense of belonging and inclusion over the first three days [new teacher induction].” Throughout the 3 days, PHS2 hoped to achieve a sense of the culture, kind of a who’s who in important faces and names, and then also provide them a chance to feel included and ask some questions about the things that they’re nervous about and they want some more guidance on.

Belonging—Onboarding Practices

This section discusses Research Question 3 and explores the participants’ responses to onboarding practices aligned with SDT components. The themes of engagement, welcoming, and inclusion emerged from many participants’ responses regarding their onboarding practices. While those in some settings dived deeper into belonging, all participants in all educational settings shared elements of belonging in their practices.

Theme 1: Fostering Belonging Through Engagement Was Part of Onboarding Practice

PD promoted engagement with a new staff member as soon as the recommendation to hire had been forwarded to human resources. As the director of professional learning, PD revealed how the message of creating a positive onboarding program was also promoted to building administrators. PD suggested a timeline to add new staff members to public emails “so that they start to see what happens and feel like they’re a part of the community”:

You pick up the phone and you offer the job. Typically a building administrator extends a welcome phone call to that person and then that follow up touchpoint with HR [human resources]. At the high school level, we tend to hire very early where elementary tends to
be a little bit later. So we talk about keeping that person engaged. If they are hired in March and they’re not coming in until August, how do we keep them up to date and informed and part of our community, even though they haven’t stepped foot in our building since the last time.

PHS2 referred to the mentoring program and the 14 hr of additional professional development throughout the school year after the three days of new teacher induction before the start of the school year as another form of remaining engaged with new staff members:

We have formal topics that are discussed from September through April with our new staff members; however, mentors are encouraged to stay engaged with their mentees frequently. This allows for support and ensures that any concerns are brought to our attention.

**Theme 2: Providing a Welcoming Environment as Part of Onboarding Practices Was Discussed by All Participants**

PD described the district’s strategic plan to promote an inclusive, welcoming environment once new staff members are in the building:

The whole goal of the first induction day is to have a welcoming atmosphere. We talk about we are a diverse, inclusive, equitable district and how that is a leading value for all of us. With that welcoming and inclusive attitude, we hope that trickles do.

PHS1 mentioned that during the 2022–2023 school year the motto “You Belong Here” was adopted for the new teacher induction program in her school to create a welcoming and inviting environment for new staff members:

Funny that you asked that because our theme last year for onboarding was, you belong here. We wrapped everything around that. We started with, tell us your story, who are you? We know you have a lot to contribute to our community. You are our community now. We told them, it was our hope that when they leave our onboarding, that they feel like they belong.

PMS2 described his staff’s willingness to ensure a welcoming environment prior to the start of the school year:
I can’t say enough about the school staff. I know those folks are already reaching out to these new teachers [during the summer months] and saying, “Hey, welcome aboard,” “Welcome to the team,” “Feel free to reach out to me with any questions,” “Here’s my email address.”

**Theme 3: Inclusion Was Discussed as a Key Practice; However, Definitions of Inclusion Differed**

PMS1 wanted to ensure that their onboarding practices allowed for positive relationship building and encouraged confidence and inclusion, which results in contributions by a new staff member to the learning community:

After year one, I hope that they have establishing some relationships here at Granger. That they feel confident that they know the workings of the building or who to go to get their job done. Then third, that they feel like they can contribute our building and community and they feel that they’re an integral part of that [community].

PMS1 accomplished this by setting up opportunities to promote relationship building as part of the onboarding practice:

I think right away we put a lot of time into small group [activities] with my goal of getting to know where these employees have come from? Where are they in their career or their life? Really getting to know what expertise they can bring to us. During our induction days, we really try to bring in admin a lot so that they can hear their story a little bit more. The lead teacher and I really do try to cultivate the relationship through conversation to build up our new employees to other people. We have this new staff member, and this is where they’ve come from and this is what they could help with. It’s more purposeful but also informal.

**Implications/Discussion**

For Research Question 1, I investigated whether the goals of onboarding aligned with autonomy, one of the components of SDT, by talking with those who oversaw onboarding in a single district. Generally, the data show that there were components of autonomy (building confidence, empowerment, and choice) included in their onboarding practices but not included in
their goals. These results are similar to those reported in the literature. Bauer’s (2010) study describes this model as high-potential onboarding. This means that goals and practices differ and lack culture and connection (autonomy). In order to move from high-potential onboarding to proactive and high-functioning onboarding, a formal document, or road map, that outlines the specific timeline, goals, responsibilities, and support available to new hires will help them succeed, as it spells out what they should do and what assistance they can expect (Leidner et al., 2020). Additionally, Ryan and Deci (2020) found that greater autonomy support is associated with more autonomous forms of employee motivation, which in turn mediate the effects of autonomy support on indicators of work well-being (i.e., job satisfaction, work stress, and physical symptoms of illness).

Interviews with various participants provided qualitative feedback for Research Question 2. Competence is one of the components of SDT, and the data show that there were attributes of competence in their onboarding practices; however, some of the components were part of their practices and not their goals. They all shared the goal of building competence through the use of the district’s mission and vision. Their onboarding practices supported their goal, as mentioned universally by all participants. According to Tarallo (2021), strong onboarding designs include strategies such as steeping in organizational mission, vision, and norms; clear definition of roles and responsibilities; and learning opportunities for new hires to develop essential skills and understanding (competence). Themes from the qualitative feedback regarding competence (support systems/resources and differentiation based on professional experience) were not part of participants’ onboarding goals but rather part of their practice. Kaplan and Madjar (2017) found that supporting the needs of new staff members, particularly
their competence, contributed positively to predicting self-actualization, investment, and self-exploration, and controlled motivation predicted emotional burnout.

For Research Question 3, I explored whether the goals of onboarding aligned with belonging, one of the components of SDT. Themes of engagement, welcoming environment, and inclusion surfaced. While providing a welcoming environment was a goal of onboarding for most, it was a practice for all. Engagement and inclusion were discussed as practices and not goals. Relatedness involves feelings of closeness and belonging to a social group. Without connections, self-determination is harder to achieve because an individual lacks access to help and support (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Studies have shown that new employees who feel a sense of belonging are more likely to stay with an organization for longer and perform better in their roles (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Making a conscious effort during the onboarding process to engage and include new staff members creates an inclusive work environment that fosters a sense of community and belonging.

Differences Between Levels

The study’s findings indicate notable differences in the onboarding goals between the elementary and middle school settings and the high school setting. Specifically, the data showed that the elementary and middle school educational levels had a significant focus on belonging relative to autonomy and competence as part of their onboarding goals. This emphasis on belonging was demonstrated through practices such as fostering engagement, providing a welcoming environment, and promoting inclusion. In contrast, the high school level had a more balanced approach to onboarding goals, focusing more on autonomy and competence.
For elementary and middle school settings, the goal of belonging was clearly articulated in practices, such as making new hires feel welcomed and engaged, creating an inclusive environment where building staff cultivate relationships with teachers, and valuing building mentors. The high school participants focused more on onboarding practices targeted toward building new hires’ competence, like immersing them in the district’s mission and vision; introducing them to teaching tools, computer programs, and applications; and helping them understand where to access the curriculum.

**Limitations**

As with most research, this study has several limitations. The first limitation is that this study needs to be more generalizable. Since the study only examined one school district—a suburban, Midwest district—it may not reflect other contexts, such as urban or rural districts. This suburban, Midwest K–12 district is large, occupying 46 mi² (119 km²) and consisting of 33 school sites. The size itself is a limitation since, typically, it is more challenging to implement district-wide programs in larger districts due to limited resources (staff, time, and money).

Another significant limitation of this study is the small sample size, as well as the participants. Two high school participants, two middle school participants, and one elementary participant in charge of implementing building onboarding programs may not fully represent the district’s onboarding practices and goals. Additionally, district staff did not participate in the study and could not speak to the implementation of programs. Another limitation of this study is the interviewer–interviewee relationship. Since the interviews were conducted throughout Lakewood School District, assistant principals, or those tasked with onboarding new hires, may
have biased the information gathered since I, too, work for the district. Disclosing the purpose of the study to the interviewees may have helped to ensure open and honest dialogue.

A final limitation of this study is the definition of “onboarding.” This dissertation is built on the following definition of onboarding: formal and informal practices, programs, and policies enacted or engaged in by an organization or its agents to facilitate newcomer adjustment; effective onboarding programs are considered the cornerstone of successful organizations. They not only accelerate new employees on the path to productivity but also foster a sense of belonging and commitment, laying the foundation for long-term engagement and success (Klein & Polin, 2012). Some see onboarding as beginning with recruitment and continuing through a new hire’s first couple of years, while others see onboarding as just a human resources process with which to “bring on” a new hire (Doke, 2014). The limitation here is that guiding research may not fully represent the outcome, depending on the interpretation of onboarding.

**Opportunities for Future Research**

This study has limitations as it only examines one school district, which is a suburban, Midwest district. Therefore, the results may not be applicable to other contexts, such as rural or urban settings. To address this, a replication study in different educational contexts would be useful. In the replication study, it is recommended to have multiple and consistent points of data collection, especially following participation in novice teacher onboarding.

Another recommendation for future research is to increase the study’s time frame and design it as a longitudinal, multiyear study. Extending the time frame would allow input from onboarding providers and new hires after a period of time. Creating research questions for providers and new hires would allow for the comparison of data and the perceptions that both
have about the success of a program with respect to its intent. Additionally, cross-referencing the goals and practices of the onboarding program with STD would provide additional data points.

Finally, expanding the study to include different outcomes is a significant opportunity. If studies about novice teacher onboarding occur over multiple years and in varied educational contexts, then there would be space to study multiple variables that are also related to the success of novice teachers, such as teachers’ levels of trust, perception of fit and connectedness to their districts, and psychological needs. Doing so would add to the thin, but growing, body of literature about novice teacher onboarding in K–12 education.
CHAPTER 4. PAPER 3

Employee onboarding is one of the initial chances for organizations to provide a conducive environment for individuals to familiarize themselves with their organizational contexts and work environments. A well-structured employee onboarding program, based on the best practices and literature, helps new hires adapt to their roles’ social, operational, and performance aspects. Additionally, it equips them with the skills necessary to contribute to organizations’ larger objectives (Bauer, 2010), leading to an increase in organizational socialization and reduction in uncertainty among program participants.

The aim of this study was to examine whether schools within a large Midwest suburban K–12 school district used the same theory of action in their onboarding and whether the theory of action targeted vital components of a well-evidenced theory (SDT) that aligns with decisions to remain in the profession and identify possible ways to improve the onboarding process in the district. Ultimately, this qualitative research study aims to identify actions or processes for integrating new staff members into a school. Participants from three educational settings (elementary, middle, and high school) tasked with implementing the onboarding programs for their buildings were interviewed. The research questions focused on the program goals and practices and their connection to the three pillars of SDT: autonomy, competence, and belonging.

When people become a part of a school, they want to feel like they belong; they want to feel like they are competent to fulfill the duties of the job; and they want to feel that they have freedom to adjust and enrich lessons. This is especially true for novice teachers in their initial years in the classroom. While the three settings’ goals and practices touched on aspects of SDT,
there was a significant focus on belonging above competence and autonomy from two of the three settings. Elementary and middle school participants shared the importance of fostering a belonging environment as part of the buildings’ onboarding program goals, while the high school participants shared competence building as a goal and embedded it in many of their practices. Despite these mixed results, the district provides a comprehensive onboarding program that allows novice teachers and new hires to undergo significant transformation during their novice teacher onboarding experience, taking important steps toward building a sense of organizational belonging in novice teachers while building their competence and autonomy through their practices. Moving forward, there is increased room to draw upon this study to develop more strategic interventions to meet the needs of novice teachers to reinforce their sense of belonging in this suburban, Midwest school district.

The onboarding process involves a well-structured and all-encompassing method of integrating new employees into an organization. Its primary aim is to ensure a smooth transition and that employees can successfully adapt to a company’s culture, policies, and work environment. This process involves more than just basic orientation and includes activities that help new hires acquire the job-related skills, knowledge, and socialization required for their roles. One way to ensure onboarding is effective is to ensure it is designed to achieve the goals a district/building has for it. Paper 3 draws on the literature review in Paper 1 and the empirical evidence in Paper 2 to develop a tool for self-assessment and reflection.

**Educational Settings**

This study focused on a limited sample within one of the state’s largest school districts. Notably, in the high school context, participants operated within a departmentalized structure
overseen by a department chair responsible for facilitating new staff member onboarding. Conversely, the middle school environment was organized into teams, each comprising four core subject area teachers (English language arts, math, science, and social studies). These teachers collaborated closely, sharing strategies, concerns, and support systems for individual students to ensure comprehensive student engagement. In contrast, the elementary school setting differed, with teachers responsible for teaching multiple subjects throughout the day and retaining students for the majority of the school day.

These factors bear significant importance, as teachers cater to students in varying ways. For instance, in settings like middle school, there are opportunities to discuss student concerns, progress, or engagement ideas with team members, given that teachers interact with students across multiple subject areas. It is common for elementary and middle school teachers to respond to inquiries about their teaching responsibilities by stating that they teach “students,” reflecting the holistic approach to student support and education. Conversely, high school teachers may specify subjects such as English or Spanish when asked the same question. These responses are often influenced by the educational settings and structures prevalent in each school level.

**Need for Belonging**

In the middle and elementary school settings, the organizational structure, smaller student population, and teacher load facilitate enhanced teacher collaboration, problem solving, and intervention opportunities, thereby cultivating a supportive environment for new staff members. The emphasis on inclusion promotes a sense of connectedness, as evidenced by consistent findings in qualitative data.
Conversely, the department-based structure of high schools often prioritizes autonomy and competence, frequently leaving the cultivation of belonging to mentors or department chairs. High schools typically have a considerably larger student population than schools in other educational settings, and teachers commonly handle five different course preparations encompassing various levels throughout the school day.

**Reflective Tool**

The final product of this dissertation is a reflective onboarding tool containing guiding questions (Appendix B). This reflective onboarding tool aims to engage onboarding providers with a product grounded in the theoretical framework of SDT and the empirical evidence from Paper 2 to improve the intrinsic motivation of new hires while increasing teacher retention. This tool empowers onboarding providers to reflect on, discuss, analyze, plan, implement, and evaluate their current onboarding goals and practices, ultimately leading to increased motivation, engagement, and job satisfaction. Providing district personnel responsible for implementing building onboarding with a structured framework for self-reflection engages new hires with opportunities to become intrinsically motivated, improves their overall onboarding experience, and leads to retention.

The product described below is a tool of self-reflection that asks users to systematically examine their programs using questions that draw on the literature on onboarding, SDT, and the empirical evidence from Paper 2.

The methodology used in developing the core of this tool involved conducting a thorough literature review of onboarding best practices and SDT. I then considered my qualitative data to design and develop the tool, using feedback from the onboarding providers from the three levels
(elementary, middle, and high schools) to refine the questions and ensure they are relevant and practical.

The core of the reflective tool (Step 3) incorporates self-reflection questions based on the three critical needs identified in SDT: autonomy, competence, and belonging. Ryan and Deci (2020) developed SDT, a psychological framework that centers on the aspects that drive human behavior and the factors that influence an individual’s sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The first set of questions is focused on understanding whether the onboarding builds autonomy. Autonomy is the innate desire to feel volitional, self-determined, and in control of one’s actions. It involves the sense that one’s behavior is in alignment with personal values, interests, and goals (Howard et al., 2020); autonomy-supporting activities are providing choice, acknowledging feelings and perspectives, offering rationale, encouraging initiative, minimizing control, and promoting collaborative decision making (Howard et al., 2020). The questions in this section ask about these aspects of autonomy and autonomy-supporting activities. The autonomy questions allow the onboarding providers to reflect on support systems and the positive influence on new hires’ well-being (Nie et al., 2014). Additionally, creating an engaging and autonomous environment is positively associated with intrinsic motivation, while creating a controlling environment can create a damaging effect (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

The second set of questions is focused on competence. Competence is strongly linked to the requirement of individuals to feel proficient and self-assured when dealing with their surroundings (Ryan & Deci, 2020); competence-supporting activities are providing clear expectations, offering constructive feedback, supporting autonomy in professional learning, and creating a supportive environment (Howard et al., 2020). The questions in this section ask about these aspects of competence and competence-supporting activities. The competence questions
are meant to reflect on opportunities to promote growth and support as part of the onboarding goals and practices while ensuring that a new hire can perform their job duties. Howard et al. (2020) suggest that promoting competence can lead to higher job satisfaction, engagement, and productivity.

The third set of questions focus on belonging. Belonging is the natural human inclination to establish significant and valuable connections with other individuals, to experience a feeling of social integration, and to feel a sense of belonging within interpersonal relationships and communities (Ryan & Deci, 2020); belonging-supporting encouraging collaboration, creating an inclusive environment, facilitating positive social interactions, providing emotional support and open communication, and recognizing and celebrating achievements (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The questions in this section ask about these aspects of belonging and belonging-supporting activities. On the other hand, the belonging questions are intended to inspire a higher level of value consonance and create a more supportive goal structure. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2020) found that teachers who perceive a higher level of value consonance and a more supportive goal structure in their school are more likely to feel a sense of belonging, be less exhausted, and be more satisfied with their jobs.

The findings from the study underscore the importance of achieving a harmonious equilibrium in onboarding goals and practices, encompassing the cultivation of autonomy, competence, and relatedness across various educational settings. Mentoring programs, affinity groups, and various other forms of support are available; onboarding represents just one facet of this support framework. Interestingly, among the interviewees, only one individual highlighted the presence of additional supportive measures. Notably, the results revealed an imbalance in the emphasis on competence development at the high school level, with limited attention directed
toward fostering a sense of belonging. Conversely, in elementary and middle school environments, the opposite trend was observed, with a more significant focus on creating a sense of belonging and less attention directed toward building of competence or autonomy, as indicated by the empirical results. Recognizing the strengths and areas for improvement revealed by the empirical findings and acknowledging that a holistic strategy encompassing all three factors is likely to produce more favorable results for new employees (Van den Broeck et al., 2021), it became essential to develop a tool facilitating a thorough assessment of onboarding goals and practices within the framework of a theoretical foundation.

In order to make the guiding questions most practical, the rest of the protocol in Appendix B was created to ensure proper reflection and implementation. This allows users of the protocol to identify needs and objectives, evaluate effectiveness, identify strengths and weaknesses, gauge employee engagement, assess alignment with the district’s mission and vision, and track key performance indicators. Including all stakeholders tasked with onboarding new staff members is vital, as they must reflect on, discuss, analyze, plan, implement, and evaluate the program’s goals and practices.

One unique feature of this tool is its emphasis on promoting relatedness and a sense of belonging among new hires. By helping new hires understand how their work contributes to the larger mission and purpose of the organization, the tool aims to foster a sense of meaning and purpose in their work. The study in Paper 2 revealed an imbalance between elementary and middle schools, where relatedness and belonging were a more significant focus in onboarding providers’ onboarding goals and practices, and the high school setting, which was much heavier on building competence. According to the study by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2020), teachers with a stronger sense of belonging to their school were more likely to remain in their current
positions. On the other hand, teachers who felt a weaker sense of belonging were more likely to consider leaving their schools. The study suggests that promoting a positive school climate and fostering a sense of belonging among teachers could be effective strategies for retaining teachers in schools.

This tool’s impact and potential applications are significant, as onboarding is a critical process for organizations and can significantly impact employee retention and job satisfaction. The tool’s limitations include the fact that it is designed for a specific organizational context and may not apply to all industries or types of organizations. Future work could involve adapting the tool for different contexts and evaluating its effectiveness in improving onboarding outcomes.
REFERENCES


https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/teacher-turnover-report


APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
The interviewer will ask each participant to state their name, title, and association with the school district. Background information will be gathered at the beginning of the interview, including the number of years worked or associated with the school district, educational background, and professional background. Informed consent will be collected before the recording starts. Participants will be reminded that they have the option to stop the interview at any time. Written consent will be collected before the interview begins.

Framing of the study:
School teacher onboarding is an important activity school districts and buildings engage in. The onboarding new teachers receive can shape their effectiveness, their initial experiences, and ultimately their decisions to stay in the building or district. However, we know little about how schools and districts ground their onboarding practices in relevant theory. This study will examine if schools within a single district use the same theory of action in their onboarding if the theory of action targets key components of a well-evidenced theory (self-determination theory) which aligns with decisions to remain in the profession and identify possible ways to improve the onboarding process in the district. Ultimately, this study aims to identify actions or processes for integrating new staff members into a school.

Goals of current onboarding processes/practices
- When new teachers come to a building, they usually go through a process to learn about the building, the community, the staff, etc.
  - What do you want to achieve with your onboarding processes/practices? In other words, what goals do you have for your onboarding processes?
- What three takeaways do you want new staff members to possess when completing new teacher onboarding?

Learning about the onboarding process as it exists
- What support can a new staff member expect when starting at (name of school)?
- [Probe if not mentioned] Is there a peer designated to guide the new staff member through the onboarding process?
  - What is their role?
  - What criteria are used to determine the peer/mentor?
- How does your onboarding process build the skills and knowledge that enable the teacher to be successful and maximize student learning (competence)?
- How does your onboarding process foster self-direction, capacity, and freedom?
- How does your onboarding process promote acceptance and inclusion among teachers? In other words, how does your onboarding program make teachers feel valued and an important part of the life and activity of your building?
- competence, autonomy, and belonging?
- Do you tailor your onboarding process to meet teachers with prior experience?
  - How do you provide onboarding to new staff members that start after the first day of school?
- Are new hires encouraged to facilitate extracurriculars (i.e., coaching, club moderator, etc.)?
  - What are the benefits? If not, what is the philosophy behind it?
• As you think about the processes and practices we discussed, how do they help achieve those takeaways? [ask about specifics they mentioned]
• When onboarding new staff members, do you differentiate based on experience and generational needs? Please share some examples.

Learning about how they measure the impact of onboarding processes as they exist
• New teachers are often busy with learning the ropes, figuring out what it means to be a teacher, and all the other stuff at the beginning of a new year. Sometimes onboarding can be just something a teacher has to do rather than something a teacher sees value in doing. How do you know if a teacher is receptive to the onboarding process or is just going through the motions?
  o Do you have any examples or stories about a teacher not engaging?
  o How do you measure the success of your onboarding process?
• If it appears that a new staff member is not successful in understanding the culture and climate of the school, how is that addressed?
• Do your onboarding processes contribute to teachers wanting to stay? If so, what data backs that up? If not, what data backs that up?
APPENDIX B

PROTOCOL FOR REFLECTING ON ONBOARDING PRACTICES AND GOALS
The ABCs of SDT: Intrinsic Motivation Onboarding

Step 1: Reflect

- Use this process as an opportunity to bring all stakeholders to the table to individually reflect on the current onboarding goals, practices, and areas of growth and strength.

Step 2: Discuss

- Transition to conversations regarding the group’s vision of onboarding and areas of strength and growth.

Step 3: Analyze

- Use the guiding questions from the ABCs of SDT to engage in a deeper discussion of the roles of autonomy, belonging, and competence within the onboarding goals and practices.

Autonomy

- How do we incorporate autonomy into my onboarding goals and practices, allowing new hires to control their learning and development?
- How do we encourage new hires to take ownership of their onboarding experience and set their own goals and objectives?
- What strategies do we use to provide feedback and recognition to new hires, supporting their motivation and engagement?

Belonging

- How do we promote relatedness among new hires, helping them feel connected to their colleagues and the organization?
- How do we help new hires understand how their work contributes to the larger mission and purpose of the organization, fostering a sense of meaning and purpose?
- How do we ensure that new hires are respected and valued as individuals, promoting their psychological well-being and sense of belonging?
Competence

- How do we foster competence in new hires, providing them with the resources and support to succeed in their roles?
- How do we provide opportunities for new hires to develop and grow within their roles, supporting their long-term career aspirations?
- How do we tailor our onboarding practices and goals to meet the unique needs and preferences of each individual new hire?

Step 4: Plan

- Collaborate and create an action plan using the responses from the ABCs of SDT to reflect on the onboarding goals and practices.

Step 5: Implement and evaluate

- Implement the action plan and monitor and evaluate the onboarding process with the ABCs of SDT lens.
APPENDIX C

SDT REFLECTIVE TOOL FOR ONBOARDING