

Student: [REDACTED]

Mentor: [REDACTED]

Institution: College of Education and Health Professions: University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

Classification: Senior

GPA: 4.0

Area of Study: Elementary Education: Curriculum and Instruction

Title of Project: *Investigation of K-2 Teachers' Self-Efficacy in One Rural School District*

### **Project Summary**

A 2019 study found that teacher attrition accounts for nearly 90% of annual teacher demand (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Beyond finding such trends in the relevant research, as a preservice teacher I have had similar conversations with teachers in both my practicum and student teaching placements about increased feelings of teacher inadequacy or low self-efficacy which could lead to teacher turnover. This research project serves the purpose of answering the following research question: "How do teachers in one Northwest Arkansas school district rate their self-efficacy?" The results of this study allow me to understand the extent to which teachers believe they have the capacity to affect student performance. These results can be compared to existing studies to understand if COVID-19 still has effects on teacher self-efficacy, or if a low sense of self-efficacy is attributed to other factors.

Research will be done in one rural school district with a group of K-2 teachers. These teachers will initially be given the Teachers' Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES), which allows them to rank their perceived self-efficacy in three areas: classroom management, instructional practices, and student engagement. After administering the TSES with the participants, the next step is to analyze their responses to find themes. These themes will help create follow-up questions that clarify why certain low or high responses were reported on the TSES survey. The themes and anecdotes provided by teachers can be compared to existing research to describe the beliefs of teachers in the rural Arkansas school district after COVID-19. These results may provide insight to teachers, administrators, and educator preparation programs on the demands placed on primary grade teachers in rural schools to reduce teacher attrition.

## **Background and Significance for the Research Project:**

Many areas are experiencing teacher shortages. Teacher attrition is one factor to consider when addressing the need for new teachers. Teacher attrition has increased since the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent research suggests teachers have experienced low self-efficacy and can help us understand why some teachers might be leaving the field. When questioned about this low sense of self-efficacy, some teachers suggested that these feelings stemmed from changes in education that were products of the pandemic. Soncini and Pressley conducted research regarding how teacher confidence and fulfillment in the workplace changed due to COVID-19, with Soncini finding that most teachers interviewed reported feeling “emotionally exhausted and high levels of task stress and job ambiguity” (Soncini et al., 2021, p. 494). Pressley’s study also demonstrated that many teachers have felt low self-efficacy as a result of COVID-19. Upon examining how these teachers completed the TSES subsections of instruction and engagement Pressley found average teacher efficacy scores were lower than in previous years and studies (Pressley, 2021). The results also showed that teachers who were teaching virtually during the pandemic had the lowest instructional efficacy, when compared to teachers who were either allowed to teach in-person or allowed to teach a mixture of virtual and in-person students (Pressley, 2021).

A study done by Herwin in 2021, however, gathered and studied data regarding how a group of elementary teachers adapted their instruction and took agency with high self-efficacy during the pandemic. Herwin states that because these teachers recognized a lack of student engagement during online learning, they had the self-efficacy to make changes that could mitigate this boredom (Herwin et al., 2021).

Further studies that investigated how COVID-19 affected self-efficacy found that teacher attitudes regarding the pandemic have been quite negative, likely because many teachers had no

distance education experience before the beginning of 2020 (Erten, 2022). Childs also approached the issue from the teachers' perspective, conducting a survey with two hundred and ninety-one teachers all asking the same question: "What do you wish your school leaders knew about this (wellness support) aspect of your work?" (Childs et al., 2022). According to Childs, the responses from these teachers detailed how the pandemic affected many of their students' social and emotional development, citing a greater need for mental health intervention. Among all of these teachers there seem to be three common concerns: after the emotional stress of the pandemic and being separated from social circles, there simply isn't enough access to mental health professionals and programming at schools, the services that are offered don't seem to be extensive enough, and these teachers felt a low sense of self-efficacy regarding how to deal with their students' heightened sense of social and emotional distress after returning to school from the pandemic (Childs et al., 2022).

This social emotional distress was noted by Hamilton in his research as well, citing clear, widespread impacts on students' social-emotional health, which makes instructing and engaging students more challenging (Hamilton & Gross, 2022). Although Hamilton focused on how COVID-19 affected the students specifically, his findings align with those of Childs and indicate that these added stressors on students are similarly felt by teachers (and often lower their sense of self-efficacy).

### **Methodology and Anticipated Results:**

To understand the self-efficacy of teachers, the study will focus on a group of K-2 teachers in one rural, Northwest Arkansas School District. The plan for this study is to gather a

target sample of teachers across these three grade levels including teachers who have varying years of experience. Primary grade teachers teach students how to “do school” and their current students in the 2023-2024 school year would not have had experiences with the virtual instruction and distant learning that occurred in the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years.

To determine levels of self-efficacy each teacher will complete the Teachers’ Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES), which allows them to rank their perceived self-efficacy in regards to certain scenarios on a scale of one to nine (one being that the teacher feels they can do “nothing” in the given scenario and nine being that the teacher feels they can do “a great deal” to control their classroom in the given scenario). After administering the TSES, the next step is to analyze their responses using summary statistics to identify trends. These trends will be used to create follow-up questions, which will be presented to teachers in a group interview to clarify low or high responses to items on the TSES survey. Responses to the group interview questions will be transcribed and the qualitative data will be coded to identify themes. Both quantitative and qualitative data will be used to answer the research question, “How do teachers in one Northwest Arkansas school district rate their self-efficacy?”

**Project Timeline for Research Study:**

**January 2024:** Information and consent forms will be distributed with the TSES survey.

**February 2024:** Consult with faculty member and analyze survey results for follow-up interview questions.

**March 2024:** Schedule and complete follow-up interviews. Transcribe interviews. Code qualitative data for themes. Analysis and interpretation of the data.

**April 2024:** Write a summary report on the conclusions, implications, limitations, and recommendations for the research study. Preparation and defense of research findings.

**May 2024:** Prepare conference proposals and visual poster presentation for presenting my research.

## References

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