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## Special Education Teacher Burnout: Examining the Role of Educator Preparation Programs in Prevention

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SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER BURNOUT: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF  
EDUCATOR PREPARATION PROGRAMS IN PREVENTION

Brittany L. Straub

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements of  
Doctor of Education  
Higher Education Leadership

National College of Education  
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03/24/2022

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**Date Approved**

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## **Abstract**

Teacher burnout is increasingly problematic, especially for special education teachers who have a unique set of job responsibilities. Survey and interview data was used in this phenomenological study to examine how the educator preparation program (EPP) experience and self-authorship journey of early career special education teachers impact their potential to experience burnout. Data findings regarding level of self-perceived burnout, recollections of being or not being taught stress management and coping strategies in their EPPs, recollections of the self-authorship journey, and intentions for remaining in the career are shared in this dissertation. The essence of this phenomenon can be summed up as such: individuals are going into special education because of a passion, but many special education teachers are experiencing mental health symptoms because of their career and/or are experiencing some degree of self-perceived burnout. Fortunately, the results of this study can help EPPs improve pre-service teacher preparation with the aim of improving rates of mental health distress and teacher burnout.

*Keywords:* self-authorship, educator preparation program (EPP), wellbeing, teacher self-efficacy, burnout

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This research study is dedicated to hardworking teachers everywhere, those who are currently teaching and those who are still pre-service educators ready to embark on their calling. Your work matters, and you are making a difference.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### **Introduction & Context**

According to the Indiana Department of Education 2019 Legislative Priority (2018) documentation, 35% of teachers choose to leave the education profession at some point within their first five years of teaching. Education is a demanding career and one that is often chosen for intrinsic reasons because teachers want to help students. With such high rates of burnout in Indiana, educator preparation programs (EPPs) need to be intentionally preparing pre-service teachers for a world in which they can easily become overburdened. The existing problem in most EPPs is that there is currently no such course and/or training offered to pre-service teachers. Understanding the evolution of EPPs provides context to comprehend how the research will be used. Also, the history of burnout provides background knowledge helpful to understand the research problem. Several topics will be examined throughout this chapter to provide an understanding of how this work is framed: the research problem, purpose, and importance; the theoretical framework; the research question and design; definitions of terms related to the study; and finally, a description of assumptions, limitations, and delimitations.

#### **Problem Statement**

There is a knowledge gap around special education teacher burnout and how stakeholders at various levels can do their part to combat the problem. The literature review, located in Chapter 2, discusses several themes around teacher burnout: causes of burnout, mental health symptoms resulting from burnout, the effects of burnout, and interventions for burnout. This research uses a qualitative, phenomenological approach to identify higher education curriculum improvements for EPPs to improve burnout rates. Clement (2017) wrote that all educators, administrators, and levels of educational institutions should work together to improve

the state of affairs in American education. This research responds to Clement's (2017) call to action.

Hanson (2013) interviewed a recently retired teacher; the former teacher revealed that there were many times in her career she thought she was nearing the point of burnout. She explained that changes in curriculum and different course loads each year contributed to her state of exhaustion. Hanson (2013) reflected on her findings and concluded that learning how to manage stress levels in a positive way can prevent teachers from reaching burnout.

Hanson (2013) has provided a foundation for this research by describing a connection between teacher attrition and self-efficacy. She stated that teachers should be aware of stress-reducing strategies to reduce turnover and increase self-efficacy. There are some factors that teachers cannot control such as inadequate support from school leadership and increased demands on teachers. However, improving stress management may improve self-efficacy (Hanson, 2013). Hanson (2013) also listed several suggested strategies for teachers: reflection of strengths and weaknesses, goal setting, problem-solving to change negative situations, maintaining physical fitness, and engaging in hobbies. The correlation she drew between turnover and self-efficacy relates to one of the hypotheses of this dissertation and is incorporated in Figure 1 as a mediating variable.

Although there is current research about the topic of teacher burnout, there are not many scholars who have explored how to prevent K-12 special education teacher burnout through the work of EPPs. Improving EPP curriculum so that pre-service teachers are prepared for a demanding career before even beginning their first position could potentially change teacher burnout rates. This is a unique approach to take considering most of the existing literature does not address this idea. This dissertation provides data on which to base

first steps toward achieving this goal. Understanding the perspective of K-12 special education teachers is necessary to identify what, if anything, EPPs should be doing to prepare pre-service teachers for a demanding career.

### **Purpose of the Study**

McNiff (2013) wrote that scholarly research can be a personal, a social, and an institutional contribution. This dissertation fulfills all three types of contributions. The research study has the potential to benefit individuals on a personal level; it may improve social interactions and habits in K-12 special education, and it may serve as a basis for institutional transformation at EPPs.

Unfortunately, many teachers in America experience mental illness symptoms such as stress, anxiety, and depression, which can result in teacher burnout. Clement (2017) proposed that more people should be involved in correcting this problem. He wrote, “Teacher stress may only be lowered when everyone involved in the education process recognizes the difficulties and works to relieve some of the pressures placed on teachers” (Clement, 2017, p. 135). The goal of this research is to provide an analysis that in the long term could improve the quality of life for special education teachers across America; also, teacher retention impacts student education, which is explained at a further point in this dissertation.

Is it enough to prepare pre-service teachers to deal with stressors in the education field prior to obtaining employment? Should the focus be on lifelong learning and mentoring programs after teachers begin their careers? Wittman (n.d.) explained the Forgetting Curve, which suggests individuals will forget what they are taught and not apply it later when needed. To combat this, many states offer mentoring and induction programs to offer continuous support for teachers (Indiana Department of Education, 2019). Another approach

is to consider what EPPs can do proactively to prepare pre-service teachers for the demands of education with the hope of reducing burnout.

### **Importance of the Study**

This research study can inform higher education EPP employees to better-prepare pre-service teachers. Several individuals could use the findings from this study: K-12 teachers, EPP faculty, and policymakers. According to Keys (1991), an organization following the organismic metaphor adapts and changes according to the environment. In this case, there is a need for EPPs to respond to the trends in the Indiana environment regarding teacher burnout. There are several individuals involved in the improvement of an EPP. All the faculty members at a university's Division of Education are invested in the success of the education programs.

### ***Related External Partners***

Just as higher education faculty and administrators are an important group of EPP participants, external reviewers are critical to effective assessment of the academic program. Diamond (2002) suggested that including external stakeholders is an opportunity to gain additional perspectives. Many EPPs have an established stakeholder or advisory board with one to three meetings per academic year. Regarding an action plan for integrating curriculum about stressors in education, round table discussion should take place at advisory board meetings to provide ideas for improvement.

This dissertation has practical significance as it could one day serve as a foundation for the development of a course or training program to be integrated into any EPP to prepare pre-service teachers. The course and/or training program could include curriculum about stress management, demands in education, and other relevant topics deriving from survey and interview data. While the addition to EPP curriculum would be modeled on the one Harris

(2011) designed, it would also include further research and various theories to support teacher wellness.

Special education teachers and students at the K-12 level could benefit from this research. According to Roffey (2012), strong rapport between teachers and students is important. For example, students learn more and behave better when they have a positive teacher-student relationship with their educators. Roffey (2012) also identified teacher attrition as “a major concern in the Western world” and claimed, “how teachers feel makes a difference to their ability to respond effectively to the challenges they face” (p. 8). The consequence of burnout is that these relationships are prevented from happening when teachers cannot focus on making connections with their students. In addition to Roffey’s (2012) claims, Yong and Yue (2008) also argue that overall morale can affect the educational system. Yong and Yue (2008) reported that stress in the workplace can affect the climate of a school, create lower morale, and even prevent the students from reaching educational milestones. The scholars also suggested that teacher stress can ultimately lead to more instances of teachers leaving their positions (Yong & Yue, 2008). In short, K-12 special education teacher burnout affects teachers, students, and the overall school organization, which is why those three units will be served because of the research findings. While student progress was not measured in this study, research suggests that students are indirectly benefited by teacher turnover improvements.

While it is clear that burnout has been present throughout history, there is still a need for more research surrounding this topic, especially as it relates to education. There is some existing research regarding how higher education EPPs prepare pre-service teachers for reading instruction, use of technology, classroom management, and other topics. However, the

correlation between EPPs and K-12 special education teacher burnout is limited. This connection needs to be examined further to determine if it is possible to proactively curb K-12 special education teacher burnout by an improved EPP experience.

Considering the demands in education, the symptoms of burnout, and the consequences of teacher burnout, higher education EPPs have a unique responsibility to prepare pre-service teachers. Traditionally, EPPs have served a specific purpose: 1) EPPs must abide by set standards and higher education regulations, which also includes remaining consistent with the institutional mission and focusing on the right skills to teach pre-service teachers; 2) EPPs must demonstrate evidence of success and attempts to improve areas of weakness; 3) Most importantly, EPPs must demonstrate that they are preparing pre-service teachers.

### ***The Council for the Accreditation of Education Preparation***

One set of standards that many EPPs operate under is the Council for the Accreditation of Education Preparation (CAEP) standards. CAEP is the programmatic accrediting agency for many EPPs (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, n.d.-b). The agency reviews the education programs at the institution to ensure that pre-service teachers are being prepared adequately. According to the CAEP (n.d.-b) website, being CAEP accredited allows the pre-service teachers to seek licensure or certification from the state they want to teach in after completing the education program.

The CAEP accreditation cycle requires EPPs to engage in continuous reflection and improvement to show that the program meets expectations (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, n.d.-a). The program review process is used to evaluate preparation programs for educators such as teachers, building leaders, school psychologists, reading

interventionalists, librarians, etc. The program review process is part of the CAEP partnership agreement (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, n.d.-a). According to the website, EPPs submit reports each year that indicate and describe measures related to the eight areas CAEP evaluates. Then, a self-study takes place when the institution must use the evidence collected over recent years to prove effectiveness regarding the CAEP standards. The self-study report clearly outlines and describes the evidence to the visiting team prior to the visit. A formative review is completed with that data prior to the visit at which point the visiting team is on campus for two to three days observing, investigating, and interviewing. Finally, a written report is composed and provided to the institution with a decision about programmatic accreditation (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, n.d.-a). Although there are many guidelines set by CAEP and other organizations that EPPs must follow, there is no such standard that requires learning about self-wellness.

### ***Assuring That Graduates Have the Appropriate Skills***

As previously mentioned, advisory boards serve as a viable way to gather information about what pre-service teachers need to be prepared for upon graduation. Another strategy of ensuring that graduates are prepared for their future careers takes place through interaction with cooperating teachers and other community volunteers who work with EPP pre-service teachers. Pre-service teachers are assigned a cooperating teacher from a local school at the elementary, middle, or high school level for each field placement they complete. Faculty members observe pre-service teachers in their field placement settings to evaluate them as they teach lessons to the class. Faculty members are encouraged to interact with the cooperating teachers during those observations of pre-service teachers to gather information about what the institution's Division of Education can be doing differently to prepare pre-service teachers. It is during observations of

these field placements that EPP faculty communicate with K-12 employers to learn about what skills graduates must have.

### ***Application to Higher Education***

Beyond assessing self-authorship, there are many action steps higher education professionals can take to apply the self-authorship theory to college student development efforts. These are steps to consider when improving an EPP. According to Karas et al. (n.d.), there are several recommendations for higher education institutions to ensure progress in student development. First, learning preferences should be taken into consideration. Also, practicing awareness, reflection, and understanding should be integrated into courses to increase college students' emotional intelligence. Finally, the scholars argued that participating in campus and community events improves the sense of self-belonging (Karas et al., n.d.).

According to Baxter Magolda's (1998) research findings, the four dimensions or phases of self-authorship can be integrated into the college experience with purpose. For example, "Transforming pedagogy to help students learn how to make knowledge claims (Dimension 1) and to gain confidence in constructing knowledge (Dimension 2)" is helpful for college students in their student development journey (Baxter Magolda, 1998, p. 154). Faculty members can have a part in college students' development by intentionally introducing "multiple perspectives and mutually working through the process of analyzing different views and making a decision" (Baxter Magolda, 1998, p. 154).

There are also some practices that counteract a college student's journey to self-authorship. In a traditional classroom, which is categorized by a lecture-style, *sit and get* setting, students can become authority-dependent (Baxter Magolda, 1998, p. 153). Knowing

that some practices can counteract self-authorship is important because higher education professionals cannot make the best decisions for college students if they do not understand both sides of the spectrum. Barber and King (2014) claimed that understanding the process leading toward self-authorship is what allows higher education leaders and faculty to “design learning environments” that promote this type of student development (Barber & King, 2014, p. 434).

Meszaros (2007) claimed that self-authorship takes place as college students mold themselves through a continual process of changing their values and beliefs as they experience the world. Meszaros (2007) researched the Learning Partnerships Model (LPM), which is a “theoretical context for developmental transformations and a model for implementing the teaching and learning process that fosters growth” (p. 6). The LPM framework suggests that college students develop most when they experience the curricular in tandem with the co-curricular (Meszaros, 2007, p. 12). In other words, college students thrive the most when they have influencing experiences within the classroom *and* from student life. Meszaros (2007) suggested that these “two worlds” do not always co-exist for the “whole person” to develop, and the “LPM provides a bridge or a pattern for collaboration between the two worlds” (p. 12).

The LPM suggests that “The transitions required for the journey of self-authorship takes time, energy, and guidance from a variety of dedicated educators” (p. 11). In other words, when educators help college students navigate the “two worlds” they make progress toward self-authorship. However, helping them achieve self-authorship cannot be “cultivated solely by engaging actively with the raw materials and tools of the academy or by participating in a student-centered classroom, although these are essential” (Hodge et al., n.d.). Educators must, instead, foster the holistic growth of students through integrating activities into their courses such

as the following: self-reflection, authentic curricular and co-curricular experiences, challenges, and appropriate supports (Hodge et al., n.d.).

Miami University implemented the LPM. However, the original study was conducted with white, mostly privileged, undergraduate students, so Baxter Magolda later called for more studies with diverse populations using the model (Patton et al., 2016). Miami University strategies were put in place with the following purposes: guide college students to build an internal belief system and appreciate life-long learning; engage college students in discovery activities that promote critical thinking; and create a campus that balances curricular *and* co-curricular learning opportunities (Hodge et al., n.d.). Miami University efforts are in alignment with Baxter Magolda's (1998) claims that "students must be validated as knowers and taught to construct meaning with others. Taking seriously the goal of self-authorship requires rethinking our traditional sense of teaching, learning, and authority" (p. 155). Acknowledging that traditional approaches in higher education only lead to student reliance on external authority is important to implement change and ultimately promote internal authority (Baxter Magolda, 1998). To this day, Miami University uses the LPM to "challenge learners to engage in the complex process of knowledge construction...and to share authority and expertise to mutually construct viable perspectives" (Student Affairs in Higher Education, n.d.).

Self-authorship is accomplished best when educators consider the theory as the higher education environment and strategies are created. Through intentional student development efforts and dedicated educators, college students have a better chance of achieving self-authorship, which not only helps them with academics but also sets them up for success for the rest of their lives.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This research is rooted in the theory of self-authorship. The theory is a factor in the EPP experience. The EPP experience is the independent variable in this study. Through survey and interview data, this researcher determined teachers' perceptions and recollections of their EPP experiences including self-authorship; the study also allowed for identification of what about those experiences led to teacher wellbeing and teacher self-efficacy. To understand how self-authorship influences the research, it is important to understand the history of the theory, the major tenants of the theory, and its application to higher education.

According to Baxter Magolda (1998), there are three elements that a college student gains through arriving at self-authorship. Learning to trust their internal voice, building an internal foundation, and securing internal commitments naturally develop as they become the authors of their own lives. College students learn to trust themselves when they learn more about the world around them, both professionally and personally, and begin to see they can grow as decision-makers and independent beings in that world. Building an internal foundation occurs as college students "refine their personal, internal authority in determining their beliefs, identity, and relationship" (p. 280). Finally, securing internal commitments is defined as the transition from knowing one's internal commitments to actually living them and/or acting on them (Baxter Magolda, 2008). The three elements may contribute to teacher wellbeing and teacher self-efficacy. This leads to the question, if teachers can trust themselves and feel confident in the decisions they make, will their sense of efficacy be impacted and result in a lower risk of burnout? A more detailed summary of self-authorship is included in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

### ***Result of Theory Application***

The question of self-authorship impact on wellbeing and self-efficacy and the resulting impact on burnout is grounded in theory. Critchley and Gibbs (2012) study the effects of positive psychology in schools. The article from *Educational & Child Psychology* outlines the research regarding teachers' efficacy beliefs after integrating positive psychology measures in the school building. Numerous interventions were put in place at one school while no interventions were implemented at a second school. Teachers' feelings of professional success were studied at both schools, and the findings indicated feelings of self-efficacy increased for teachers from the school in which the interventions were practiced. The article includes data relating to teachers' feelings and perceived burnout. The study was a mixed-methods approach, which provides qualitative and quantitative research. The data collected from surveys, interviews, and observations help to create a clear picture of the school community before and after interventions.

This chapter provides the information needed to move forward with the research question. Having an accurate understanding of the historical context of higher education and its role in preparing pre-service teachers is necessary to move forward with this research topic. The conceptual framework pictured in Figure 1 as well as the explanation of the self-authorship theory frames the research question. Conclusions drawn from the study have the potential to impact future generations of teachers.

### **Research Question & Research Design**

This researcher set out to answer the following research question: How do the EPP experience and self-authorship journey of early career special education teachers impact their potential to experience burnout? Phenomenological research methodology was used to learn

about and analyze a shared experience among K-12 special education teachers. Qualitative methods such as a survey and interviews were used to collect data. The population was K-12 special education teachers from one district. Through a mixture of survey and interview data, this researcher accurately measured self-perceived burnout and perceptions of EPP experiences. More information about the research design is provided in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

### **Definitions of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, educator preparation program (EPP) will refer to any collegiate program preparing pre-service teachers for the field of education. Teacher wellbeing and teacher self-efficacy are also factors in this study. Teacher wellbeing is defined as a teacher's sense of professional and personal fulfillment (McCallum et al., 2017). Teacher self-efficacy is defined as the satisfaction one feels in his or her job because of feeling a sense of accomplishment as a teacher (Hanson, 2013). Finally, this study examines teacher burnout, which is explained as a loss of motivation for one's career (Schaufeli, 2017). All terms will be defined in further detail in the third chapter of this dissertation.

### **Assumptions, Limitations, & Delimitations**

All researchers make assumptions about data. In fact, making logic-driven assumptions are necessary to analyze and understand results appropriately. Assumptions are framed through each person's own understanding of the world; they influence an individual's approach to research methodology. Although using individuality as motivation is important to some degree because it is what makes this researcher passionate about the research topic, it is also important that it does not cloud judgement. When this happens, inaccurate assumptions are made, and those inaccuracies are not productive for the research process.

One limitation to the study is the effect the COVID-19 pandemic has had on teacher burnout. Teachers of all experience-levels, grade-levels, and content areas have different perceptions of the teaching field today because of the struggles the worldwide pandemic has brought to the career. The small interview population is a delimiting factor. Although there were more survey respondents, the interviews were limited to just seven. This researcher planned to conduct six to 12 interviews depending on meeting saturation, and seven interviews proved sufficient for that purpose. Another delimiting factor is the fact that individuals from the same district were involved in this study and also that only one district was used in the study. This limited the perspectives as well as number of respondents and was carefully considered in the planning of this study.

## **Overview**

This dissertation contains five chapters. In Chapter 1 you have read about the research problem, the purpose and importance of the research, a brief overview of the theoretical framework, brief details about the research question and design, key definitions to know and understand regarding the study, an explanation of researcher assumptions, and a short description of limitations and delimitations of the study. In Chapter 2, readers will examine a review of the literature pertaining to the problem of K-12 special education teacher burnout and its relation to higher education. The literature review includes rates and reasons for burnout as well as symptoms associated with burnout. Prevention of burnout, consequences of burnout, and current efforts to help with burnout are also described in detail in the literature review. Chapter 3 contains a more detailed explanation of the research question including the conceptual framework. Readers will also learn about the chosen methodology and specific methods such as the survey tool and interview protocol. Chapter 3 also describes the

participants who were recruited and how that recruitment took place. The method for analyzing data is also described. This researcher also provides assurances about confidentiality and anonymity and describes the limitations and delimitations of the study. Also, Chapter 3 expands on how validity, reliability, and trustworthiness was ensured as well as what role the researcher's positionality had in the study. In Chapter 4, readers will learn about the survey and interview data. Finally, Chapter 5 includes a summary of findings, implications for higher education EPPs, connections to the literature, and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Review of Literature**

This literature review examines the problem of K-12 teacher burnout and its relation to higher education. While much of the literature presented in this chapter is relative to K-12 teachers with varying years of experience, many of the studies included are about beginning teachers specifically. The review will describe rates and reasons for burnout as well as address symptoms, prevention, consequences, and current efforts regarding burnout. Educator preparation programs (EPPs) are examined in depth for their role and methods in preparing K-12 teachers. Finally, an examination of teacher workload and other stressors in the K-12 setting will be included.

#### **Burnout**

Burnout was and is a threat to many professions. Margolis (2008) claimed that new teachers are especially at risk of burnout, specifically those who are in their first four to six years of teaching. Freudenberger (1989) introduced the idea of burnout in 1973. The psychologist argued that individuals working in helping professions were once known as supermen and superwomen, and with the coining of the term burnout, those old notions were being dismissed in exchange for the understanding that all humans struggle at times. He also claimed that acknowledging burnout is imperative to continue helping our students, patients, clients, and even ourselves (Freudenberger, 1989). According to Schaufeli (2017), Freudenberger used the term burnout to refer to “gradual emotional depletion, loss of motivation, and reduced commitment among volunteers of the St Mark’s Free Clinic in New York’s East Village, whom he observed as a consulting psychologist” (p. 107). The

psychologist was passionate about learning more about burnout because of his observations as well as his own experience with burnout (Schaufeli, 2017).

After Freudenberger introduced burnout in the clinical context, an academic researcher and social psychologist named Christina Maslach added to the body of research about burnout by developing “the most widely used questionnaire for assessing burnout” (Schaufeli, 2017, p. 105). Through interviewing human service workers, Maslach and her team of colleagues identified three areas of job burnout: overwhelming exhaustion, cynicism about the job, and lack of accomplishment. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was designed after identification of the three dimensions of burnout. Today it is used around the world to research burnout and has even been translated to several different languages (Maslach, 2003).

The development of the MBI paved the way for burnout research. For example, “the scientific community deemed burnout a ‘pseudoscientific’ or ‘fad’ concept and denounced it as a ‘pop psychology’, but this was soon changed after the introduction of the MBI, which triggered a wave of empirical burnout research” (Schaufeli, 2017, p. 108). In fact, from the 1980s to the 1990s, publications about burnout increased by 64%, and then they increased by 150% from the 1990s to the 2000s (Schaufeli, 2017). In the early years of its use, the MBI only measured burnout in the context of human service careers such as “health care, education, social work, psychotherapy, legal services, and law enforcement.” However, then the MBI was updated to include generalized questions in the mid-1990s (Schaufeli, 2017, p. 108).

Chang (2009) specialized in how to measure burnout. Chang (2009) conducted an extensive literature review about teacher burnout and the emotions teachers feel in the profession. The scholar studied the existing literature from the past 30 years, claiming that

emotional exhaustion is the primary element of burnout. One conclusion Chang (2009) came to was that others studied teacher burnout and the symptom of emotional exhaustion, but literature about the teachers' emotions that could lead to burnout was difficult to find. Chang (2009) argued that more studies should be conducted about the antecedent appraisals teachers make so that teachers can better understand how their emotions are triggered and how to regulate those emotions.

Chang (2009) used the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) to measure the three dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. The author explained emotional regulation and why it is helpful for teachers: "In order to help teachers in emotional management, teacher educators can focus on increasing four understandings: acknowledging that teaching is an emotional profession, identifying and reflecting on emotions and the underlying cognitive appraisals, regulating their emotions appropriately, and coping with emotions effectively" (Chang, 2009, p. 212).

### ***Rates & Reasons***

Various states struggle with teacher retention, and the reasons are growing rapidly. According to Shockman (2020), 29% of Minnesota teachers experience stress and worry and have considered leaving the education field. These results are based on a survey, which was distributed in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic when most teachers were teaching virtually rather than in person. The survey conclusions identify hybrid teaching as the most stressful because teachers struggle to design lessons for both in-person and virtual learning experiences. The added responsibility has resulted in an increase by 35% of applications for teacher retirement benefits, indicating that teachers are preparing to leave. This data reflects consequences from the COVID-19 pandemic, but it is most troubling because there was already

a teacher shortage in Minnesota (Shockman, 2020). While these statistics are just representative of one state, the teacher shortage is a national problem.

Vicarious trauma (VT) is described as a therapist's beliefs and expectations about self and others resulting from the painful and traumatic experienced shared by clients (McCann & Pearlman, 1990). While this definition refers to mental health counselors or therapists, the concept can be applied to educators working with vulnerable K-12 students as well. Students with disabilities experience Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) at higher rates than their typical peers. Lesh (2020) argued that because of that reality, special education teachers may experience VT more than their colleagues.

### *Symptoms*

Chang (2009) stated that burnout happens when an individual no longer feels energized, hopeful, and efficacious but, instead, feels exhausted, cynical, and ineffective. There is a range of symptoms related to burnout including anxiety, depression, and stress. Anxiety is associated with uncontrolled worry and may include restlessness, fatigue, irritability, and/or lack of focus (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 222). Depression is characterized by sadness, loss of hope, and or decreased interest or pleasure (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 160).

Work stress is defined as the reaction one expresses after feeling the demands of his or her job, specifically when the demands are greater than one's endurance; often, this work stress can result in physiological, psychological, and behavioral transformations (Hiebert, 1988; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Freudenberger (1974) defined work stress as the exhaustion experienced when individuals work excessively long hours and have a large workload, which can affect them mentally and physically. According to Pines and Aronson

(1988), work stress is an emotional state, which derives from physical, emotional, and psychological exhaustion. Farber (1991) argued that work burnout or work stress develops as employees struggle to balance input and output in their work and personal lives.

Freudenberger claimed that there is a connection between burnout and depression. He stated that burnout begins as a job-specific condition, but eventually the symptoms can become more pervasive as they extend to other areas of life. In many cases, burnout can lead to withdrawal, cynicism, exhaustion, health-related problems, and/or diagnosed depression (Freudenberger, 1989).

Schaufeli (2017) reiterated a possible co-existence of burnout and mental health struggles. The scholar suggested “This theory is supported by a more recent three-wave study spanning seven years, which demonstrated that high levels of burnout constitute a risk factor for the development of future depressive symptoms” (p. 117). He argued that the distinction and separation between burnout and depression is inconsistent. For example, the information from 92 studies on burnout and depression indicates that burnout and depression symptoms overlap, and the levels of burnout and depression often correlate, especially the specific symptom of exhaustion. This suggests a correlation between the two. However, the same meta-analysis suggested that burnout is job-specific, while depression can be linked to generic factors, indicating that the two conditions are distinct from one another (p. 118). The inconsistency of findings suggests that, at least for some, burnout and mental health struggles can co-exist and/or fuel one another.

### ***Teacher Burnout***

According to Bressman et al. (2018), the teaching career is known for higher turnover compared to some other careers. Ingersoll et al. (2011) identify professions such as lawyers,

architects, pharmacists, professors, etc. as occupations with lower turnover compared to K-12 teachers. One element to consider is what specifically makes education a demanding career.

Yong and Yue (2008) claimed that there are studies that support that the teaching career is one of the most stressful. The scholars also argued that teachers who are stressed for long periods of time are at risk for work burnout (Yong & Yue, 2008). According to Yong and Yue (2008), there are several reasons for teacher burnout in China. Although the location of the research was China, conclusions are transferrable to American education as well. Those reasons can be categorized into five themes: student factors, job factors, school organization factors, personal factors, and external factors. Student factors include discipline issues and motivation issues. Job factors include low salary, lack of authority, and large class sizes. School organization factors include strained interpersonal relationships, heavy workload, lack of support, time pressures, poor school culture, and poor building conditions. Personal factors include teachers' high expectations of themselves. Finally, external factors or factors that derive from outside of school include pressures from society and parents as well as budget cuts that affect staffing (Yong & Yue, 2008). It is evident that there are many factors causing stress for K-12 teachers.

According to Margolis (2008), the first four to six years of a teacher's career is a critical time when many decide to stay or leave the profession. While teacher retention is more problematic in certain areas of the United States, it is evident that the issue is growing across the country. Margolis (2008) argued that efforts to retain teachers are insufficient, which is what contributes to the growing problem of teacher attrition. Margolis (2008) stated that there are many reasons education is considered a tough career. The scholar suggested that teachers leave the profession in pursuit of more money, better benefits, and/or a greater opportunity to grow professionally. Margolis (2008) argued that teachers also desire a less stressful career

and a change of pace with less repetition in work schedule. While the research from Margolis (2008) supports that new teachers are at risk for burnout, Bressman et al. (2018) suggested that teacher attrition is a concern for beginning and veteran teachers alike.

Harmsen et al. (2018) studied causes of burnout and burnout-related symptoms. They examined the relationship between beginning teachers' perceived stress and the rates of teacher attrition. The researchers surveyed 143 beginning teachers using the Questionnaire on the Experience and Evaluation of Work-BTs (QEEW-BT), which consists of 170 questions. Participants are asked to use a Likert scale to answer questions about five identified causes of stress such as high psychological task demands, negative social factors, lack of feedback from leadership, lack of professional development opportunities, and poor relationships with students. Stress responses were also measured including discontent, tension, and negative emotions (Harmsen et al., 2018). Then qualitative data was collected through observations of beginning teachers using the International Comparative Analysis of Learning and Teaching (ICALT) observation instrument. The instrument contains 32 questions to gauge teacher behavior according to six domains: classroom climate, classroom management, instruction, student motivation, differentiation, and teaching students learning strategies. Again, a Likert scale was used, but this time, the scale was completed by experienced teachers who observed beginning teachers regarding those six domains (Harmsen et al., 2018). Through their research, Harmsen et al. (2018) were able to identify the causes of stress as well as ways in which that stress manifests for beginning teachers. Harmsen et al. (2018) concluded that there is a connection between beginning teachers' perceived negative K-12 student aspects and the tension, discontent, and other negative emotions they feel. Additionally, the scholars concluded that the negative emotions many beginning teachers feel can lead to attrition.

### *Workload & Other Stressors*

Bressman et al. (2018) argued that the education career is one of fast changes and increased stressors. They identified several contributors including increased workload, changing student populations, advances in technology, and more pressure on teachers regarding K-12 student achievement. Harmsen et al. (2018) named job demands, student disruptive behavior, negative social interactions, lack of autonomy, and poor school culture and working environment as just a few stressors in the education field. The authors studied the connection between such stressors and beginning teachers' reactions to stress, specifically attrition trends. According to Harmsen et al. (2018), job demands, student misbehavior, and negative social interactions are the largest predictors of beginning teachers' stress responses. Bennet et al. (2013) offered several potential reasons teachers experiences burnout: overwhelmed feelings about teaching, challenges with student misbehavior, and feeling isolated and without a mentor for support. Hartwick and Kang (2013) listed special needs, low student achievement, second language difficulties, and low student motivation as stressors that teachers might feel.

Tuckwiller et al. (2019) examined burnout in the context of special education teachers. The researchers studied the dual factor model of mental health in the school context. The model suggests that complete mental health is only achieved in the absence of mental illness alongside the presence of wellbeing. In other words, both are needed to have whole mental health (Tuckwiller et al., 2019). These researchers used the idea to make hypotheses about teacher wellbeing and burnout. They conducted a mixed-methods study with special education teachers in the form of interviews, focus groups, and surveys. The Workplace PERMA Profiler, was used to measure workplace wellbeing (Tuckwiller et al., 2019). The Workplace PERMA Profiler measures the five areas of wellbeing: positive emotion, engagement,

relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Kern, 2014). The Teacher's Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale was used to measure teacher efficacy. The Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) was used to measure depression, and the General Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7) instrument was used to measure anxiety (Tuckwiller et al., 2019). The researchers used the results from the mixed-methods investigation to make an "Educational Well-being Toolbox" with suggestions for individual wellbeing and characteristics of a healthy school environment (Tuckwiller et al., 2019, p. 4).

The study conducted by Tuckwiller et al. (2019) relates to theories grounded in holistic development. First, the scholars used a two-prong model for understanding teacher wellbeing, which suggests that mental health is affected by more than one factor. Another way the study embraces the holistic approach is through the conclusions made in the development of the toolbox, which included suggestions for not just the teacher but also the school leaders. The integrative theory of self-authorship is expanded on in a later section of this review of literature.

Another current stressor is the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. According to Perna (2022), teachers are stressed and overworked. The last two years during the world pandemic have added pressures to an already demanding career. Teachers who already give their time and energy to the career are now exhausted and left feeling depleted. Perna (2022) wonders how this decline is sustainable for our nation and suggestions that the public will surely begin to feel the aftermath of teacher burnout.

### ***Prevention***

Prilleltensky et al. (2016) described teacher efficacy as an important burnout prevention factor. Yong and Yue (2007) suggested two mindsets: 1) seek hope in failure and know that it is

acceptable to not be perfect; 2) see the positive in all things. They also suggested two applicable practices: 1) teachers should treat themselves properly with health in mind; 2) teachers should practice time management and prioritization (Yong & Yue, 2007). In fact, Prilleltensky et al. (2016) found that self-efficacy, a healthy lifestyle, and intentional self-care are considered protective factors. According to these scholars, when risk factors are reduced and protective factors are increased, the odds of teacher stress decreases.

Lesh (2020) recommended several self-care practices to improve life for special educators. Keeping a gratitude journal is a healthy practice because it allows teachers to reflect on what they are grateful for as well as return to those pages when they need reminding. Reflection time is necessary to not only decompress from the day but also identify what worked and did not run smoothly that day. It can be used as a mindfulness tool as well as a professional growth tool. Exercise and a proper diet are also important strategies for self-care. Lesh (2020) also recommended creating a self-directed stress management plan to be used as a tool for teacher retention, and among her final suggestions were continuing to improve pedagogical practices and celebrating accomplishments. Yong and Yue (2008) identified several areas to improve rates of teacher burnout: 1) taking a proactive attitude toward work, 2) turning work into pleasure, 3) satisfying personal requirements, 4) managing time, 5) defining role responsibilities, and 6) being open to school reform and change.

Based on their research, Harmsen et al. (2018) argued that induction programs are important for beginning teachers. Induction programs are programs that mentor and initiate new teachers to support them as they learn and grow through their first years of teaching. The Indiana Department of Education (2019) stated that induction programs improve retention rates of new and seasoned teachers and even improve student achievement. Future

examination of induction programs and how EPPs might be involved in such programs should take place.

Chang (2009) posed the question: “If classroom disruptive behavior is identified as the prominent source of teacher burnout, how does one teacher manage to survive, while the other is depleted by it?” (p. 202). This suggests that mindset can influence a teacher’s emotional reaction. Thus, a prevention strategy is practicing mindfulness and habits of mind techniques. Furthermore, Chang (2009) identified emotional regulation practices and coping strategies as prevention for burnout. To clarify, Chang (2009) distinguished a difference between proactive coping which is used in anticipation of a stressor, and reactive coping, which is used in response to existing stress. It should be noted that proactive coping is a more effective approach, according to Chang (2009).

While there are many preventative strategies for teachers, Clement (2017) claimed that reducing teacher stress and, therefore, teacher attrition is not the responsibility of just the teacher but, rather, a collective effort by multiple groups of people. Specifically, “Teacher stress may only be lowered when everyone involved in the education process recognizes the difficulties and works to relieve some of the pressures placed on teachers” (p. 135). Clement (2017) separated the responsibility to reduce teacher stress into three distinct categories. First, the scholar argued that teachers should practice the problem and solution method of identifying the stress, devising a solution to the problem, and then enacting that plan. This, however, is not always so simple, which is why Clement (2017) encouraged colleague teachers to help their peers throughout professional learning communities (PLCs), social events, and emotional support. Finally, the third group of people Clement (2017) identified as having a role in reducing teacher stress is administration. The researcher indicated that administrators should take efforts to provide

relevant and helpful professional development opportunities and create a safe and supportive working community. Prilleltensky et al. (2016) also called for a collaborative approach to influence burnout. Teachers, administrators, and teacher trainers should all be working together to improve the situation, according to the researchers.

### *Consequences*

Herman et al. (2020) purported that typically high teacher stress, when in isolation, is not a predictor of teacher and student consequences. On the other hand, teachers who report high stress in combination with low coping abilities observe negative consequences for teachers and students. The consequences of teacher burnout affect K-12 students, teachers, the community, and the field of education. According to Roffey (2012), there is value in teachers having strong rapport with their students. The K-12 students learn better and even behave better when they have a bond with their teachers. Not only does relationship building help students, but teacher wellbeing is also influenced by the connection. Roffey (2012) stated, teacher wellbeing can influence attrition. However, teachers might not always choose to leave the field when they are experiencing symptoms of burnout. Bressman et al. (2018) suggested that K-12 students may receive a lesser education as a result of teachers choosing to remain in the field even when experiencing burnout.

Yong and Yue (2008) argued that stress in the workplace can affect the climate of a school, create lower morale, and even prevent the K-12 students from reaching educational milestones. These scholars also suggested that teacher stress can ultimately lead to more instances of teachers leaving their positions (Yong & Yue, 2008). Not only does burnout lead to teacher attrition, which has negative impacts, but the effects of a teacher staying in the profession even when experiencing burnout are also negative. For example, burnout can stifle

enthusiasm and creativity. Enthusiasm and creativity are needed for teachers to effectively plan instruction. Other consequences for teachers who experience burnout include lack of focus, low self-respect, and a struggle to maintain control in class (Yong & Yue, 2008).

Teachers can experience loss of interest in work and indifference toward others when they are consumed with burnout, and these symptoms ultimately affect the students (Yong & Yue, 2008). Regarding the school organization, when teachers experience burnout, K-12 students receive a lower quality education, and faculty and staff have an overall lower morale. In fact, the salivary cortisol levels of students in classrooms with teachers experiencing burnout differ from those children in classrooms with energized teachers (Herman et al., 2020).

Although struggles with self-control, self-respect, work efficiency, and irritability are considered short-term consequences of teacher burnout, teachers can also experience long-term effects. The long-term effects may include depression, ulcers and hypertension, alcoholism, and overreaction to less significant stressful situations (Yong & Yue, 2008). Yong and Yue (2008) stated that “anger, anxiety, depression, restlessness, dejection, indifference, boredom, self-reproach, tension, disgust with life, and other negative reactions” are all signs of teacher burnout (p. 80). Ultimately, dealing with these symptoms can lead to a discontent with their career and cause teachers to struggle to devote themselves to their chosen profession (Yong & Yue, 2008). In addition to these consequences, Cancio et al. (2018) described consequences of special education teachers experiencing stress. The identified consequences are as follows: decreased sense of accomplishment, increased struggles with personal and professional relationships, difficulty with management of other responsibilities, and perhaps most detrimental, emotional exhaustion.

Michie and Cockcroft (1996) concluded that chronic stress can eventually lead to changes in the brain over time. Specifically, the hippocampus, which is the part of the brain connected with memory, degrades with prolonged exposure to stress. Through this lens, it is easy to see how this might influence teachers and students. Yong and Yue (2008) argued that burned-out teachers spend less time planning lessons, may react coldly to students, do not incorporate creativity and flexibility into the classroom, do not hold students to high standards, and suffer from mental and physical exhaustion. These consequences of burnout reduce the likelihood that teachers and K-12 students develop strong rapport, which can stifle student progress (Yong & Yue, 2008). The teacher-student bond is important, and when teachers are overextended and overwhelmed, the students also feel this burden. Also, Roffey (2012) claimed training teachers and then investing in new teachers when those teachers leave the profession is expensive for districts and communities.

Perna (2022) explains that teachers need to foster relationships with students in order to make a difference. In fact, most teachers go into the field of education with that very goal. Now, K-12 education is understaffed, and teachers are overworked. Many teachers exist in survival mode leaving little time to focus on teacher/student relationships. Perna (2022) suggests the effect is three-fold. First, he predicts that fewer young people will enter the teaching profession. After all, our younger generation is seeing a group of teachers who are stressed and will likely run away from the same career. If Perna's (2022) prediction holds true, our nation will be plagued by an ever-increasing teacher shortage. Second, fewer teachers will lead to bigger class sizes and more inexperienced teachers in the field. Perna (2022) argues that this will lead to a drop in the quality of education in America. Finally, graduation rates could be affected as a result of more students who are unengaged in school and who do not have strong relationships with

teachers (Perna, 2022). Each of these three consequences, if seen to fruition, will have disastrous effects on our students and teachers as well as the workforce in America.

Shen et al. (2015) focused on the connection between burnout and K-12 student motivation. Shen et al. (2015) studied 1,302 high school students. The students attended 20 different high schools and were from two neighboring school districts in the Midwest United States. The sample also included 33 physical education teachers. Shen et al. (2015) surveyed teachers and students. Students completed the questionnaires at the beginning of the fall semester and also at the end of that semester. Analysis of survey data suggested that “teachers’ emotional exhaustion was negatively related to students’ perceived teacher autonomy support (TAS); in turn, there was a negative relationship between teachers’ feeling of depersonalization and students’ autonomous motivation development even when controlling for inadequate TAS” (Shen et al., 2015, p. 519). The relationship between TAS and exhaustion indicated that as exhaustion went up, TAS went down and vice versa (Shen et al., 2015). The study conducted by Shen et al. (2015) serves as a justification for why more research about teacher burnout needs to take place. Specifically, teacher preparation in the context of the EPP to reduce teacher burnout should be examined, and the research by Shen et al. (2015) suggests there is a need for improvement.

### ***Current Efforts***

According to the Indiana Department of Education (2019), recruitment and retention of excellent educators is a priority, which is why there is a strong emphasis on the use of mentoring and induction (M & I) programs:

As such, the Office of Innovation is supporting districts in the development of systematic processes for new teacher mentoring and induction. M & I programs positively affect the retention of both new and experienced teachers and are proven to increase student achievement.

Teacher burnout is typically addressed through efforts made by individual states and districts. For the state of Indiana, mentoring programs have an impact on teacher retention, which suggests that mentoring can be a proactive approach (Indiana Department of Education, 2019).

Herman et al. (2020) studied how to intervene when teachers experience stress. They began by examining three existing theories: transactional theory of stress, stress mindset theory, and the prosocial classroom model. The transactional theory of stress refers to the relationship an individual has with the environment. In other words, a transaction takes place when a person perceives the environment as either positive or negative. If a negative perception, a stress reaction arises as the individual attempts to manage the challenging person-environment relationship (Lazarus, 1990). According to Crum et al. (2017), stress mindset is the belief that “an individual holds the mindset that stress has enhancing consequences for various stress-related outcomes...or holds the mindset that stress has debilitating consequences for outcomes such as performance and productivity, health and well-being, and learning and growth” (p. 380). In other words, mindset can shape an individual’s stress response in the face of tough situations. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) supported the prosocial classroom model, which states that teachers’ social-emotional competence (SEC) can influence the learning environment, teacher-student relationships, and student learning.

Herman et al. (2020) studied the three theories and integrated findings from each to design the Coping-Competence-Context (3C) Theory of Teacher Stress. The 3C Theory is a framework to guide future research about teacher stress (Herman et al., 2020). The researchers explained the three pathways to teacher stress development as well as interventions for stress. The first pathway is the coping pathway and involves teachers’ perceptions of their own coping skills (Herman et al., 2020). The second pathway is the competence pathway which

links teachers' stress levels to behavior management and other classroom practices. This pathway is very similar to the prosocial classroom model, designed by Jennings and Greenberg (2009), which suggests that as teachers experience stress, they are more likely to react in a harsh manner to their K-12 students, thus causing students to behave even more poorly and creating more stress for the teachers. The third and final pathway of the 3C Theory is context, which places emphasis on the school and education policies that lead to more teacher stress. Some of these practices include standardized testing, administrative support or lack thereof, and more.

They also wrote about the link between teacher stress and negative student and teacher outcomes. Herman et al. (2020) found that teacher stress can lead to burnout, and burnout leads to attrition, which is not good for students. They identified several areas of training that are likely to help teachers and students in the K-12 setting. Teachers should receive training in coping, stress mindset, and classroom management, which all relate to the Coping and Competence pathways of the 3C framework (Herman et al., 2020). Additionally, the scholars suggested leadership training to improve the context for teachers.

Cancio et al. (2018) focused on coping strategies for teachers. The researchers conducted surveys to determine what causes stress for special education teachers. The study involved 211 special education teachers. Among the most common reasons for stress were having large caseloads, managing multiple roles, feeling pressure for student achievement, and managing student behavior. The authors suggest that replacing special education teachers is not an easy feat, and for that reason, it is in the best interest of teachers and districts to place a high emphasis on stress-reducing strategies (Cancio et al., 2018).

Iancu et al. (2018) completed a meta-analysis to examine burnout-reducing strategies and the effectiveness of each. The researchers categorized interventions for burnout into the following: cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), mindfulness and relaxation, social-emotional skills, psychoeducational approach, social support, and professional development. They determined there are several factors in a teacher's life and workplace that dictate how effective these interventions can be. Iancu et al. (2018) gave special attention to mindfulness interventions and determined that they had more effect on exhaustion and personal accomplishment than other strategies.

Scholars at University of Miami School of Education and Human Development conducted a study with a focus group. The study was part of a larger project for the American Psychological Association (APA), which involved exploring ways to alleviate teacher stress. The participants involved in the focus groups were asked to reflect on how they feel as teachers today, specifically how it feels to be a new teacher (Prilleltensky et al., 2016). These authors described the causes of stress as personal, interpersonal, and organizational. They provided tips for induction programs, teacher preparation programs, and building administrators. The scholars also suggested training about mindfulness, professional learning communities (PLCs), classroom management, and coping skills (Prilleltensky et al., 2016). Their recommendations for EPPs are theme related, not specific, which allows for easy transfer of ideas to multiple institutions.

According to Hartwick (2007), who studied public school teachers' spiritual coping strategies, 91.5% of individuals they studied self-reported that they pray. Of that pool of teachers, 84% were convinced praying helped them cope with stressful situations related to the education career. Founded in Hartwick's (2007) earlier research, Hartwick and Kang (2013)

examined spiritual practices and the connection to reducing teacher burnout. They examined spiritual stress coping strategies for teachers. Their research was based on the idea that teacher attrition is a problem that affects the quality of education in America. These authors explained several spiritual coping strategies for teachers who have religious beliefs. Hartwick and Kang (2013) also examined how those spiritual coping strategies can be used to process stress. Among the strategies presented are prayer, meditation, and reading devotionals or scripture. Hartwick and Kang (2013) concluded that there are implications for teacher preparation and professional development opportunities.

### **Early Career Induction & Mentoring Programs**

Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) write that policies and mentorship programs can influence teacher turnover. They argue that teacher attrition for beginning teachers is greater when the teachers are underprepared and lack a mentor in the profession. In fact, the rate of turnover is two to three times higher for those who are underprepared compared to beginning teachers with adequate preparation and mentorship. Just as preparation and mentorship is important, the induction experience can impact turnover. Those who do not receive the quality induction supports leave the profession at twice the rate as beginning teachers who receive such support.

According to Ingersoll et al. (2011), teachers who receive mentoring and induction as they begin their careers have higher success in three specific areas. 1) They have a higher commitment to their career resulting in higher retention. 2) They also perform better at certain teaching practices, which directly relates to the 3) area of success which is that beginning teachers who participate in induction programs see higher student achievement. Teacher induction programs are important because teacher preparation programs do not always prepare

pre-service teachers with all the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need to be successful beginning teachers (Ingersoll et al., 2011). The induction process helps smooth that process from pre-service teacher to beginning teacher. According to Ingersoll et al. (2011), induction can include activities such as orientation gatherings, trainings, guidance, mentoring, etc.

Dimatteo (2014) studied mentoring programs for new teachers, specifically what effect mentoring programs have on new teachers. Her study focused on one specific school but is transferrable to other schools and populations. Tashkent International School has a mentoring program for teachers who have recently been hired (Dimatteo, 2014). Dimatteo (2014) used a mixed-methods approach. Eight teachers at Tashkent International School participated in the research. Dimatteo (2014) surveyed, interviewed, and observed the teachers. Results showed several areas of strength in the mentoring program such as a collaborative culture, opportunities for veteran teachers to take a leadership role, and an acceptance of a questioning/coaching practice used between mentors and new teachers (Dimatteo, 2014). Dimatteo also identified an area of improvement in the Tashkent International School mentoring program: continuous training for lead teachers to improve their understanding as mentors. Dimatteo (2014) concluded that mentoring programs are an effective way to improve teacher retention rates.

Bressman et al. (2018) argue that mentoring teachers should continue beyond just the induction phase. New and experienced teachers should continue to receive such support, and often it is the more experienced teachers who could benefit most from mentorship in order to decrease frustration, cynicism, and burnout. The scholars studied 20 experienced teachers to gather and analyze perceptions about teacher mentorship. Bressman et al. (2018) stated, “Experienced teachers have different professional development needs than those teachers new to the profession. Therefore, understanding the interests, desires and challenges veteran faculty face

pose interesting questions about how to help support a continuum” (p. 163). If the needs of beginning teachers and experienced teachers are different, then it is possible that pre-service teachers should be considered differently as well, which changes the way EPPs prepare pre-service teachers.

### **Educator Preparation Programs**

According to Ducharme et al. (n.d.), formal teacher preparation in America did not begin until the 1820s when “normal schools” were developed. During the 19th century, most states had at least one normal school to prepare teachers. Over time, normal schools have evolved. Today, one way to become a certified teacher is to complete what is called a teacher preparation program or educator preparation program (EPP). Most teachers in America, in fact approximately 80% of them, complete the traditional EPP. This option is for individuals who do not already have a bachelor’s degree, in which case they can earn their degree and teaching certificate at the same time by completing the EPP (2020 Teacher Certification, n.d.). There are other options such as Transition to Teaching (TTT) programs.

No matter the pathway, all pre-service teachers who enter an accredited program receive a purposefully planned curriculum to become quality teachers. According to Indiana Department of Education (2020), all Indiana EPPs must provide “high quality preparation for future Indiana educators” and should undergo consistent review and reporting to ensure this. To remain nationally and state accredited, Indiana EPPs are required to meet the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) national standards (Indiana Department of Education, 2020).

### ***Educator Preparation Program Curriculum***

Ingersoll et al. (2012) called teacher preparation, specifically the balance between content and pedagogy, “one of the most contentious issues in education policy” (p. 30). To address that balance, Indiana EPPs follow several sets of standards including 1) Specialty Professional Associations (SPAs); 2) Indiana Developmental Standards for Educators of Early Childhood, Elementary, and/or Secondary levels; 3) Indiana Content Standards for Educators; 4) Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Standards; and 5) Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) Standards.

SPAs must be followed to be accredited at both the national and state level. They are national subject discipline standards and pertain to each licensing area. The Indiana Developmental Standards for Educators are the pedagogy standards Indiana EPPs must follow. There are Indiana Content Standards for Educators that align with all licensable subjects. The CEC Standards are a set of national standards and specifically prepare teachers who will teach students with disabilities. Finally, the InTASC Standards are a set of national teacher pedagogy standards included in EPP programs.

Indiana EPPs are required to include social and emotional learning (SEL) in education program curriculum. Specifically, according to Indiana Code 20-28-5-26, teacher preparation programs must prepare pre-service teachers “to use evidence based trauma informed classroom instruction, including instruction in evidence based social emotional learning classroom practices that are conducive to supporting students” (LawSERVER, n.d.). While pre-service teachers must learn about SEL so that they can help K-12 students one day, it is not mandatory for pre-service teachers to *experience* SEL in an EPP for themselves in order to prepare for the workforce and their own mental health. There is a lack of mental health preparation in the higher education

standards for EPPs. The closest correlation between higher education EPP standards and stress management, coping skills, and mindfulness lies in the InTASC professional educator standards, which EPPs are aligned to. InTASC Standard 9 states that teachers should participate in “meaningful and appropriate professional learning experiences aligned with his/her own needs and the needs of the learners, school, and system” as well as know “how to use a variety of self assessment and problem-solving strategies to analyze and reflect on his/her practice and to plan for adaptations/adjustments” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013, p. 41). InTASC Standard 9 is focused on professional performance and knowledge, and while reflection and changing behavior are part of this, alignment with teacher wellbeing is a stretch.

While not necessarily about SEL in the EPP curriculum, Ingersoll et al. (2012) argued that strong pedagogical training can curb teacher attrition. Using data from the National Center for Education, the researchers studied individuals in their first year of teaching. Ingersoll et al. (2012) suggested first-year teachers are at a higher risk of leaving the profession, and they are also the population of teachers still most affected by their pre-service educational experience. After their data analysis, Ingersoll et al. (2012) concluded that the type of preparation, specifically how much pedagogical training pre-service teachers received, influenced the likelihood that teachers stayed in the profession. The scholars stated that “some features of teacher education and preparation have a strong bearing on retention of new teachers” (Ingersoll et al., 2012, p. 34).

### ***Kinds of Preparation***

In order to apply the knowledge and skills taught through EPP curriculum, pre-service teachers participate in field experiences throughout the program at most institutions. Pre-service teachers gradually become more involved beginning with an introductory-level field placement

and then moving onto more demanding field placements before finally student teaching. Through these field hours, pre-service teachers are able to practice skills and tools and reflect on their performance. Collaboration with university supervisors (from the university) and cooperating teachers (from the field placement setting) is very important during this process. The collaboration is vital in preparing pre-service teachers. Just as the field experiences are important, course content prepares pre-service teachers for the education field. However, as previously stated, the mandated course content is lacking in teacher wellbeing practices.

According to Cancio et al. (2018), much of the existing research about teacher burnout relates directly to the stressors causing burnout and not as much about the coping strategies to help prevent burnout. The authors suggested more research in this area should be conducted, which would ultimately impact EPPs by providing empirical research to support curriculum changes at the higher education level. Like the lack of research regarding coping strategies for teachers, Chang (2009) argued that there is little research on emotional regulation as it relates to burnout. Again, more research in this area would directly impact EPP curriculum decisions.

Margolis (2008) argued that providing opportunities for growth and renewal are important to counter the stress that a teacher might feel. Margolis (2008) promoted university and K-12 school collaboration. The scholar claimed that mentoring a new teacher re-energizes seasoned teachers because it gives them a chance to reflect on their own growth as teachers. The argument is that K-12 education and higher education collaboration is mutually beneficial (Margolis, 2008).

Clement (2017) stated that everyone involved in education should be part of the process. Individual teachers need to hold themselves accountable to maintaining a healthy balance between work and personal life. However, colleagues, administrators, and communities can all

support teachers (Clement, 2017). As part of the community, EPPs should embrace the idea of better preparing pre-service teachers for a demanding career.

Prilleltensky et al. (2016) argued for more time spent preparing teachers for classroom management, coping skills, mindfulness, and self-acceptance as a means to prevent burnout. Hartwick and Kang (2013) recommended that “teacher education programs should acknowledge and address spiritual coping as a way to remain resilient in the face of professional stress” (p. 182). Hartwick and Kang (2013) also stated that pre-service teachers should be required to create their own action plan for stress management, one that they can use in their careers upon obtaining their first teaching position.

Harris (2011) studied stress management coursework at the higher education level for pre-service teachers. A total of 54 Canadian institutions were examined, specifically the course descriptions for EPP courses, to determine which of them were offering stress management courses to pre-service teachers. Only five institutions were offering such a course (Harris, 2011). Harris (2011) learned that of the five institutions offering a stress management course, many of those courses were offered on just an elective basis and, therefore, were not required of pre-service teachers. The curriculum consisted largely of health and fitness as an approach to dealing with stressors. Harris (2011) suggested expanding stress management course offerings in an attempt to better prepare pre-service teachers. Harris designed a framework for a future course including course objectives, strategies to teach and practice, and how to assess the college students in the course. Future research suggestions include surveying pre-service teachers about their thoughts on such a course as well as researching stress itself in education (Harris, 2011).

Chang (2009) suggested that teachers should know how to identify stressors and recognize their own emotional reactions to those stressors. Also, learning to be proactive with

coping strategies is important for teachers (Chang, 2009). To ensure this learning takes place, Chang (2009) argued that EPPs should prioritize four areas: preparing pre-service teachers with the understanding that teaching is an emotional career, teaching pre-service teachers to recognize their own emotions and thoughts, teaching emotional regulation, and finally, teaching coping strategies.

Something EPPs should consider at this time in history is the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on teachers. According to Modan (2021), K-12 teachers are two times more likely than government employees to have difficulty adjusting to the COVID-19 demands the world is encountering at the moment. The difficulty comes with three major symptoms. 1) School employees have reported more anxiety (34%) than other government workers (29%) during the pandemic. 2) They have reported more stress (52%) than other government workers (35%) during the pandemic. 3) Finally, they have reported more burnout (52%) than other government workers (34%) during the pandemic (Modan, 2021). Even so, K-12 educators are more likely to stay in the same profession than other government employees who report they would like to change their line of work (Modan, 2021). EPPs should consider what can be done to help support K-12 teachers, especially during the pandemic when mental health symptoms are emphasized. Modan (2021) reported that some districts have chosen to adopt an uncommon approach to help address the teacher retention problem. To keep teachers, districts are choosing to invest in social-emotional support for employees as well as social-emotional professional development opportunities.

### **Self-Authorship**

Epistemology is focused on the “nature and justification of human knowledge” (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997, p. 88). Student development researchers concern themselves with how college

students build knowledge, and the act of building knowledge influences cognitive processes such as thinking and reasoning (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997, p. 88). Just as epistemology serves a part in self-authorship, interpersonal/relational development is also a factor in the theory. According to Halawah (2006), college students who were able to forge relationships with faculty members and other positive role models had an increased success rate compared to those who did not identify as having positive role models. The informal interactions and the overall school environment influenced by professors, helpers, assistants, and others can be powerful (Halawah, 2006). Finally, the psychosocial theory, which is based on social development from childhood to adulthood, is also a contributing piece in the overall picture of self-authorship. Many psychosocial researchers investigate the connection between the higher education environment and college students' natural development. To design effective learning environments to promote self-authorship, higher education professionals must take singular student development theories into account as well, which is why theories such as epistemological, interpersonal/relational, and psychosocial are relevant.

Jean Piaget's constructive-developmental perspective paved the way for understanding the integrative approach and self-authorship. The constructive-developmental perspective maintains the idea that "people construct reality by interpreting their experiences and that the ways of constructing reality evolve according to regular principles of stability and change" (Hodge et al., n.d.). In other words, individuals develop by creating rules based on experiences, applying those rules to other scenarios, and ultimately changing rules and perceptions accordingly. When defined in such simple terms, the constructive-developmental perspective mirrors the self-authorship process.

### ***Background Information about Self-Authorship Theorists***

There are several theorists who have contributed to the body of research about the integrative student development theory of self-authorship. Robert Kegan, Marcia Baxter Magolda, James Barber, Patricia King, and Peggy Meszaros are experts regarding the theory. Kegan was a Harvard University professor and developed a theory to represent the stages of maturity. He argued that “human beings naturally progress over a lifetime through as many as five distinct stages” (Turknett & Turknett, 2005, p. 1). Before retiring, Baxter Magolda, a student-development scholar, was employed at Miami University of Ohio as Professor of Educational Leadership (Faculty and Staff, n.d.-b). Barber and King have collaborated on student development research. Barber is an Assistant Professor of Education at College of William and Mary (Faculty and Staff, n.d.-a). King is a Professor of Education at University of Michigan (M Community, n.d.). Together, they have committed to informing higher education leaders about student development. Prior to her passing, Meszaros was Provost of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (In Memoriam, 2017). Before that, she was a Professor of Human Development at the institution (Meszaros, 2007). Her work was centered on self-authorship and why it is important in higher education. Collectively, the five theorists have helped define self-authorship as a theory, specifically as one that is integrative of several earlier theories.

### ***Development of Self-Authorship***

Self-authorship was developed through a combination of counter views and new research, and it has evolved over time. For example, the denouncing of the belief that singular theories best explain student development along with the acceptance of more appropriate, newer research from Kegan, Baxter Magolda, and Barber and King solidified the self-authorship theory. Kegan,

Baxter Magolda, and Barber and King's research, although separate from one another, work in tandem to define the integrative approach of self-authorship.

**Opposing Views.** Baxter Magolda (2009) referenced work from Knefelkamp, Widick, and Parker (1978). The scholars categorized student development as fitting into five different clusters: “psychosocial theories, cognitive development theories, maturity models, typology models, and person-environment interaction models” (p. 621). However, Baxter Magolda (2009) claimed that focusing on the five clusters was problematic because they are separate lines of theorizing through much of student development literature” with minimal “attention to their intersection” (p. 621). For that reason, she chose to base her research on the intersections or, in other words, the integrative approach.

**Major Tenets of the Theory.** Self-authorship is developed from several key points. Kegan's Theory of the Evolution of Consciousness, Baxter Magolda's four phases, and Barber and King's three events are the building blocks of the theory. Each tenet is an essential part of the integrative student development theory of self-authorship. The scholars have published a vast selection of research-based literature regarding the topic.

***Kegan's Theory of the Evolution of Consciousness.*** Kegan's (1994) theory is based on the ““evolution of consciousness, the personal unfolding of ways of organizing experiences that are not simply replaced as we grow but subsumed into more complex systems of mind’ (p.9)” (Patton et al., 2016, p. 356). The Theory of the Evolution of Consciousness is defined by five orders: Order 0, Order 1, Order 2 Instrumental Mind, Order 3 Socialized Mind, Order 4 Self-Authoring Mind, and Order 5 Self-Transforming Mind.

Order 0 occurs when infants survive in an “objectless world” (Kegan's Theory of Evolution of Consciousness, n.d.). This stage lasts just a short time before Order 1 begins, which

is categorized by “meaning making” when toddlers can realize that they can control their reflexes and see themselves as just a part of their surrounding environment (Kegan’s Theory of Evolution of Consciousness, n.d.). Order 2 is called the Instrumental Mind and takes place when individuals can put objects, people, or ideas into categories to form thinking and meaning. Order 3, called the Socialized Mind, is defined by more abstract thinking and “commitments to communities of people and ideas” (Kegan’s Theory of Evolution of Consciousness, n.d.). Order 4 of consciousness is called Self-Authoring Mind. This is the basis for the self-authorship theory and takes place when an individual can take responsibility for one’s own thinking and feeling about values and ideologies. Another significant part of this point in consciousness is that relationships are no longer the basis for living or how one comes to determine values. Instead, relationships “become a part of one’s world” (Kegan’s Theory of Evolution of Consciousness, n.d.). Order 5, which is called Self-Transforming Mind, is rarely reached, and when someone does accomplish this point of consciousness, it is not before the age of forty. Order 5 is characterized by individuals seeing “beyond themselves, others, and systems of which they are a part to form an understanding of how all people and systems interconnect” (Kegan’s Theory of Evolution of Consciousness, n.d.). Kegan’s Theory of Evolution of Consciousness and idea of self-authorship “has gained new life with the ongoing work of Baxter Magolda and later researchers, including Pizzolato, Torres, and the research team on the Wabash study” (Patton et al., 2016, p. 376).

***Baxter Magolda’s Four Phases.*** Baxter Magolda (1998) suggested that self-authorship progresses in four phases: Following Formulas, Crossroads, Becoming the Author of One’s Own Life, and Internal Foundation. Barber and King (2014) claimed *external authorities* are part of the first phase, as they influence what college students believe, think, and feel early in the

student development journey. The *crossroads* phase occurs when college students start to question authorities. They begin to entertain other beliefs beyond those set by external authorities. Having the confidence to direct one's own life is characterized by the "notion that one could choose how to think about one's experience" (Baxter Magolda, 1998, p. 149). In other words, college students learn to frame their own experiences. Third is the stage called Becoming the Author of One's Own Life; according to Baxter Magolda (1998), "Directing one's own life through interpreting one's own needs and reactions to external circumstances requires an identity that is not consumed by others' perceptions" (p. 151). The idea here is that college students involved in the third phase can maintain their own identity even with conflicting views of others. The final stage, according to Baxter Magolda (1998), comes when "the source of authority had shifted from external to internal" (p. 152). Fullest self-authorship occurs when college students have thought critically about the "tension between external influences and their emerging internal voice" and settled on their own "beliefs, values, identity and nature of social relations" (Barber & King, 2014, p. 434).

According to Baxter Magolda (2009), external factors are at the forefront of a college student's meaning-making at the beginning of the development journey. Then the meaning-making shifts to internal voices as they become clearer. Baxter Magolda (2009) provided an image to illustrate this process: "This balancing of agency and communion (Bakan, 1966) is an ongoing quest for young adults as they compose their own realities in connection with important others in their lives in multiple contexts" (p. 626). Bakan (1966), a researcher and writer of psychology and religion, described the coming together of self and religious ideology, and in the same way, Baxter Magolda uses Bakan's ideas to represent the mixture of external and internal influences in the self-authorship process.

*Barber and King's Three Events in the Journey to Self-Authorship.* According to Barber and King (2014), there are also three events that lead to self-authorship. First, self-authorship is promoted through the exposure to new ideas or situations that college students are not used to. Interactions with people from diverse backgrounds is also an example of this type of exposure (Barber & King, 2014, p. 440). A second event that leads to self-authorship is experiencing discomfort, and the key here is that it leads to action. Taking actions because of an uncomfortable feeling often helps college students better understand themselves and the source of discomfort (Barber & King, 2014, p. 441). Examples of such challenges are 1) choosing between two social groups, 2) being in a minority group, 3) receiving a bad grade on an assignment or exam, or 4) not feeling that he or she can effectively communicate one's thoughts in class (Barber & King, 2014). Taking action might include voicing one's opinion, making decisions about friend groups, or choosing to push forward with a tough situation (Barber & King, 2014, p. 441). Finally, the third event leading to self-authorship comes from support provided to college students from institutional structures and routines (Barber & King, 2014). Small living arrangements, involvement in a team, and other forms of comfort can provide needed structure and routine for college students, and this type of support can lead to increased instances of self-authorship (Barber & King, 2014). Keeping the three events in mind is helpful in the higher education decision-making process.

### ***Assessment Techniques***

Regarding assessment of self-authorship, there are quantitative and qualitative measures. Baxter Magolda and King (2007) used two interview strategies, which were qualitative measures of college students' self-authorship. One was the self-authorship interview, which asked students to share about topics that were important to them. The other

qualitative interview technique was a reflective conversation guide and was part of the Wabash mixed methods study (Patton et al., 2016, p. 372). Just as the interview assessments are helpful in determining students' self-authorship status, Pizzolato (2007) designed a validated, quantitative assessment called the Self-Authorship Survey (SAS) (Patton et al., 2016). Pizzolato's (2007) instrument was a 29-item questionnaire to be taken by college students in an effort to evaluate recognition of statements illustrating various types of meaning-making (Creamer, Baxter Magolda, & Yue, 2010). It contained multiple subscales such as "capacity for autonomous action, problem-solving orientation, perceptions of volitional competence, and self-regulation in challenging situations" (Patton et al., 2016, p. 372). There was also a second portion of the instrument, which was a qualitative measure. For this portion, college students were asked to write about important decisions they made, and the essays were "scored on each of three dimensions: decision-making, problem solving, and autonomy" (Patton et al., 2016, p. 372). Scholars argued that more work on a reliable, quantitative self-authorship tool should take place to examine the impact of interventions used to promote self-authorship (Creamer, Baxter Magolda, & Yue, 2010). With the need for more assessments identified, the Career Decision Making Survey (CDMS) was created by Creamer, Baxter Magolda, and Yue (Patton et al., 2016).

All the assessment techniques could fit nicely into a First-Year Experience seminar as a pre-assessment. At the other end of the college experience, the assessment tools could be utilized in a Senior Capstone course. Many higher education institutions implement both types of courses into academic programs, so assessing self-authorship growth could be easily accomplished. Through self-authorship and EPP curriculum updates designed to teach stress

management, rates of burnout may be affected. In other words, assessing self-authorship will need to occur at a later date after the programming updates.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Methodology & Study Design**

Many individuals experience symptoms of burnout as a result of the demands in special education in the K-12 setting. Hartwick and Kang (2013) wrote, “The quality of education in America is affected by the increasingly problematic teacher attrition trend” (p. 165). Hanson (2013) claimed that the growing stress and burnout teachers experience contributes to turnover rates. Reducing burnout is essential for not only practicing K-12 teachers because it improves quality of life (Schaufeli, 2017), but it is also important for K-12 students who benefit more when they have energized and happy teachers (Shen et al., 2015).

### **Research Question & Chapter Roadmap**

This study examined how the educator preparation program (EPP) experience and self-authorship journey of early career special education teachers impact their potential to experience burnout. This chapter describes the research question, conceptual framework, methodology, and data collection process. The data collection process outlines participants and data sources; specific methods; plans for analysis of data; plans for ensuring confidentiality; limitations to the study; steps to ensure validity, reliability, and trustworthiness; and positionality.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Figure 1 represents the conceptual framework for this dissertation including independent, mediating, and dependent variables. The visual should be read from left to right to view chronological order and relationships. There is one independent variable, which dictates what will happen with the dependent variable. There are also two mediating variables, which link the independent and dependent variables and help explain the relationship between

them. These mediating variables do not necessarily change the strength of the relationship between the EPP and burnout, but they do explain how the relationship exists.

**Figure 1**  
*Conceptual Framework Visual*



### ***Definitions, Variables, and Hypotheses***

The independent variable, the educator preparation program (EPP) experience, is located on the left side of Figure 1. Educator preparation programs (EPPs) are accredited, standards-based higher education programs with the mission of educating pre-service teachers (Indiana Department of Education, 2020). Therefore, the EPP experience includes not only the instruction provided in such programs but also the co-curricular offerings. This researcher hypothesizes that an individual's experience within the EPP can influence teacher wellbeing and teacher self-efficacy in his or her career. Moreover, it is possible that the EPP experience influences K-12 special education teacher burnout.

The mediating variables are teacher wellbeing and teacher self-efficacy. Teacher wellbeing is defined as a teacher's sense of fulfillment, both in the professional and personal aspects, including feeling purposeful and happy (McCallum et al., 2017). It is considered a multidimensional state of being because wellbeing encompasses many parts of an individual's life. Teacher self-efficacy is defined as job satisfaction deriving from a sense of effectiveness

and a feeling of doing a good job as a teacher (Hanson, 2013). In the visual, the mediating variables are placed between the independent and dependent variables because they explain how the relationship exists. For example, this researcher hypothesizes that the EPP experience can dictate what a pre-service teacher is exposed to and hopefully knows going into his or her career. Therefore, with tools in hand, teacher wellbeing and teacher self-efficacy can be achieved within the field of special education. Furthermore, this researcher hypothesizes that teacher wellbeing and teacher self-efficacy can reduce instances of K-12 special education teacher burnout. In other words, an individual's journey through his or her EPP may influence teacher wellbeing and teacher self-efficacy, which could determine how they are able to deal with stressors in education; ability to deal with stressors may influence burnout.

Teacher burnout, the dependent variable in this case, is defined as a psychological distress, occurring when day-to-day work stressors result in problematic symptoms (Brown & Roloff, 2011). In Figure 1, it is located the furthest to the right to indicate that what happens with burnout is a result of an individual's EPP experience. There is a predicted relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Again, the model demonstrates the hypothesis that the EPP experience can influence teacher wellbeing and teacher self-efficacy, which ultimately could influence rates of K-12 special education teacher burnout.

While not directly displayed in the visual, another factor that may influence the trend of K-12 special education teacher burnout is self-authorship. This factor is not pictured in the conceptual framework visual because it is considered a part of the EPP experience. Self-authorship is categorized as "cultivating a secure sense of self that enables interdependent relationships with others and making judgments through considering but not being consumed by others' perspectives" (Hodge et al., n.d.). Patton et al. (2016) describes self-authorship as

“holistic in that it includes epistemological/cognitive, interpersonal/relational, and intrapersonal/psychosocial dimensions of development” (p. 355). Self-authorship should be considered a background factor, a specific piece of the EPP experience, that is relevant to this study.

### **Methodology & Design Approach**

This study used a phenomenological approach, which illustrated a shared meaning about a situation or phenomenon experienced by multiple individuals. It examined teacher burnout through a survey and interviews to gain an understanding of special education teachers’ perceptions of and experiences with burnout as well as their EPP experiences prior to entering the field. While phenomenology is an appropriate methodology for understanding this distinct group of individuals, the research findings should not be generalized and applied to all teachers. Teacher burnout is most certainly impacted by the diversity of teachers including, but not limited to, factors such as: years of experience, gender, K-12 student demographics served, content specialty, grade-level taught, and district support. However, for the purposes of this study, research is focused on a select group of teachers, special education teachers in one district.

Other research methodology approaches were considered but rejected due to phenomenology research being most appropriate. For example, while narrative inquiry is certainly a way to elicit personal perspectives, the purpose of this study is to understand a widely experienced phenomenon among K-12 special education teachers. This requires the analysis to focus more on what is similar than what is different about each participant’s survey and interview responses.

## Participants, Data Sources, & Recruitment

The participants for this study were selected through convenience sampling and criterion sampling. Educators in the student teaching phase, educators serving in a long-term substitute position, and educators who were currently working on emergency permits or transition to teaching permits were not eligible for the study since they have a different set of experiences and perceptions. This disclaimer, along with the request for only teachers within their first five years, was in the original request for participation sent by the informant, which was included as Appendix A. The survey was sent out by an informant and open for a three-week window. For convenient access to one set of teachers, the survey was distributed to all special education teachers, all with varied years of experience, in one district, the name of which remains anonymous. Because most literature regarding teacher burnout is centered around the five-year attrition rate, the recruitment letter asked that only those in their first five years of teaching participate in the survey. Individuals were asked to self-select into the study if they agreed to the terms of the study and if they met the criteria: still within their first five years of teaching and fully-licensed. The reason for such criteria is because the longer a teacher is out of his or her EPP, the likelihood that the effects/impact of the program may have on the teacher's wellbeing decreases. There were some participants who opted to take the survey even though they have been teaching for more than five years because they have only been in SPED for five years or fewer. For example, one respondent has seven years total in the classroom, but she has only been teaching in SPED for three years. This researcher considered using the data since the years in SPED are fewer than five. However, after much thought, these participants were eliminated from the dataset to stay consistent with the research question, which is about how the EPP experience and the self-authorship journey of *early career* special education teachers impact their potential

to experience burnout. This researcher did not feel that a teacher with seven years of experience in education, although only three years in SPED, could be considered as early career. Since the existing literature regarding burnout refers to the first five years without limitation, all years in education as a *fully-licensed* teacher, are being counted, not just those in SPED. With that said, the key component here is that the teacher must be fully-licensed. That means an individual who taught for many years as a substitute teacher or a teacher without a license in the private sector, not having gone through an EPP yet, *could* be included in the dataset since the research study is investigating the relationship between the EPP and teacher burnout. For example, one individual had many years of experience teaching preschool. This was a non-licensed position and considered a private setting. For the purposes of this study, this individual remained in the dataset because she has only been teaching for 3 total years as a fully-licensed teacher after going through her EPP. Those three years have been exclusively in the special education setting.

Of the survey respondents in the dataset, a smaller set of interviewees were selected from those who indicated on the last question that they volunteered to be interviewed. The interviewees were chosen through criterion sampling by identifying a particular factor of importance. In this case, the aim was to include at least two special education teachers from each of the following grade bands: elementary school, middle school, and high school. Additionally, the interview population represented a variety of years taught, all within five years. Seven interviews took place. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), criterion sampling is useful for quality assurance. Criterion sampling for the interviews is also a way to ensure that multiple perspectives are being recorded.

### *Data Sources*

The study included two data sources: a survey and individual interviews. The survey was brief and contained 18 questions. It began with an explanation of the study. Then participants read the informed consent verbiage and agreement. Individuals were not permitted to move beyond that part of the survey if they did not give consent. The timeline for data collection through the survey phase was relatively short. Once sent out, it remained open for just three weeks. The eligible K-12 special education teachers were surveyed to gather information about demographics, grade-level taught, gender, details about the EPP they attended, whether they remember being taught stress management techniques and coping skills, and if they are experiencing burnout and to what degree: high, medium, or low level. The survey was formatted as mostly drop-down questions with some short answer. If a question required more discussion, it was included on the interview protocol instead. After the 18<sup>th</sup> survey question, the final portion of the survey asked for interest in participating in an interview lasting approximately 45 minutes to one hour in length.

The interviews were conducted via Zoom and were one-on-one with just the researcher and the participant. Prior to the interview, participants were asked to review the terms of the interview and sign an informed consent form, which is included as Appendix E. All interviews were recorded and transcribed via Zoom technology. Zoom was appropriate for this study as it allowed for face-to-face interaction while also ensuring distance during a world pandemic. The interviews were semi-structured and contained nine main questions with clarifying questions for each.

### *Steps in Recruitment Process*

This research was conducted in two phases: a survey and then subsequent interviews with some of the respondents. As previously mentioned, the survey link and recruitment letter were distributed via email by an informant, an administrator who is employed in the chosen school district. If a special education teacher chose not to consent to participation, he or she could exit the survey at that time, and no data was collected. This process was explained in the first portion of the survey to ensure that all special education teachers understood the terms and were assured that they have choice in the matter.

Second, personal interviews followed the survey to gather additional qualitative data. Volunteers were reviewed to identify a representative sample across grades as described previously, and a link was sent to the selected interviewees with a request to identify the best date/time out of the list of interview appointment options. Once a participant signed up, a Zoom link for the arranged date and time as well as the consent form was sent to the individual.

### **Methods: Survey & Interviews**

In the first phase of the study, this researcher surveyed special education teachers from one district. Although the survey link was sent to all special educators in the district, the number of respondents was dependent on how many of those individuals were within their first five years of teaching and chose to participate in the study. Several reminders went out during the three-week window: one week after the survey opened, two weeks after the survey opened, and two and a half weeks after the survey opened.

In the second phase of the study, this researcher interviewed seven individuals. The questions prompted the participants to self-report burnout and provide details about their experiences at their respective EPPs. In Part I of the interview, the purpose of the study was

reminded. The details of the interview process were shared including a reminder of how long it would take and the fact that the participant had the right to withdraw participation at any point during the process. This researcher also shared general interview topics to be discussed and asked if there were any questions before getting started. In Part II of the interview, questions pertaining to the research question were asked. Topics covered include self-reported burnout; symptoms of anxiety, stress, depression, and/or other health-related issues; EPP experiences; recollection of one's self-authorship journey; teacher wellbeing; teacher self-efficacy; and suggestions the participant has for EPPs. In Part III of the interview, this researcher expressed appreciation for the interviewee's participation and closed the meeting with final details about what would happen next. By the conclusion of the meeting, the interviewee understood that he or she would be sent a coded transcript for member-checking purposes and feedback. These transcripts were sent to the respective participants with a note of appreciation for their participation. In an effort to be mindful of special education teachers' lack of time, participants were also notified that there was no obligation to review the transcript but that they could certainly do so if they wanted.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis process for this study was extensive. The process required careful consideration and analysis of all survey data as well as extensive review and analysis of all interview data. Following those separate tasks, the analysis process ended with a combined analysis of the survey and interview, which follows Creswell and Poth's (2018) outlined recommendations for phenomenological research studies.

### ***Data Analysis of Survey***

This researcher analyzed survey data beginning with a report on descriptive statistics and frequencies for all items. Doing so provided a broad picture of the survey respondent population participating in the research. It served as a transition from what is already apparent about K-12 special education teacher burnout from existing literature to a focus on the specific sampling group. Second, by using ANOVA tests, relationships between the responses of various groups to some survey questions were identified. Had the response rate been higher, regression would have been helpful to determine the relationship between several stressors or other experiences K-12 special education teachers face and the dependent variable, burnout. However, regression models were eliminated from the data analysis plan due to the small dataset. JASP was used for the statistical analysis of the survey. Correlational research was used to determine if the variables had a statistical relationship between them. This was helpful in making predictions and, therefore, drawing conclusions about EPP changes to reduce teacher burnout.

### ***Data Analysis of Interviews***

A carefully designed interview protocol was used to interview the participants. Zoom transcribed the interviews, and the transcripts were coded. Analysis took place in a three-iteration process. Iteration One involved establishing codes or major themes in the transcribed data, some of which were pre-set. Some anticipated codes or thematic categories are causes of stress, strategies used, and EPP experience. Iteration Two involved identifying sub-codes relevant to the major themes. Iteration Three was the application to the dataset. In other words, final conclusions were made about the interview data regarding burnout and EPP experiences.

To help with this coding process QDA Miner Lite was used. First, this researcher created a new project in the program. Then, interview transcript PDF documents were added to the project. Next, codes were added to QDA Miner Lite. Each code was added under a broad theme in the program. Color-coding was also used to identify the different codes in the transcript. After setting up the codes and broad categories, this researcher began rereading the transcripts and assigning data to the pre-set codes. QDA Miner Lite also allowed this researcher to create coding tables, which were used in the development of Chapter 4 of this dissertation. After coding was complete, this researcher utilized the “coding retrieval” feature in the program, which identified common perceptions of teachers.

### ***Combined Analysis of Survey and Interview Data***

In the end, after the survey and interviews were analyzed, this researcher followed the recommendations of Creswell and Poth (2018) who stated that phenomenology research reports should include specific pieces: a textual description, a structural description, and a composite description. The textual description illustrates *what* was experienced by K-12 special education teachers. The structural description portrays *how* the experience happened. The composite description is a final paragraph incorporating both the textual and structural details to describe the *essence* of the phenomenon. This process is outlined in detail in Chapter 4.

### **Assurances**

Ensuring confidentiality and anonymity was vital in this research study, and efforts were taken to control for such factors. Minimizing harm to human participants was also a priority. This researcher did not discuss results of the survey or interviews with others. All notes, transcripts, recordings, codebook documents, etc. were stored on a password protected

external hard drive. Teachers often have the extra burden of feeling like it is not appropriate or accepted to talk about burnout for fear of being perceived as not liking teaching and not being effective. For this reason, confidentiality and anonymity were important to ensure trust and build each participant's comfort level. This acknowledgement was made at the beginning of each interview. Expressing this understanding also helped to reduce harm to human participants by eliminating any undue worry or stress about the process. It is not anticipated that any harm greater than those encountered in daily life will come to the participants in this research study.

### **Limitations & Delimiters**

It is important to acknowledge limitations, which are influences beyond control, and delimiters, which are the researcher's choices. A limitation to the study is the influence the COVID-19 pandemic has had on teachers' perspectives, especially thoughts about teacher burnout. The worldwide health pandemic has added pressures to teachers working in an already demanding career. The need to change teaching modalities such as in-person, blended, and online teaching has forced teachers to practice more flexibility than ever before. One delimiter of the study is the fact that research is narrowed to just one survey and seven interviews. While analysis of the survey and interview data is helpful to understand a common situation for special education teachers, it is in no way applicable to all teachers across the nation. In order to make such conclusions, a deeper, wide-spread study would need to take place.

### **Ensuring Validity, Reliability, & Trustworthiness**

It was important to consider whether the collected data measured what was intended to be measured, which was a question of validity. Reliability of the study is dependent on

whether the survey tool and interview protocol measured the concept consistently. To ensure both validity and reliability definitions of anxiety, depression, burnout, and other key terms used throughout the survey tool were provided to participants. Taking steps to prevent confusion of vocabulary ensured that all participants understood what was being asked of them and increased the likelihood that they answered with a consistent understanding of the topic. Also to establish validity and reliability, this researcher piloted the survey tool and interview protocol.

The pilot survey was sent to three individuals who have experience teaching at the K-12 level. The pilot participants were asked to take the survey and report back with an estimated time it took them to complete the questions. They were also asked to think about each question and determine if they found themselves thinking any of the following statements: *I don't understand this question. The option I want isn't available. I can't find the next section. Why is it asking about that? This makes me uncomfortable.* This researcher explained to the pilot participants that information was needed about comprehension of the survey, logic and flow, technical quality, and the process for gaining consent at the start of the survey. The interview protocol was also sent to those same three pilot participants. Although the interview was not actually conducted, the three volunteers were asked to provide feedback about the interview protocol itself. The individuals involved in the pilot run also checked for researcher bias coming through in the questions and provided feedback.

Pilot participants had some feedback. Participants reported a range from six to 13 minutes to complete the survey. One typographical error was identified. The survey questions were straightforward with pilot participants having no issues comprehending them. Regarding the interview protocol, there was one suggestion for rewording a question to prompt individuals if

they did not have a recollection of learning stress management and/or coping strategies in their EPP. The survey and interview protocol were also reviewed by this researcher's committee. The committee members had several suggestions for rewording questions to invoke rich responses and more useful data. Those changes were also made prior to using the tools for data collection.

As already described, member checking took place by sending each interview participant the coded transcript to provide an opportunity to evaluate the accuracy of the captured interview as well as the accuracy of applied codes. This researcher created an audit trail with several iterations of data analysis and application of the data to the interview questions and themes. Data was coded and recoded as a strategy to establish dependability. Being specific in the codebook about when to code something and when not to code something helped to control personal bias and assumptions that all teachers experience work-related stress. The codebook allowed this researcher to be objective during the data mining process. Some readers will see this researcher's experience in special education as bias. Although a factor in validity, this researcher was sure to use reflexivity. According to Maxwell (2013), reflexivity is the influence on the setting or participant from the researcher.

### **Researcher Positionality**

According to Bourke (2014), the perceptions of the researcher *and* participants influence research findings. An individual's identity is composed of life experiences, beliefs, and passions; the combined identities of all participants, including the researcher, affect the story that unfolds through collection of data and synthesis of such data. In this case, my holistic view of the world and those in it interconnects with my study of K-12 special education teacher burnout and the response of the educator preparation program (EPP).

My work experience in K-12 education prior to my transition to higher education shapes my research interests today. This factor in my positionality may have impacted the type of information a participant was willing to share with me; my positionality could have influenced participant vulnerability and comfort because we have a shared experience. Another factor that dictates my perception is today's society at a time when educators are experiencing more pressure now than ever. The third leg in my position is my personal past. I have a personal history with burnout and symptoms such as stress and anxiety related to my work as a special education teacher. Together, my employment experience, society, and my personal struggles shape how I view and make meaning from data. I make meaning from data through a unique lens that another researcher might not have because our experiences differ.

I arrived at my research topic, K-12 special education teacher burnout and the call to action for EPPs, in a unique way. From a very young age, I felt called to be a teacher. I have fond memories of playing "school" with my sister and cousins and enjoying it more than most. I pursued my bachelor's in secondary education and licensed in English and Mild Intervention. I was a high school mild disabilities teacher, and the phenomenon I observed while teaching in that setting was that numerous teachers experience stress, anxiety, depression, and other health-related symptoms, which can contribute to burnout. Now, as an Assistant Professor of Education, I teach courses for college students majoring in special education, elementary education, and secondary education. In fact, I teach at the very school that *made* me a teacher. Although I am no longer teaching in the K-12 setting, I still feel very connected to K-12 educators: 1) because I was one and 2) because I am now preparing pre-service teachers to begin their own careers in the K-12 setting. Together, my past professional

experience, my passion, and my current professional experience led me to believe that a problem I have observed should be solved.

Current and future research could improve the lives of teachers and K-12 students. Research surrounding the phenomenon of special education teacher burnout, strategies to reduce work-related stress, and efforts to improve coping skills and stress management skills could inform the next generation of teachers and policymakers. With any luck, rates of teacher burnout would decrease as a result of the attention to this challenge.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Data Analysis & Findings**

Several topics will be developed throughout this chapter including the findings from the study and themes deriving from the data. All findings are arranged according to the survey protocol with interview data integrated throughout. As a reminder, this study examines how the EPP experience and self-authorship journey of early career special education teachers impact their potential to experience burnout. JASP was used to calculate statistical, quantitative survey data. QDA Miner Lite was used to organize themes from the interview transcripts.

There were 33 survey respondents, and 12 were excluded for having too many years as a fully-licensed teacher while two more were excluded for not being fully-licensed yet. Out of the 19 survey respondents, 10 individuals opted not to volunteer for an interview, while nine participants agreed to move to the next phase of data collection. This researcher reached out to all nine volunteers and was able to secure interviews with seven of those individuals. Readers should note that study IDs were given to all 19 participants in the dataset. When data is paired with a specific individual in this written dissertation, the study ID given to that person will be used to maintain anonymity.

#### **Years Teaching**

The mean number of years teaching was 2.74 among those 19 participants. The minimum number of years was 0, which includes those who do not have a full year of teaching completed yet. The maximum number of years taught was five years. This information is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

*Number of Years Teaching as Fully-Licensed Teacher in K-12 Education*

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	<u>Years</u>
N	19
Mean	2.74
Std. Deviation	1.49
Minimum	0.00
Maximum	5.00

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Table 2

*Number of Individuals for Each Year Milestone*

<u>Years Teaching</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Percent</u>
0	1	5.26
1	4	21.05
2	2	10.53
3	7	36.84
4	2	10.53
5	3	15.79

The frequencies for years taught are portrayed in Table 2. The survey asked participants to identify how many years they have been teaching. Again, the individuals were not to include years as a student teacher, substitute teacher, and/or teacher on an emergency permit/transition to teaching permit.

Many participants chose to provide additional information about their teaching experience. One special education teacher indicated that she had six years of experience as an instructional assistant and two years on an emergency permit prior to beginning her full-time teaching position. This is her first year as a fully-licensed special education teacher in the district after finishing her EPP. One special education teacher provided additional details about how she taught for many years in the private, preschool setting prior to earning her teaching license in special education. For the purposes of this study, only her years as a licensed special education teacher are counted in her years of experience since the others were before her EPP completion, and she is still within those first five years. Another special education teacher indicated that she is in her third year of teaching but that this is her first year not on an emergency permit. One special education teacher wrote that he is in his fifth year of teaching but only in his second year as a fully-licensed teacher since his first three were on an emergency permit. Besides the number of years they have taught, no other respondents included additional details about their experience in education prior to becoming fully-licensed, full-time special education teachers.

### **Grade-Level**

The frequencies for grade level taught are outlined in Table 3. Individuals were to choose from the following choices in a drop-down box: elementary school (K-5), middle school (6-8), or high school (9-12). Of the 19 eligible respondents, five individuals identify as elementary school special education teachers (26.32%), six individuals identify as middle school

Table 3

*Number of Individuals Teaching at Each Grade-Level*

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Elementary School	5	26.32
Middle School	6	31.58
High School	8	42.11

Table 4

*Grade-Level and Years Taught*

<u>Grade</u>	<u>0 Years</u>	<u>1 Year</u>	<u>2 Years</u>	<u>3 Years</u>	<u>4 Years</u>	<u>5 Years</u>	<u>N</u>
Elementary School		1		2	1	1	5
Middle School		2		3		1	6
High School	1	1	2	2	1	1	8

special education teachers (31.58%), and eight individuals identify as high school special education teachers (42.11%). Table 4 shows how those teachers are spread across the five years.

Some participants chose to type in additional information about the grade-level taught. One individual reported that he teaches in a “severe special education...separate classroom” setting. Another teacher reported that she teaches in the “mild special education” setting. Someone else reported that she teaches in an “applied skills” setting. One teacher stated she teaches “Moderate Special Education (Applied Skills)” at her school. One respondent reported that she co-teaches. Finally, another participant indicated that she teaches students with moderate disabilities. The various responses indicate that not only are varying grade-levels represented in this study but also varying settings within special education.

### **Gender**

The frequencies for gender are displayed in Table 5. The participants were given a choice of Male, Female, or Prefer Not to Share from a drop-down style question. Four of the individuals included in the dataset are male (21.05%). Fourteen of the special education teachers from the dataset are female (73.68%). One individual preferred not to specify a gender (5.26%).

### **Decision to Become Special Education Teacher**

Based on the seven interviews completed, it is evident that those who were interviewed all went into special education with a passion for teaching and/or individuals with disabilities. In some cases, individuals were exposed to special education through either subbing or serving as a paraprofessional. For those who fell into this category, their interactions with special education faculty and staff and the students they serve influenced their decision to become a special education teacher. Participant 2, a first-year special education teacher, spoke of his prior

Table 5

*Number of Male and Female Teachers*

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<u>Gender</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Male	4	21.05
Female	14	73.68
Prefer Not to Share	1	5.26

---

experience as a paraprofessional and stated he “fell in love” with the special education field which makes him very “passionate” about what he does. Despite the stress, he feels connected to that passionate and states, “I still want to be here.” Participant 15 spoke of her time as a paraprofessional and expressed, “I absolutely loved it, and I was like, I want to do this all the time.” A calling and/or decision based on faith was mentioned by some interviewees. For example, one special education teacher recalls telling a family member about her calling when she was just a young child: “I told her what I wanted to do when I grow up was to be a special education teacher.” Another special education teacher expressed, “I know I’m where I belong” and stated she is “doing what God wants” her to do. Other teachers expressed a passion for teaching when they stated, “my passion is really in the classroom” and “I wouldn’t be doing anything else.”

### **Type of EPP & Additional Details**

The frequencies for educator preparation program (EPP) type are portrayed in Table 6. Survey respondents chose from a drop-down box: Traditional 4-Year Bachelor’s Program for Initial Licensure or Graduate Level Transition to Teaching Program. They could also type into a space if they believed their EPP was a type not captured in the drop-down options. Of the 19 eligible respondents, eight individuals (42.11%) indicated “Traditional 4-Year Bachelor’s Program for Initial Licensure” as the type of EPP they attended. Four individuals (21.05%) selected “Graduate Level Transition to Teaching Program” as the type of EPP they attended. There were seven individuals who chose to type a different option into the text field. Of those seven answers, two codes were identified: “Master’s Program for Initial Licensure” and “Master’s Program – Unspecified Whether Initial Licensure or Advancement Degree.” Since the survey question did not explicitly state that the individuals were to choose the EPP type

Table 6

*Type of EPP*

<u>Type</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Traditional	8	42.11
TTT	4	21.05
Master's Initial	2	10.53
Master's Unspecified	5	26.32

they attended for *initial licensure* and not what their most recent educational experience is, it is unclear whether individuals marked their highest degree. Some people might have assumed they were supposed to mark their highest degree and not how they obtained their license, which is why the fourth code had to be created. Regarding the codes deriving from the type-in field, two individuals (10.53%) obtained initial licensure through a master's program, and five respondents (26.32%) stated they have obtained a master's degree, which again, could mean initial licensure or advanced degree.

### **Self-Authorship Journey & Connection to EPP**

During each interview, self-authorship was verbally defined for participants as occurring when an individual interprets one's own experiences to come to his or her own beliefs and feelings (Hodge et al., n.d.). Interviewees were asked to look back on their EPP experience and describe their recollection of their own self-authorship journey. Furthermore, they were to consider whether their self-authorship journey was connected in any way to the EPP curriculum and/or co-curricular offerings. Each participant could identify their self-authorship journey, but only some of those individuals felt that the EPP experience fostered self-authorship. Five of the seven interviewees could connect their self-authorship journey to their EPP experience. It is important to note that if 71.43% of the interviewees, nearly three-fourths, could make this connection, then EPP faculty and leaders should be making every effort to foster this growth in students.

Study ID 2 Self-Authorship Journey: This individual was originally enrolled in a traditional, 4-year EPP. His plans for his future changed, and he decided not to finish the EPP. Instead, he was hired at a community agency to work with individuals with disabilities. Eventually he became a paraprofessional in the school setting, and through discussion with other

educators, he was encouraged to go back for teaching. He contributes his success to the encouragement he received from others in his life, and he calls it a “testament to how important encouragement from other people is in a person’s life.” He recalls being very proud of himself for picking himself up after changing course for a bit and then coming back to loving teaching and feeling called to be a teacher. He believes his thoughts, feelings, and beliefs were developed more through his experiences working with individuals with disabilities and through the encouragement of others rather than his EPP experience.

Study ID 4 Self-Authorship Journey: When asked to recall her self-authorship journey and if it took place during her years attending her EPP, she described, “All of that kind of happened in my assistant job where I kind of had a chance to figure out where I fit in this area, you know in this field” She went on to explain, “That gave me a chance to kind of identify my strengths and weaknesses, to kind of zero in on what I wanted to do with it...I think by the time I started my program...I didn’t need that.” Again, this interviewee did not identify a connection between her EPP and her self-authorship journey.

Study ID 5 Self-Authorship Journey: This individual went to a Christian university for Christian education. She believes her time there did mold her beliefs and make her firmer in her faith. However, her style of teaching and beliefs as an educator also developed through her years in the classroom so far. Regarding her students and her role as a special education teacher, she knows what is important to her, and she believes that confidence comes from experience, not necessarily something she was taught in her EPP. For the purposes of this study, this participant’s time in her first EPP majoring in Christian education is being considered impactful in her self-authorship journey. While she noted learning more from her time in the field when

compared to her recent experience in her SPED EPP, she did explain that her first EPP was helpful along this journey because she became firmer in her faith, beliefs, and thoughts.

Study ID 9 Self-Authorship Journey: This individual recalled feeling like she began her EPP experience with the feeling of urgency to just get her diploma so she could be done with the school experience. She “had to peel that back a little bit” and tell herself “You’re not here to get a paper that says you did this. You’re here to get an education so that you can do it well.” She was determined to make her education a valuable experience, and because of that she states, “that’s where a lot of my authorship came in...understanding that I will always need to be learning in order to benefit my students.” This individual also credits one of her professors with “getting to the heart of teaching.” She states that this professor taught her college students to know themselves well in order to be good teachers. This interview participant expressed that knowing your strengths and your weaknesses is important. She stated, “if it’s a strength offer it, and if it’s a weakness seek help.” She believes she came to this understanding while at her EPP and, therefore, valued the connection between EPP and self-authorship.

Study ID 12 Self-Authorship Journey: This interviewee explained that she did not develop strong relationships with her professors, but she did find support in the mentor assigned to her during her time attending the EPP. The interviewee was a substitute teacher prior to becoming a fully-licensed teacher. She states her EPP fostered her self-authorship because when she was subbing, she did not have a chance to develop relationships with students. However, when she student taught, she learned about students and specific circumstances. For example, she learned how poverty affects kids. She leaned on her mentor when she felt discouraged or disappointed. She believes she became more empathetic because of her EPP experience and working through her thoughts about teaching and students with her mentor.

Study ID 15 Self-Authorship Journey: This interview volunteer attended a traditional, 4-year program for a non-education related discipline between the ages of 18-22 years old. She believes her self-authorship journey occurred mostly during that time. With that said, she did recall a research class in her EPP that shaped how she felt about education. She had to come up with an action research proposal, and it was something she was really interested in. She stated, “I felt like...I found my footing as like an adult as like an educator as, okay, maybe I'm more than just a teacher...Maybe...I got bigger and better things to do, you know, outside the classroom.” This instance is an example of self-authorship because she felt very committed to her career. What is more is she felt the charge to make a difference in her career setting. Had it not been for that assignment, she might not have known how passionate she was about her educational research topic.

Study ID 18 Self-Authorship Journey: This individual still thinks about one education professor she had. She stated, “She was an extreme advocate for students and went above and beyond. I mean, she was obsessed with teaching and teaching well, so she gave her heart and soul into the program and was really available, but you could just tell that there was just this passion...yes, that’s formed me as a person.” This individual stated she saw her professor’s integrity and credibility, and she wanted that for herself. She stated it was her professor’s loyalty that sold her on “buying everything that she was saying.” Today, she works in a specific area of special education because her professor had such an influence in her life.

Because so many of the interviewees could connect their EPP experience to their self-authorship journey, it is critical that EPP faculty and stakeholders consider how to leverage this connection. How do EPPs foster self-authorship? What assignments, discussions, experiences, and opportunities need to take place in order to promote self-authorship? Self-authorship is

important because it allows pre-service teachers to come to a place of understanding about themselves regarding their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, which is not only beneficial in life but also in their career. EPP faculty should keep this in mind and make changes to the EPP curriculum and co-curricular experiences, especially considering the high likelihood that special education teachers will experience burnout. Perhaps, the self-authorship journey and coming to a place of confidence in oneself will help combat the increasingly problematic attrition trend.

### **Strategies Taught in EPP & Elaboration**

Survey participants were asked whether they remember being taught stress management techniques and/or coping skills in their educator preparation programs (EPPs). If yes, they were asked to elaborate. Frequencies for this question are displayed in Table 7. Of the 19 eligible respondents, only one individual indicated that she remembers being taught stress management techniques and/or coping skills in her EPP. According to her survey response, she remembers being encouraged to reach out and share what was going on in the classroom. The participant expanded on her answer by describing that “none of us do this job on our own” and that there are times when “plans for the day do not happen, and that is ok.” She learned these mindsets while at her EPP. This individual also noted that what she learned from her EPP how being mindful of student needs beyond just academic needs helps her with classroom management and planning.

### **Survey Results About Strategies Learned Other Ways**

On the ninth survey question, participants read a brief explanation about how it is possible individuals learned stress management techniques and/or coping skills in a different way other than through their EPP. If yes, they were asked to provide information about what they learned and how. Many individuals left this field blank. Other responses were coded into three

Table 7

*Stress Management/Coping Skills Taught in EPP*

<u>No/Yes</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Percent</u>
No	18	94.74
Yes	1	5.26

different categories: 1) District Class or Professional Development, 2) Prior Experience Before Fully-Licensed (Either in Education or Other Career Field), and 3) Wellness Coaches, Apps, and Tips.

### ***District Class or Professional Development***

For survey question #9, four individuals (21.05%) wrote comments that relate to a class or professional development event from the district. Collectively, they listed and/or described experiences such as orientation in their district, classes or professional learning taught through the district, and a mentorship program. Regarding the mentorship program, one individual wrote, “I did attend a mentorship program through the school district...I did learn about the cycle of new teacher burnout, and I remember an open line of communication (weekly) with my mentor teacher was one of the strategies to help.” It should be noted that this experience took place during the teacher’s years on an emergency permit and while attending her EPP. However, her answers are relative to this study because she is now teaching as a fully-licensed teacher and has finished the EPP experience.

### ***Prior Experience Before Fully-Licensed (Either in Education or Other Career Field)***

Two survey participants (10.53%) identified training or experience that occurred prior to becoming fully-licensed as being helpful to their teaching career now. In one case, the individual explained that her many years of experience in education, although not as a fully-licensed teacher, have given her some tools for stress management: “years of experience provides a lot of education to an educator.” Another individual identified his experience in the business sector as being helpful for his career as a teacher now: “Within those fields I learned techniques to help with workloads by automating as much as possible. Ensuring that collaboration and communication stays high. Making sure that time is spent with friends or

family outside of work.” He explained that he learned techniques to help with workload while in the business field. He also named collaboration, communication, and time spent with friends as essential components of managing the work/life balance.

### ***Wellness Coaches, Apps, and Tips***

Two survey respondents (10.53%) gave answers that could be categorized as wellness coaches, apps, or tips. One wrote “Health Wellness and Health Tips” while the other expressed, “I think stress management and coping skills are available from many sources (wellness coaches, apps, etc.) but it's hard to make them regular habits.”

### **Interview Discussion About Other Ways**

The conversation was continued during the interviews. Participants were asked what they have learned in other ways, which could be from district trainings or outside sources. Individuals mentioned collaboration with others and leaning on a support network can help with stress, anxiety, and depression. One participant mentioned that he has recently started giving himself permission to take help from others: “A mantra I’ve been taking myself is ‘Don’t say no to help.’” One thing being taught in this district through the new teacher mentor program is that all teachers must understand that becoming a great teacher is a growth process and that teachers are not great at everything right away. More than one teacher mentioned humor and fun as methods of dealing with work-related stress, anxiety, and depression. For example, these teachers described how they integrate fun activities into the classroom and build relationships with students to keep it light. One teacher mentioned that her principal and wellness coach encourage mediation and self-care. This same teacher expressed that she meditates on her own by using an app on her cellphone. One teacher mentioned that he has a personal goal to make it to his tenth year of teaching. At that point, he will reevaluate to determine if he wants to continue teaching.

Table 8

*Learning Stress Management/Coping Skills in Other Ways*

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<u>Grade</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Percent</u>
District	4	21.05
Prior Experience	2	10.53
Coaches, Apps, Tips	2	10.53

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He stated that this is a coping mechanism for him because he feels in control of the situation and knows that there is a point at which he can leave if he no longer feels fulfilled in his career. He stated, “The other biggest thing that’s really helped me...is I’ve given myself 10 years, so for me, mentally, I’m like, I’m going to do 10 years, and I’m going to ask myself is this still really what I want to do.” It should be noted that this individual currently feels fulfilled despite his stress and anxiety. He was the one individual who did not indicate that he has any level of burnout at all. Other strategies mentioned by the interview participants are as follows: breathing techniques, practicing yoga, disconnecting from school after hours, faith in God, etc.

Mindset appeared to be important for at least one individual. The interviewee explained, “And what I’ve really had to remind myself is that, and I actually have it written on a sticky note right on my wall here, is that comparison is the thief of joy.” The individual did not express how, when, or where this was learned. Others mentioned leaning on support to cope with stress.

- “I feel like if I had a different principal or different administrators, I probably would have an ulcer by now... I think our principal...does a phenomenal job of really understanding and listening to the special education teachers.”
- “I feel like sped. departments are closer...the relationships are closer, and so there's a lot of good support.”
- Another interviewee expressed that she has learned a helpful habit: “set boundaries that you can take care of yourself, because people say to take care of yourself but then...in the next breath they're asking you to do something that is the opposite of taking care of yourself.”

Again, the source of this knowledge and how they learned this was not expressed, although it is clear that it was not taught in their EPPs.

## Symptoms in Past or Present

The survey defined three major symptoms for respondents. They read the definitions prior to answering the related questions. Work stress was defined as the reaction one expresses after feeling the demands of his or her job, specifically when the demands are greater than one's endurance; often, this work stress can result in physiological, psychological, and behavioral transformations (Hiebert, 1988; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Anxiety was defined as a symptom associated with uncontrolled worry and may include restlessness, fatigue, irritability, and/or lack of focus (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 222). Depression was defined as being characterized by sadness, loss of hope, and or decreased interest or pleasure (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 160). For question #10, the participants were asked whether they have ever or currently experience stress, anxiety, and/or depression as a result of a career in special education. They were to check all that apply. There was also a "Not Applicable" option and a fill in the blank space to type additional symptoms. Of the three symptoms, stress was the most prevalent, followed by anxiety, and finally depression. Only two individuals from the 19 eligible respondents provided additional information in the type-in field. One offered, "I have clinical agitated depression and mild/moderate OCD. These years of teaching during Covid have truly taxed me in these areas." Another described that although she finds some parts of her career depressing (students struggling, parents giving up on kids, students having no self-value), she is not depressed as a general state. In other words, she finds things depressing but says, "I don't believe depression has happened." Response rates for stress, anxiety, and depression are included in Table 9; percentages for whether those symptoms were felt at all in the past or present are included in the table.

Table 9

*Stress, Anxiety, Depression (Experienced in Past or Present)*

	<u>N</u>	<u>Percent</u>
<u>Stress</u>		
No	0	0
Yes	19	100.00
<u>Anxiety</u>		
No	5	26.32
Yes	14	73.68
<u>Depression</u>		
No	10	52.63
Yes	9	47.37

As noted in Table 9, all 19 survey respondents (100%) marked stress as a factor. There were no individuals who did not identify this as a problematic symptom. Fourteen individuals (73.68%) checked anxiety as a symptom either in the past or present. Only five individuals (26.32%) have not experienced anxiety because of their career. Nine individuals (47.37%) checked depression as a symptom either in the past or present. Roughly the same number of participants (52.63%) indicated that depression is not a symptom they have experienced because of their career.

Survey participants were asked if there was any other information they wanted to provide or explain regarding symptoms. One special education teacher wrote, “I suffer from generalized anxiety disorder.” This individual also participated in the interview phase of the study and was very honest about the diagnosis and what that feels like. Another special education teacher noted that the “stress makes it hard to focus and remember things and sometimes leads to mistakes, which just take more time.” Some physical symptoms were listed in the survey responses: “Just feeling tense,” “Difficulty sleeping,” and “tightness in chest, digestive problems, anxiety attacks” (collective responses from several individuals). Another teacher listed physical and mental symptoms in the survey submission: “Grey hair. Loss of sleep. Loss of appetite. Loss of motivation. Loss or empathy.”

### ***Work-Related Symptoms Shared in Interviews***

A theme was identified as the interviews were conducted: the decline in mental, emotional, and physical health. One individual described the feeling of being in “fight or flight” mode all the time. Another mentioned feeling like she was “winging it on a wing and a prayer” because she feels so overwhelmed and unsure of how to do certain job responsibilities. More than one individual from the interview pool mentioned having either generalized anxiety disorder

or obsessive-compulsive disorder. One interview participant explained that she feels “cranky” at home toward her husband and sleeps a lot. Another teacher described a recent situation when she was talking with five to six other teachers. Some were special education teachers, and others were general education teachers. She described, “For some reason, anxiety came up as a conversation, and all but one of us are on anxiety meds and have been for a while.” While there is no proof that these symptoms are caused *only* from work, the interviewees did volunteer this information when asked about work-related symptoms.

### **Frequency of Stress, Anxiety, and Depression in Last Month**

Survey questions #11-13 asked the participants to consider the last month leading up to the survey. They were to rate their symptoms on a Likert scale. The question presented is as follows: In the last month, how often have you experienced stress as a result of your career? This same question was repeated for anxiety and then depression. The participants selected one of the following: 0-Never, 1-Almost Never, 2-Sometimes, 3-Fairly Often, or 4-Very Often.

The difference between survey question #10 and survey questions #11-13 is that the first asked whether the symptom had been experienced *at all* in the past or the present while the latter questions ask the participants to rate those symptoms but only in the last month. Table 10 shows descriptive data for these responses. Again, stress was the most noted symptom followed by anxiety and then depression.

Four participants (21.05%) marked that they have experienced stress sometimes in the last month. Five individuals (26.32%) marked that they have experienced stress fairly often in the last month. Ten respondents (52.63%) marked that they have experienced stress very often

Table 10

*Frequency of Stress, Anxiety, and Depression on Likert Scale*

	<u>Stress Frequency</u>	<u>Anxiety Frequency</u>	<u>Depression Frequency</u>
Mean	3.32	2.47	0.95
Std. Deviation	0.82	1.47	1.13
Minimum	2.00	0.00	0.00
Maximum	4.00	4.00	4.00

Table 11

*Stress on Likert Scale and Number of Individuals for Each Rating*

	<u>N</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Sometimes	4	21.05
Fairly Often	5	26.32
Very Often	10	52.63

in the last month. No participants marked that they have never or almost never experienced stress in the past month.

As indicated in Table 12, two individuals (10.53%) marked that they have never experienced anxiety in the past month. Four participants (21.05%) marked that they have experienced anxiety almost never in the last month. Three people (15.79%) marked that they have experienced anxiety sometimes in the last month. Three others (15.79%) marked that they have experienced anxiety fairly often in the last month. Seven respondents (36.84%) marked that they have experienced anxiety very often in the last month. There is some discrepancy between question #10 and question #12. For example, 14 individuals (73.68%) stated in question #10 that they have at one point or currently experience anxiety as a result of their career, which left five individuals (26.32%) who have never experienced anxiety because of teaching. This does not align with question #12 where only two individuals (10.53%) said they have not experienced anxiety at all in the last month. This number does not necessarily have to match because it is possible that some individuals believe they have not experienced the symptom in the last month even though they have experienced it at one time. However, the fact that the percentage for question #10 is larger than the lack of anxiety in the last month indicates there is a misunderstanding or mistake in participants' responses from one question to the next. Both question #10 and question #12 include the verbiage "as a result of your career" in them. Therefore, it is not probable that a participant would have considered their anxiety experienced for other reasons unrelated to teaching.

Nine individuals (47.37%) marked that they have not experienced depression at all in the last month because of their career. Four people (21.05%) marked that they almost never experienced depression in the last month. Five participants (26.32%) marked their frequency of

Table 12

*Anxiety on Likert Scale and Number of Individuals for Each Rating*

	<u>N</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Never	2	10.53
Almost Never	4	21.05
Sometimes	3	15.79
Fairly Often	3	15.79
Very Often	7	36.84

Table 13

*Depression on Likert Scale and Number of Individuals for Each Rating*

	<u>N</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Never	9	47.37
Almost Never	4	21.05
Sometimes	5	26.32
Fairly Often	0	0.00
Very Often	1	5.26

depression in the last month as sometimes. No participants marked that they experienced depression fairly often in the last month. One individual (5.26%) marked depression as being felt very often in the past month. Again, there is some discrepancy between question #10 and question #13. For example, although 10 individuals stated they have never experienced depression because of their career, either currently or in the past, only nine of the eligible respondents indicated that they have not experienced depression at some point in the past month. Since the latter number was smaller, there must have been a misunderstanding or mistake in some participants' responses from one question to the next. Again, the questions both used the verbiage "as a result of your career" to probe respondents to think only of depression experienced because of their career in special education.

### ***Gender and Frequency of Symptoms***

Survey participants identified their gender. While one individual chose not to share, the remaining 18 participants were separated into a male or female group. A T-Test was conducted to determine if there is a statistical difference among males and females and their rankings of stress, anxiety, and depression. Again, survey questions #11-13 asked individuals to consider the most recent month of time and rate their stress/anxiety/depression experienced as a result of their career. They chose from the following options: 0-never, 1-almost never, 2-sometimes, 3-fairly often, and 4-often.

Regarding stress, there was no statistically significant difference of gender,  $t(16) = -0.73$ ,  $p = 0.46$ . Although the mean for men (3.00) and the mean for women (3.36) are not identical, the T-Test shows they are not statistically significantly different. Regarding anxiety, although different means for men (3.00) and women (2.43), there was no statistically significant difference of gender,  $t(16) = 0.68$ ,  $p = 0.51$ . Regarding depression, again even with the different means for

Table 14  
*T-Test for Gender and Symptoms*

	<u>t</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>p</u>
Stress	-0.73	16	0.46
Anxiety	0.68	16	0.51
Depression	1.00	16	0.33 <sup>a</sup>

Table 15

*Gender and Mean Scores for Symptoms*

	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>N</u>
<u>Stress</u>			
Male	3.00	1.16	4
Female	3.36	0.75	14
<u>Anxiety</u>			
Male	3.00	1.41	4
Female	2.43	1.51	14
<u>Depression</u>			
Male	1.50	1.92	4
Female	0.86	0.23	14

men (1.50) and women (0.86), there was no statistically significant difference of gender,  $t(16) = 1.00$ ,  $p = 0.33^a$ . In other words, men and women in the dataset experienced stress, anxiety, and depression with no notable statistically significant differences, meaning regardless of gender special education teachers in the first five years feel similarly about the three main mental health symptoms identified for them.

### **Causes of Symptoms**

Survey question #14 asked participants to explain the cause of the symptoms if applicable. The data was coded into four categories: 1) workload, 2) lack of support, 3) extra stress, 4) combination of two or more factors. It was not possible to code all responses because most responses indicated a combination of two or more factors. Six individuals (31.58%) identified workload as the only cause of work-related symptoms like stress, anxiety, or depression. One person (5.26%) noted lack of support as the cause of symptoms. One individual (5.26%) described that the symptoms were caused by extra stress. Because no other information was provided, it is unclear what the extra stress is. Nine respondents (47.37%) described more than one factor as the cause of symptoms. Table 16 shows the frequencies for causes of symptoms.

Regarding workload, one individual wrote about not having “enough hours in the day to complete things for work.” One teacher wrote that the “workload of co-teaching and managing a caseload at the same time” causes stress. She explained in writing: “I love both parts of the job, but it's like trying to do 2 full-time jobs. As a result, I spend lots of my own time working on IEPs or class preparation and don't feel like I can really excel at either because of always being pulled in multiple directions.” On that same note, one participant identified “special education requirements and teaching at the same time” as a cause of symptoms. Others wrote they have

Table 16

*Cause of Symptoms and Number of Individuals Naming Each Cause*

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Workload	6	31.58
Lack of Support	1	5.26
Extra Stress	1	5.26
Combination of Two or More	9	47.37

“too much paperwork” and get overwhelmed with “Annual Case Conferences...and getting them scheduled with parents.” Another teacher included in the survey that she gets stressed because of “increased expectations of planning and documenting.” She explained, “Time can only be spent once so sometimes frantic multi-tasking causes stress and anxiety. The feeling like I have to do it all is often aggravated by the compulsion disorder.”

Several individuals typed into the survey multiple factors as the causes of work-related, problematic symptoms. As noted in the quotations below, common themes include COVID-19, lack of support from administration, feeling overworked, etc.

- “Being a first-year teacher, I am learning a lot about what needs to be done...unclear expectations...I have a student who is aggressive...worry about the safety of our students and staff. I have a student who is gaining services from DCS...”
- “Behavior issues from students and paperwork from so many students on my caseload.”
- “Workload and not enough time, worry about students’ wellbeing, worry about money and time off. COVID!”
- “Salary, workload, expectations, helping in the building”
- “Excessive workload, student behavior, Covid culture”
- “Over demanding workload, with very little training, unrealistic expectations, and over complicating (creating more unnecessary work) with the way we are supposed to complete things; placing emphasis on stuff that should not matter, while downplaying important stuff that should.”
- “The biggest cause is adapting to new concepts due to Covid...We are often lumped in with general education teachers even though we teach different standards and are

expected to implement what they are doing...Additionally, parent lack of involvement or over-involvement is a struggle.”

- “Unrealistic expectations, a lack of time to complete work related tasks, work/life balance”
- “Not enough support from Administration or the surrounding Community. Low pay with an expectation of having to do work outside of work hours and no pay for that extra time necessary to complete the job effectively.”

Like the survey, the interviews also revealed several common job-related causes for stress, anxiety, and depression. Large caseloads and class sizes are a concern for special education teachers. The amount of juggling because of the many job responsibilities causes symptoms. The amount of paperwork is difficult to manage, and the deadlines for that paperwork are stressful. One interviewee stated, “My coworkers and I feel like we’re social workers, parents, friends, special education teachers...mom, dad.” Related to that same concept, an individual expressed, “the biggest thing is always that feeling of really we have two full time jobs.” Again, a person expressed, “juggling two completely different jobs, and then like just always having to figure out how to prioritize your time.” An interviewee stated, “I think it’s hard to feel like you’re doing a good job on both.”

The amount of support that is available to new teachers, or teachers in general, has decreased because of the need to allocate that support differently because of the teacher shortage. The interviewees reported that COVID-19 was an added stress in the last couple of years, both because of new job demands and also physically because of the extra health precautions and masks. Special education teachers already felt as if they were split between two jobs: the teacher

and the case manager. Now because of COVID-19, more is required regarding planning because of the need to prepare eLearning lessons.

Colleagues can also be a stressor. In other words, when colleagues do not meet expectations or are absent often, this makes things more difficult for others. Related to coworkers, negative culture and gossip can make the working environment stressful. Also, multiple individuals mentioned being pulled from their regular schedule to cover other areas of the building because of the need for a substitute.

One of the biggest themes that came across throughout the interviews is the feeling of being pulled in too many directions and away from their main role as a special education teacher. One individual explained, “So I think another thing that contributes to burnout is the perception in some settings that the special ed. teacher is an extra adult...So if an adult is needed for something else, then, oh well we’ll just pull a sped. person to cover that class.” Others reiterated the following:

- “Being in special ed., you get pulled all the time...I walk into the building, and I never know exactly what my schedule is going to be...I never know sometimes what I'm going to be teaching, who I'm going to be teaching.”
- “I feel like it's selling us sped. teachers short a little bit, saying, your time isn't valuable.”
- “Sometimes I feel like I am asked to make a decision between what I feel is best for my students and what I feel is best for my job, and I don't think that's a fair thing for them to ask.”

The general feeling from many of the interviewees is that they are not able to thrive in their own positions because of needing to help other areas of the building.

## **Level of Burnout**

In the survey, teacher burnout was defined for participants so that they had a clear understanding of what to consider when answering the questions. After reviewing the definition, they were asked to rate their self-perceived level of burnout. Participants could choose from the following options: N/A, Low-Level, Medium-Level, or High-Level. One individual (5.26%) indicated that burnout was not applicable to him. This individual happened to be one that was interviewed as well. He indicated that he is a first-year teacher and, therefore, does not feel burnout to any degree yet. Seven participants (36.84%) stated they perceive their burnout as low-level at this time. Seven individuals (36.84%) chose medium-level as their degree of self-perceived burnout. Four respondents (21.05%) described their self-perceived burnout as high-level. It appears that the majority of participants (73.68%) fall within the low to medium levels of burnout. After rating their self-perceived burnout, participants were given a space to provide additional commentary about burnout, some of which is quoted in the following pages.

Several quotes from the survey responses and the interview transcripts have been included below and separated into categories. First, quotes from individuals who have a self-perceived low-level of burnout are included. Next in this chapter, quotes from participants with a self-perceived medium-level of burnout are listed, followed by quotations from individuals with a self-perceived high-level of burnout. While there is no noticeable theme among the thoughts from individuals with medium-level burnout, there is a different theme in each of the other levels. Participants with low-level burnout expressed feeling lucky, being where they are supposed to be, and enjoying the career. Vocabulary used expressed a positive

Table 17  
*Burnout and Number of Individuals for Each Level*

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	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
No Burnout	1	5.26
Low-Level	7	36.84
Medium-Level	7	36.84
High-Level	4	21.05

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mindset. Those who identify as having high-level burnout typically referenced thoughts about leaving the career or considering other options.

### ***Self-Perceived Low-Level Burnout***

- “I’m lucky because my co-teaching situation is excellent, and my case load is pretty small. I think my burnout occurs when the district or state or whoever (not teachers) add responsibilities or expectations to an already demanding workload...Also, just the feeling of not being able to excel in my job because of competing demands and priorities.”
- “I am often exhausted, and because of the afore mentioned need to multi-task to meet district/school requirements I feel ineffective. I do not feel cynical. Teaching is what I am supposed to do.”
- “Still enjoy the instructional part”

### ***Self-Perceived Medium-Level Burnout***

- “It depends on the time of the year and the day even sometimes. There are days where the burnout feelings are strong and others where you just have a good day, and they slide away. COVID has been a huge stressor this year, and burnout is HIGH.” (Although this participant stated burnout is high, self-perceived burnout was rated as medium-level.)
- “We lose extremely good young teachers due to this burnout.”

### ***Self-Perceived High-Level Burnout***

- “I believe that I am currently experiencing teacher burnout due to the lack of support and how everyone is concerned about deadlines and compliance but [little] emphasis is on teacher effectiveness.”
- “I contemplate leaving the profession altogether on a regular basis and contemplate different types of careers I could obtain with my degree.”

- “I added a content endorsement to my license to get out of teaching special education next school year. I contemplate leaving the profession on a regular basis.”

### ***Years of Teaching and Level of Burnout***

An ANOVA was conducted to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between responses on burnout from teachers who have been teaching different numbers of years. To run the test, years were separated into three groups: 1-teachers with zero full years and one year of teaching, 2-teachers with two to three years of teaching, and 3-teachers were four to five years of teaching. Survey participants chose their level of self-perceived burnout as 0-N/A, 1-low, 2-medium, or 3-high. Participants with zero to one year of teaching had a mean score of 1.80. Survey respondents with two to three years of teaching had a mean score of 1.67, and participants with four to five years of teaching had a mean score of 1.80.

There were no statistically significant differences between years teaching and level of burnout as determined by ANOVA  $F(2, 16) = 0.05; p = 0.95$ . A *post hoc* test showed no statistically significant difference between each subset of groups. Means are shown in Table 19. The fact that there was no statistically significant difference among year groups suggests that individuals are not just getting to a specific year of teaching and then suddenly feeling burnout. They are experiencing it, in some cases, from the beginning.

### **Intentions for Career**

Survey question #18 asked participants to identify their intentions for their career. The options were as follows:

- a. I intend to remain teaching in special education, and I am fulfilled in my career.
- b. I intend to remain teaching in special education, but I am not fulfilled in my career.

Table 18

*ANOVA Years and Burnout*

	<u>Sum of Squares</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>Mean Square</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Year Groups	0.084	2	0.04	0.05	0.95
Residuals	13.60	16	0.85		

Table 19

*Years Teaching and Mean Scores for Level of Burnout*

<u>Years</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>N</u>
0-1	1.80	1.30	5
2-3	1.67	0.71	9
4-5	1.80	0.84	5

Table 20

*Post Hoc Comparisons for Year Groups*

<u>Year Groups</u>	<u>Mean</u> <u>Difference</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>Cohen's d</u>	<u>p tukey</u>
0-1 year & 2-3 years	0.13	0.51	0.26	0.14	0.96
0-1 year & 4-5 years	-1.39e -16	0.58	-2.38e -16	-1.27e -16	1.00
2-3 years & 4-5 years	-0.13	0.51	-0.26	-0.18	0.96

- c. I intend to remain in education, but I have plans to end my role as a special education teacher.
- d. I intend to leave the education field.
- e. I prefer not to answer this question.
- f. Other (space to type)

Table 21 shows frequencies for participants' intentions for their career in special education. Seven individuals (36.84%) intend to remain teaching in special education and are fulfilled in their career. Four participants (21.05%) intend to remain teaching in special education but are not fulfilled in their career. Four participants (21.05%) intend to remain in education but have plans to end their role as a special education teacher. Two respondents (10.53%) intend to leave the education field. Two respondents (10.53%) chose to use the type-in field, which indicated another intention. One wrote about plans for higher education while the other wrote about plans to move into administration. These individuals could not be lumped with Code 3 individuals who intend to leave special education teaching but remain in education because the type of higher education and/or administration position was not specified as either special education or not. There were no individuals who chose option E from the drop down, which would indicate they preferred not to share their intentions. All individuals were very open about their intentions.

### ***Sum of Symptoms and Intentions for Career***

Again, survey question #18 asked individuals to choose from six different options in a drop-down style question. The first two options were for participants who will stay teaching in special education, and the other options were selected by individuals who intend to leave special education. That could mean staying in education but leaving special education. It could also

Table 21

*Intentions and Number of Individuals for Each Plan*

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	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Remain/Fulfilled	7	36.84
Remain/Not Fulfilled	4	21.05
Remain Ed/Not SPED	4	21.05
Leave Education	2	10.53
Other	2	10.53

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Table 22

*ANOVA Sum of Symptoms and Intention to Stay or Leave Special Education*

	<u>Sum of Squares</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>Mean Square</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Sum	0.41	2	0.21	0.78	0.48
Residuals	4.22	16	0.26		

Table 23

*Sum of Symptoms and Intention to Stay or Leave Special Education*

<u>Sum of Symptoms</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>N</u>
1	0.80	0.45	5
2	0.40	0.55	5
3	0.56	0.53	9

Table 24

*Post Hoc Comparisons for Sum of Symptoms*

		<u>Mean Difference</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>P tukey</u>
1	2	0.40	0.33	0.45
	3	0.24	0.29	0.68
2	3	-0.16	0.29	0.85

mean leaving education altogether. The data was recoded to be a yes (1) or no (0) regarding staying in special education. An ANOVA was run to determine if the differences are statistically significant between those with one work-related symptom versus two or three symptoms and their reported intentions to stay in special education. Those with one symptom of stress, anxiety, or depression had a mean score of 0.80 regarding their intention to stay in special education. Those with two symptoms had a mean score of 0.40, and individuals with three symptoms had a mean score of 0.56.

There were no statistically significant differences between sum of symptoms and intentions to stay or leave special education determined by ANOVA  $F(2, 16) = 0.78; p = 0.48$ . A *post hoc* test showed no statistically significant difference between each subset of groups, meaning whether an individual had one, two, or three symptoms had no statistical bearing on whether they intended to stay or leave special education. Means are shown in Table 23.

### **Teacher Self-Efficacy & Connection to EPP**

Teacher self-efficacy was defined to interviewee as job satisfaction deriving from a sense of effectiveness and a feeling of doing a good job as a teacher (Hanson, 2013). When asked about their own teacher self-efficacy, individuals generally felt that they make a difference. They were also asked about their thoughts of whether they thought their own self-efficacy today is affected by their EPP experience. Although a connection was rarely made to the EPP experience, the interviewees did have much to say about teacher self-efficacy. The following positive words were used to describe their teacher self-efficacy: proud, making a difference, contributing, respected, fulfilling. There were also some comments about the disappointments special education teachers feel: depends on the day, failed, forgotten about, defeated. Overall, the consensus was that the interviewed special education teachers truly know they are making a

difference, but it doesn't take away the fact that there are some very hard days that make them unsure sometimes.

In his interview, a special education teacher explained "I feel proud but not satisfied...When you're teaching, you're never satisfied...You know what could have went better...I'm always trying to figure out ways to improve something." This individual happens to be the only person who does not experience burnout in any manner. His commentary suggests that he is a reflective teacher and seeks to improve his craft. Regarding teacher self-efficacy, he used the word "proud" to describe his belief that he is making a difference. Another individual expressed, "Every single day, I'm making a difference, so for me that's extremely fulfilling." She knows that she is efficacious in her career and that she is helping others. Another participant explained, "I think the connection is really being that advocate for the student and knowing the special education laws and then translating all of that knowledge into...practically show that in my day to day life as a teacher." She knows that her advocacy for her students makes a difference, and she knows that her knowledge of the special education laws helps her students. This interviewee did connect her self-efficacy to her EPP.

Another special education teacher described,

I do feel like I'm contributing. For me, it makes a big difference like a school I'm at now. There's more respect. I feel more respected from the admin team. as a sped. professional, as an expert in my field than I did at my other school where I felt like the admins didn't understand the job...didn't understand what we do, and they didn't understand why it was important and so like decisions were made...that had huge impacts on us without ever talking to any of us.

Her teacher self-efficacy is impacted by her administration team and the respect she feels from them. Another participant verbalized,

Depends on the day. Some days I'm like I did it and I accomplished it, and then the next day I'm like, I totally failed...When I see like small growth with my students...I'm like oh my gosh...I did it. I'm moving this kid along. It's so great, and then I just, I'll have

days where you know, a co-teacher...will say something...but it comes off like I'm their assistant, and I'm like, I'm a full-blown teacher man. That'll just like kind of defeat me all over again...My kids making progress will always make you feel on top of the world. Stuff like that will make me feel defeated.

Some days, she knows that she is effective in her career, while other days make it difficult to remember that. However, seeing the growth in her students is the reward she needs to remember she is making a difference. Another special education teacher explained,

Most days I would say that I do. I mean there's days...it's kind of like am I even getting through to these kids at all...but then there's times that you know they surprise you...They're like oh yeah, I remember how to do this. I remember you taught me this special trick or what have you, but even more so like building relationships with the kids...There's a lot of poverty. There's not much stability sometimes at home, and sometimes we're the only people that they see every day, and they have some sort of bond that way and I guess it's a trust factor that they're like okay I can go to school, and I know that I'm going to see this teacher, and she's going to be there every day for me.

Again, this teacher says that remembering her impact on students is dependent upon the day, but overall, she does know she is making a difference.

### **Recommendations for EPPs**

Individuals were asked if there is anything they wish they would have experienced in the EPP curriculum or co-curriculum activities to prepare them for a career in special education. One individual stated that he improved his knowledge of how to teach while attending his EPP, but he was not prepared for the paperwork side of his role as a special education teacher. He feels he could have been more prepared for the paperwork responsibilities and legal background involved with special education. This same participant noted that he would have appreciated having a support network of other first-year teachers working on emergency permits who were also enrolled in his EPP. Together, while taking classes, they could have intentionally supported one another. Another individual expressed that she never learned about how to work with other coworkers, particularly those who are ineffective and make things harder

for the team. She explained that EPPs should make this part of the curriculum to prepare individuals for that problem and how to work through it professionally and reflectively. One interview participant suggested that EPPs teach individuals how to organize the classroom, the paperwork, the schedule, etc. She never learned this and felt underprepared. One interview volunteer mentioned that the EPP curriculum was catered toward the elementary school special education teacher. A greater variety of grade-level preparation would have been helpful and motivating to this individual. Another interviewee stated that she was frustrated with her classroom management course because the course assignments were written for the typical general education teacher, not necessarily special education teachers. She found herself detached from the assignments since her classroom and responsibilities look different than that of a general education teacher, and as a result, she felt that she came away from the course uninformed about how to manage the special education environment. That same individual mentioned that she could have used more information about what the typical special education teacher's day looks like and what teaching responsibilities might be involved. She believes she was also underprepared for how to manage her caseload as far as keeping a schedule of responsibilities and tending to regular BIP reviews and annual reviews, etc. In other words, being taught how to have a system to remember all the special education teacher responsibilities would be beneficial for pre-service teachers and/or teachers attending an EPP.

When asked about what preparation they wish they would have received in their EPPs, interview participants stated they wished they would have learned about cultural consideration for students, self-care strategies, setting boundaries, and advocating for themselves as well as their students. One special education teacher expressed the belief that pre-service teachers should

learn about self-care while still attending their EPPs. She also emphasized the importance of learning about how to set boundaries:

Every student would benefit from a course on self-care, you know, while teaching, and how to manage stress and how to manage like traumatic situations. I think teacher burnout, in my opinion, comes from lack of boundaries that teachers may have and learning when to say no and learning to take that lunch break or learning to not work on the weekend whenever one asks you to.

Another interviewee echoed her thoughts about boundaries:

Practically, it's really as simple as setting boundaries and teaching students to say no to their administration when it's appropriate. At the same time, like philosophically, I think that this is the job that, like, you don't come here for the money. You know you come here because you want to make a difference, or you really have a desire to help students to work with a great team of people. So, it's also a mindset. And I think if you come in with a mindset, you won't get disappointed. Then you'll have smooth sailing, you know, and no job is perfect...So being taught...about expectations and being taught...these are school standards, this is what is expected as a special ed teacher, this is what is expected from you in the state of Indiana. And then at the same time. Here, in combination with what's expected of you. Here is what you can bring to the table, along with your boundaries and taking care of yourself so that you can enjoy a 20-year career as a special educator.

A third interviewee expressed the same idea:

I mean I guess just like the theme that's run through our conversation is that I think teachers need to be taught how to self-advocate for themselves and...what are appropriate boundaries to set, and how do you set those.

Beyond just setting boundaries and learning to advocate for oneself in the workforce, interviewees expressed that it is important for EPPs to teach other skills to prepare pre-service teachers:

Also, I think something that would be very helpful, knowing more about culture...I read a book about poverty and tragedy and stress...None of that stuff was ever really touched on I mean I maybe had a little bit of classroom management techniques but nothing, formal.

There were several points throughout the seven interviews when the idea of working together to make a difference came up. The idea that EPPs should prepare pre-service teachers

for a demanding career in a proactive manner as opposed to after they are already experiencing symptoms in the career was intriguing to many of the interviewees. When asked how EPPs could help, one interviewee expressed, “Encourage them to fight for their students. Encourage them to respect hierarchy, respect authority, but take your concerns to them. Let them know because unless people are talking, unless people are sharing it’s not going to change.” She emphasized that change-making comes only when multiple stakeholders work together. Another stated, “I appreciate that you're taking the time to do this because it will make a difference...you're advocating for...the college students who are trying to be the teachers...We all have to do our part.”

During the interview, one of the last questions was about what advice the interviewee would give to a group of educator preparation program (EPP) faculty, staff, leaders, and policymakers if they were sitting with us today. They were asked to consider what it takes to prepare the next generation of teachers for a demanding career that often leads to burnout. Regarding social and emotional learning (SEL), one teacher stated, “We’re being told, teach our kids how to do this, but nobody’s teaching us...So how do we know how to teach them something that we don’t even know and we don’t practice ourselves...We’re supposed to teach social emotional learning...Well, we don’t know how to do that.”

Although this was not a question, there was a suggestion for the K-12 education system at the district level. One participant mentioned “more designated time during the day to work on stuff would be really nice.” Although this is not a theme this researcher coded for, because it is not something that can be addressed through this study, it is worth mentioning that special education teachers are feeling that they do not have enough time in the day to complete the paperwork involved in the career.

## **Phenomenology Research**

In alignment with Creswell and Poth's (2018) suggested template, a textual description, structural description, and composite description should be given to clearly convey phenomenology research data. The textual description, *what* was experienced, was included in this chapter as statistics and tables. The structural description, *how* the experience happened, was included in the analysis of the data as well as evidenced by the qualitative interview data, especially the voice illustrated through quotations. Finally, a composite description must be developed, which is the incorporation of both the textual and the structural details to describe the essence of the phenomenon.

### ***Composite Description***

After analyzing themes and patterns, the phenomenon of K-12 special education teacher burnout and its connection to the EPP experience and self-authorship is clearer. Special education teachers go into this field to make a difference. This researcher heard story after story about individuals following a calling or a passion to work with students with disabilities. Faculty and leadership at the EPP level have the unique opportunity to help foster self-authorship in pre-service teachers. Five of the seven interviewees recalled developing their own thoughts, feelings, and beliefs while attending their EPP. Of the 19 survey respondents, only one participant remembered learning stress management strategies and/or coping skills. Many of those same individuals expressed that they have learned strategies in other ways either from their district or other experiences. However, all 19 respondents still identified at least one, and in most cases more, symptoms they experience because of their career. The participants identified multiple causes of such symptoms, some of which were topics that could be addressed at the EPP level. Of the 19 survey participants, 18 individuals

stated they experience some degree of self-perceived burnout: low-level (36.84%), medium-level (36.84%), and high-level (21.05%). It should be noted that symptoms do not automatically equal burnout. While there are some individuals who had both, causation was not assessed. While intentions for their special education career were diverse, the largest percentage of the 19 respondents claimed that they intend to stay teaching in special education and feel fulfilled in their career. In all cases, interviewees expressed that they feel some degree of teacher self-efficacy even if it is not felt consistently day to day. The interview participants gave numerous suggestions for EPPs to help foster self-efficacy, teacher wellness, and self-authorship to ultimately reduce teacher burnout.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Discussion & Conclusions**

As a reminder, this study investigated how the EPP experience and self-authorship journey of early career special education teachers impact their potential to experience burnout. As mentioned in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, most educator preparation programs (EPPs) do not focus on teaching pre-service teachers stress management and coping strategies, which is a missed opportunity to prepare the next generation of teachers for a demanding career. By surveying and interviewing special education teachers in their first five years as fully-licensed teachers, this researcher was able to draw conclusions about what changes could be implemented at the higher education level to better prepare pre-service teachers and to ultimately make attempts at reducing burnout. The final chapter in this dissertation includes the following: an explanation of the purpose of the research study, a summary of findings, the implications of the study, connections to the literature, and recommendations for future research.

#### **Purpose & Significance of Study**

The main point of the work was to gather data that could influence change at the EPP level to better prepare pre-service teachers. Faculty and leaders involved with EPPs at the higher education level could consider the recommendations outlined in this dissertation to improve the EPP curriculum and co-curricular opportunities. With time, changes made in EPPs could impact K-12 special education teacher burnout.

Again, the conceptual framework representing this study, shows the EPP experience, and therefore the self-authorship journey, and the relationship to teacher burnout. The mediating variables, teacher wellbeing and teacher self-efficacy, do not change the strength of the relationship. Rather, they show how the relationship exists. The original hypotheses for this

study are as follows: 1) The EPP experience can dictate what a pre-service teacher is exposed to and hopefully knows going into his or her career, so teacher wellbeing and teacher self-efficacy can be achieved within the field of special education. 2) Teacher wellbeing and teacher self-efficacy can reduce instances of K-12 special education teacher burnout.

This researcher used the phenomenological approach for the study, ultimately concluding in a shared meaning about a situation, in this case special education teachers and their recollections of how the EPP experience influenced their self-perceived burnout. A survey was used to first question teachers in a broad sense before using interviewing to hear specific stories. The phenomenology findings are literally about the 19 survey respondents, seven of which were interviewed, but the ideas can be applied to a broader population of special education teachers. More importantly, the implications can help EPPs across America improve curricular and co-curricular experiences for pre-service teachers.

### **Summary of Findings & Implications**

The summary of findings and implications section is arranged by common themes found in the data. Each theme will be explored to provide guidance to readers about meaning to take from the findings. Implications are drawn and explained within this section.

#### ***A Calling for Special Education***

A common theme identified in the interviews was that, generally speaking, special education teachers begin their careers because of a calling. They want to make a difference. They want to help individuals with disabilities. They do not take this responsibility lightly. What does this mean for EPPs? EPP faculty and leaders need to be fostering this calling. EPP faculty need to affirm pre-service teachers in their goal to make a difference. EPP faculty need to inspire and lead so that pre-service teachers can do the same for their K-12 students one day.

### ***Fostering Self-Authorship in the EPP***

Self-authorship was a major part of the interview discussions. Participant 2 contributed his work with individuals with disabilities and the encouragement from others in his life for his self-authorship journey. These experiences occurred prior to his time in his EPP for special education licensing. Participant 4 believes her time as a paraprofessional before getting her license was when she developed her own beliefs and convictions as a person and special education professional. Participant 5 attended an EPP for Christian education prior to returning to school for special education licensing. She spoke of her time at her Christian EPP during her bachelor's pursuit as being impactful on her beliefs and faith. Participant 9 learned, while attending her EPP, to be a reflective and lifelong learner. She also learned that it is important to know her strengths and weaknesses, not just as a person but also as a teacher. Participant 12 developed a strong relationship with her mentor while attending her EPP. She leaned on her mentor for guidance. Her time during her EPP years was also the first time she was able to develop strong relationships with students, which occurred when she was student teaching. Prior to that, the relationships were difficult to foster because she was substitute teaching. Her EPP curriculum and experiences also taught her about culture and poverty in the K-12 school setting. Although participant 15 stated her self-authorship journey took place largely while she was pursuing her bachelor's degree for a non-education related program, she did come to know herself better during her time attending her EPP as well. For example, the research class at her EPP fueled her passion and helped her come to know something about herself that she did not see or know before. Participant 18 gives credit to one of her education professors who had an important influence in her life. Interactions with this professor solidified her beliefs as a special

education teacher. Because of this professor, this participant knew exactly what kind of teacher she wanted to be.

All the interview participants could recall and describe their self-authorship journey. However, those recollections were not always connected to their EPP. The fact that five of the seven individual stories could be connected to the EPP experience is encouraging. This data gives EPP faculty and leaders something to recreate for others.

### ***Teaching Stress Management/Coping Strategies in the EPP***

One survey respondent remembers being taught stress management strategies/coping skills in her EPP. This individual was also interviewed, so she was able to verbally expand on her thoughts regarding this preparation. She recalls being taught to lean on others for support. She remembers learning about being flexible as a teacher because class lessons will not always go according to plan. She also contributes her classroom management preparation to her own stress management. In other words, when asked about whether she was taught stress management strategies/coping skills, she listed classroom management as something that fits into that category. Other individuals did not feel that they were taught ideas for stress management/coping while attending their EPPs. This lack of preparation could be contributing to the overall consensus from this group of individuals who feel that they are experiencing some level of burnout. Overwhelmingly, interviewees felt that this type of preparation is needed in EPPs.

### ***Strategies Learned Outside of the EPP***

Although only one participant learned stress management strategies/coping skills while attending her EPP, the other survey respondents and interview participants could identify some strategies they learned other ways. Those strategies can be sorted into very specific categories.

Teachers find comfort in depending on others: collaborating, leaning on a support network, and accepting help from others were listed as strategies used to help with stress, anxiety, and depression. Regarding classroom practices teachers mentioned using humor and fun activities in class. Teachers have also learned to use personal habits and mindset to reduce work-related symptoms: yoga, religious faith, the mindset that teaching is a learning process, and personal goals to reach a teaching milestone. Other strategies mentioned could be categorized as having to do with boundaries: disconnecting after school, protecting their time, and saying no when needed. Finally, there were some strategies teachers have learned to use that are implemented by the schools/districts and cannot be controlled entirely by the teachers: administration-led mindfulness activities, professional development, orientation, mentorship program, and wellness coaches. Although these were not taught in the participants' EPPs, this data is helpful because EPP faculty can attempt to integrate the ideas into curricular and co-curricular experiences.

### ***Career-Related Symptoms & Causes***

Even with the strategies either taught at EPPs or learned in another manner, survey respondents and interviewees continue to experience work-related symptoms. In fact, not one teacher mentioned they are free of stress, anxiety, and/or depression. In all cases, they experience or have experienced at least one of those symptoms as a result of their career. In the survey question asking whether they have ever experienced, either in the past or present, the three main symptoms identified in this dissertation, stress was the highest experienced followed by anxiety and then depression. There were follow up questions about how often those symptoms were experienced in the last month, and the same order applies: stress, then anxiety, then depression. Something else to note is that all study participants experience stress because of their career. Out of the three symptoms provided to them for consideration, stress had a 100% rate indicating that

there was not one special education teacher who is stress-free. It was a unanimous response. Other symptoms listed in the survey or discussed in the interview are as follows: tension, changed sleeping patterns (too much or too little sleep), grey hair, loss of appetite, loss of motivation, loss of empathy, and grumpiness. Knowing these symptoms are problematic for special education teachers allows EPP faculty to purposefully design instruction centered around these themes. In their education courses and/or trainings, pre-service teachers should learn how to recognize signs of these issues and how to respond when identified.

Several causes were listed in the survey or expressed during the interviews. Regarding workload, teachers communicated paperwork, size of caseload, preparing for conferences and fitting them in, and needing to do too many responsibilities in too little time. Other causes identified by teachers include lack of support, first-year learning curve, worry about students, student behavior, lack of training, unrealistic expectations, ineffective coworkers, and being pulled from normal duties to cover elsewhere in the building. Some of these causes could be addressed at the EPP level if it is a made a priority to teach and prepare pre-service teachers about such realities. However, a bigger approach needs to be taken. Educators and stakeholders are all in this together, and while the EPP can tackle specific causes of work-related symptoms, help from policymakers and K-12 administrators is also needed. For the purposes of this dissertation, the focus is on what the EPP can change.

### ***Level of Burnout & Intentions to Remain in the Career***

Of the 19 survey respondents, one individual indicated that he does not experience burnout. The other answers for this question were fairly evenly spread across the three levels with high-level being slightly lower. As a reminder, the survey respondents rated their self-perceived burnout as not applicable (5.26%), low-level (36.84%), medium-level (36.84%), or

high-level (21.05%). The majority of participants (73.68%) believe they are experiencing low-level or medium-level burnout. It should be noted that all survey respondents were from one district. If the study had used participants from multiple districts, it is possible these numbers would look different due to district and school building differences. It should also be stated that symptoms do not automatically equal burnout.

Although there was an option to select if they preferred not to answer the question, all 19 survey respondents chose to answer the question about their intentions to remain in the career. The largest percent was made up of people who intend to stay in their career as a special education teacher and would say they feel fulfilled. The percentages of individuals who intend to remain teaching special education but are not fulfilled and individuals who intend to remain in education but not as a teacher in special education were tied. The smallest percentage of individuals were those who selected the intent to leave education altogether and the group of individuals who wrote something unique in the type-in field.

Interestingly, even with burnout, some special education teachers are choosing to stay in their career. Could this be contributed to their teacher self-efficacy? Their calling to go into special education and passion for teaching could also be a steady factor in this decision. A possible topic for future research is to investigate why special education teachers stay in the field. While this researcher can make inferences about why most of the study participants intend to stay in the field, possibly self-efficacy, it should be noted that this was not discussed during interviews.

### ***Teacher Self-Efficacy***

The seven interviewees were asked to comment on their own teacher self-efficacy. All interviewees expressed that they feel efficacious to at least some extent. Words like proud,

contributing, respected, and fulfilled were used when individuals communicated that they know they are making a difference. Words like depends on day, failed, forgotten about, defeated were used when participants expressed specific times that they doubt their importance. Overall, the interviewees believe they are being impactful, but this does not take away the fact that this career is still difficult in many ways.

### ***Suggestions for EPPs***

Ultimately, the goal of this research study is to reduce teacher burnout for K-12 special education teachers, which is an area plagued by fast turnover. To do that, there are many stakeholders who can take part in supporting teachers: faculty and leaders at the EPP level as well as K-12 administrators and policymakers. Together, all constituents can foster teacher wellness, teacher self-efficacy, and self-authorship to attempt to build healthy and effective special education teachers. After all, the responsibility to reduce burnout should not just fall on K-12 teachers. Rather, a team effort is important in order to decrease the problem.

As mentioned previously in this dissertation, EPPs have specific responsibilities. They must abide by a set of standards, demonstrate evidence of improvement, and show that pre-service teachers are being prepared. This study, while it cannot be tied to a specific EPP, illustrates in a broad sense that special education teachers are not prepared for how to cope with the demands of their career. Interactions between pre-service teachers and cooperating teachers should prepare pre-service teachers by giving them a realistic yet optimistic idea of special education. Continual communication between cooperating teachers and university supervisors is also necessary. Faculty and/or university supervisors should be intentionally seeking from cooperating teachers and K-12 school administrators what they feel pre-service teachers need to

know more to be prepared for the field of special education. This can be accomplished during visits to the schools for observations of pre-service teachers.

There are also nine curricular improvements to be made at the EPP-level, which derived from participant input and are as follows: 1) EPP faculty should teach their pre-service teachers about the paperwork involved in special education. While many EPPs have their students write practice Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), the participants in the study mentioned time and time again how they were not prepared for the extent of such paperwork. A clearer picture of the amount of paperwork involved in special education is needed in order for pre-service teachers to be ready. 2) EPP faculty should include classroom organization discussions in EPP courses. Discussions about how to arrange the classroom so that it is accessible to all students should take place. How to stay organized for the sake of the teacher should also be considered in these discussions. 3) EPP faculty should be careful not to cater instruction to elementary school special education teachers. Those wanting to teach in the secondary setting should be just as prepared, and the study data indicates that might not be the case at least for one individual. 4) Special education teachers teach direct services in the special education environment as well as co-teach and/or provide integrated services in the general education environment. Pre-service teachers should be prepared for what their daily schedule could look like. While that is difficult because all districts and schools have different expectations for special education teachers, pre-service teachers should come away from their EPP experience at least having knowledge of what they might expect. 5) EPP faculty should teach classroom management specific to the special education teacher. There are classroom management strategies and tips helpful for all settings, and then there are topics to consider for the special education environment specifically. 6) Pre-service teachers should learn how to manage a caseload including helpful tips for organization

and scheduling throughout the academic year. Tips and tools of the trade should be shared with pre-service teachers including examples of keeping a calendar, using organizational and scheduling tools, etc. 7) EPP faculty should make culturally responsive pedagogy a priority. Study participants mentioned the need to learn about poverty and culture. 8) EPP faculty should discuss with pre-service teachers the idea of setting boundaries as well as advocating for themselves and their students' needs. It should be noted that these advocacy skills, particularly when used for themselves, should be prefaced with how to be respectful and compliant toward their district administrators. 9) Finally, social and emotional learning should be taught and practiced with pre-service teachers so that they can continue to use those skills in the career for themselves. As part of this training, they should also be required, as a course assignment, to create an action plan for stress management to use when teaching full time.

While most suggestions for EPPs relate to the EPP curriculum, there is one co-curricular improvement to be made. One interviewee mentioned the need for a support network within his EPP. He attended his EPP while teaching on an emergency permit, and he would have benefited from having a network of other individuals in the same situation. Together, they could have collaborated about problems encountered in the field and/or questions. EPPs should design network systems for this purpose.

Returning to the theoretical framework for this study, the EPP experience should include self-authorship for all pre-service teachers. As an independent variable, the EPP experience/self-authorship journey in some ways dictates an early career special education teacher's wellbeing and teacher self-efficacy. Again, in all cases, the interviewees felt teacher self-efficacy to some extent, and many of those same individuals could connect their self-authorship journey to their EPP experience. To promote self-authorship, EPP faculty should provide opportunities for pre-

service teachers to practice awareness, reflection, and understanding. Doing so will improve college students' emotional intelligence and enable them to become the author of their own lives, which is self-authorship at its fullest. When one can own life choices, feelings, beliefs, and opinions, he or she develops confidence and assurance. This mentality can be helpful in achieving teacher self-efficacy and prevent burnout.

As mentioned in a previous chapter, many EPPs have advisory boards which provide invaluable feedback to EPP faculty. It is this researcher's recommendation that EPP advisory boards provide input about what curricular and co-curricular changes could be made at the higher education level to better prepare pre-service teachers. This task might best be accomplished as round table discussions.

### ***Suggestions for K-12 Level***

This study was conducted to learn about implications for EPPs at the higher education level. However, there are three specific recommendations identified that could be made at the K-12 level. 1) Teachers could benefit from continued social and emotional learning (SEL) instruction. This SEL instruction should have an emphasis on adult practices so that teachers can learn how to manage stress and cope with the negative consequences of a demanding career. Such instruction would not be beneficial if rolled out through online modules or other platforms that take time from the teachers. In other words, it should be provided through teacher in-service days when teachers are compensated for their time and not expected to complete something extra. 2) If possible, more designated time for work during the school day should be given to special education teachers. They teach *and* manage a caseload and in most cases are only provided with one prep period during the day instead of one for each part of their job. 3) Finally, special education teachers should not be pulled from their job responsibilities to cover for other

individuals or areas of the building. This requirement leads to special education teachers having even less time in the day for their own tasks. If coverage is needed, which is a reality currently with the teacher shortage, all faculty in the building should be used for coverage, not just special education teachers.

### **Connections to Literature**

Lesh (2020) argued that special education teachers may experience vicarious trauma (VT) more than other educators. In other words, the population of students they work with may influence the beliefs and expectations a special education teacher has about self and others. This could be because students with disabilities statistically experience Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) at higher rates than their typical peers. Therefore, some special education teachers witness and feel that trauma through their students. Lesh's (2020) research aligns with this study because more than one individual mentioned worrying about his or her students or feeling anxiety about a student's situation.

Yong and Yue (2008) explained five reasons for teacher burnout: student factors, job factors, school organization factors, personal factors, and external factors. Student factors could include student misbehavior. Job factors represent low salary, large class sizes, etc. School organization factors might include heavy workload, lack of support, time pressures, or poor school culture. While personal factors and external factors were not mentioned as much by survey and interview participants in this study, the other themes were. Yong and Yue's (2008) research aligns to this study as it became apparent that special education teachers do list these reasons for stress, anxiety, and/or depression.

Like Yong and Yue (2008), other researchers have studied the reasons for teacher burnout as well. Bressman et al. (2018) associated increased workload, changing student

population, advances in technology, and pressure on teachers for student achievement with teacher burnout. Harmsen et al. (2018) associated burnout with job demands, poor student behavior, poor school culture, among other factors. Bennet et al. (2013) described the connection between burnout and student misbehavior and feeling isolated without a mentor. Again, this study revealed several of these same factors as reasons for stress, anxiety, and depression.

As explained in Chapter 2, Herman et al. (2020) designed the Coping-Competence-Context (3C) Theory of Teacher Stress. According to their theory, there are three pathways to teacher stress development. 1) Teachers may experience stress because of their perceptions of their own coping skills. 2) Teachers may experience stress because of how they handle behavior management and classroom practices. 3) Teachers may experience stress because of school, district, or societal education policies. While not necessarily founded in the 3C Theory of Teacher Stress, this researcher's study does have some parallels with the research from Herman et al. (2020). For example, each of the pathways was noted by survey and interview participants in some manner. The strategies Herman et al. (2020) identify in their study are a starting point for ideas about curricular improvements in EPPs. It is possible that the 3C Theory can serve as a guide to implement topics from each area into the new course or training program: coping, competence, and context. Pre-service teachers would learn about coping strategies, skills to make them competent teachers, and issues related to school context. All three topics from the 3C Theory could easily be added into updated curriculum for a new course or training program.

The study conducted by Cancio et al. (2018) applies to research about EPPs and pre-service teacher preparation because the findings can be used in the course development and/or training program development. The factors causing stress should be discussed within courses

to inform pre-service teachers. Also, the implications for K-12 school administrators and teachers are helpful strategies that should be taught to pre-service teachers. The hope is that as a generation of teachers is educated within EPPs about stress management, they will take that knowledge with them to the workforce, improving their own lives and also the lives of others who learn from them.

While this study uncovered details about special education teachers' mental health symptoms experienced because of their career, this researcher also learned that the majority of the individuals surveyed plan to remain in special education or education in some capacity. It is likely that this commitment to the field comes from the passion educators feel or the self-efficacy that was communicated by all individuals who were interviewed. Hanson (2013) explained a connection between teacher attrition and self-efficacy and implied that teachers should be aware of techniques that lower stress to reduce turnover and increase self-efficacy.

Yong and Yue (2008) recommend that individuals learn two mindsets and practice some specific habits. To achieve teacher self-efficacy, individuals can seek hope in failure and know that it is acceptable to not be perfect. Individuals can also see the positive in all things. Teachers should prioritize health and mental wellness, and teachers should attempt to manage time wisely (Yong & Yue, 2008). These suggestions are relevant to the findings from this study.

Hanson (2013) provided multiple recommendations for teachers to prevent burnout. Her suggestions should be implemented and taught at the higher education level to equip pre-service teachers with these strategies prior to entering the field: reflection of strengths and weaknesses, goal setting, problem-solving to change negative situations, etc. EPP faculty members can purposefully provide opportunities to reflect on strengths and weaknesses and set goals to improve. Educators should be reflective individuals who can learn from mistakes and continue

growing in areas of strength. Teaching this skill in the EPP setting is essential to equip pre-service teachers with the ability to *find* their own self-efficacy when days are hard in the field. Also helpful to find one's own self-efficacy is the skill of problem-solving. EPP faculty members should look for opportunities to push their pre-service teachers to promote problem-solving skills. Having this skill later in the career will be necessary to overcome trials and find solutions, hence developing self-efficacy.

Again, there is a small connection to social and emotional learning (SEL) in the InTASC professional educator standards: “meaningful and appropriate professional learning experiences aligned with his/her own needs and the needs of the learners, school, and system” as well as know “how to use a variety of self assessment and problem-solving strategies to analyze and reflect on his/her practice and to plan for adaptations/adjustments” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013, p. 41). While there is this small connection, it is a stretch. In other words, EPPs, at least in Indiana, are not mandated to include SEL *with pre-service teachers as the focus*. This should be prioritized.

Iancu et al. (2018) made several suggestions to improve teacher burnout. Among the suggestions were mindfulness and relaxation, social and emotional skills, social support, and professional development. The individual survey and interview participants may or may not be using these skills and habits; some mentioned use of meditation and exercise, while others mentioned leaning on their social network for support. However, not one participant mentioned being taught these skills and habits from their EPP. Including such topics in EPPs going forward is important.

The three dimensions measured by the MBI could be used as a starting point for curriculum development to be integrated in EPPs. In other words, ideas such as emotional

exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy should be taught and discussed at the higher education level in the teacher education courses. The inclusion of such topics may prepare pre-service teachers for three areas related to burnout.

### **Recommendations for Future Work**

The current literature suggests that teachers, specifically special education teachers, are overwhelmed. In many cases, the work-related stress, anxiety, and depression results in devastating rates of burnout and teacher attrition. Through careful analysis of survey and interview data, it is evident that the mental health of teachers is suffering. Teachers are employing their own strategies to help themselves, but the symptoms remain a constant factor in the lives of many teachers. Although it is encouraging to see that teachers are supporting one another, it appears that EPPs as well as districts and building administrators could be doing more to help K-12 special education teachers. While several recommendations have been made for the higher education level, future studies should be conducted to focus on how the K-12 setting can be improved to support special education teachers. Future research about how EPPs could partner closely with K-12 induction programs should take place.

Another idea for future research is to follow a cohort of individuals who go through a newly improved EPP. Recommendations have been made as a result of this study, but the effectiveness of EPP curricular and co-curricular changes has not been measured. In other words, whether K-12 teacher burnout is really reduced because of the future changes made at the higher education level will be left unexplored. Looking ahead to a long-term plan, two more steps in this research endeavor should be considered. First, the skills or knowledge increased in one cohort of pre-service teachers as a result of an improved EPP should be measured. Second, future research should take place to determine if the improved EPP

curriculum and co-curricular experiences are successful in reducing teacher burnout. To do this, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), which is a questionnaire used to assess burnout, could be used to collect data about attitudes toward teaching (Schaufeli, 2017). Interviews could also be conducted to collect data about whether participants were able to maintain new behaviors learned while attending the EPP.

Two more considerations for future research are as follows: 1) Researchers could evaluate how stress impacts a K-12 teacher's accomplishments and ability to do their work. While this study questioned interviewees about teacher self-efficacy, the belief that they are effective in their positions, their answers were largely about how they help students and how they feel, not necessarily about how they tend to all teacher duties. Further research could take place to identify if stress impacts teachers' ability to actually accomplish tasks. 2) Researchers could also investigate why special education teachers are choosing to remain in the career. As mentioned before, this researcher can infer that this might be the case because of a strong teacher self-efficacy and/or a calling or passion for the career, but since that was not the focus of this study, these inferences lack a solid foundation of evidence.

## **Conclusion**

This researcher hypothesized the following: 1) The EPP experience can influence wellbeing and teacher self-efficacy. 2) Teacher wellbeing and teacher self-efficacy can reduce instances of K-12 special education teacher burnout. All but one participant in the dataset could not remember being taught stress-management and/or coping strategies while attending their EPPs. Regarding teacher wellbeing, all individuals in the dataset noted having at least one of the three main symptoms provided to them for consideration: stress, anxiety, and/or depression. The majority of interviewees could connect their self-authorship journey to their

EPP experience. Interestingly, while 18 of the 19 eligible study participants experience some level of self-perceived burnout, many individuals plan to stay in special education or at least the education field. While wellbeing seems to be a concern for this collective group of individuals, they all feel teacher self-efficacy. Could it be that these participants' lack of wellbeing is what sometimes causes the burnout while the teacher self-efficacy is what causes the commitment to stay in the field? How do EPPs improve the EPP experience, self-authorship journey included, to build wellbeing and teacher-self efficacy and ultimately reduce special education teacher burnout? The recommended actions in this chapter are a starting point.

Wittman (n.d.) defines the Forgetting Curve as forgetting what was taught and not applying those skills later when needed. One might argue that EPP focus on stress-management and coping strategies is not enough for this reason, favoring mentoring and induction programs instead. While it is important to establish well-developed mentoring and induction programs to help teachers begin and continue their careers through the first five years, it is also essential to equip them with some knowledge up front. Since no such mandates have been made, at least not in Indiana, to teach pre-service teachers social and emotional learning (SEL) to use as adults, conclusions cannot be made about the effectiveness of such changes because they have not been trialed and tested.

Attempting to prepare pre-service teachers for the demands of teaching special education *prior* to entering the workforce is a proactive approach. It is this researcher's hope that the findings from this study will be used to improve EPPs to ultimately reduce teacher burnout. Although my effort to make a difference is rooted in my passion for teaching and my love for educators and students alike, I would be lying if I claimed I am not gaining something from this

study as well. I feel that, having gone through an unfortunate case of burnout myself, I am somehow able to rectify that by studying this phenomenon and identifying implications for future EPP improvements.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: E-Mail Request for Survey Participation

Hello (District Name) Special Education Teachers,

My name is Brittany Straub. I am an Assistant Professor of Special Education at University of Saint Francis. I taught for 8 years as a mild disabilities teacher prior to transitioning to higher education.

I am currently completing my Doctorate of Education. My research question is as follows: How do the educator preparation program (EPP) experience and self-authorship journey of early career special education teachers impact their potential to burn out?

In short, I would like to examine K-12 special education teachers' recollections of the EPP experience when they attended their own colleges and what they remember or do not remember learning regarding stress management/coping strategies/mindfulness/etc. I am hopeful that I will be able to draw some connections between the EPP experience and teachers' perceived feelings of burnout. The implications of this study are important because as a professor of pre-service teachers, I would love to improve my own EPP to better prepare pre-service teachers for a demanding career and potentially improve burnout rates.

Individuals eligible for this study include special education teachers in their first five years of teaching. Educators in the student teaching phase, educators serving in a long-term substitute position, and educators who are currently working on emergency permits or transition to teaching permits are not eligible for the study.

I have chosen to use a voluntary, short (approximately 10-minute) survey as my first method of data collection. The last question in the short survey asks for volunteers to meet with me via Zoom for a subsequent interview. Both the survey and the interview are, of course, optional. However, I welcome your participation as this is an opportunity for you to share your story.

To access the survey, please use the following link: \_\_\_\_

Thank you for your consideration. Please reach out if you have questions.

Brittany Straub, Ed.S.

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## Appendix B: Survey Tool

### Part I: Introduction & Survey Informed Consent

My name is Brittany Straub, and I am a Higher Education Leadership doctoral student at National Louis University. I am requesting your participation in the study: *Special Education Teacher Burnout: Examining the Role of Educator Preparation Programs in Prevention*, occurring from December 2021 to March 2022. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of K-12 special education teachers in their educator preparation program (EPP) prior to entering the work field and how those experiences have impacted burnout now. This study will help the researcher understand the phenomenon of K-12 special education teacher burnout and lived experiences within their EPPs.

By selecting the option that you give consent and by continuing to the next survey question, you are agreeing to participate in a research project conducted by Brittany Straub, student at National Louis University in Chicago.

After reading the informed consent, please continue with the survey or exit the survey at this time. \*



I have read the informed consent. I am a special education teacher in my first five years of teaching, and I voluntarily agree to continue with the 10-minute survey.

Participation in this phase of the study will include:

1 survey

Your participation is requested if you are a special education teacher in your first five years of teaching. Your participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time without penalty or bias. The results of this study may be published or otherwise reported at conferences in the future. Participants' identities will in no way be revealed. Data will be reported anonymously and bear no identifiers that could connect data to individual participants. To ensure confidentiality the researcher will secure survey results on a password protected external hard drive. Only Brittany Straub will have access to data.

There are no anticipated risks or benefits greater than those encountered in daily life. Further, the information gained from this study could be useful to educator preparation programs (EPPs) at the higher education level.

Upon request you may receive summary results from this study and copies of any publications that may occur. To request results from this study, please email the researcher, Brittany Straub, at \_\_\_\_\_ or call 260-399-7700 ext. 8119.

Should you have questions or concerns about the study, please contact Dr. Jacci Rivard, Dissertation Committee Chair, at [jrivard@nl.edu](mailto:jrivard@nl.edu).

Thank you for your consideration.

## **Part II: Survey Questions**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study. The following section contains 18 survey questions, most of which are multiple choice or drop-down style questions. Feel free to include written commentary that might help describe your answers.

1. How many years have you been teaching? Please do not include years as a student teacher, substitute teacher, and/or teacher on an emergency permit/transition to teaching permit. (short answer)
2. What grade-level do you teach? (drop-down style)
  - a. Elementary School (Grades K-5)
  - b. Middle School (Grades 6-8)
  - c. High School (Grades 9-12)
3. If you wish to provide additional comments about the above question, please use the space provided here.
4. Please identify your gender. (drop-down style)
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Prefer Not to Share
5. What type of educator preparation program (EPP) did you attend? (multiple choice style)
  - a. Traditional 4-Year Bachelor's Program for Initial Licensure
  - b. Graduate Level Transition to Teaching Program
  - c. Other: \_\_\_\_\_ (space to type)
6. If you wish to provide additional comments about the above question, please use the space provided here.
7. Do you remember being taught stress management techniques and/or coping skills in your EPP? (drop-down style)
  - a. No
  - b. Yes
8. If yes, please elaborate. What do you remember learning?
9. It is possible you learned stress management techniques and/or coping skills in a different way other than your EPP. If so, please provide information about what you learned and

how.

10. Have you ever or do you currently experience any of the following as a result of your career? (Check all that apply.)
  - a. Stress: Work stress is defined as the reaction one expresses after feeling the demands of his or her job, specifically when the demands are greater than one's endurance; often, this work stress can result in physiological, psychological, and behavioral transformations (Hiebert, 1988; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).
  - b. Anxiety: Anxiety is associated with uncontrolled worry and may include restlessness, fatigue, irritability, and/or lack of focus (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 222).
  - c. Depression: Depression is characterized by sadness, loss of hope, and or decreased interest or pleasure (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 160).
  - d. N/A
  - e. Other: \_\_\_\_\_ (space to type)
11. In the last month, how often have you experienced stress as a result of your career?
  - a. 0-never, 1-almost never, 2-sometimes, 3-fairly often, 4-often
12. In the last month, how often have you experienced anxiety as a result of your career?
  - a. 0-never, 1-almost never, 2-sometimes, 3-fairly often, 4-often
13. In the last month, how often have you experienced depression as a result of your career?
  - a. 0-never, 1-almost never, 2-sometimes, 3-fairly often, 4-often
14. If you noted that you experience any of the above symptoms, what would you say is the cause?
15. Regarding symptoms, is there any other information you would like to provide/explain?
16. Teacher burnout is described as occurring when an individual feels exhausted, cynical, and ineffective instead of energized, hopeful, and efficacious (Chang, 2009). Have you ever or do you currently experience teacher burnout? To what degree do you perceive this burnout?
  - a. N/A
  - b. Low-Level
  - c. Medium-Level
  - d. High-Level
17. If you wish to provide additional comments about the above question, please use the space provided here.
18. What are your intentions for your career?
  - a. I intend to remain teaching in special education, and I am fulfilled in my career.
  - b. I intend to remain teaching in special education, but I am not fulfilled in my

- career.
- c. I intend to remain in education, but I have plans to end my role as a special education teacher.
  - d. I intend to leave the education field.
  - e. I prefer not to answer this question.
  - f. Other (space to type)

### **Part III: Conclusion & Interview Interest**

Thank you for participating in the survey portion of the study: *Special Education Teacher Burnout: Examining the Role of Educator Preparation Programs in Prevention*.

Following the survey window, this researcher will conduct interviews. If you are willing to participate in a 45-minute to 1 hour interview in January or February, please enter your name and email address in the box below.

## **Appendix C: E-Mail Reminders about Survey**

### ***Sent One Week After Survey Opens***

Hello (District Name) Special Education Teachers,

As a reminder, I would love for you to participate in my study: *Special Education Teacher Burnout: Examining the Role of Educator Preparation Programs in Prevention*.

The survey remains open for just 2 more weeks. You are eligible for this study if you are a special education teacher working within your first five years. Educators in the student teaching phase, educators serving in a long-term substitute position, and educators who are currently working on emergency permits or transition to teaching permits are not eligible for the study.

Please take some time to complete the short (approximately 10-minute) survey. I would greatly appreciate your participation and contribution to this important study.

(Survey Link Included Here)

Brittany Straub, Ed.S.

Assistant Professor  
Director of Master of Arts in Teaching & Transition to Teaching – Secondary  
Director of Master of Online Teaching  
Division of Education  
University of Saint Francis  
Fort Wayne, IN 46808  
Office: (260) 399-7700, ext. 8119

### ***Sent Two Weeks After Survey Opens***

Hello (District Name) Special Education Teachers,

As a reminder, I would love for you to participate in my study: *Special Education Teacher Burnout: Examining the Role of Educator Preparation Programs in Prevention*.

The survey remains open for just 1 more week. You are eligible for this study if you are a special education teacher working within your first five years. Educators in the student teaching phase, educators serving in a long-term substitute position, and educators who are currently working on emergency permits or transition to teaching permits are not eligible for the study.

Please take some time to complete the short (approximately 10-minute) survey. I would greatly appreciate your participation and contribution to this important study.

(Survey Link Included Here)

Brittany Straub, Ed.S.

Assistant Professor  
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Fort Wayne, IN 46808  
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***Sent Two and a Half Weeks After Survey Opens***

Hello (District Name) Special Education Teachers,

As a reminder, I would love for you to participate in my study: *Special Education Teacher Burnout: Examining the Role of Educator Preparation Programs in Prevention*.

The survey remains open for just 3 more days. You are eligible for this study if you are a special education teacher working within your first five years. Educators in the student teaching phase, educators serving in a long-term substitute position, and educators who are currently working on emergency permits or transition to teaching permits are not eligible for the study.

Please take some time to complete the short (approximately 10-minute) survey. I would greatly appreciate your participation and contribution to this important study.

(Survey Link Included Here)

Brittany Straub, Ed.S.

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## Appendix D: E-Mail to Interview Volunteers

Hello (District Name) Special Education Teacher,

Thank you for volunteering to take part in the interview portion of the research study: *Special Education Teacher Burnout: Examining the Role of Educator Preparation Programs in Prevention*.

Please take some time to complete the following form to indicate your availability for a 45-minute to one-hour interview. [LINK](#)

Once a mutually agreed upon time is identified, a Zoom link will be sent to you via email. Interviews will be video/audio recorded and transcribed, and participants will have an opportunity to view and have final approval of the content of interview transcripts and coded data.

Please review the attached document: 1) Interview Informed Consent.

I am available to answer questions prior to the interview if needed. Once comfortable, and if you choose to continue participation in the interview portion of the interview, please sign and date the consent form. The forms can be emailed back at your convenience prior to the scheduled interview.

Thank you for your collaboration and willingness to participate in the study.

Brittany Straub, Ed.S.

Assistant Professor  
Director of Master of Arts in Teaching & Transition to Teaching – Secondary  
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University of Saint Francis  
Fort Wayne, IN 46808  
Office: (260) 399-7700, ext. 8119

## Appendix E: Interview Informed Consent

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the interview portion of the study: *Special Education Teacher Burnout: Examining the Role of Educator Preparation Programs in Prevention*.

Again, the purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of K-12 special education teachers in their educator preparation program (EPP) prior to entering the work field and how those experiences have impacted burnout now. This study will help the researcher understand the phenomenon of K-12 special education teacher burnout and lived experiences within their EPPs.

By signing this document, you are agreeing to continue your participation in this research project conducted by Brittany Straub, student at National Louis University in Chicago.

Participation in this phase of the study will include:

1 interview scheduled at your convenience in January 2022 or February 2022

- The interview will last approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour and include approximately 9-12 questions with clarifying questions for each to understand the special education teacher's level of burnout and what was experienced in his or her EPP.
- Interviews will be video/audio recorded and transcribed, and participants will have an opportunity to view and have final approval of the content of interview transcripts and coded data.

Your participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time without penalty or bias. The results of this study may be published or otherwise reported at conferences in the future.

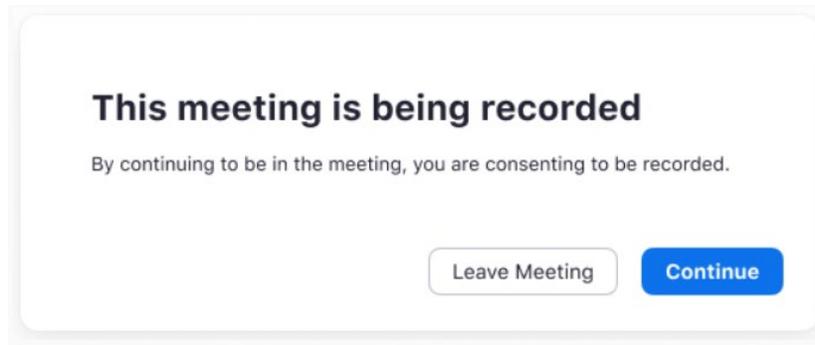
Participants' identities will in no way be revealed. Data will be reported anonymously and bear no identifiers that could connect data to individual participants. To ensure confidentiality the researcher will secure interview recordings and interview transcripts on a password protected external hard drive. Only Brittany Straub will have access to data.

There are no anticipated risks or benefits greater than those encountered in daily life. Further, the information gained from this study could be useful to educator preparation programs (EPPs) at the higher education level.

Upon request you may receive summary results from this study and copies of any publications that may occur. To request results from this study, please email the researcher, Brittany Straub, at \_\_\_\_\_ or call 260-399-7700 ext. 8119.

Should you have questions or concerns about the study, please contact Dr. Jacci Rivard, Dissertation Committee Chair, at [jrivard@nl.edu](mailto:jrivard@nl.edu).

By signing this form, you agree to the use of Zoom video/audio recording and transcription. In addition to this consent form, when the Zoom recording begins, you will be prompted to give consent by selecting the "Continue" button pictured below.



Thank you for your consideration.

Participant Consent: I have read the informed consent, and I understand my rights as a participant and agree to the terms.

Name: \_\_

Signature: \_\_

Date: \_\_

## Appendix F: Interview Protocol

### Part I: Introduction – greeting and appreciation for sitting down with me

- a) Purpose of Study
- b) Details of Interview
- c) Assurances of Confidentiality
- d) Video/Audio Recording Reminder

### Part II: Interview Questions & Follow-Up Questions

Now, we are moving into the question portion of our interview.

1. Could you start by giving me a summary of your career path?
  - a. What influenced your decision to become a special education teacher?
2. You indicated in your survey you experience a low/medium/high-level of burnout. Can you tell me a little about how that presents itself in your occupation?
  - a. Can you expand on details about the lack of or presence of work-related stress/anxiety/depression/other health-related issues in your occupation?
  - b. In your opinion, what causes those symptoms?
3. You indicated in your survey that you remember being taught stress management techniques and/or coping skills in your EPP and/or that you learned such strategies in a different way. Tell me about a time you recall learning those skills.
  - a. Do you continue to use those strategies today?
  - b. What other strategies do you use to improve your social wellness, physical wellness, emotional wellness, spiritual wellness, or occupational wellness?
  - c. Can you expand on that to give me an idea of how you implement this strategy? In other words, how would you explain to someone else how to do it?
4. Regarding teacher burnout, is there anything you wish you would have experienced in your EPP curriculum or co-curricular activities to prepare you?
  - a. What about regarding curriculum taught in courses?
  - b. What about co-curricular activities recommended or required by the Education Program?
  - c. What about co-curricular activities recommended or required by the institution?
5. Self-authorship occurs as an individual interprets one's own experiences to come to his or her own beliefs and feelings (Hodge et al., n.d.). Looking back on your EPP experience, what is your recollection of your own self-authorship journey?
  - a. Was your self-authorship journey connected in any way to EPP curriculum and/or EPP co-curricular offerings, and if so, how?
  - b. Tell me about a memory you have regarding your self-authorship journey.
6. Teacher wellbeing is defined as a teacher's sense of fulfillment, both in the professional and personal aspects, including feeling purposeful and happy (McCallum et al., 2017). Can you tell me about your own teacher wellbeing?
  - a. How did your EPP experience influence your teacher wellbeing, if at all?

7. Teacher self-efficacy is defined as job satisfaction deriving from a sense of effectiveness and a feeling of doing a good job as a teacher (Hanson, 2013). Can you tell me about your own teacher self-efficacy?
  - a. Can you tell me a little about how the EPP experience influenced your own self-efficacy? For example, did your EPP encourage self-reflection of your own teaching practices? Did your EPP encourage goal setting based on your reflection?
  
8. If there were a group of educator preparation program faculty, staff, leaders, and policymakers sitting with us today, what advice would you give them?
  - a. Specifically, what would you tell them about preparing the next generation of teachers for a demanding career that often leads to burnout?
  - b. What would be an effective addition to EPPs? This could be curricular or co-curricular.
  
9. Is there anything else you would like to share with me or think I should know about special education teacher burnout?

**Part III: Appreciation & Closing**

- a) Express Thanks
- b) Copy of Transcript to Follow

## Appendix G: Survey Codebook

Included in the dataset are the respondents who, at the time of taking the survey, were 1) fully-licensed special education teachers still in their first 5 years of teaching and 2) not on emergency permits or in a position of substitute teaching or student teaching.

STUDYID	Each eligible participant was given a study ID to ensure anonymity while also keeping records of which participants stated what.
YEARS	Question #1: How many years have you been teaching? Please do not include years as a student teacher, substitute teacher, and/or teacher on an emergency permit/transition to teaching permit. (short answer) 0 = less than 1 year 1 = 1 year 2 = 2 years 3 = 3 years 4 = 4 years 5 = 5 years
YEARGROUPS	1 = 0-1 years of teaching 2 = 2-3 years of teaching 3 = 4-5 years of teaching
GRADE	Question #2: What grade-level do you teach? (drop-down style) 1 = Elementary School (Grades K-5) 2 = Middle School (Grades 6-8) 3 = High School (Grades 9-12)
GRADEADDITIONAL	Question #3: If you wish to provide additional comments about the above question, please use the space provided here.  No themes needing codes emerged from this question. This data was used to evaluate the codes for question #1 and question #2.
GENDER	Question #4: Please identify your gender. (drop-down style) 1 = Male 2 = Female 3 = Prefer Not to Share
EPP	Question #5: What type of educator preparation program (EPP) did you attend? (multiple choice style with other-type in field) 1 = Traditional 4-Year Bachelor's Program for Initial Licensure 2 = Graduate Level Transition to Teaching Program 3 = Master's Program for Initial Licensure 4 = Master's Program – Unspecified Whether Initial Licensure or Advancement Degree  The typed information was categorized into codes 3 and 4.
EPPADDITIONAL	Question #6: If you wish to provide additional comments about the above question, please use the space provided here.

	No themes needing codes emerged from this question. This data was used to evaluate the codes for question #5.
TAUGHT	Question #7: Do you remember being taught stress management techniques and/or coping skills in your EPP? (drop-down style) 0 = No 1 = Yes
TAUGHTADDITIONAL	Question #8: If yes, please elaborate. What do you remember learning?  No themes needing codes emerged from this question. Only one individual noted being taught stress management techniques and/or coping skills in the EPP setting. That individual's feedback is included in Chapter 4.
OTHERSOURCE	Question #9: It is possible you learned stress management techniques and/or coping skills in a different way other than your EPP. If so, please provide information about what you learned and how. 1 = District Class or Professional Development 2 = Prior Experience Before Fully-Licensed (Either in Education or Other Career Field) 3 = Wellness Coaches, Apps, Tips
EXPERIENCESTRESS	Question #10: Have you ever or do you currently experience any of the following as a result of your career? (Check all that apply.) (Stress, Anxiety, Depression, N/A, Other-Type in Field)  Stress 0 = No 1 = Yes  Note: No individuals selected N/A. Also, there were only four individuals who typed into the "Other" field. Their responses fell into the depression category and/or did not generate new themes. Their commentary is included in Chapter 4.
EXPERIENCEANX	Question #10 Continued  Anxiety 0 = No 1 = Yes
EXPERIENCEDEP	Question #10 Continued  Depression 0 = No 1 = Yes

SUM	The sum of symptoms was calculated for each participant.
STRESSFREQ	Question #11: In the last month, how often have you experienced stress as a result of your career? 0 = Never 1 = Almost Never 2 = Sometimes 3 = Fairly Often 4 = Very Often
ANXIETYFREQ	Question #12: In the last month, how often have you experienced anxiety as a result of your career? 0 = Never 1 = Almost Never 2 = Sometimes 3 = Fairly Often 4 = Very Often
DEPRESSIONFREQ	Question #13: In the last month, how often have you experienced depression as a result of your career? 0 = Never 1 = Almost Never 2 = Sometimes 3 = Fairly Often 4 = Very Often
CAUSE	Question #14: If you noted that you experience any of the above symptoms, what would you say is the cause? 1 = Workload 2 = Lack of Support 3 = Extra Stress 4 = Combination of 2 or More Factors  Note: It was impossible to code all responses because most responses indicated a combination of 2 or more factors. All causes are explained in detail in Chapter 4.
OTHERSYMPTOMS	Question #15: Regarding symptoms, is there any other information you would like to provide/explain?  Note: No consistent themes were identified. The individual responses are described in detail in Chapter 4.
BURNOUT	Question #16: Teacher burnout is described as occurring when an individual feels exhausted, cynical, and ineffective instead of energized, hopeful, and efficacious (Chang, 2009). Have you ever or do you currently experience teacher burnout? To what degree do you perceive this burnout? 0 = N/A

	<p>1 = Low-Level  2 = Medium Level  3 = High Level</p>
BURNOUTINFO	<p>Question #17: If you wish to provide additional comments about the above question, please use the space provided here.</p> <p>Note: No consistent themes were identified. The individual responses are described in detail in Chapter 4.</p>
INTENTIONS	<p>Question #18: What are your intentions for your career?</p> <p>1 = I intend to remain teaching in special education, and I am fulfilled in my career.  2 = I intend to remain teaching in special education, but I am not fulfilled in my career.  3 = I intent to remain in education, but I have plans to end my role as a special education teacher.  4 = I intend to leave the education field.  5 = I prefer not to answer this question.  6 = Other (This was a type in field.)</p>
STAYYESORNO	<p>Anyone who selected options 1 or 2 for the above question intends to stay teaching in special education. Participants who chose options 3-6 intend to leave special education teaching.</p> <p>0 = Stay No  1 = Stay Yes</p>
INTERVIEW	<p>Question #19: If you agreed to be contacted for an interview, please provide your name, email address, and phone number.</p> <p>0 = Info Not Provided  1 = Info Provided</p>

## Appendix H: Interview Codebook

The following codebook contains pre-set codes. However, other codes will emerge throughout the analysis process. This is a working document reflecting the preliminary stages of research.

	<b>Codes &amp; Sub-Codes</b>	<b>When to Use</b>	<b>When to NOT Use</b>
Code 1	Presence of Work-Related Stress	Use this code when participants discuss having work-related stress/anxiety/depression in their position. Use of this code is for general references to those symptoms, not specific examples.	Do not use this code when a specific example is given.
Sub-Code 1.1	Examples of Work-Related Stress	Use this code for specific examples of work-related stress.	
Sub-Code 1.2	Causes of Work-Related Stress	Use this code when a participant mentions a reason or cause of work-related stress.	
Code 2	Coaching/Training to Use Stress-Reducing Strategies	Use this code when a participant discusses the experience of being coached or taught how to use strategies for reducing stress.	Do not use this code when a participant identifies a stress-reducing strategy as self-taught.
Code 2.1	Social Wellness	Use this code when participants describe how he/she maintains or fails to maintain social wellness.	
Code 2.2	Physical Wellness	Use this code when participants describe how he/she maintains or fails to maintain physical wellness.	
Code 2.3	Spiritual Wellness	Use this code when participants describe how he/she maintains or fails to maintain spiritual wellness.	
Code 2.4	Occupational Wellness	Use this code when participants describe how he/she maintains or fails to maintain occupational wellness.	
Code 3	Changes	Use this code when the participant mentions a need for changes in education that may help reduce work-related stress.  Personal Changes: a change only he or she can do	

		External Changes: must be made by policymakers, administrators, etc.	
Code 4	Level of Burnout	Use this code when a participant describes his or her perception of the level of burnout as either high, medium, or low level.	Do not use this code when the participant does not perceive himself or herself as experiencing burnout.
Code 5	EPP Preparation	Use this code when a participant explains whether he or she was taught mindfulness or stress-reducing techniques in his or her EPP. – used for taught and not taught	
Sub-Code 5.1	Continued Use	Use this code when a participant continues to use the strategies taught at the EPP.	
Code 6	Wishes for EPP Experience	Use this code when a participant describes something he or she wishes was different about the EPP experience. – This code is used when the participant gives suggestions for EPPs. – could be curricular or co-curricular	
Code 7	Self-Authorship	Use this code when a participant expresses a recollection of self-authorship being connected to the EPP experience.	
Code 8	Teacher Wellbeing	Use this code when a participant describes a lack of or a presence of teacher wellbeing.	
Sub-Code 8.1	Connected to EPP	Use this code when a participant expresses a belief that the EPP experience is or is not connected to teacher wellbeing.	
Sub-Code 8.2	Connected to Burnout	Use this code when a participant expresses a belief that teacher wellbeing is or is not connected to reduced burnout.	
Code 9	Teacher Self-Efficacy	Use this code when a participant describes a lack of or presence of teacher self-efficacy.	
Sub-Code 9.1	Efficacy Connected to EPP	Use this code when a participant expresses a belief that the EPP experience is or is not connected to teacher self-efficacy.	

Sub-Code 9.2	Efficacy Connected to Burnout	Use this code when a participant expresses a belief that teacher self-efficacy is or is not connected to reduced burnout.	
Code 10	Decision to Become SPED Teacher	Use this code when a participant mentions his or her reason for becoming a SPED teacher.	
Sub-Code 10.1	Passion/Calling	Use this code when the participant expands on the passion or the calling he or she felt and/or feels.	