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Perceptions of a Suburban School District's High New Music Teacher Attrition Rate

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Sarah Martinez

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2016

Abstract

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MEd, Texas State University, 2008

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Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

A high attrition rate exists among new music teachers in a public school district in Central Texas. This problem is mirrored by a high attrition rate of music teachers across the United States. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore reasons for the attrition of music teachers at the study site, to articulate why some new music teachers have left the profession, and to identify supports that could be influential in retaining new music teachers. The study was grounded in Gardner's theory that administrators have the ability to make policy changes that can influence retention and attrition rates for music teachers. Data were collected through individual interviews with 3 administrators, 3 new music teachers, and a focus group of 3 former music teachers who resigned from their positions at the study site. Data were open coded and thematically analyzed for reoccurring themes. Findings indicated that the high attrition rate of music teachers at the study site may result from unequal treatment of music teachers compared to core content teachers. Another issue noted was the lack of understanding by music teachers and administrators about available supports to new teachers. Recommendations include providing equal opportunities to music teachers to attend subject-specific professional learning communities and professional development activities. This study may contribute to social change through adjustments to the training and mentoring structures for new music teachers in the local district, which may ultimately decrease the turnover of music teachers.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the many teachers throughout my life who set me up to be successful in this profession. To Mrs. Evelyn Schaal who was my elementary music teacher and piano teacher for many years after that, thank you for teaching me the love of music and the desire to be a better musician. To Mrs. Marie Stauber who gave me my first chance to teach the class when I was in 5th grade, thank you for challenging me and trusting me. To Ms. Santhia Jo Collins who created lifelong memories with Bay Area Children's Chorus, thank you for inspiring me to give the gift of music to others. To Ms. Annetta Kasinger who gave me a second chance to finish high school, thank you for showing me that I had more to offer the world. To Mr. Lee Lemson who convinced me that I could make it as a music major despite my doubts, thank you for believing in me. To Mrs. Patricia Moreno who answered 20 questions every week during my first year of teaching, thank you for being patient with me. I hope I can be a positive influence on the next generation of teachers the way you all were for me!

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Section 1: The Problem

Music education is important for a student's overall social and physical development (Izumi-Taylor, Morris, Meredith, & Hicks, 2012; Hughes, 2011; Mattar, 2013), and music teachers play an essential role in a child's education (Gardner, 2010). Kloss (2012) warned that more students drop out of music programs in the year following a teacher turnover, so it is important that school districts are able to support and retain their music teachers. A suburban public school district in Texas is losing 1 to 4 of its 13 elementary music teachers each year (Music Coordinator, personal communication, June 14, 2014). The results of this study were used to develop a project to improve the support and retention of new music teachers.

Definition of the Problem

The problem addressed in this study was the high attrition rate among new music teachers in a suburban public school district in Texas. From 2010 to 2013, 10 of the 19 elementary music teachers employed by the local district left their positions (Music Coordinator, personal communication, June 14, 2014). The majority of the teachers who left had completed 3 years or less as a music teacher before leaving the job. Continually recruiting, hiring, and training new teachers can be financially costly for school districts (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014; Baker, 2011; Buchanan, 2012), and not having experienced teachers can be academically costly for students (Baker, 2011; Kutsyuruba, Godden, & Tregunna, 2014). Music teacher retention is not just a local problem. Researchers have provided evidence that many new music teachers across the nation are leaving the profession (Aspnes, 2010; Gardner, 2010; Hancock, 2009; Kloss, 2013).

Through this project study, the problem of new music teacher attrition was explored at the local, state, and national levels through existing data, literature, and face-to-face interviews.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

The local public school district has 13 elementary campuses, and each campus has one elementary music teacher position, as shown in Table 1 (Music Coordinator, personal communication, June 14, 2014). Over a period of 4 years, 10 teachers joined the elementary music team to fill the vacancies of teachers who had left. Of those, seven were new to the profession, two came from similar positions in other districts, and one had previous experience as a core subject teacher. Most of the music teacher job openings were the result of someone who had 3 years or less teaching experience leaving the profession (Music Coordinator, personal communication, June 14, 2014).

Table 1

New and Returning Elementary Music Teachers in Local District

Year	New Teachers	Returning Teachers	Total Teachers
2013	3	10	13
2012	2	11	13
2011	1	12	13
2010	4	9	13

The Texas Music Educators Association (2015) lists current job vacancies for music teachers in Texas. At the onset of this study, there were 82 entry-level public school music positions that were listed as unfilled. Seven of these positions were within

60 miles of the local district. This aligns with Baker's (2011) and Gardner's (2010) research, which indicated that many music positions are going unfilled.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

Gardner's (2010) examination of job openings in the field of music education showed a shortage of music teachers and unfilled music teaching positions due to many teachers leaving the profession. Hancock (2009) observed that a majority of music teachers who leave the profession do not have plans to return. The shortage of music teachers has played a part in the cancellation of several music festivals in the United States (Aspnes, 2010).

Kloss (2012) emphasized that music teacher turnover is more than just one teacher leaving and another arriving. Students expect to have new teachers in the core subjects each year, but they also expect to continue working with the same noncore teachers with whom they have already built a relationship. When a change in teacher occurs, students can experience a full range of emotions within themselves or among their friends (Kloss, 2013). Students could benefit from building lasting relationships with their music teachers.

According to the Alliance for Excellent Education (2014), 40-50% of new teachers leave the profession within 5 years. With 9,115,900 people in the occupation (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012), it is costly to continuously train and lose new recruits. The estimated cost of teacher attrition is $235 million in Texas alone (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014). Teacher turnover leads to new recruitment and hiring costs

that can put a financial strain on school districts (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014; Baker, 2011; Buchanan, 2012; Kutsyuruba et al., 2014).

Based on these reasons, it is important to understand teacher attrition and how it might be reduced (Darling-Hammond, 2014; Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014; Kutsyuruba et al., 2014; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014). Gardner (2010) studied music teacher retention and attrition to determine whether patterns might shed light on why so many teachers have left. Gardner found that the more teachers felt supported, the more likely they were to stay in their current positions. The key to retaining new music teachers in the local district may be to provide better support.

The U.S. Department of Education (2010) expressed the need for a comprehensive new teacher induction program that includes carefully selected and trained mentors, professional development, and ongoing evaluation of practice with constructive feedback. Through further research of this topic, it was revealed that professional learning communities (Riveros, Newton, & Burgess, 2012), ongoing professional development (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2012), and mentoring (Gaikhorst, Beishuizen, Korstjens, & Volman, 2014) have been three of the most common support systems for new teachers. This study focused on these support systems and how they might influence new music teacher retention in the local district.

The local school district has outlined a new teacher induction program and professional development model that specifically targets the preparation of teachers of the four core subject areas and special education. At the time of this study, all teachers were following the same professional development program because there was no

specific training or mentoring plan for those who are not core teachers or special education teachers. Gardner's (2010) study showed that music teachers may be leaving at a high rate due to lack of support. The findings of this study could lead to policy changes that specifically target the support needed for better music teacher retention.

Definitions

Several terms related to the field of education and research were used in this study. To clarify these terms for the reader, the following definitions are provided:

Case: The focus of a study, such as a person or entity (Stake, 2006).

Continuing professional education (CPE) credit: Mandatory hours of professional development needed to renew a teaching certificate in Texas (Texas Education Agency, 2016).

Core teacher: A teacher of mathematics, English language arts, science, or social studies (Yuan, 2015).

Curriculum guide: A systematic way for teachers to present content to students (Parsad & Spiegelman, 2012).

Multiple case study: A group of similar cases that are analyzed individually first, then as a collection (Stake, 2006).

Professional learning community (PLC): A group of school personnel collaborating for the purpose of sustained, substantive school improvement through the collection, analysis, and use of data (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008).

Teacher attrition: The percentage of teachers who leave annually (Kirby & Grissmer, 1993).

Quintain: The collective target in a multiple case study (Stake, 2006).

Significance of the Study

Teachers play an essential role in the educational system, and they are viewed by society as fundamentally important (Gardner, 2010). Many new teachers choose to leave the teaching profession within the first few years (Morrison, 2013). Ingersoll et al. (2012) documented how adequate preparation in subject-specific pedagogical methods and skills helps keep teachers in the profession past the first phase. Much research has been done about teacher retention (Gray & Taie, 2015) and the supports that may help improve the rates, but supporting new music teachers can come with a unique set of challenges that has not been thoroughly researched (Berry, Daughtrey, & Wieder, 2010).

According to Ingersoll et al. (2012), an effective induction and mentoring program has been shown to correlate with higher novice teacher retention rates than the regional and statewide averages, and one school administrator in the study directly credited a mentor for retaining a valuable novice teacher. Because the local school district was already providing an induction and mentoring program and embedded professional learning communities, a study was needed to explore why the program was not successfully retaining new music teachers. This study could help determine whether there are gaps or deficiencies in the professional development, mentoring program, or professional learning communities that are not allowing for adequate support of new music teachers.

New teacher turnover was especially high among new music teachers in the local district. There may be a variety of reasons for this. The results of this study informed the

development of a project. The findings could lead to new support systems being developed or changes in the PLC design, professional development, or mentoring program to better support the new music teachers and increase the retention rate among this population. Other districts could use the results to make decisions made about training and mentoring new music teachers. Students may benefit from more stability in the music education staff (Kloss, 2013).

Guiding/Research Questions

Music teachers are leaving the profession (Gardner, 2010), and more research is needed about supporting new music teachers (Berry et al., 2010). This study addressed possible reasons for the high turnover rate among new music teachers in the local district. The guiding questions for this study were as follows:

1. How does participation in a professional learning community provide support to new music teachers?
2. How does professional development provide support to new music teachers?
3. How does a mentor provide support to new music teachers?
4. Why did some new music teachers decide to leave the profession?
5. What supports do new music teachers, former music teachers, and school administrators consider essential for new music teacher retention?

I conducted a multiple case study by first treating each data source as an individual case for data collection and analysis. I then analyzed the collection of cases as a whole (Stake, 2006). This allowed for insight into this phenomenon from the different

viewpoints of administrators, new music teachers, and former music teachers who recently left the profession after 3 years or less working in the occupation.

Review of the Literature

Conceptual Framework

The field of education is focused on student achievement (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014). Shaw and Newton (2014) stated, "If the most precious product developed in education is the student, then our most prized commodity should be the classroom teacher" (p. 101). The role that teachers play in the educational system is fundamentally important (Gardner, 2010). Other recent studies have indicated that the best way to improve student achievement is to support the teachers (Allen et al., 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2014; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014).

This need for strong and supported teachers holds true especially in music classes. Brain research indicates that more skilled levels of musical practice are linked with better cognitive control processes, and the strength of the music educator can determine the speed at which students' attention and cognition improve (Goodhart, 2014). A high-quality music education can support a child's development of language, literacy, and communication skills (Bernstorf, 2013; Morehouse, 2013). Students develop their self-discipline, self-motivation, and metacognative skills through music practice (Bathgate, Sims-Knight, & Schunn, 2012; Benton, 2013; Konrad, 2014). School music programs can provide students with a sense of community and pride (Bledsoe, 2015). Additionally, music classes are ideal settings for children to build socioemotional skills (Edgar, 2013;

Jacobi, 2012; Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2012; Ritblatt, Longstreth, Hokoda, Cannon, & Weston, 2013).

Music teachers have the opportunity to shape the role of arts education in their students' lives (Abril & Bannerman, 2015). Students are able to study with the same music teacher for multiple years and build deeper connections. Because students expect to work with their music teachers for several years, music teacher turnover can cause a full range of emotions among students (Kloss, 2013).

The problem of this study was music teacher attrition. Gardner (2010) gathered data about this problem by distributing a staffing survey to nearly 2,000 music teachers and almost 46,000 other types of teachers. There were two purposes for that study. The first was to create a profile of music teacher attributes and opinions and to compare these to other types of teachers. The second goal was to develop a theoretical model that could predict the retention or attrition of music teachers.

Gardner (2010) outlined the same trend seen in the local district: music teachers have left jobs at a high rate. The shortage of music teachers has caused problems in the field of music education. A lack of qualified music teachers has played a part in many music festivals being canceled (Aspnes, 2010) and several music teacher positions going unfilled (Gardner, 2010). The lack of qualified music teachers can also impact student achievement. Goodhart (2014) documented how the quality of the music teacher can determine the speed at which students' cognitive skills improve. Similarly, Zubrzycki (2012) contended that students who had a substitute for 10 or more days in a school year saw significantly lower test results than peers whose teachers were present more often.

Teacher attrition has both an expertise-related and a financial cost (Buchanan, 2012). Teacher experience and knowledge may be lost to the profession if teachers do not stay (Buchanan et al., 2013). Continuously recruiting, hiring, and training new teachers is more expensive than investing in the ones already holding the position (Kutsyuruba et al., 2014). For these reasons it is important to understand teacher attrition and how it might be reduced (Darling-Hammond, 2014; Gardner, 2010; Goldring et al., 2014; Kutsyuruba et al., 2014; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014). Administrators might be able to make policy changes that could improve music teachers' perceptions of their current positions. A more positive perception may influence the attrition rate for this population (Gardner, 2010).

Music teacher attrition may be counteracted through support by the local school district (Gardner, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). These supports could include professional learning communities (Riveros et al., 2012), professional development (Ingersoll et al., 2012), and mentoring (Gaikhorst et al., 2014). The following sections will cover each of these individually, though it should be noted that they are often used in combination (Le Cornu, 2010) and novice teachers should receive multiple forms of support (Bell-Robertson, 2014).

Professional learning community (PLC). DuFour et al. (2008) advocated for sustained, substantive school improvement that could be achieved through school employees participating in a PLC. A PLC is a group of educational personnel working collectively to create and maintain a learning culture for all adults and students (Huffman, 2011). PLCs continue to be a growing practice in schools (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012;

Mindich & Lieberman, 2012), and studies have shown that PLCs can enhance teacher quality (National Council of Teachers of English, 2010).

PLCs have been beneficial in supporting teachers by providing a network of human resources (Riveros et al., 2012; Shin, 2013). Each teacher brings a different set of knowledge, skills, and experiences to a PLC, and the combination can be more powerful than any one expert opinion (Ferguson, 2013; Luebke, 2013). PLCs are especially important for novice teachers because they can cover a large span of topics that veteran educators have encountered over a career span (Lindsey, Jungwirth, Pahl, & Lindsey, 2009). They can also be crucial for all teachers working through the rapid changes in the educational world (Owen, 2014).

A common misconception is that any group of educators who meet are a PLC, but this will not produce the results described in the professional literature (Brig, 2014). According to DuFour (2014), a PLC must be focused on best practice to be effective. Educators must ensure that the network is more than just a support group, a forum for sharing stories, or a platform for promoting personal instructional preferences. Forced collaboration among teachers may even be worse than no collaboration (O'Keeffe, 2012).

Gardner (2010) articulated that many music teachers receive less embedded support than general education teachers. Maher, Burroughs, Dietz, and Karnbach (2010) highlighted the difficulties in getting music teachers to participate in meaningful PLCs, because teachers are often isolated by distance and the nature of their jobs. Though research has shown that PLCs are harder to maintain for music teachers, it has also shown that they are highly effective and becoming more manageable through the use of

technology (Blitz, 2013). Both face-to-face and virtual PLCs should reflect what is known about best practice, and when well-structured they can be a vehicle for high-quality professional development (Mindich & Lieberman, 2012).

Blitz (2013) proposed that online and hybrid PLCs can be effective for teachers in isolated positions. Online meetings via Skype and a private Facebook blog provided a place for music teachers to discuss thoughts, concerns, and insecurities regarding the development of new music teachers (Pellegrino, Sweet, Kastner, Russell, & Reese, 2014). These types of virtual connections are especially helpful for those lacking nearby colleagues within their content area, but they can also be beneficial for any educator searching for new and different ideas (Giebelhausen, 2015; Richardson & Mancabelli, 2011).

DuFour (2014) described how successful virtual PLCs were created through software such as Elluminate and Collaborate. The software enabled teachers to send and receive written or verbal messages, share computer screens, poll, and plan together. The meetings could be recorded and stored for later review.

As Killion (2013) described, technology can open up a multitude of possibilities, but its effectiveness is in the method and consistency in which it is used. Burns (2013) predicted that social media and mobile technologies may become increasingly more important because of their availability and networking possibilities. Bell-Robertson (2015) compiled a literature review showing there is not enough research available about face-to-face and virtual learning communities to support novice music teachers.

Professional development. Professional development is important to people of various occupations (Goldring et al., 2014; Ho, 2014). A survey of former teachers who left the profession indicated that nearly 46% believed the professional development was better in their current positions, as opposed to 21% who thought it was better in their teaching positions and 33% who thought neither was better or worse (Goldring et al., 2014). Gardner's (2010) research indicated that music teachers were not satisfied with the information they received on instructional practices. This is a concern that could be remedied through intentionally prepared professional development (Baker-Doyle, 2010; Green & Ballard, 2011).

Professional development has the power to improve teachers' practice, school performance, and students' achievement (Gersten, Taylor, Keys, Rolfhus, & Newman-Gonchar, 2014; Opfer & Pedder, 2010). The Texas Education Agency (2016) recognized professional development as essential and required all teachers to earn 200 hours of continuing professional education (CPE) credit every 5 years to renew their teaching certificates. Educational leaders continuously review the effectiveness and efficiency of professional development to inform future practice (Swinton, De Berry, Scafidi, & Woodward, 2010). According to Baker-Doyle (2010), professional development can address two of the primary factors related to teacher retention: congruency of beliefs to the norms of the organization and the relational needs of teachers.

Desimone (2009) outlined the core features of effective professional development: content-focused, active learning, coherent, and collective participation. Although the last three may be easily addressed with all staff, it is the content-focused

feature that many music teachers may not receive in professional development (Gardner, 2010). Parsad and Spiegelman (2012) researched professional development in music and found that only 69% of public secondary schools offered any professional development program for music teachers.

Gersten et al. (2014) suggested that some professional development programs lacked measurable benefits. Available information regarding the effectiveness of professional development is mixed, but often these studies group together all types and qualities of professional development. This can result in the actual effects of professional development being lost in the data (Kutsyuruba et al., 2014). Other more rigorously designed research has indicated positive effects using subject-specific professional development (Ingersoll et al., 2012; Kutsyuruba et al., 2014).

The new teacher training that is provided by school districts is typically a one-size-fits-all approach that does not take into consideration atypical classroom settings that might exist for music teachers. These issues might include teaching without a district-provided curriculum guide, teaching larger groups of students, planning for multiple grade levels, or teaching without a dedicated classroom (Berry et al., 2010; Robinson, 2011). Many early-career music teachers need support in facing pedagogical issues and classroom management situations that are unique to the music classroom environment (Legette, 2013).

For music teachers, meaningful professional development could look different than the traditional model. It could include further training in the subject and experiences in making music. Pellegrino (2011) argued that there is not enough emphasis placed on

music making in the professional development designed for music teachers and that these experiences are important to the music teachers' sense of identity, beliefs, well-being, and effectiveness. This type of learning is sometimes referred to as non-formal, and Mok (2011) documented its importance in the music education field. DeMonte (2013) further asserted that short-term, disconnected professional development that is commonplace in the field of education today is not as effective as sustained investments in individual teachers.

Mentoring. A survey of former teachers who left for a new occupation indicated that almost 42% believed they had better opportunities for learning from their colleagues in their current positions, with nearly 16% who thought it was better in teaching and 42% who thought neither was better or worse (Goldring et al., 2014). Mentoring can play an important role for a new teacher (Gaikhorst et al., 2014). It can come in several different forms (Desimone et al., 2013) that are discussed below.

Stanley, Snell, and Edgar (2013) observed that collaboration between music teachers led to more positive experiences reported. Conway (2015) connected the previous and current research to show that novice teachers can benefit from having an experienced music mentor. Pairing novice teachers with a mentor is becoming a more common and necessary practice in education (Buchanan, 2012; Hudson, 2012; Kutsyuruba et al., 2014), but mentors should be carefully chosen and specifically trained for the task to get the best results (Leonard, 2012; Range, Duncan, & Hvidston, 2013).

A good teacher will not necessarily make a good mentor (Ambrosetti, 2014). Those who volunteer to be a mentor may not inherently know how to be one. Mentors

often need help understanding the complexities of mentoring and the roles of mentors and mentees (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010).

The scope of existing studies on mentoring reflects differing results. When two different models of new teacher development were compared, some researchers found that in-school mentors and collaborative teams were more effective in increasing teacher retention than training offered by district-wide coaches (Hallam, Chou, Hite & Hite, 2012). In contrast, Ormond's (2011) study of off-site mentoring indicated that there is great value in using someone with potentially more time to invest in a mentee than another teacher on the same campus might have.

Desimone et al. (2013) distinguished between formal and informal mentoring. They found that formal and informal mentors can serve similar functions and often provide complementary support. Hochberg et al. (2015) mirrored these findings and offered suggestions for how schools can use both forms of mentoring for increased benefits.

Mentoring new music teachers poses a challenge, as music teachers are commonly the only ones teaching the content on their campus (Maher et al., 2010). Using alternative mentoring strategies such as reciprocal mentoring (Paris, 2013) or off-site mentoring (Ormond, 2011) may present a solution to this issue. Smailes and Gannon-Leary (2011) highlighted availability as one of the best qualities of virtual mentoring, but they also listed possible misuse as a likely drawback.

Review of the Broader Problem

I searched for as much relevant information on the topic of music teacher attrition and retention as possible. I looked in professional journals from Kodály Educators of Texas and Texas Music Educators Association for related information. The Walden University library's databases provided journal articles on the topic with combinations of the following keywords in searches: *teacher*, *music teacher*, *novice teacher*, *support*, *attrition*, *retention*, *perceptions*, *professional learning community* (*PLC*), *professional development*, and *mentor*. Similar keyword search combinations were conducted through the SAGE database. Results included general information about teacher attrition and support, as well as more specific information about music teachers and common support systems. I checked in the references section of relevant sources and often found other relevant sources. Saturation was reached when the differing combinations of search words no longer revealed new relevant articles. Statistics and general information were also gathered from the websites of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012), Texas Music Educators Association (2015), the U.S. Department of Education (2010), and the local school district's website.

There is a concern across the United States for stability in the music education workforce because the music teacher attrition rates are significantly high in the United States (Gardner, 2010). A large percentage of teachers leave the profession within the first 5 years (Paris, 2013; Sass, Flores, Claeys, & Perez, 2012). Although career accomplishment is often measured in factors such as job security, salary, and benefits (Gardner, 2010; Kena et al., 2015), one study claimed that former teachers rated job

security and benefits higher in the field of teaching than their current occupations (Goldring et al., 2014). Gardner (2010) illustrated how almost 87% of former music teachers were happier with their new jobs than they were in their former teaching positions. A closer look at what causes teachers to leave may reveal important information for teacher retention in the future.

High teacher attrition rates can lead to experience and knowledge being lost to the profession (Buchanan et al., 2013). It would be more advantageous to research what is needed to improve teacher retention rates (Gardner, 2010; Ingersoll, 2012) rather than to continue focusing on increasing the supply of new teachers. This study was guided by Gardner's (2010) theory that administrators have the ability to make policy changes that can influence retention and attrition rates for music teachers.

Teacher attrition has been widely studied in response to the issue of new teachers in the U.S. leaving the teaching profession within the first few years (Gray & Taie, 2015; Morrison, 2013). There has been little data collected specifically about music teacher attrition rates in the United States (Gardner, 2010). There is also a wealth of information about preservice music teachers, but very little data available about trends among current music teachers (Berry et al., 2010; Gardner, 2010). This study could provide useful information to the local district and others throughout the United States facing a similar problem of high music teacher attrition.

Gardner (2010) suggested that future research on the topic of music teacher retention focus on the opinions and perceptions of music teachers rather than their attributes. Gardner (2010) also found that administrators can have a large impact on

music teacher attrition, so it was important that their perceptions be included in this study. Through the research questions for this study, I targeted the different viewpoints of administrators, new music teachers, and former music teachers in an effort to get a complete picture of this phenomenon. I used open-ended interview questions which can be found in Appendices B, C, and D of this document to allow these perceptions to be voiced. Teachers and administrators answered these same questions in a round of beta testing before they were used in this study.

New teachers commonly enter the world of teaching at a young age but with several years of pre-service knowledge from undergraduate courses or alternative certification programs (Green & Ballard, 2011; Hellman, & McDowell, 2011; Legette, 2013). New teachers are often enthusiastic about the opportunities ahead and the lessons they have prepared, but their enthusiasm is quickly replaced by anxiety when they are faced with issues of student discipline and classroom management (Gardner, 2010; Pearman & Lefever-Davis, 2012). New teachers need guidance in adjusting to full-time teaching demands (Buchanan et al., 2013). Other issues for new teachers might include managing colleague interactions through common planning and professional learning communities, and building relationships with students and parents (Buchanan et al., 2013; Johnson, 2014).

Several distinguishing characteristics were discovered in Gardner's (2010) research that separated music teachers from other types of teachers. Music teachers dealt with issues that other teachers do not usually encounter, such as concert planning, transportation requests for offsite events, or managing large budgets. Another significant

difference was that many music teachers held part-time positions or taught in several buildings within the school district. Itinerant teachers may have a unique set of challenges that come from traveling during the school day, working with multiple administration teams, and working within the schedules of different campuses (Gardner, 2010). Gardner (2010) indicated that music teachers have not received as much guidance in working with students who have special needs as teachers of other disciplines have received, with nearly 24% of music teachers indicating that they received no support in this area. These issues may contribute to the attrition rate if they are not addressed through an induction program (Ingersoll, 2012).

The school district can provide support systems for teachers to help them be successful at the beginning of their careers (Ingersoll et al., 2012) and to better retain teachers (Allen et al., 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2014; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). These supports could include professional learning communities (Riveros et al., 2012), professional development (Ingersoll et al., 2012), and mentoring (Gaikhorst et al., 2014; Gardner, 2010). The goal of these supports is to provide teachers with ongoing information and human resources that can help with issues that arise in the teaching profession.

The professional learning community (PLC) model was advocated by DuFour et al. (2008) and continues to be a growing practice in schools (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Mindich & Lieberman, 2012). PLCs have provided teachers with a network of human resources (Riveros et al., 2012). Research has shown that PLCs have been successful in enhancing teacher quality (National Council of Teachers of English, 2010).

Desimone (2009) provided a conceptual framework for professional development. She suggested that the core features of effective professional development include content-focused, involving active learning, coherent, and collective participation. Desimone's framework has been supported by theoretical literature and recent research studies (King, 2011; Koellner & Jacobs, 2014; Kraft & Papay, 2014; Nishimura, 2014).

Jacobs (2008) concluded that an induction and one-to-one mentoring program increased both the retention and the effectiveness of new music teachers. Conway (2015) connected past research with current research and found that new music teachers can greatly benefit from having an experienced music mentor. New music teachers and mentors both reported benefits from their collaboration (Conway, 2015; Stanley et al., 2013).

Professional learning communities (Riveros et al., 2012), ongoing professional development (Ingersoll et al., 2012), and mentoring (Gaikhorst et al., 2014) have proven to be effective in supporting new teachers. These are often used in combinations (Le Cornu, 2010), and it is especially important for new teachers to have multiple forms of support (Bell-Robertson, 2014). The U.S. Department of Education (2010) encouraged a new teacher induction program that includes mentors, instructional support, professional development, opportunities to observe experienced teachers, ongoing evaluation of practice, and constructive feedback. The local school district is already providing an induction and mentoring program and embedded professional learning communities. This study might give insight into why these supports are not successfully retaining new music teachers in the local district.

Implications

New teacher turnover is especially high among new music teachers in the local district. This could be caused by inadequate support systems available to new music teachers, and the results of this research could lead to changes in the PLC design, professional development, or mentoring program for new music teachers in the district. The results of this research informed the development of a project, and this study may open up possibilities for changes that can be made to better support new music teachers and increase the retention rate. The problem of music teacher attrition is mirrored across the U.S., and the results of this study may provide insight for other school districts with a high music teacher turnover.

Summary

An important part of a strong music program is a consistent, well-prepared music teacher. A local public school district has experienced a high turnover rate among teachers who have taught music in the district for 3 years or less. Data have shown that this is a problem at the local, state, and national levels.

There may be ways to decrease teacher attrition (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). This could come in the form of professional learning communities (Riveros et al., 2012), professional development (Ingersoll et al., 2012), mentoring (Gaikhorst et al., 2014), or a combination of the above. The following section provides details about how this problem was studied.

Section 2: The Methodology

Teachers in Gardner's (2010) study indicated that the strongest influence on teacher satisfaction and job commitment was the teacher's perceived level of support. The objective of this study was to document teachers' and administrators' perceptions in an effort to better understand the factors behind the high attrition rate among music teachers in a suburban public school district in Central Texas. The results may lead to changes in the support systems the district currently provides or the development of new support systems (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014) targeting the unique needs of new music teachers.

Qualitative Research Design

Because I was looking to capture participants' perceptions about the high new music teacher attrition rate, the research design required collection and adequate documentation of this information. According to Creswell (2012), educational research designs are based on the nature of the research problem and the questions that will address it. Designs differ in epistemological assumptions, theoretical frameworks, and research procedures (Yilmaz, 2013).

Gardner (2010) indicated that further research on this topic should focus on the opinions and perceptions of music teachers. Quantitative research involves collecting numeric data from many people using preset questions and responses (Creswell, 2012). Quantitative methods would not have been appropriate for this study because the participants' perceptions might not have been thoroughly collected with preset responses.

Qualitative research involves collecting data based on words from a small number of participants (Creswell, 2012). This type of research is focused on the discovery, insight, and understanding from the perceptions of those being studied (Merriam, 2009). Gardner (2010) called for further research on teachers' perceived level of support, and perceptions would be more effectively gathered through open-ended questions. Through this study I sought to articulate perceptions about new music teacher attrition in a public school district. This purpose aligned with the qualitative approach because the study was aimed at understanding the participants' perspectives (Merriam, 2009).

Yin (2014) described how there is no formula for choosing research designs, but the more the research questions rely on the "how" and "why" of a phenomenon the more relevant case study research will be. Case study research was an appropriate design for this study because it involves thoroughly investigating a contemporary phenomenon within its real-world context (Yin, 2014). This study was a good match for the case study design because the phenomenon was the high attrition rate of new music teachers, and interviewing current and former music teachers and administrators was the method for gathering real-world data.

A single case study could have yielded data about new music teachers' perceptions, but a more complete picture was desired, which led to including perspectives from the different groups of people who had been affected by the quintain: the current music teachers, former music teachers, and school administrators. A multiple case study involves a group of single cases that are bound by a common characteristic or condition (Stake, 2006). In this project study, new music teachers, former music teachers, and

school administrators each brought unique perspectives to the common problem they face: high music teacher attrition within their school district. I followed Yin's (2014) established procedures for multiple case research by collecting and analyzing data from each case and then analyzing the collective group of cases to develop a better understanding of the reasons for the high attrition rate in local music teachers.

Each of the groups answered general questions about their perceptions of the support new music teachers receive. There were also questions specifically addressing PLCs, professional development, and mentoring. Interview questions can be found in Appendices B, C, and D. There is not a sufficient bank of data on attrition of music teachers (Gardner, 2010), so the results of this study may benefit the local district and others facing this problem.

Participants

Through this study, I sought to discover reasons a local public school district had not been successfully retaining new music teachers. The results of this study are intended to guide district leaders in creating a better support system for new music teachers. Other public school districts may use the results to guide their own research or inform decisions made about training and mentoring new music teachers.

Before participants were recruited for this study, I applied for and received approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (approval #03-18-16-0344501). I took Creswell's (2012) advice not to conduct research in my own "backyard," but instead participants were recruited from nearby places with a similar population and similar issues. New music teachers, school administrators, and former

music teachers were invited to participate in the study. These participants were recruited through social media, and participation was completely voluntary.

I used a purposeful sample by pairing a new music teacher and administrator from the same school. Public data from the district website was used to determine whether teachers and school administrators came from the same school. A purposeful sample of former music teachers who recently completed 0 to 3 years of teaching music before leaving the profession was also used in this study. The target sample of participants for this study was two to six school administrators, two to six new music teachers, and two to six former music teachers. Stake (2006) suggested the use of only a few participants in a multiple case study to establish each case and allow for the depth of planning, interviewing, transcribing, checking, editing, and finding meaningful correlations. The number of participants for this study was intentionally limited to allow for this depth of inquiry. Priority for participation was given to those who met the inclusion criteria, which caused some participants to be excluded.

The guidelines set forth by the National Institutes of Health (2014) were used to help ensure the ethical protection of participants. Before each interview or focus group was initiated, the participants were reminded that personal information would be kept confidential by changing any names used or leaving them out whenever the study was published or presented. Participants were also informed that their participation was voluntary and could be stopped at any point at their discretion or extended beyond the given time frame, if desired. Interviewees were given the chance to ask questions about the research process or receive further clarification before the formal interview process

began. The interviews and focus group data were transcribed, and participants had the opportunity to make corrections or additions.

Data Collection

This study focused on new music teacher retention, and to get a complete picture this phenomenon was studied from the following viewpoints: administrators, new music teachers, and former music teachers who left the profession after 3 years or less. Data were collected for each group as described below. Interview guides can be found in Appendices B, C, and D.

Before any data were collected, the interview questions were piloted with people who were not included in the research data. Two participants were chosen for each set of beta test interviews, and three participants were chosen for the test focus group. These participants helped determine whether changes were needed to the interview questions. These participants' responses helped to guide this study. They were not included in the study's results.

Three school administrators participated in individual interviews. Each administrator was asked to describe any benefits or drawbacks he or she had seen regarding the school district's new teacher induction program as they related to new music teachers. Administrators were asked to elaborate on the effectiveness of PLCs, professional development opportunities, or mentoring programs that music teachers had participated in. Administrators also described indicators that helped them know whether the new music teachers were receiving the support they needed. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

Individual interviews were also conducted with three new music teachers. They were asked about their experiences with the school district's new teacher induction program. New music teachers were also asked to describe the benefits or drawbacks of PLCs or professional development they had participated in. They provided information about interactions with their mentor, their beliefs about a successful first year, and the support they were receiving. These interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

In the final data collection step, a focus group was conducted with three former music teachers. They were asked similar questions about their experiences with the district's support systems. They were also asked about their reasons for leaving the profession and whether they believed something could have been done to prevent their departure from the profession. The focus group session was audio recorded and transcribed.

All data were stored on my personal password-protected computer, and a backup copy was kept on a flash drive in a locked cabinet. Personal identifiers were removed, and transcriptions of interview data were sent to participants for review as each group of data were collected. Any necessary adjustments to the interview and focus group transcriptions were made before data were analyzed.

Data Analysis

As data were collected, further questions were asked of participants for clarification. A transcript of each interview was sent to the participants for checking. Any necessary adjustments to the interview and focus group transcriptions were made before the analysis began.

Each transcript was analyzed and coded for recurring themes. This process began as I read through each document and made comments or observations in the margins to indicate bits of data that may potentially be relevant to the study (Merriam, 2009). Each document was treated as if it was the sole source of data in this beginning stage (Stake, 2006), and categories were created and labeled from similar data.

The coded data were then grouped under the category heading in a separate document with identifying codes including the participant's label and the page number of the excerpt (Merriam, 2009). This is the point when I started to compare each set of coded data and place cases in one document. I adjusted the category names during this process to ensure that they were exhaustive and mutually exclusive (Merriam, 2009).

I made plans in case a discrepant case emerged among the results to seek further clarification or additional research, but this did not occur. All results were considered for this study, and none of the participants asked for their data to be withdrawn. After the analysis was complete, I sent a summary of the results with their category headings to each of the participants for member checking before they were reported.

Role of the Researcher

As a music teacher in Central Texas, I knew some of the participants prior to this study. I was not in a supervisory position over any of the participants, and participation or nonparticipation did not cause any risk or benefit to the participants' employment. At the time of recruitment, all participants were made aware that my role as a music teacher was separate from my role as a researcher.

I was also aware of the potential for prior experiences to influence my thoughts on the current research. Clarifying questions were asked during the interviews to ensure accurate documentation of the participants' perceptions. Participants were allowed to make changes to the data during the transcript review and member checking.

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations

Assumptions

For this study, I expected all participants would give honest, in-depth answers. I wrote each question multiple ways before the final version was chosen as the clearest and most unbiased. Before the research began, I invited two to three people from each group who would not be participating in the final study to beta test the interview questions and provide feedback on whether they thought the questions would lead to an accurate description of participants' experiences. I used open-ended questions to invite participants to elaborate on their experiences, and confidentiality was preserved by recording their responses under an alias.

I also assumed participants would not give responses based on what they thought I wanted to hear. Participation in this study was voluntary, and participants did not receive any compensation. Participants had the option to withdraw at any time without consequence.

Limitations

This study focused on the experiences of a specific group of people within a limited time frame, and therefore results may not be generalizable. Because the study participants were all in Central Texas, findings may not be applicable to people in other

parts of the country. The results may not be applicable to teachers of other subjects or teachers in school districts with fewer available resources.

This study was also limited to the accounts given by the participants. With a limited amount of time for the interviews and focus group, some information may have been left out. A copy of the participants' responses was provided to them for additional support or clarification to mitigate these limitations.

Scope

This study included music teachers in Central Texas who had been teaching music for less than 3 years. These teachers were currently employed by a suburban public school district in the field of music education. I also explored the perceptions of the school administrators and former music teachers who left the profession with 3 years or less experience in the field of music education.

Delimitations

This study was limited to public school music teachers in Central Texas with less than 3 years of experience. This population was chosen for this study because of the data that it is a changing population from year to year. Teacher retention is important for the stability of a music program and building meaningful relationships with students (Kloss, 2013).

Paired new music teachers and administrators from the same school were given priority to participate in the study. The district's website provided public employment data. Former music teachers who recently left the profession were also given priority to participate.

Data Analysis Results

I collected data through individual interviews with three new public school music teachers and three school administrators who currently supervise them. I also facilitated a focus group of three former public school music teachers. Each of these perspectives represented an important piece of the phenomenon (Stake, 2006). I recorded the audio from each interview and transcribed it. To preserve confidentiality I removed personal identifiers by giving each interviewee a label and blanking out any proper names they used. I sent transcriptions of the data to participants as the data were collected, and I made adjustments to the interview and focus group transcriptions based on feedback from the interviewees.

All interview data were considered for this study. A possible discrepancy arose in the focus group of former teachers when one mentioned not knowing anything about the monthly meetings, as part of the district's new teacher induction program. After a brief discussion, the former teachers reached the conclusion that those meetings might not have been in place 3 years ago when this teacher was part of the program. The former teacher was able to contribute information about the 3 days of training before the school year, which was in line with what the other former and current teachers shared.

To begin the analysis process, I read through each printed transcript to get a general idea of the data (Creswell, 2012). I then identified bits of data that might be relevant to the study (Merriam, 2009) and used open coding to tag them with possible category names from the research questions of this study (Yin, 2014) and reoccurring themes from the interviews (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014). I coded each transcript with the

same category names, and the process of coding the data was considered complete when all of the data that had been identified as meaningful to the study had at least one possible category name.

The coded data were grouped together under the category heading in a new document with the participant's label (Merriam, 2009). All of the electronic raw data and analyzed data were kept and stored on my password-protected computer. I also kept a backup copy of the data and hard copies of data in a locked cabinet.

I adjusted the category names many times in the analysis document until the themes became exhaustive and mutually exclusive (Merriam, 2009). These themes were further broken down into subthemes to divide clearly distinct topics. The finalized themes and subthemes can be found in the table below.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme
1. Inequity	1.1 PLCs
	1.2 Professional Development
	1.3 New Teacher Induction Program
2. Collaboration	2.1 Benefits
	2.2 Drawbacks
3. The Unknown	2.1 Teacher's Perspective
	2.2 Administrator's Perspective

After I categorized the data, results were again sent to participants via email to validate a credible interpretation of the information (Stake, 2006). I received feedback from most participants, and I sent additional email to one participant who had not responded during the member checking. After a waiting period of one week, the results of

the analysis were considered complete. The following sections describe the data from each theme.

Inequity

I identified the theme of inequity in each of the six individual interviews conducted and the focus group. This theme encompassed the idea that music teachers may not be treated equally or given the same opportunities as other teachers on the same campus. Teachers and administrators both discussed this issue regarding PLCs, and teachers also brought up the issue regarding professional development and the new teacher induction program.

PLCs. Gardner (2010) compared music teachers to other types of teachers, and he found that music teachers were least satisfied with the quantity of interactions with their administrators regarding instructional practices. The idea that administrators spend less time discussing instructional practices with music teachers was mentioned by many of the teachers and administrators who participated in this project when discussing PLCs. Without being prompted, every teacher and administrator participating in this study brought up at least one way that PLCs for special area or elective teachers are not treated the same way as they are for core content teachers.

One of the new music teachers stated that PLCs for fine arts were run more like a team meeting. Student data and pedagogy were not discussed, and none of the school administration attended. This teacher commented feeling like fine arts teachers seem less important because their PLCs did not have the same expectations. The paired administrator stated in the interview that fine arts teachers were not participating in PLCs

at this campus, which confirms the idea that it has been more like a meeting. Brig (2014) indicated that a PLC not fully engaging in DuFour's ideas will not produce the positive results PLCs have been described to produce in professional literature.

Another new music teacher said elective teachers were asked to join a grade level PLC at the beginning of the year during professional development days. After the school year began their conference periods did not match up so elective teachers stopped participating in PLCs. The paired administrator interview confirmed that elective teachers have not been participating in PLCs at this campus. Similarly, during the focus group one of the former teachers said that special area teachers met every week at the beginning of the year, but many of the topics the instructional strategist went over with them did not apply to their team so eventually they stopped meeting as a PLC. A different former music teacher stated they never even attempted to meet together as a PLC.

The final pairing of a new music teacher and an administrator showed evidence of the music teacher participating in a PLC, though it was still not equitable to the ones core content teachers participated in. The music teacher indicated that special area teachers kept the students for an extra class during the week so that classroom teachers could have PLCs without losing their conference time, but special area teachers held their PLCs during their conference time. The administrator said the instructional strategists have run PLCs for both core content and special area teachers by reviewing assessment data and looking for trends and areas that need support. The music teacher expressed frustration that this data always came from one of the grade levels' PLCs and the team was asked how they could support that grade level's goals rather than something that could naturally

fit within their specialized contents. These comments were similar to one of the former music teachers' insights from the focus group: PLCs for special areas were always focused on math and reading data and how cross-curricular connections could be made.

Professional development. The theme of inequity was also addressed by three teachers regarding professional development, though it was not brought up by any of the administrators at this time. One of the former teachers participating in the focus group described how core content teachers had professional development days that were hosted by the school district throughout the year, but these were not available to noncore teachers. Two teachers discussed using personal funds to attend meaningful professional development outside of what the school district offered. One of them specifically identified paying for the TMEA conference, which other participants in this study said was paid for by their school. It could be concluded that sending music teachers to professional development outside of the district is a site-based decision.

New teacher induction program. The local school district's new teacher induction program includes 3 days of learning before the school year begins and monthly meetings throughout the school year (Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, personal communication, August 20, 2012). During the focus group, one of the former music teachers started a discussion about the required monthly meetings. Another former teacher indicated that for these meetings they were grouped together with interventionists and teachers of various noncore subjects rather than homogenous groups of teachers within the same grade level and/or subject. This former teacher expressed that

the wide variety of issues within the group made it difficult for any needs to be addressed.

Collaboration

Stanley, Snell, and Edgar (2013) reported more positive experiences as the result of collaboration among music teachers. The theme of collaboration appeared in this study in the context of the new teacher induction program, mentoring, and gatherings of music teachers that were not district-mandated. Benefits of collaboration were discussed by both teachers and administrators, and drawbacks were also addressed by some of the teachers.

Benefits. According to the local school district's website, its new teacher induction program seeks to benefit new teachers personally and professionally. During this study, teachers discussed the benefits of meeting other music teachers and district leadership before the school year started. Administrators appreciated the ability to share their vision and the established campus expectations with new hires.

Every former and current music teacher in this study spoke of at least one mentor or lead teacher who positively influenced them during their interview. Those who had on-campus mentors highlighted benefits such as having someone highly available to them and receiving valuable feedback. Those with mentors or lead teachers off-campus received help with music equipment inventory, logistics of taking a group to a local choir competition, and questions about curriculum.

During the focus group, one former teacher mentioned the informal meetings that music teachers in the district held every 6 weeks. This former teacher considered these meetings to be the "best professional development of all," and enjoyed having others who

understood common issues in music classrooms. Another study participant further explained that sometimes they had sharing sessions for everyone to present ideas that worked well and other times they just had open question and answer sessions, both of which were useful.

Drawbacks. O'Keefe (2012) asserted that collaboration is not inherently constructive, and that forced collaboration could be worse than no collaboration (O'Keeffe, 2012). During the focus group for this study, a former teacher stated that special area teachers had PLCs at the beginning of the year that were not productive for the group and they were soon discontinued. Another former teacher described how the special area teachers' PLCs were largely a discussion of what the core teachers were working on in their PLCs and therefore did not seem meaningful for the group. Forced collaboration also drew negative responses from both current and former teachers regarding the local district's new teacher induction program meetings.

The Unknown

The final theme derived from the interview analysis incorporated what teachers and administrators stated they did not know or did not understand. This was a widely occurring theme in the data that spanned several topics. The subthemes below divide this category into the separate the perspectives of teachers and administrators.

Teachers' perspectives. One of the former music teachers explained that a question had been brought up during a new teacher induction meeting about large class management. The topic turned into what the former teacher described as a "group complaining session" from several teachers with class sizes of 30-40 students. The

administrator overseeing the group had not experienced this issue which may have contributed to why the discussion did not include any solutions or resources for this issue, leaving this teacher and possibly others in the group feeling less supported than before the meeting.

Teachers brought up uncertainty about a variety of topics during this study including budgets, field trips, accommodations, parent communication, and technology. Three teachers specifically stated that they felt well prepared for the pedagogy of teaching, but they felt underprepared for the other duties that were necessary but not directly related to the pedagogy. None of these topics were discussed during the administrator interviews.

Administrators' perspectives. All three administrators interviewed in this study stated in separate interviews that they knew less about the professional development the district offered for music teachers than what they knew about core content teacher selections. One administrator attributed this to the fact that it is all planned by central office staff. Principals are only informed when and where the teachers will be required to attend the training. Another administrator said the music teacher participated in a PLC throughout the year, but also admitted to not knowing much about it and never having attended the PLC because it was run by an instructional strategist.

Conclusion

Gardner (2010) indicated that teachers' perceived level of support had a direct connection to their job satisfaction. Through this project study I sought to document teachers' and administrators' perceptions about essential supports needed for new music

teachers retention and why some former teachers chose to leave the profession within the first 3 years. I wrote the research questions to specifically target the influence of professional learning communities, professional development, and mentors on teachers' perceived level of support.

Teachers and administrators in this study agreed that the collaboration during the new teacher induction program and during informal music teacher meetings every 6 weeks were highly successful support systems. Mentors also proved to be greatly beneficial. Other themes that emerged from the data of this study pointed to areas of need within the district's existing support systems.

One possible reason for the high attrition of new music teachers could be the unequal treatment of music teachers compared to core content teachers regarding PLCs, professional development, and the district's new teacher induction program. U.S. Department of Education (2010) articulated how each of these programs can be beneficial for new teachers if implemented effectively. Outlining the areas of concern with these programs regarding music teachers and possible solutions for those issues could allow for changes in current practice that benefit current and future new music teachers in the district.

Another possible reason for the high attrition rate among new music teachers might be the lack of communication or understanding about supports that are available and desired by new music teachers. Teachers expressed frustration about being in support groups facilitated by people who do not understand their issues. Administrators discussed not knowing much about the professional development or PLCs that music teachers are

involved in. Getting information readily available to both entities about desired and effective support systems could bridge the communication gap.

I proposed a policy recommendation as the deliverable for this project study. Background information from literature, current district policies and procedures, and a summary of this study's findings were included in this presentation. The results were shared with school and district administrators in an effort to inform them of changes that might lead to better retention of new music teachers.

Section 3: The Project

Based on the findings from the study, there was a desire to address the high attrition rate of music teachers in the local public school district through a policy recommendation. The proposed project was approved by the doctoral committee, and the completed project can be found in Appendix A. This policy recommendation includes background information about the high music teacher attrition rate, supporting evidence from the literature and a local research study, and suggestions for improving the district procedures as they relate to the attrition rate of new music teachers. This policy recommendation was intended to inform district and school administrators and fine arts staff of changes that might lead to better retention of new music teachers.

Description and Goals

The problem of this study was the high attrition rate of new music teachers in a local public school district. A multiple case study was conducted in an effort to identify possible reasons new music teachers are leaving. The results of this study revealed areas of concern in the local district's policies and procedures that may be inadvertently contributing to the high attrition rate of new music teachers.

A policy recommendation was developed to address the areas where there may be gaps in the district's policies and procedures regarding the professional growth of new music teachers. I included background information from current peer-reviewed literature that identified common deficiencies in music teacher support. I also described local school district policies and practices and this study's data analysis. Based on the compilation of data from these sources, I provided suggestions for improving the local

district's procedures as they relate to supporting new music teachers. The complete policy recommendation can be found in Appendix A of this document. The immediate goal of the recommendation is to provide suggestions for better supporting the district's new music teachers. The long-term goal is to increase the retention rate of the district's new music teachers.

Rationale

The guiding questions for this project study were aimed at identifying essential supports for new music teachers and gauging how well professional learning communities, professional development, and mentors are currently supporting new music teachers. The data analysis from the local study provided evidence that there are inconsistencies in the way each of the identified support systems have been carried out regarding new music teachers, and a plan is needed to address these issues. Gardner's (2010) research showed that the music teacher retention rate can be positively affected when teachers feel they are supported.

Retaining music teachers is important for the stability of the music programs at each campus and the fine arts program districtwide (Kloss, 2012). High music teacher attrition can cost the district financially through the recurring expenses of recruiting, hiring, and training new teachers (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014). Attrition can also be academically costly for students when there is a lack of experienced teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2014).

I researched new teacher support systems through professional literature and relevant websites. The three most frequently cited support systems were professional

learning communities (PLCs), ongoing professional development, and mentoring. Subsequently, I sought evidence of the local district's current practices in these areas.

Part of the district's goals includes growing and developing its employees. There are instructional strategists on every campus to build professional learning communities with teachers and support the administrators. The district's strategy for professional development includes addressing a variety of topics throughout the school year. The district has outlined a new teacher induction and mentoring program that includes training for mentors and mentees. With so many support systems available to new teachers in the district, a local study was needed to better understand why these resources were not influencing the retention rate of new music teachers.

The local study was based on Gardner's (2010) research that compared and contrasted attributes of music teachers to predict their retention or attrition. Gardner called for additional research on this topic to be focused on the opinions and perceptions of music teachers. A multiple case study was conducted using a focus group of former music teachers and individual interviews with new music teachers and their school administrators.

The study findings indicated that there were perceptions of unequal treatment regarding opportunities for professional growth for music teachers, especially regarding professional development and PLCs. Concerns were expressed about the music teacher PLCs feeling forced and unmeaningful for the group. There were also uncertainties about a variety of topics affecting new music teachers and the administrators who oversee them.

These results led to the development of a policy recommendation seeking to maximize the effectiveness of the district's professional development resources for music teachers. Action steps included creating meaningful PLCs for music teachers, engaging music teachers in content-focused professional development, grouping music teachers together throughout the new teacher induction program, and providing new music teachers with mentors who share the same subject, grade level, and campus. Different options for making each action step possible were provided.

The action steps listed directly correspond to the areas of concern revealed through the local study. If these changes are implemented, music teachers may feel more supported by the local district. Gardner (2010) found that teachers' perceived level of support directly influenced the likelihood that they would remain in their current position. Changes suggested in my policy recommendation may lead to an increase in the retention rate of the district's new music teachers.

Review of the Literature

I researched solutions to a high music teacher attrition rate through professional journal articles, books, and the websites of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Texas Music Educators Association, and the U.S. Department of Education. The three most frequently cited support systems were professional learning communities (PLCs), ongoing professional development, and mentoring. Because the local district already provides these resources to new teachers, it was important to articulate a policy recommendation with detailed information about how well the district's policies and procedures align with best practices in each of these areas as they relate to new music teachers.

Justification for the Use of a Policy Recommendation

Findings from the local study indicated some inconsistencies in the district's policies and procedures that may be inadvertently contributing to the high attrition rate of new music teachers. A policy recommendation was proposed to address these issues. The complete policy recommendation can be found in Appendix A.

Educational research is invested in both the theoretical background and the application of the research (Renkl, 2013). For this project, I included background information and suggestions from professional literature, the local school district's website, and findings from the multiple case study. These findings led to the development of a policy recommendation, a type of prescriptive statement that suggests a causal relationship between an action and the desired effect (Wecker, 2013).

Prescriptive statements should be based on a body of credible evidence (Marley & Levin, 2011), so a wide variety of sources were used. These were found through searches of professional journals in the Walden and SAGE databases using the following keywords: *teacher*, *music teacher*, *novice teacher*, *support*, *attrition*, *retention*, *perceptions*, *professional learning community* (PLC), *professional development*, and *mentor*. Statistics and general information were also gathered from the websites of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012), Texas Music Educators Association (2015), the U.S. Department of Education (2010), and the local school district.

Professional Learning Communities

Professional learning communities are groups of educational personnel who work together to create and sustain a learning culture for adults and students (Huffman, 2011).

PLCs are especially useful to novice teachers when there are veteran educators participating in the group who can cover a variety of topics they have encountered throughout their careers (Lindsey et al., 2009). For a PLC to achieve the benefits described in the professional literature, it must be focused on collaboration and best practice (Brig, 2014).

The local interviews revealed two possible issues with the current PLC design regarding music teachers. The first problem was that not all music teachers were participating in a PLC. Though five current or former music teachers indicated they started the school year with a PLC, only three of those teachers continued working with the PLC throughout the year. The second problem was that those who were participating in PLCs were not working with subject-specific data or teaching strategies. One music teacher said that no data were reviewed during PLC meetings, and two others stated that the data they reviewed were related to subjects other than music.

Brig (2014) advocated for DuFour's best practice models to be used in PLCs, and the local school district's policies call for all teachers to participate in high-quality PLCs, but this can be difficult for many music teachers because they are the only teachers of their subject on their campus. There is a need for differentiated processes to get music teachers fully involved in a professional learning community with other music teachers. Two possible strategies for completing this action step are outlined below.

During the focus group of this study, one former music teacher described the informal meetings that music teachers in the district attended every 6 weeks. This former teacher considered these meetings to be the "best professional development of all," and

enjoyed having others who understood common issues in music classrooms. Another study participant explained that sometimes they participated in sharing sessions to present ideas that worked well and other times they had open question-and-answer sessions, both of which were useful. These meetings were collaborative in nature and would be a good start to a districtwide music teacher PLC. To realize the full benefits of a PLC, these meetings would need to become intentionally focused on best practice, rather than just a forum for sharing stories or a platform for promoting personal instructional preferences (DuFour, 2014).

One public school district found a different solution to this problem through the use of technology (Maher et al., 2010). The district's electronic learning community included discussion forums, online resource sharing, and opportunities for immediate feedback and collaboration. Teacher leaders were trained to design continuous job-embedded professional development with real-time examples, facilitate forums and chat sessions, and maintain contact with their fine arts supervisor about the project's successes or needs. When virtual PLCs are well-structured and reflect what is known about best practice, they can be as effective as face-to-face PLCs (Mindich & Lieberman, 2012).

Professional Development

Professional development has the power to improve teachers' practice, school performance, and students' achievement (Gersten et al., 2014). To be effective, professional development should be content-focused, involve active learning, be coherent, and have collective participation (Desimone, 2009). If implemented fully, professional development can address two of the main factors of teacher retention:

alignment of the teacher's beliefs to those of the organization and the teacher's relational needs (Baker-Doyle, 2010).

All three administrators interviewed during this study stated that they knew less about the professional development the district offered for music teachers than they knew about core content teacher options. Data also indicated that the content-focused piece is available to the district's core content teachers throughout the school year, but this is not currently offered to the music teachers. There are two options for providing this resource to the district's music teachers: send them to content-focused professional development, or bring in content-focused professional development to them. In addition to the traditional professional development model, non-formal learning could also provide an avenue for music teachers to gain this support.

The first option is to send music teachers to professional development outside of the district. During the local study, two teachers discussed using personal funds to attend professional development in music. This was perceived as inequitable because teachers of other subjects do not have to pay for their professional development.

There are many local options for sending teachers to get training in music education. The Texas Music Educators Association (2016) hosts an annual convention every February in Central Texas, with over 300 workshops offered for band, orchestra, vocal, elementary, and college educators. There are three simultaneous music conventions at the same location every July with workshops targeting band (Texas Bandmasters Association, 2016), choir (Texas Choral Directors Association, 2016), and orchestra (Texas Orchestra Directors Association, 2016) directors. Other organizations

such as Kodály Educators of Texas (2016) and Central Texas Orff (2016) offer workshops throughout the year and extended training programs during the summer.

It may be more cost effective to bring content-specific professional development to the district's music teachers. There are many colleges and universities in Central Texas that could be contacted for this purpose. Additionally, the Texas Education Agency (2016) lists three independent providers who can offer continuing professional education (CPE) credits through music education.

For music teachers, meaningful professional development could look different than the traditional model. It could include further training in the subject and experiences in making music. This type of learning is sometimes referred to as non-formal (Mok, 2011), and these experiences are important to the music teacher's sense of identity, beliefs, well-being, and effectiveness (Pellegrino, 2011). As with traditional professional development, the district's music teachers could be sent to a provider outside the school district for these experiences, or the district could bring in experts for this type of training.

Induction and Mentoring

The final support system I researched was induction and mentoring programs. An effective induction and mentoring program has shown a correlation to higher novice teacher retention rates than the regional and statewide averages (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2012). It is important to note that not all good teachers are good mentors (Ambrosetti, 2014). Mentors should be chosen carefully and trained specifically for the complexities of this task (Leonard, 2012).

The local district has a new teacher induction and mentoring program in place that includes training for mentors and mentees. During the focus group of the local research study, one of the former music teachers started a discussion about the required monthly meetings that are part of the induction program. Another former teacher indicated that for these meetings they were grouped together with interventionists and teachers of various noncore subjects rather than homogenous groups of teachers within the same grade level and/or subject. This former teacher expressed that the wide variety of issues within the group made it difficult for any needs to be addressed.

One solution to this issue would be to group teachers only with other teachers of their content throughout the new teacher induction program. This might require the use of a different facility that could accommodate the separation of teachers into additional groups. Teacher leaders could be utilized as facilitators to supplement the central office staff who usually take these roles. Another way to make this solution work would be to schedule some groupings of same content teachers at a different time than other groups for the new teacher induction program so that the same facility and facilitators would be available to multiple clusters.

A different approach to this problem would be to leave all noncore teachers grouped together as they currently are for the new teacher induction program, but provide a way to create needs-based subgroups during the question and answer sessions. This would allow teachers opportunities to get help with more situational problems. As with the previously solution, additional facilitators would be helpful in making this successful.

The local study revealed that some music teachers were paired with other music teachers for mentoring, and others were assigned a mentor who taught a different subject on campus. The greatest effects of a mentoring program can be seen when a mentor shares the same subject taught, grade level, and campus (Hochberg et al., 2015). It would not be possible to provide all of these qualities in one mentor for most music teachers, so options are given for how to make this possible by using two formal mentors or the combination of a formal and informal mentor.

The last issue addressed through this project was specific to mentors. In the local study, those who had on-campus mentors highlighted benefits such as having someone highly available to them and receiving valuable feedback. Those with mentors or lead teachers off-campus received help with music equipment inventory, logistics of taking a group to a local choir competition, and questions about curriculum. Core content teachers can receive readily available help with campus issues and content issues from one mentor, but to provide all of this to music teachers they would need to be assigned two mentors: one who is also a music teacher and one who works on the same campus as the mentee. A decision would need to be made on whether to provide a full stipend to each mentor or divide one stipend between the two people who are sharing the job. Both mentors could attend the same mentor training provided by the district at little to no additional cost to the district.

Another option for ensuring music teachers are getting what they need from mentors is to encourage the use of both formal and informal mentors. Formal mentors are assigned to mentees, but informal mentors are chosen by the mentees themselves

(Hochberg et al., 2015). Desimone et al. (2013) called for formal mentors to be matched by content area when possible. Using this as a guide, it would be best to assign music teachers with a music mentor in the district and allow them to self-select an informal campus mentor.

Project Description

The policy recommendation begins with a detailed explanation of the problem of music teacher attrition. It includes local evidence of the problem from the research study and citations from professional literature that indicate the local data is a reflection of a dilemma across the U.S. The background information continued with a thoroughly researched set of solutions from professional journal articles, books, and high profile websites. The current policies and procedures for this school district and local music teachers' and administrators' perceptions of their effectiveness on new music teachers completed the setting for the work to be done through this project.

I made connections between the district's application of support programs for new music teachers and best practices for new teacher support systems as described in peer-reviewed literature. I identified places of possible deficiencies through evidence from the study. The recommendations I gave suggest how to connect music teachers to the district's teacher support systems more effectively.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

The local district already has a professional development model and structure for PLCs in place that can be improved upon by making them subject-specific for music teachers. The district also has a well-established new teacher induction and mentoring

program which could also benefit from a grouping of music teachers to focus on their specific needs. Teacher and administrator participants in the research study discussed the benefits of these resources, so the goal should be to improve upon these rather than creating something new.

Potential Barriers

Each of the action steps prescribed will require a commitment from the school district. A teacher leader would need to be trained to facilitate PLCs for music teachers either face-to-face or online. Supplementary facilitators may also be required to group music teachers together throughout the new teacher induction program. Providing content-specific professional development or sending music teachers to receive this elsewhere would incur a financial cost. If both content-specific and on campus mentors are provided, the decision to provide a full stipend to each mentor or divide one stipend between the two people could also impact the district financially.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The action steps provided do not need to be completed in any particular order and are not dependent upon each other. The district leadership could implement them as financial and human resources are available. A suggested timetable for implementation is provided as a guide:

Table 3

Implementation Timetable

Action Step	Implementation
1. PLC	Year 1: Train teacher leaders Year 2: Start of music teacher PLC
2. Professional Development	Year 1: Survey music faculty about PD Year 2: Send or bring in music PD
3. New Teacher Induction Program	Year 1: Separate music teachers
4. Mentors	Year 1: Add an additional mentor

Roles and Responsibilities

A successful implementation of this project will take a team of willing supporters. The next phase will include submitting the policy recommendation to the school district for approval. If approved, it will take teamwork throughout the district to execute the action steps. An evaluation of the project will give insight to the level of success and may lead to additional next steps to be taken.

Researcher. I have taken the bulk of the responsibility in gathering research from professional literature and local interviews about the problem of new music teacher attrition and possible solutions. I have developed the policy recommendation and prepared a timeline for implementation. My next step will be to seek approval from the local school district. Because this project will take cooperation from multiple departments within the district, I will submit it first to the Superintendent and Board of Trustees who oversee all of the school district's operations. If the policy recommendation is approved my role will be to provide guidance and maintain communication with others who are involved. I will follow up at the end of the next 2 school years with an assessment of the project and recommend the next steps for the school district.

Superintendent and board of trustees. This project will not be possible without the approval of the district's superintendent and board of trustees. I will submit the policy recommendation to the superintendent for review, and I will request that it be an item on the agenda at the next school board meeting. The policy recommendation might be accepted as written, partially accepted, revised, or rejected. This initial action by the district will determine if the project can move forward.

Director of professional development. If the policy recommendation is accepted, a main role in its implementation will go to the director of professional development. She oversees district-wide professional development, so she and I could develop a survey for the music faculty to determine professional development needs and plan to start providing content-specific professional development in the second year of the project's implementation. She also oversees the new teacher induction and mentoring program for the district, so we could work together to coordinate the music-specific group sessions and assigning both a content and campus mentor.

Chief academic officer. Each campus has at least one instructional strategist who serves as the PLC lead and reports directly to the chief academic officer. I would work with him to identify music teachers who are ready to take on additional responsibilities as newly-appointed music teacher PLC leads (Orr & Cleveland-Innes, 2015). They could be involved in the instructional strategist training sessions and help plan for the full implementation of a music teacher PLC during the second year of the project.

Director of purchasing. The final person who may need to be involved is the director of purchasing. Some of the action steps require a financial commitment from the

district, and she would be responsible for obligating funds. She would also help put a plan in place for financing the long-term execution of the project if it proves to be successful and there is a desire to make these new processes permanent.

Project Evaluation Plan

The focus of this study was new music teacher attrition in a local public school district. I provided a policy recommendation (Appendix A) that includes options to better support the district's new music teachers and ultimately increase new music teacher retention. The local district's new hire data in subsequent years will give an indication of the project's success.

The degree of success could also be demonstrated qualitatively through conducting interviews at the end of each school year with the district's new music teachers (Appendix C) and analyzing the results of the interviews conducted in this research study. Additional interviews would indicate whether changes made by the district were beneficial to new music teachers. Those interviews may affirm the direction of the project or point to further changes that are needed.

Project Implications

Local Community

The local school district has a high rate of new music teacher attrition. Gardner (2010) showed that music teachers may be leaving at a high rate due to lack of support. Through this project I identified research-based best practices for new music teacher retention and compared them to the local district's policies and procedures. The findings of this study led to a policy recommendation (Appendix A) that specifically targets

supports for new music teachers through subject-specific training and professional learning communities.

After completing the action steps outlined in the policy recommendation the district's new music teachers may have additional support, but they are not the only ones who will benefit. The local school district can profit financially from a higher music teacher retention rate, as the financial cost of recruiting, hiring, and training new teachers often far outweigh any savings seen in the salary differences (Levy, Joy, Ellis, Jablonski, & Karelitz, 2012). Students can benefit academically from the wisdom of experienced teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2014) and long-term teacher-student relationships (Kloss, 2013).

Far-Reaching

The problem of high music teacher attrition is seen throughout the United States. Other researchers and district leaders may gain insight from the comparison of support systems provided to core teachers and music teachers in this study. The policy recommendation may provide ideas for other school districts facing the same problem.

Conclusion

In this study, I recognized the problem of high music teacher attrition in the local public school district and recommended strategies for addressing it. The project (Appendix A) is a policy recommendation to local district leaders supported by peer-reviewed literature and local research data. The recommendation specifies several options to provide new music teachers with support systems comparable to those provided to core content teachers. This project aims to increase the retention rate of new music teachers in

the local school district. The following section will include an analysis and reflection of the project and me as a researcher and project developer.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

The purpose of this section is to provide insight into the policy recommendation's strengths, limitations, and potential impact on social change. Recommendations are given for remediation of the project's limitations and directions for further research. I reflect on what I learned about scholarship, project development, leadership, and change. I also list insights I discovered about myself as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer.

Project Strengths

Gardner (2010) called for further investigation of the perceptions of music teachers regarding their jobs and how to increase their retention rate through support systems. This local study addressed music teachers' and administrators' perceptions to uncover several needs that led to the development of the project. The project involved pairing those needs with research-based solutions. One of the strengths of the project is the direct connection of previous and current research in the project deliverable.

A policy statement suggests a causal relationship between an action and the desired effect (Wecker, 2013). In this project, the action steps are intended to lead to better support systems for new music teachers. A strong point of the proposed policy recommendation is the flexibility in its implementation. The action steps are not dependent upon each other, and therefore they could be implemented in any order. District leadership could phase in different recommendations as money is available and music teacher leaders are trained to fill each of the steps. Other districts referencing this project could implement similar solutions in various combinations.

Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations

One limitation of the project is that the desired effect of a higher music teacher retention rate is a long-term goal with many factors. Because music teacher attrition cannot be definitively solved in one way, the problem needs to be addressed in an ongoing manner through multiple approaches. The policy recommendation included several options that could provide better support to new music teachers and possibly reduce the rate of music teacher attrition. It is recommended that follow-up interviews take place at the end of each school year. Analysis of the original and recommended interview results may affirm the direction of the project or point to changes that are needed.

Another limitation to this project is that there is no indicator of final completion. Even if the music teacher attrition rate improves and new interviews show that the policy recommendation had a positive effect, the process must be ongoing. The local district is growing, and new music teachers will need to be hired to fill positions that are created as new schools are built. These new teachers should be monitored to ensure they are receiving the support they need.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

There are other possible solutions that could address the problem. For example, the local district could hire an instructional strategist specifically for music teachers, as is done for the core content areas and special education. This would be financially costly for the district, and the benefits of creating this position might not outweigh the recurring expense. Similarly, the district could hire a professional development facilitator for music

teachers, but having another permanent employee would be a much greater expense than contracting these services out a couple of times during the school year.

Scholarship

My role in education has changed throughout my career. I have taught elementary and middle school students in two districts and on four campuses. In each of these places, I noticed that my fine arts coworkers who were new to the profession often changed careers within the first few years, but the seasoned teachers tended to remain in the profession. I started my journey at Walden University with the desire to better understand this problem and explore possible solutions. This project study allowed me that opportunity with consistent feedback from my committee to help align and focus my work.

As a lifelong learner, I enjoyed the process of researching, discussing, writing, and receiving feedback. I was reminded of the value of failure because every time I had to make major changes to my project, I was more satisfied with the results. Accepting criticism is not easy, but it is a necessary part of growth.

My scholarly research and academic writing skills were strengthened as I searched for all of the relevant information I could find related to the topic of music teacher attrition and possible solutions for this problem. I read articles in professional journals in hard copy form and online through the Walden University library's databases and the SAGE database. I checked the references section of relevant sources to find other useful sources. I explored the websites of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012), Texas

Music Educators Association (2015), the U.S. Department of Education (2010), and the local school district.

I was further challenged when websites I used for references at the beginning of this project were removed or relocated before my final study was ready for submission. I was able to locate most of the information from other websites, but some of my paper needed to be rewritten when I could not find a new source to back up the information I had previously found and cited. Combing through all of these resources and formulating a policy recommendation that could address the problem has been my biggest and longest-running research undertaking to date.

Project Development

After several classes where I had to research and find solutions for hypothetical problems, I was excited to begin this journey of developing a project based on a real local issue. To prepare an effective policy recommendation, I had to get an understanding of what each party involved would hope for in the final product. For this project, the parties involved included local district and campus leaders, local music teachers, and my Walden University committee members overseeing the project development. Before I began, I looked up policy recommendations that had previously been submitted to the local school board and set up a framework for a similar design. I then consulted the project checklist provided by Walden University and set up sections that could address each of the required areas. Filling in the required information was the easy part because I already had an abundance of local and national data from my research and other published sources.

The degree of success for the project can be evaluated through conducting additional interviews at the end of each school year with the district's new music teachers. An analysis of those results may indicate whether changes are needed. The future retention rate of new music teachers in the district will also indicate the project's success.

Leadership and Change

As I searched for ways to improve support systems for current and future music teachers, I reflected on what teacher leaders had done for me to help get me to where I am today. I now have a much deeper understanding and appreciation of the time, effort, and resources needed to put existing teacher support systems in place. My goals as a teacher leader include being well informed and equipped with credible information, taking risks, admitting and learning from my mistakes, and continuously looking for ways to improve.

As a scholar, I committed to work on my project a little each day, even during the busiest times of my teaching schedule. It was often frustrating when I wanted to accomplish more than I was able to within a limited amount of time, but I also looked forward to each time I could come back to the project with fresh eyes and insight. As a practitioner, I have used what I have learned on this journey to seek out ways I can grow professionally and provide support to other music teachers. As a project developer, I learned to consider multiple viewpoints and provide a range of possible solutions that could be implemented based on the resources available.

Project's Importance

The policy recommendation specifically targets support systems for new music teachers in an effort to increase their retention rate. The local school district can also benefit financially, as the cost of recruiting, hiring, and training new teachers is often more than any savings seen in the salary differences (Levy, Joy, Ellis, Jablonski, & Karelitz, 2012). Students can benefit academically through the experience of seasoned teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2014) and long-term teacher-student relationships (Kloss, 2013). The policy recommendation has a suggested implementation timetable of 2 years in hopes that the careful plan for changes can be implemented in a meaningful and lasting manner.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The high attrition rate of music teachers was the problem of this study, and it is one that has been experienced and documented throughout the United States. The research leading up to this project filled a gap documented by Gardner (2010) for further research on music teacher attrition, including the perceptions of music teachers about support they received. The insights gained allowed for the creation of a policy recommendation. Action steps in this policy recommendation could lead to a positive impact on the local district's efforts to retain new music teachers by providing them the opportunity to participate in subject-specific PLCs and professional development. Other districts facing a high music teacher attrition rate can reference the action steps to formulate their policy changes.

New music teachers can benefit from this project through the creation of more focused support systems provided by the school district. Administrators can gain a better understanding of the needs of their new music teachers and resources available for addressing these needs. The school community can benefit from a higher retention rate of music teachers through stronger support programs (Darling-Hammond, 2014) and longer lasting teacher-student relationships (Kloss, 2012). The school district can save money from a higher music teacher retention rate by not incurring the costs of recruiting, hiring, and training new teachers (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014).

After action steps have been taken, it may be helpful to compare the perceptions of music teachers on the newly formed support systems to those of core teachers who have similar support systems. Further research should also include follow-up interviews in the local district to evaluate the effectiveness of this policy recommendation. This follow-up study might include a quantitative analysis of any changes seen in the retention rate of music teachers after implementation of the policy recommendation.

Conclusion

The development of this project addressed a gap in the local district's current policies and practices where music teachers were not provided with support systems comparable to those provided to core content teachers. Working through the information sources and the issues that arose during the project development influenced my perceptions on leadership, change, and the way I view myself as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer through looking at the possible causes of high music teacher attrition and what might be done to address the issues. The goal of the project's

deliverable was to provide solutions to decrease the high music teacher attrition rate locally through achievable action steps addressing the need for subject-specific PLCs and professional development for music teachers. Other U.S. school districts facing a similar issue may reference this information to find possible solutions to their high music teacher attrition rate.

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Appendix A: The Project

To: District Administrators and Fine Arts Department Staff

Re: Policy Recommendation for Addressing the High Attrition Rate of New Music Teachers in the District

Prepared by: Sarah Martinez

Executive Summary

In recent years, there has been a high turnover rate among new music teachers, within the local district (Music Coordinator, personal communication, July 27, 2016). The problem of high music teacher attrition has also been experienced in other places across the U.S. in recent years (Gardner, 2010). Retaining new music teachers is important for the stability of the music programs at each campus and the fine arts program district-wide (Kloss, 2013). To better understand this issue and explore possible solutions, I conducted a qualitative multiple case study involving individual interviews with local school administrators, new music teachers, and a focus group interview with former music teachers. These data were compared with documented research on the possible causes and solutions for high music teacher attrition.

Participants in the local research study articulated the strengths in the existing policies and procedures of the district, but they also revealed some gaps in local practices that may be inadvertently contributing to the high attrition of new music teachers. One point music teacher participants discussed was the perceived unequal treatment of music teachers compared to core content teachers, especially regarding professional development and PLCs. There also seemed to be a lack of understanding from both

teachers and school administrators about supports for new music teachers provided through the district or through other local sources.

This document outlines background information about the problem of music teacher attrition from professional literature and related local statistics and policies. Professional journals from Kodály Educators of Texas and Texas Music Educators Association were searched for related information. The Walden University library's databases and SAGE database also provided journal articles on the topic. Statistics and general information were also gathered from the websites of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012), Texas Music Educators Association (2015), and the U.S. Department of Education (2010), and the district's website.

There are several options identified in this document to address the issues that arise with a high teacher turnover rate. The immediate goal of this policy recommendation is to provide suggestions for better supporting the district's new music teachers. The long-term goal is to see an increase in the retention rate of the district's new music teachers.

New music teachers can benefit from this project through the creation of more focused support systems provided by the school district. Administrators can gain a better understanding of the needs of their new music teachers and what resources are available for addressing these needs. The school community can benefit from a higher retention rate of music teachers through stronger music programs (Darling-Hammond, 2014) and longer lasting teacher-student relationships (Kloss, 2012). The school district can save

money from a higher music teacher retention rate by not incurring the costs of recruiting, hiring, and training new teachers (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014).

The Problem of High Music Teacher Attrition

The local district has seen a high attrition rate among new music teachers in recent years. Evidence of this issue can be seen in the 15 elementary music teachers who left the district from 2010-2015 (Music Coordinator, personal communication, July 27, 2016). Most of the music teacher job openings were the result of someone who had 3 years or less teaching experience leaving the profession (Music Coordinator, personal communication, June 14, 2014). Gardner (2010) found that teachers' perceived level of support directly influenced the likelihood that they would remain in their current position, so a detailed look into the local district's support system for new music teachers was needed.

New and Returning Elementary Music Teachers in the Local District

Year	New Teachers	Returning Teachers	Total Teachers
2015	3	10	13
2014	2	11	13
2013	3	10	13
2012	2	11	13
2011	1	12	13
2010	4	9	13

A high rate of music teacher attrition is not just a local issue. There is an increasing demand for music teachers in the U.S., but a decline in people graduating with music education degrees (Baker, 2011). A shortage of music teachers persists due to people leaving the profession (Gardner, 2010). A majority of those moving on to other professions have no plans to return to teaching music (Hancock, 2009). This can cause

music teaching positions to remain vacant or be filled by someone who is not certified in music education.

Another area of concern with the high music teacher attrition is the financial cost of recruiting, hiring, and training new teachers (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014). Although there may be some savings in the salary differences when a new teacher is hired, these are often far outweighed by the other costs incurred in the turnover process. The district-level cost of replacing a teacher can average about $5,000 per teacher, with additional costs sustained by the campus (Levy, Joy, Ellis, Jablonski, & Karelitz, 2012).

It can also be academically costly for students when there is a lack of experienced teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2014). This is especially true for students enrolled in music classes. These students expect to study with the same teacher for the duration of their time at the school, and teacher turnover can cause a lack of long-term teacher-student relationships (Kloss, 2013).

Research-Based Solutions

Solutions to a high music teacher attrition rate were researched through professional journal articles, books, and the websites of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Texas Music Educators Association, and the U.S. Department of Education. The three most frequently cited support systems were professional learning communities (PLCs), ongoing professional development, and mentoring. The U.S. Department of Education called for a comprehensive new teacher induction program with carefully selected and trained mentors, professional development, and continuing evaluation of practice with constructive feedback (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). These support systems can

be combined to provide new teachers with ongoing help via information and human resources.

Professional learning communities are groups of educational personnel who work together to create and sustain a learning culture for adults and students (Huffman, 2011). PLCs are especially useful to novice teachers when there are veteran educators participating in the group who can cover a variety of topics they have encountered throughout their careers (Lindsey, Jungwirth, Pahl, & Lindsay, 2009). For a PLC to achieve the benefits described in the professional literature, it must be focused on collaboration and best practice (Brig, 2014).

Professional development has proven to be a successful support system for people in a variety of careers (Ho, 2014). To be effective, it should be content-focused, involve active learning, be coherent, and have collective participation (Desimone, 2009). If implemented fully, it can address two of the main factors of teacher retention: alignment of the teacher's beliefs to those of the organization and the teacher's relational needs (Baker-Doyle, 2010).

The final support system researched was mentoring. An effective induction and mentoring program has shown a correlation to higher novice teacher retention rates than the regional and statewide averages (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2012). It is important to note that not all good teachers are good mentors (Ambrosetti, 2014). Mentors should be chosen carefully and trained specifically for the complexities of this task (Leonard, 2012).

Background of Existing Local Policy

Part of the local district's strategic plan includes growing and developing its employees. There are instructional strategists on every campus to build professional learning communities with teachers and support the administrators. The district's professional development model aims to prepare the district's new teachers through addressing a variety of topics throughout the school year. There is targeted training for the four core subject areas and special education, but there is no specific training or mentoring plan for noncore and non-special education teachers. The district has outlined a new teacher induction and mentoring program that includes training for mentors and mentees in all subject areas.

The Local Research Study

The problem of high music teacher attrition has been documented both locally and throughout the U.S., and it can be the source of the other aforementioned issues. It is important to address this problem, and understanding the reasons behind the high attrition rate is the first step to finding solutions. A local research study was conducted to expose the possible causes.

The study was based on Gardner's (2010) previous research about music teacher retention. He surveyed 1,903 music teachers and 45,954 other types of teachers to compare and contrast factors that might predict the retention or attrition of music teachers. Gardner found that teachers' perceived level of support directly influenced the likelihood that they would remain in their current position. He called for additional research on this topic to be focused on the opinions and perceptions of music teachers.

Gathering information about participants' perspectives naturally fits within the qualitative research tradition (Merriam, 2009). To get a complete picture, a multiple case study was conducted using a focus group of 3 former music teachers and individual interviews with 3 new music teachers and their school administrators. Each participant responded to questions about their perceptions of the support new music teachers receive through the district's new teacher induction and mentoring program, PLCs, and professional development. They were also asked if there were other areas of support they could benefit from.

Personal identifiers were removed and transcripts of the interviews were provided to each participant to check for accuracy and allow for adjustments to responses before the analysis began. The documents were then coded with themes and analyzed together for common trends. Participants were provided with the categorized data for one last accuracy check before the results were considered finalized. The themes and subthemes that emerged can be found in the table below.

Data Analysis from Local Study on New Music Teacher Attrition

Theme	Subtheme
1. Inequity	1.1 PLCs
	1.2 Professional Development
	1.3 New Teacher Induction Program
2. Collaboration	2.1 Benefits
	2.2 Drawbacks
3. The Unknown	2.1 Teacher's Perspective
	2.2 Administrator's Perspective

Inequity was brought up my every participant in this study. This first theme encompassed the idea that music teachers may not be treated equally or given the same opportunities as other teachers on the same campus. Teachers and administrators both

shared that administrators often spend less time discussing subject-specific practices with music teachers than their core teacher coworkers. Some participants mentioned that the PLCs were run more like a fine arts team meeting or that music teachers did not participate in a PLC at all. Core content teachers have subject-specific professional development and new teacher induction days hosted by the district, but these are not available to music teachers.

The next theme of this study was collaboration. The benefits of the new teacher program and ability for teachers and administrators to interact before the school year started and throughout the year were appreciated. Every former and current music teacher in this study spoke of at least one mentor or lead teacher who positively influenced them during their interview. Some teachers had on campus mentors, and others were assigned music teacher mentors on other campuses. Each proved to have very distinct benefits to the new music teachers. The drawbacks of collaboration were discussed in regards to PLCs that felt forced and did not seem meaningful for the group.

The final theme of the study emerged from what teachers and administrators stated they did not know or did not understand. Teachers brought up uncertainty about a variety of topics during this study including budgets, field trips, accommodations, parent communication, and technology. Administrators expressed a lack of knowledge about the PLCs music teachers are participating in or how to get music teachers subject-specific training.

Recommendations

Though there are many support systems already in place in the district, there is a need to connect music teachers to these supports more effectively. This can be accomplished through several action steps listed below. The district already has a professional development model and structure for PLCs in place. There is subject-specific training for the four core subject areas and special education teachers. The district also has a well-established new teacher induction and mentoring program. Music teachers and administrators who participated in the local study highlighted the benefits of the district's mentors and induction program. To maximize the effectiveness of the district's resources for music teachers, the following recommendations are suggested. It should be noted that these action steps are not listed in a chronological order of implementation, as they could be put into practice in any order or simultaneously.

Action Step #1: Create Meaningful PLCs for Music Teachers

The findings from the local research study showed two possible issues with the current PLC design regarding music teachers. The first problem is that not all music teachers are participating in a PLC. The second is that those who are participating in PLCs are not working with subject-specific data or teaching strategies.

Best practice models (Brig, 2014; DuFour, 2014) and the local district policies call for all teachers to participate in relevant PLCs, but this can be difficult because they are often isolated by distance and the nature of their jobs. There is a need for professional learning communities that are designed for music teachers and give music teachers the

opportunity to collaborate with other music teachers. Two possible strategies for completing this action step are outlined below.

During the local research study, one former music teacher mentioned the informal meetings that music teachers in the district attended every 6 weeks. This former teacher considered these meetings to be the "best professional development of all," and enjoyed having others who understood common issues in music classrooms. Another study participant further explained that sometimes they participate in sharing sessions to present ideas that worked well and other times they just had open question and answer sessions, both of which were useful. These meetings are collaborative in nature and would be a good start to a district-wide music teacher PLC. To see the full benefits of a PLC, music would need to become intentionally focused on effective instructional practices, rather than just a forum for sharing stories or a platform for promoting personal instructional preferences (DuFour, 2014). This action step can be completed by training music teacher leaders to use the existing music teacher meeting times to focus on data and research-based instructional practices.

One public school district found a different solution to this problem through the use of technology (Maher, Burroughs, Dietz, & Karnbach, 2010). Their electronic learning community includes discussion forums, online resource sharing, and opportunities for immediate feedback and collaboration. Teacher leaders were trained to design continuous job-embedded professional development with real-time examples, facilitate forums and chat sessions, and maintain contact with their fine arts supervisor about the project's successes or needs. When virtual PLCs are well-structured and reflect

what is known about best practice, they can be as effective as face-to-face PLCs (Mindich, & Lieberman, 2012). The second possibility for completing this action step could be to train music teacher leaders to use technology to facilitate district-wide music teacher PLCs with a focus on data and research-based instructional practices.

Action Step #2: Engage Music Teachers in Content-Focused Professional Development

Professional development has the power to improve teachers' practice, school performance, and students' achievement (Gersten, Taylor, Keys, Rolfhus, & Newman-Gonchar, 2014). It should include each of the following core features: content-focused, active learning, coherent, and collective participation (Desimone, 2009). All three administrators interviewed in the local research study stated in separate interviews that they knew less about the professional development the district offered for music teachers than what they knew about core content teacher selections. Data also provided evidence that the content-focused piece is available to the district's core content teachers throughout the school year, but this is not currently offered to the music teachers. There are two options for providing this resource to the district's music teachers: send them to content-focused professional development or bring in content-focused professional development to them. In addition to the traditional professional development mold, non-formal learning (Mok, 2011; Pellegrino, 2011) could also provide an avenue for music teachers to gain this support through further training in the subject and experiences in making music.

The first option is to send music teachers to professional development outside of the district. During the local research study, two teachers discussed using personal funds to attend professional development in music. This was perceived as inequitable because teachers of other subjects do not have to pay for their professional development.

There are many local options for sending teachers to get training in music education. The Texas Music Educators Association hosts an annual convention every February in Central Texas, with over 300 workshops offered for band, orchestra, vocal, elementary, and college educators (Texas Music Educators Association, 2016). There are three simultaneous music conventions at the same location every July with workshops targeting band (Texas Bandmasters Association, 2016), choir (Texas Choral Directors Association, 2016), and orchestra (Texas Orchestra Directors Association, 2016) directors. Other organizations such as Kodály Educators of Texas (2016) and Central Texas Orff (2016) offer workshops throughout the year and extended training programs during the summer.

It may be more cost effective to bring content-specific professional development to the district's music teachers. There are numerous colleges and universities in Central Texas who could be contacted for this purpose. Additionally, the Texas Education Agency (2016) lists three independent providers who can offer continuing professional education (CPE) credits through music education.

For music teachers, meaningful professional development could look different than the traditional model. It could include further training in the subject and experiences in making music. This type of learning is sometimes referred to as non-formal (Mok,

2011), and these experiences are important to the music teacher's sense of identity, beliefs, well-being, and effectiveness (Pellegrino, 2011). As with traditional professional development, the district's music teachers could be sent to a provider outside the school district for these experiences or the district could bring in experts for this type of training.

Action Step #3: Group Music Teachers Together Exclusively Throughout the New Teacher Induction Program

Collaboration between music teachers can lead to more positive experiences (Stanley, Snell, & Edgar, 2013). During the focus group of the local research study, one of the former music teachers started a discussion about the required monthly meetings. Another former teacher indicated that for these meetings they were grouped together with interventionists and teachers of various noncore subjects rather than homogenous groups of teachers within the same grade level and/or subject. This former teacher expressed that the wide variety of issues within the group made it difficult for any needs to be addressed.

One solution to this issue would be to group teachers only with other teachers of their content throughout the new teacher induction program. This might require the use of a different facility that could accommodate the separation of teachers into additional groups. Teacher leaders could be utilized as facilitators to supplement the central office staff who usually take these roles. Another way to make this solution work would be to schedule some groupings of same content teachers at a different time than other groups for the new teacher induction program so that the same facility and facilitators would be available to multiple clusters.

A different approach to this problem would be to leave all noncore teachers grouped together as they currently are for the new teacher induction program, but provide a way to create needs-based subgroups during the question and answer sessions. This would allow teachers opportunities to get help with more situational problems. As with the previously solution, additional facilitators would be helpful in making this successful.

Action Step #4: Provide New Music Teachers with Mentors Who Share Subject, Grade Level, and Campus

The local study revealed that some music teachers were paired with other music teachers for mentoring, and others were assigned a mentor who taught a different subject on campus. The greatest effects of a mentoring program can be seen when a mentor shares the same subject taught, grade level, and campus (Hochberg et al., 2015). It would not be possible to provide all of these qualities in one mentor for most music teachers, so options are given for how to make this possible by using two formal mentors or the combination of a formal and informal mentor.

In the local study, those who had on-campus mentors highlighted benefits such as having someone readily available to them and receiving valuable feedback. Those with mentors or lead teachers off-campus received help with music equipment inventory, logistics of taking a group to a local choir competition, and questions about curriculum. Core content teachers can receive readily available help with campus issues and content issues from one mentor, but to provide all of this to music teachers they would need to be assigned two mentors: one who is also a music teacher and one who works on the same campus as the mentee. A decision would need to be made on whether to provide a full

stipend to each mentor or divide one stipend between the two people who are sharing the job. Both mentors could attend the same mentor training provided by the district at little to no additional cost to the district.

Another option for ensuring music teachers are getting what they need from mentors is to encourage the use of both formal and informal mentors. Formal mentors are assigned to mentees, but informal mentors are chosen by the mentees themselves (Hochberg et al., 2015). Desimone et al. (2013) called for formal mentors to be matched by content area when possible. Using this as a guide, it would be best to assign music teachers with a music mentor in the district and allow them to self-select an informal campus mentor.

Implementation Timetable

The action steps provided do not need to be completed in any particular order and are not dependent upon each other. The district leadership could implement them as financial and human resources are available. A suggested timetable for implementation is provided as a guide:

Suggested Timetable for Implementation

Action Step	Implementation
1. PLC	Year 1: Train teacher leaders Year 2: Start of music teacher PLC
2. Professional Development	Year 1: Survey music faculty about PD Year 2: Send or bring in music PD
3. New Teacher Induction Program	Year 1: Separate music teachers
4. Mentors	Year 1: Add an additional mentor

Conclusion

There is a need to address the high turnover rate among new music teachers within in the local school district. Retaining new music teachers can positively influence the district financially and its students academically. The options recommended in this document can lead to better support for the district's new music teachers and an increase in their retention rate.

Appendix B: Interview Guide for School Administrators

1. Describe the population and culture of your school.
2. Describe the benefits and/or drawbacks of your school district's new teacher induction program regarding new music teachers.
3. What type of PLC did your new music teachers participate in? Describe any benefits or drawbacks you know of that he/she received from participation in this PLC.
4. What professional development opportunities are available to your new music teachers? What feedback did you get from the teachers about these?
5. How are mentors for your new music teachers selected? What do you know about how they interact?
6. What indicators do you have that your new teachers are receiving or not receiving the support they need?
7. How do you measure success in your new music teachers?
8. What has been successful for the retention of new music teachers?
9. What do you feel is needed for the retention of new music teachers?
10. Please feel free to share any other relevant information pertaining to this study that have not already addressed or that you would like to add on.

Appendix C: Interview Guide for New Music Teachers

1. What process did you go through to become a music teacher?
2. Describe the population and culture of your school.
3. Describe the benefits or drawbacks of your school district's new teacher induction program.
4. Describe the PLC you have participated in and what you have gained from participation.
5. What professional development opportunities were available to you? What benefits or drawbacks did you receive from these?
6. How have you interacted with your mentor, and what benefits or drawbacks have you seen from having this resource available?
7. In what ways are you receiving support?
8. What additional supports would be beneficial?
9. What does a successful first year as a teacher look like to you?
10. Do you plan to continue in your current position next year? Why or why not?
11. Please feel free to share any other relevant information pertaining to this study that have not already addressed or that you would like to add on.

Appendix D: Focus Group Guide for Former Music Teachers

1. What process did you go through to become a music teacher?
2. Describe the population and culture of the school where you worked as a music teacher.
3. Describe the benefits or drawbacks of your school district's new teacher induction program.
4. Describe the PLC you participated in and what you gained from participation.
5. What professional development opportunities were available to you? What benefits or drawbacks did you receive from these?
6. How did you interact with your mentor, and what benefits or drawbacks did you see from having this resource available?
7. In what ways did you receive support?
8. What additional supports would have been beneficial?
9. What does a successful first year as a teacher look like to you?
10. What were your reasons for leaving the profession? How could they have been prevented or lessened?
11. Please feel free to share any other relevant information pertaining to this study that have not already addressed or that you would like to add on.