

2018

# Strategies used to Retain Teachers in Hard to Staff Schools

Levi Shavers  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Education

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Levi Shavers

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2018

Abstract

Strategies used to Retain Teachers in Hard to Staff Schools

by

Levi Shavers, Jr.

MSE, University of Central Arkansas, 1997

BA, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, 1983

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Administrator Leadership for Teaching and Learning

Walden University

June 2018

## Abstract

Teacher attrition has serious consequences in hard to staff schools. Mostly poor and ethnic minority students are deprived of being taught by stable, experienced teachers. The purpose of this study was to explore the strategies used to effectively retain teachers in such schools through the perspective of teachers at a high school that comprises poor and ethnic minority students in southwest Georgia. The conceptual framework that guided this study was Chen's theory about race and social class which postulated that a high percentage of poor ethnic minority students results in low teacher morale. This study explored the reasons why teachers stay at a school where there is a high proportion of poor and ethnic minority students. In this research, the case study strategy of inquiry was employed and data were collected from interviews with 10 teachers (using a 16-question interview guide) to solicit their perspectives on the working conditions at their school. The data were then examined for patterns and themes in the text. The findings produced 4 consolidated themes that revealed (a) aspects of a successful environment created by the principal; (b) an effective mentoring program that was aimed at assisting, developing, and supporting new and inexperienced teachers; (c) good parental involvement where parents were enthusiastic about supporting the school and their child's educational progress; and (d) stable and charismatic leadership that promoted retention. If implemented at hard to staff schools, these best practices can lead to improved teacher morale, better prepared teachers, and higher student achievement.

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## Dedication

I, Levi Shavers, Jr., dedicate this Doctor of Education degree to the Lord Almighty and to the ones that I love so dearly - my parents (Levi and Annie), my sister (Sandra) and her family, and my two brothers (James and Carl). I also dedicate this degree to two gentlemen that I adopted as brothers later in life - Dr. William "Bill" Lee Geiger and James Carpenter. I met Bill in 1982 while I was a college sophomore. Bill was there to help me brave the storms and rain. A chance encounter (while on the Grey Hound bus traveling from Memphis, Tennessee to Baltimore, Maryland) yielded the adoption of James in 2009. Like Bill, James's brotherly love was a bridge over troubled waters when I was weary and feeling small. I sincerely thank you (Bill and James) for being there. Lastly, but certainly not least, I want to thank God for giving me these special people (my loved ones and Bill and James). I thank Him for manifesting Himself through these people by making me feel loved. I also thank the Lord Almighty for giving me the knowledge and the endurance to persevere through such a rigorous program.

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## Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Problem Statement.....	5
Nature of the Study.....	5
Research Questions.....	6
Purpose of the Study.....	7
Conceptual Framework.....	8
Operational Definitions.....	9
Assumptions.....	11
Limitations.....	11
Delimitations.....	12
Scope.....	12
Significance of the Study.....	12
Summary and Transition.....	14
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	15
Conceptual Framework.....	16
Teacher Attrition.....	18
Public School Demographics.....	24
Teacher Mentoring and Support.....	26
Administrative Support.....	30
Working Conditions.....	34
Parental Support.....	37



Conclusion.....	41
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	42
Literature Related on Method and Differing Methods.....	42
Research Design.....	43
Research Questions.....	44
Context of Study & Participant Selection.....	45
Ethical Considerations.....	46
Role of the Researcher.....	47
Data Collection Procedures.....	48
Data Analysis Procedures.....	49
Methods to Address Trustworthiness.....	49
Summary.....	50
Chapter 4: Results.....	51
Introduction.....	51
Setting.....	51
Data Collection.....	53
Data Analysis.....	54
Announcements.....	55
Teaching.....	56
Successful Environment Created by Principal.....	57
Principal as Educational Leader.....	58
Principal as Promoter of School.....	59

Principal as Galvanizer.....	60
Principal as Kindhearted.....	61
Admiration.....	62
Administrative Support.....	62
We are Like Family.....	66
Mentoring.....	68
Parental Involvement.....	70
Parental Support.....	70
Open House/Parent-Teacher Night: Good Turn Out!.....	71
Concern.....	72
Student Descriptions.....	73
Negatives.....	75
Teacher Attrition.....	75
Discussion.....	77
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	80
Implications for Social Change.....	81
Summary.....	82
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations.....	84
Introduction.....	84
Discussion.....	85
Theme 1.....	86
Theme 2.....	89

Theme 3.....	90
Theme 4.....	92
Limitations of the Study.....	96
Recommendations as a Result of this Study.....	97
Recommendation 1.....	98
Recommendation 2.....	102
Recommendation 3.....	103
Recommendation 4.....	105
Recommendations for Future Research.....	108
Implications.....	109
Conclusion.....	109
References.....	111
Appendix A.....	131
Appendix B.....	133

LIST OF TABLES

Table of Demographics of Participant Teachers.....52

## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

There are consequences when teachers choose to leave their classrooms. They, along with countless others, are affected. This study was driven by what makes teachers stay at a school with high ethnic minority and high poverty level students. The sample for this study came from a group of teachers (via interviews) from a southwest Georgia high school with a high percentage of poor and ethnic minority students, yet that continues to present a low teacher attrition rate. This low attrition rate refutes the notion that schools with a high proportion of poor and ethnic minority students are difficult places to work and whose teachers are constantly leaving.

Teacher attrition is an issue that has drawn national attention. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF; 2007) indicated that 46% of all new teachers in the United States leave the profession within 5 years. The national teacher turnover rate has risen to 16.8% (NCTAF, 2007). In urban schools it is over 20%, and in some schools and districts, the teacher dropout rate is actually higher than the student dropout rate (Kain, 2011).

The participant school was located in southwest Georgia and had a low teacher attrition rate, even though the school has a high proportion of poor and ethnic minority students. The school has been frequently featured in district newsletters and local newspapers for its academic excellence. At the time of the study, a recent newspaper article shed the spotlight on outstanding students at the school. Dozens of students

among the high schools in the district competed at a Science Fair, which was located at a local college. Based on their performance, only 10 students were selected to compete in the Georgia Science and Engineering Fair.

Two other newspaper articles shed the spotlight on the accomplishments of the teaching staff at the participant school. Only one high school in the district, the participant school, made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). A reporter for the local television station said while other schools are failing to make the grade, the participant was celebrating its AYP accomplishment.

A year later, the participant school was in celebration mode, again! The staff celebrated with cake and ice cream. The principal and the superintendent were present and offered their congratulatory speeches. The principal said, “You did a very fine job, and I’m proud of you.” A teacher at the school said, “I am one of those teachers that have grown here. I’ve been here 15 years and have been teaching 22 years.” Another teacher, who had also been at the school 15 years, said, “Here at [participant school], we have high expectations.” A third teacher said,

We’ve got a lot of good people, and we all work together. It’s not so much a competitive level between the teachers, so if I have something I share it. We get together and have department meetings and start talking. If we have students in common, we might talk about what we do that works with that student specifically.

In considering teacher attrition rates, it is important to note that statistics may include teachers who simply move from one school or one state to another. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2001) indicated that teachers hold approximately 3.8 million, or about 4%, of the available jobs in the United States. During the 2004–2005 school year, 621,000 (approximately 17%) teachers left their position, and slightly less than half of those teachers transferred to a different school (NCES, 2001). That represents a rate of almost 1,000 teachers per day who quit teaching and 1,000 teachers per day who transfer to a new school across the United States. When schools with large levels of poverty are considered separately, the percentage jumps from 17% to 21% (Andrew, 2009). Such statistics are of great concern for educational researchers who study achievement gaps.

Teachers from across the country are leaving the classroom in search of better schools; some are looking within their districts, while others are looking outside of their districts (Kopkowski, 2008). Still others are switching careers (Shields, 2009). Dissatisfaction with their current working conditions (e.g., safety concerns, disruptive student behavior, the accountability movement under No Child Left Behind, lack of parental support, lack of administrative support, stress due to heavy workloads, lack of resources, and high student-to-teacher ratio) has caused educators to look elsewhere (Kopkowski, 2008; Senece & Wood, 2009; Shields, 2009). These schools, for the most part, have high-ethnic minority and high-poverty populations.

Although city school systems have instituted programs such as Support on Site to combat these conditions, the teacher attrition rate for such schools is still higher than the national average and significantly higher than rural and suburban school systems (Kopkowski, 2008). This instability impacts the school system, parents, and students. The school system is losing potentially good teachers that could have a great impact on student learning. One example is Chicago City Schools, which has a turnover rate of almost 50% of faculty within 5 years (Bruno, Ashby, & Manzo, 2012).

High-poverty, low-achieving schools nationwide are losing teachers. Teacher attrition appears to be higher in these hard to staff schools (American Federation of Teachers, 2013). Many hard to staff schools are high-poverty, inner-city schools or rural schools that, as a consequence of their location in economically depressed or isolated districts, offer lower salaries (American Federation of Teachers, 2013). Hard to staff schools also lack the amenities with which other districts attract teachers. Such schools have high turnover rates and a high percentage of relatively new teachers because more experienced teachers, whose seniority gives them greater choice, tend to go elsewhere (Amrein-Beardsley, 2007).

In this study, I focused on the need for increased understanding of and the ways in which a school system can reduce teacher attrition. The participating school, which had a low attrition rate and shared the same demographics as schools with high attrition rates, was analyzed for best practices, which could lead to more effective teacher retention.



### **Problem Statement**

Teacher turnover and attrition is a national problem. The exit of teachers from the profession and the movement of teachers to better schools or better jobs are also costly for the students, who lose the value of being taught by an experienced teacher, and to the schools and districts, who must recruit and train their replacements (NCTAF, 2003). Teacher turnover is 50% higher in high-poverty than in low-poverty schools (Ingersoll, 2001). The NCTAF (2003) also noted that teacher turnover is most pronounced in urban schools with larger numbers of poor and ethnic minority students. These statistics are alarming and present a challenge to all schools with high poverty and high ethnic minority rates.

I chose the participant school to study to address this national problem. It was not the site of a local problem related to teacher attrition but was chosen as a model of best practices regarding teacher attrition. Therefore, it was imperative that research be conducted with a school (having high poverty and high ethnic minority rates) that has a high teacher retention rate and explore what strategies this school was using to encourage its teachers to stay at the school.

### **Nature of the Study**

In this study, I focused on solutions to the teacher attrition rate. Schools with low teacher attrition rates that share the same demographics as schools with high attrition rates were analyzed for current practices in teacher retention. I used the qualitative

method to do so. Creswell (2009) stated that qualitative research is “The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant’s setting, data analysis inductively building from particular to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the data” (p. 4).

I used the case study design in this study. A case study is qualitative design that “investigates a contextualized contemporary phenomenon within specified boundaries” (Hatch, 2002). Creswell (2007) stated, “Case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system” (p. 73). Case studies allow researchers to gather information using multiple sources of data (Creswell, 2007). Using the case study approach, I examined the participant teachers’ perceptions of the best practices that caused them to want to stay at their school.

I selected 10 teachers to participate in this study. Each of these teachers had 4 or more years’ teaching experience. They were selected from a school that has a high ethnic minority rate and high economically disadvantaged population with a low teacher attrition rate. These teachers shared their perspectives on the effective strategies that their school utilize to retain their teachers. In Chapter 3, I will go into more depth regarding the research design of the study.

### **Research Questions**

The following research question was the central focus of the study: “What makes teachers stay at a school where there is a high proportion of poor and ethnic minority students?” I also explored the following research sub-questions:

1. What administrative support strategies does a school with predominate ethnic minority and socioeconomic disadvantaged students provide for its teachers?
2. How do teachers perceive parental involvement at a school with predominate ethnic minority and socioeconomic disadvantaged students?
3. What type of working conditions does a school with predominate ethnic minority and socioeconomic disadvantaged students provide for its teachers?
4. What type of teacher mentoring strategies does a school with predominate ethnic minority and low socioeconomic students provide for their teachers?
5. Why do teachers decide to stay at a school with predominate ethnic minority and socioeconomic disadvantaged students?
6. How has a school with predominate ethnic minority and socioeconomic disadvantaged students beat the odds by making Annual Yearly Progress for the past decade?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The negative effects of teacher attrition and of shortages of highly qualified teachers are felt most intensely in low socioeconomic status (SES), high ethnic minority populated schools (Howard, 2009). Research on teacher attrition is plentiful but not in the area of the traditional hard to staff schools. The purpose of this study was to explore the effective strategies used in retaining teachers in a high poverty and high ethnic minority school through the perspective of teachers. As a study site, I selected a hard to staff school with low teacher attrition rates for best practices in teacher retention. The

increasing population of ethnic minorities and the expanding economic issues in this country are social characteristics that are mirrored in today's classrooms (Marbley et al., 2007; NCES, 2001). This has caused a majority of new teachers to find themselves in classrooms with a majority of students from ethnic minorities, creating a great need for teachers to have attitudes and skills that enable them to work effectively with students of ethnic minority groups and of low SES. Evidence from the literature indicates that each year, thousands of teachers who work in city schools leave their jobs because they are dissatisfied with their current working conditions.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The literature on teacher attrition is filled with examinations of why teachers leave the teaching profession. Much research has been completed on the problems that infect our American schools and the consequences in the form of statistical data that impact our youth, communities, and school systems. It cannot be disputed that teacher attrition is a serious problem.

Chaos and disarray, along with other negative nouns (including teacher attrition), are predictable phenomena in schools with a large percentage of poor and ethnic minority students. In this qualitative case study, I was primarily guided by Chen's (2007) theories about race and social class. Chen pointed out that a high percentage of poor ethnic minority students result in school disorder and low teacher morale.

This study will contain an action agenda for reform (e.g., administrative support, teacher recognition, teacher empowerment, collegiality among teachers, parental support,

etc.). These reforms may change the lives of its participants (teachers; Creswell, 2003).

Therefore, it was appropriate to include the advocacy/participatory paradigm.

Wilson (2008) presented two concepts, culture and passion, that supported retention.

According to Wilson, retention “is sustained by consistent leadership ... and a value system that guides behavior and builds respect (p. 13).” One example is evident in Eagle Rock School in Estes Park, Colorado, where the school’s culture and caring environment transformed the once-tough environment of its student population (Wilson, 2008) (CITE).

Positive school culture “... protects against ... the loss of teachers” (Shaefer, Long, & Clandinin, 2012). Support is another concept related to retention. For example, elements of support include mentoring by experienced teachers, administrative and parental support, collaboration among teachers, teacher empowerment, and recognition from supervisors and administrators (Fontaine, Kane, Duquette, & Savoie-Zajc, 2012; Perrachione, Peterson, & Rosser, 2008; Prather-Jones, 2011; Shaefer et al., 2012; ).

### **Operational Definitions**

In this section, I will supply operational definitions for terms that appear frequently and are critical to this study.

*Climate*: The shared norms and values of the school setting related to student and faculty social, emotional, and physical well being (Gregory, Cornell, & Fan, 2012).

*Economically disadvantaged*: An individual who comes from a family with an annual income below a level, which is based on low-income thresholds according to family size (Bureau of the Census, 2011).

*Hard to staff schools:* Schools with a large percentage of socioeconomically disadvantaged students, difficult teaching environment, undesirable school location, and low academic achievement of student population (Morgan & Kritsonis, 2008).

*Inner city:* The unusually older, central part of a city, especially when characterized by crowded neighborhoods in which low-income, often ethnic minority groups predominate (Harrison, 1985).

*Novice teacher:* A teacher who, based on their experience measured in the amount of time (usually a short amount of time) they have been in the profession. Such teacher generally lacks effectiveness in their actions and thinking processes (Everhart et al., 2013).

*Socioeconomic:* A term that is a combination of two words-*social* and *economic*. The social condition of a person means culture and society where a person is living and his interaction with the society. *Economic* refers to financial status of a person. The socioeconomic condition of an individual refers to his/her society, culture, environment, interaction in society, and financial status (Akademi, 2011).

*Teacher attrition:* A person leaving the field of teaching (Greiner & Smith, 2009; NCTAF, 2003).

*Teacher turnover:* The rate in which teachers enter and leave the field of teaching (Schaefer et al., 2012).

*Veteran teacher:* A teacher who, because of the years spent in the classroom, has acquired knowledge, experience, expertise, and effectiveness in their profession (Everhart et al., 2013).

### **Assumptions**

The main focus of this study was to examine the forces at play that serve to keep teachers in their schools in hard to staff schools. My assumptions were that the participants, as potential benefactors of this study, would be interested in the topic of teacher attrition and would want to participate in the interviews by answering honestly. An additional assumption was that effective practices that encourage teachers to remain at their schools are representative of teacher stability across the nation. Further, I assumed that this topic was not too controversial and political for the school and that the results of this study could serve to benefit the school and not cause harm.

### **Limitations**

One limitation of this study was the small sample size. The study was limited to 10 teachers in one public school in Georgia with a low teacher attrition rate. It was not intended to represent other public schools in Georgia or in any other state. I chose the participants based on purposeful sampling, whereby the collected interview data came from one specific site and from participants who were easily accessible.

I was not an employee of the participant school. Creswell (1998) asserted that using “one’s own backyard provides easy access . . . and intimate knowledge of a setting may be an asset” (p. 114). However, research completed at an individual’s own school

could “establish expectations for data that may severely compromise the values of the data; individuals may withhold information” (Creswell, 1998, p. 115). Efforts were made to prevent this phenomenon. I anticipated that teachers responded honestly and requested that veteran and novice teachers recall both their first year and their present-day job satisfaction. Another limitation was time constraints. Scheduling constraints could have resulted in teachers having little or no time to collaboratively plan or discuss issues about student achievement.

### **Delimitations**

The delimitations of this study were limited to interviewing public school teachers in the state of Georgia and finding ways to retain teachers in the profession. The respondents were 10 public school teachers who were teaching during the 2014–2015 school year. Participants were teachers who were licensed by the state of Georgia.

### **Scope**

In this study, I focused on the reasons why teachers stayed at their school of high ethnic minority/high poverty student populations and proposed ways to retain teachers in such schools. The study took place at a high school in southwest Georgia. The school community has an overwhelming majority Black population.

### **Significance of the Study**

Schools with a large proportion of poor and ethnic minority students influence the movement and (in some cases) the careers of many teachers. The local problem



presented continuous movement of teachers from their schools resulting in a great number of new and inexperienced teachers in southwest Georgia. According to the NCTAF (2007), almost half of all new teachers leave the profession within 5 years. In urban schools, the teacher dropout rate is higher than the national average (NCTAF, 2007). The results of this study can be applied professionally when schools model the strategies that the participant school (which has a large number of poor and ethnic minority students) used.

The exodus of teachers is costly for school districts in that district personnel must recruit and train new teachers (NCTAF, 2003). Such teacher instability affects student learning because their replacements often lack experience and the proper credentials to adequately instruct students in the classroom (Honawar, 2007; Melnick & Meister, 2008). Moreover, many veteran teachers are either retiring or moving to better schools (Amrein-Beardsley, 2007; Ingersoll, 2001). This results in a larger number of inexperienced teachers who could benefit from the mentorship from veteran teachers.

The best practices that take place within the participant school will promote positive social change within schools that are hard to staff. If such practices are adopted, then teachers at such schools will see an improvement in their working conditions. The attrition rate will drop and the retention rate will soar because the support system includes teacher-mentors who share and model their experiences with novice teachers and administrators who show their genuine support and their knowledge of teacher development. With that kind of support, teachers are less inclined to leave.

### **Summary and Transition**

In this case study on teacher attrition, I addressed a problem where teachers are leaving their jobs in search of new ones. This transition impacts the school system, parents, and students. The purpose of this study was to explore the effective strategies in retaining teachers in hard to staff schools. The school under study had low teacher attrition and shared the same demographics as schools with high teacher attrition. Using qualitative research methods, I analyzed the data from teachers at the participant school for best practices in teacher retention. During individual teacher interviews, participants were asked open-ended questions related to the central research question: What makes teachers stay at a school where there is a high proportion of poor and ethnic minority students? They shared their perspectives on the effective strategies that their school utilized to retain their teachers. The results of this study are expected to help schools with the same demographics meet the challenges they encounter in retaining teachers. Chapter 2 will include a review of research and literature, while in Chapter 3, I will go into depth explaining the research design and the study. In Chapters 4 and 5 I will highlight the findings and implications of the study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

One of the major educational concerns in this country is the search for qualified and caring teachers for low-income students of color who will soon form the majority population in public schools (Irvine & Fenwick, 2011). Schools with this population are considered *hard to staff* schools. Such schools experience higher turnovers than schools with more affluent students (Amrein-Beardsley, 2012; Liu & Ramsey, 2008). This can be attributed to several factors such as low wages, lack of resources and administrative support, work overload, and student misbehavior (Mee & Haverback, 2014). Students in these hard to staff (or high needs) schools are more likely to suffer due to increased teacher turnover with less qualified teachers (Petty, Fitchett, & O'Connor, 2012). New and inexperienced teachers are at a higher risk of leaving the profession (Perrachione et al., 2008).

The purpose for this study was to explore strategies in effectively retaining teachers in hard to staff schools in southwest Georgia. The focus of this study was to examine the forces at play that serve to keep teachers in their schools and the forces that serve to drive teachers away from their schools. In this section, I will present a review of recent research that relates to the study of effective support strategies in teacher retention. I will highlight the demographic features of public schools and the forces that attract teachers to and repel teachers from the teaching profession. It will also include a discussion of the impact that attrition has on school districts and on teaching and learning. Additionally, I will focus on the support

structures that are needed to retain all teachers with a concentration on high ethnic minority schools.

For this review, I conducted a search for literature related to the topics of teacher attrition and retention. Topics, such as attrition, retention, induction programs, and high ethnic minority and low-income schools, were used to narrow down my search which was carried out using the Walden University Library and my local public library. Additional resources searched included databases and search engines such as Google , Google Books, and Google Scholar. The keywords and phrases I used in my search were *mentoring, induction programs, novice teachers, new teacher orientation, and teacher attrition*. I organized the review into the following categories: new teacher needs, why new teachers leave, components of induction programs, mentoring, retention practices, and support components. I will also address the research method selected for the study in this literature review. The components of induction programs and the benefits of induction programs were discussed to generate a list of potential themes for the study.

### **Conceptual Framework**

*Predictable* is a powerful term that describes the nature of poor and ethnic minority schools. Chaos, teacher attrition, inadequate facilities, underachievers, etc. are *predictable* phenomena in such schools. According to one researcher, “History... is a compass [people] use to find themselves ... It tells them where they are ... [and] what they must be.” (Murray, 2012, para. 1) This educational blogger highlighted the historical lack of funding that results in economic poverty in poor and ethnic minority

schools. It is unfortunate that economic poverty has the tendency to be a predictor of other negative outcomes (e.g., intellectual poverty), however (Murray, 2012, para. 4). When intellectual support and resources (e.g., laptops for all students) are applied in poor and ethnic minority schools, more students achieve and are engaged (Hudley, 2013, para. 4).

Chen (2007) pointed out that a large percentage of poor and ethnic minority students results in school chaos and decreased teacher morale. Exposure to chaotic activities not only disrupts the classroom setting but can be a factor shaping the experiences of disadvantaged students (Burdick-Will, 2013). Students in large urban districts often lag behind their suburban peers (Burdick-Will, 2013). Researchers have tried to understand these differences by focusing on measures of school funding (Lauen & Gaddis, 2013).

Burdick-Will (2013) looked at several schools in the Chicago School District and determined (through police and school incident reporting records) that a large percentage of them engaged in high levels of violent activities daily. The author stated that even those who were not actively involved (e.g., witnesses) in such incidents were negatively impacted in ways that reduced their opportunity to learn and achieve. In this study, I focused on a school in southwest Georgia that exhibited some of the same characteristics as the schools in Chicago. It is a Title 1 school (with inadequate facilities) and over 80% minority. In contrast, it is not predictable. According to the teachers surveyed, most of

its students are good and disruptions are minimal; the teachers are excited about being there, attrition is low, and the students are some of the highest achievers in the state.

### **Teacher Attrition**

Teacher attrition appears to be related to race, age, and gender. Black teachers were found to be less satisfied with their teaching jobs, but Caucasian teachers are most likely to leave (Fairchild et al., 2012; Liu & Ramsey, 2008; Schaefer et al. 2012).

Attrition was high for young teachers, low for midcareer teachers, and high for teachers nearing retirement (Lochmiller, Sugimoto, & Muller, 2016). Females were more likely to remain (Liu & Ramsey, 2008).

There appears to be some variation between researchers as to the percentage of new teachers who are leaving the profession. However, they can agree upon one thing: Teachers are leaving at an exceptionally high rate. Watson, Harper, Ratliff, and Singleton (2010) reported 9% of K-12 teachers leave the profession after their first year in the classroom. Hare (2012) reported a similar average of 8% for 2005. This author cited information from the NCES that reported a dramatic increase (from 8% to 20%) in the number of teachers who left the profession that year. This increase was due in part to a large number of teachers who retired that year (Hare, 2012, para. 2). A longitudinal study conducted by the NCES during the 2007–2008 school year looked at 1,900 beginning teachers. After 3 years, 10%–12% of them reported leaving the profession entirely in each of the consecutive years (Kent, Green, & Feldman, 2012). A more recent finding from the NCES revealed 7% of public school teachers with 1–3 years' experience left the profession after the 2011–2012 school year (Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014).

Darby et al. (2011) reported that within 3 years, approximately 1 in 5 teachers (20%) leave the profession during that time, while Irvine and Fenwick (2011) reported 33%. As for 5 years after hire, reports of teacher attrition ranged from 20 to 50% with Watson et al. (2010) reporting 25% to 50%, Perrachione et al. (2008) reporting 20% to 30%, Huysman (2008) reporting between 40% and 50%, Irvine and Fenwick reporting 46%., and Petty et al. (2012) reporting more than 33%.

Teachers have one of the biggest attrition rates of any profession, and beginning teachers are at a higher risk of leaving teaching (Cagle & McNeese, 2010; Perrachione et al., 2008). New teachers leave the profession due to high levels of stress caused by large amounts of work, student misbehavior, negative relationships with coworkers, and pressure from high-stakes testing (Paulik, 2012; Sass, Flores, Claeys, & Pérez, 2012). First year teachers typically identify inadequate support from administration, colleagues, and parents as key issues they face in their new profession (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Fry, 2007). Teachers who experienced unpleasant emotions early in their careers left the teaching profession altogether (Darby et al., 2011).

The turnover rate for urban high poverty schools is nearly 70% higher than low poverty schools (Greenlee & Brown, 2009; Irvine & Fenwick, 2011; Martinez, Frick, Kim, & Fried, 2010). Educational testing services reported that among eighth graders, 52% of Black students had a teacher that left before the school year ended compared to 28% of Whites (Irvine & Fenwick, 2011CITE). The absentee rate for teachers who taught Black students was greater (Irvine & Fenwick, 2011CITE). Students in

predominantly Black schools are most likely to be taught by inexperienced teachers who are most likely without management skills (Aragon et al., 2014; Irvine & Fenwick, 2011). Additionally, Black teachers are likely to remain in a Black school, and as the Black population increases, Whites are likely to leave (Fairchild et al., 2012; Scafidi, Sjaquestb, & Stinebrickner, 2007).

The public school system is the only American institution that reaches across all citizens for a large portion of their lives; no other institution plays such a central role in promoting the American dream (Hochschild, 2001). Ingersoll (2001) stated that there is a revolving door in education. Early-career teachers continually leave schools in high-ethnic minority, high-poverty communities to work in schools in higher-income communities, or to take jobs outside of education (Lynch, 2012). As a result, schools that need effective teachers have the greatest difficulty attracting and retaining them (Rice, 2010). Borman and Dowling (2008) explained that this exodus is attributed to the evidence of teachers' discontent with their low-income or ethnic minority students. Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin (2004) showed that student demographics are more important to teachers' transfer decisions than salary differences across districts. They interpreted this to mean that teachers choose to leave their students rather than their schools.

The racial composition of a school seems to determine the degree of satisfaction experienced by teachers. Many White teachers are unprepared and unwilling to teach students of color, and some even hold negative and racist attitudes about the students'



abilities and learning capacities (Halvorsen, Lee, & Andrade, 2009). They tend to “write off” such students as slow learners and not capable of achieving (Halvorsen, Lee, & Andrade, 2009). A person can imagine the emotional devastation young students of color experience when faced with such attitudes. Goldenberg (2014) referred to this interaction as “cultural clash” between low-income students of color and middle-class White teachers in the classroom and noted that this could make teaching and learning difficult (p. 113).

Disciplinary behavior of students of color is another reason why teachers do not have a satisfying experience in urban schools because a considerable amount of time is spent disciplining rather than instructing (Milner & Tenor, 2010). Additionally, the sheer presence of large numbers of students of color is enough to cause some teachers to become uncomfortable and less positive about their working conditions than their suburban counterparts (Renzulli, Macpherson-Parrott, & Beattie, 2011; Rhodes, Allen, & Nevill, 2004). This became apparent when a suburban school in Detroit had to open its doors to an influx of Black students after their school closed down (Hill, 2009). Many of the teachers did not welcome their presence and referred to them as “those kids” (Hill, 2009, p. 108). These kids became victims to adults who shunned diversity and, according to Ladson-Billing (1994), might have been better off in their segregated state since these teachers did not want to teach them. Such schools, according to Knox and Anfara (2013), experience particularly high rates of teacher dissatisfaction and turnover that can exacerbate preexisting problems with student achievement and discipline.

Lack of resources and the need for more funding is another issue in attracting and retaining teachers in high-ethnic minority, low-income schools. More funding is needed to improve the quality of teaching at such schools, according to Petty et al. (2012). One educator responded, “many of us pay for these resources from our own pockets” (Petty et al., 2012). Unfortunately, the average teacher cannot purchase some improvements such as smaller class size and more teachers (Grubb & Allen, 2011).

Considering the problems that are present in today’s schools , why would anyone want to become a teacher? Tamir (2009) pointed out that teachers are not paid well and that highly talented and capable professionals are choosing careers that are more economically rewarding. Tamir further indicated that teachers are looked down upon as low-status semi-professionals. Despite the challenges, an overwhelming majority say they want to make a difference.

Some researchers claim that teacher salaries are an important factor that attracts (or repels) teachers to hard to staff schools while other researchers assert that pay is of minimal importance. The former believe more teachers would be attracted to hard to staff schools if they were offered more money. Petty et al. (2012) pointed out that teachers want more money and feel more money is necessary because of the high stress involved. In order to accommodate them, some districts have provided incentives such as signing bonuses to prospective teachers.

O’Connor (2004) asked teachers to list their three most important professional needs. Higher salary was among the top five. Some indicated that they desired a salary

that was comparable to other professionals with college degrees. Others stated that they wanted a salary that was comparable to other professionals in relation to the job's importance.

O'Connor (2004) also asked teachers to list their three most important reasons for leaving if they were to leave within 5 years. Salary was the number one reason. Other comments mentioned stress and frustrations over not being able to get things done in spite of the numerous hours spent on school work, not being able to take a day off without spending a considerable amount of time writing everything down for the substitute, and feeling unappreciated.

In contrast, salary does not appear to be the ultimate force that keeps teachers at their schools. Instead, caring tended to appear most frequently in other research literature when teachers were asked why they chose to stay. A survey conducted by Petty et al. (2012) listed caring as the most important reason why teachers stayed. Crane and Green (2013) and Liu and Ramsey (2008) reported that new teachers stayed when they were content with interactions between students and school leaders. Sandoval-Lucero, Shanklin, Sobel, Townsend, & Davis (2011) and Lumpkin (2007) argued that teaching not only involves knowledge of content area but also satisfying classroom engagement through emotional connections with students.

For many new teachers, making it from one day to the next is a struggle. They are often given the heaviest class loads, the worst behaved students, and no support from the administration (Petty et al., 2012). Yet, they are expected to perform well. Some

will avoid asking for help because doing so is a clear indication that they are having trouble (Petty et al., 2012). As a result, teachers are leaving the classrooms in large numbers.

### **Public School Demographics**

The face of America's public schools is changing. It does not always consist of White middle-class students (Nadelson et al., 2012). Instead, it consists of students from a diversity of ethnic groups and social classes. Therefore, it is imperative that educators prepare themselves for such diversity by initiating relevant pre-service and in-service training that meets the needs of our changing student population. Nadelson et al. found that pre-service teachers who are exposed to diversity training are more likely to make a difference in the lives of diverse students. Such training is best practice. Its purpose is to help teachers connect to and get to know their students by embracing and supporting diversity (Bennett, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2009). By doing so, teachers are facilitating the success of low-income and ethnic minority students as well as their own success (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

As early as 2042, America is expected to become *majority minority* - where no one ethnic group makes up more than half the population (DeVore, 2011). The student population of America's suburban public schools has increased by 3.4 million in the past decade and almost all of this increase (99%) has been due to the enrollment of new Latino, Black, and Asian students, according to a Pew Hispanic Center analysis of public school data. Once a largely White enclave, suburban school districts during the 2006-

2007 school year educated a student population that was 41% non-White, up from 28% during the 1993-1994 school year, and not much different from the 44% non-White share of the nation's overall public school student population (Fry, 2009).

As a result of such statistics, relevant preservice and in-service training is needed to equip teachers with the necessary tools to become culturally responsive to diverse students (Bennett, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Culturally responsive teachers connect class lessons to home, socio-cultural, and school experiences by incorporating content that has cultural relevance with individual students. Such training is aimed at retention and, if modeled effectively (along with mentors), will result in teachers' success with low-income and ethnic minority students (Bennett, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Milner (2014) presented a relevant preservice/in-service training strategy (on homelessness) that serves to meet the needs of students experiencing challenging situations. Many educators may not be aware of the symptoms such as sleeplessness, restlessness, and poor self-esteem, considering this to be part of a potpourri of problems low-income and ethnic minority students' experience.

In conclusion, preservice/in-service training programs share one thing in common: meeting the needs of students served. As American school demographics change, so will the needs. And these needs require prompt attention and adequate services in order to produce desired results - academic success. When these services are provided, both the provider and the recipients benefit from them. Anderson and Stillman (2010) found when preservice teachers were placed in schools with a high proportion of

low-income and ethnic minority students, they became more comfortable with the students and showed an interest in developing a close, caring relationship with them. This culture of caring can transform a child, a classroom, and even a school. It can result in a positive learning environment where the relationship is built on trust and the teacher (s) made a difference in the lives of the students they served.

### **Teacher Mentoring and Support**

A review of the literature on teacher mentors clearly defines its purpose: to support teachers by assisting them in developing their knowledge and expertise in teaching and learning (Monroe, 2009). Many students who graduate from teacher preparation programs are not prepared to face the actual classroom (Flower, McKenna, & Haring, 2016). According to a Tennessee newsletter, they would benefit from experienced mentors who know about the district, the students, and other challenges teachers might face (Teacher Mentors Open, 2013). The newsletter also confirmed the purpose of teacher mentors: The goal is to develop better teachers with the idea that better teachers lead to better students and higher student achievement (p.8). Dr. Hill, a professor and teacher mentor explained what mentoring is and his role in the process: “Mentoring involves helping people recognize and achieve their life goals. I try to do this inside and outside the classroom. I guide students and help them identify what they need to be successful...” (Noble, 2009).

Teacher mentoring programs, with their unique style and flavor, exist all over America. Their goal is to attend to the needs of novice teachers. Chicago, for example,

has a context-specific induction program that prepares prospective teachers for urban settings known as Urban Teacher Education Program (UTEP) (Hammerness & Matsko, 2013). One year before graduation, prospective teachers are assigned to an induction coach. With support and planning, prospective teachers are able to gain knowledge of the routines and culture of the place where they would be teaching. Once hired, teachers receive 3 years of teacher support from their mentors (Hammerness & Matsko, 2013).

In Toledo, not only do mentors support teachers, they also take part in evaluating them and making decisions regarding their continued employment. Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) is a mentoring governing body that is made up of teachers and administrators whose sole responsibility is to oversee the work of mentors and gather data from them as they work with novice teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2013). Mentor teachers develop a plan of support suited to the needs of teachers they are mentoring. The support consists of working with the teacher in planning and designing instruction, classroom management, assessment, providing resources and professional development, and providing feedback on classroom management and instructional practices (Darling-Hammond, 2013). In Baltimore, retired teachers and older adults participating in Experience Corps, used their experience as volunteers by providing assistance and moral support to novice teachers (Martinez, Frick, Kim, & Fried, 2010). Their goal was to reduce the attrition rate in this urban setting by rendering their services to students by assisting them with their assignments and to teachers by helping out with daily chores such as classroom management.

The list of teacher mentoring programs that serves the needs of teachers all over America goes on. And some are effective in reducing the attrition rate and increasing the retention rate of teachers. Yonezawa, Jones, and Singer (2011) suggested (as a mentoring device) that teachers, both novice and experienced, communicate and support one another, learn from one another, and lead one another as they face the challenges in their work environment. Teachers like positive interactions with colleagues and mentors. And these interactions were described as pleasant and supportive when teachers planned and collaborated with one another (Darby, Mihans, Gonzalez, Lyons, Goldstein, & Anderson, 2011; Huysman, 2008; Petty et al., 2012). When such interactions went awry, teachers were left feeling frustrated and isolated - left alone to deal with problems such as crowded classrooms, inadequate facilities, limited funding, discipline problems, etc. (Darby et al., 2011; Heitin, 2012; Yendol-Hoppey, Jacobs, & Dana, 2009). To prevent new teachers from entering an isolative culture and from becoming another attrition statistic, Bieler (2012) encouraged mentors and experienced teachers to promote community. The researcher asked recent graduates from a secondary education program what kind of approaches experienced teachers could take to help new teachers adapt to the teaching profession. The graduates' responses reflected how experienced teachers helped them make it through their most difficult times in their teaching career. Their responses included, "share friendship and ideas, navigate curriculum together, grade together, observe and reflect together, and discipline together" (Bieler, 2012).



Some mentors are not available to support, assist, guide, and encourage teachers to face the challenges in their profession, but their legacy lives on. Whether passed on or not, these commemorative mentors (teachers, retired teachers, parents, other relatives, or older adults) are often referenced and given credit for teacher success. Such is the case of a group of teachers who credited their success as disciplinarians to their mentors (Monroe, 2009). Four teachers—two Black, two White—participated in a case study at a Southeastern urban middle school. The Black teachers indicated that their family upbringing and members of their family (e.g., mother, aunt, grandmother) who were also educators influenced their beliefs about discipline. The White teachers indicated that the educational institution enhanced their best practices. One stated that the lack of competent teachers who taught him influenced his desire to be a great teacher; the other stated that her discipline practices improved as a result of observing another teacher.

Since the 1990s, there has been a surge of new teachers entering induction programs. By 2008, the participation rate was almost 80% as compared to 41% in 1990 (Hammerness & Matsko, 2013). And positive results have been seen. In Chicago's UTEP, evidence indicates that teachers that prepared for particular contexts had higher retention rates (Tamir, 2009). Toledo's PAR's outcomes found that retention rates for beginning teachers increased significantly and the attrition rate fell from 26% to 15% (Darling-Hammond, 2013). Further, those who left Toledo's school district left not because they were disenchanted with teaching, but because their contract was not renewed (Darling-Hammond, 2013). Baltimore's Experience Corps improved the tone of

the classrooms and reduced teacher absences and attrition (Martinez et al., 2010). These and many other positive changes came about as a result of experienced teachers who refused to be selfish. They invested their time and energy in the success of struggling “babes” in education. They were a parent figure, a guide, a counselor, a role model, a coach, a colleague, and a friend. They will not be forgotten.

### **Administrative Support**

If administrators offer genuine support and assistance to struggling new teachers, then they are investing in a wave of teachers who focus on improving student achievement and classroom management (Caples & McNeese, 2010). Teachers want supportive administrators; they want to be respected as professionals; they want recognition and feedback. Such qualities from the administration seem to curb attrition. Petty et al. (2012) found that teachers who work under democratic and respectful administrators reported greater job satisfaction. Also, Youngs (2007) stated that principals with extensive knowledge about teacher development were more supportive of beginner teachers; ineffective principals were less supportive. Ineffective principals continuously show disrespect toward their teachers by treating them like “widgets” (Bonich, Merlino, & Porter, 2012). Just as widgets are used to plug up holes, teachers are ordered (at the spur of the moment) to switch to a different grade level, teach a different subject, or move to a different school.

If classroom management is the foundation for a successful classroom learning experience for new teachers, then administrators, veteran teachers, and mentors ought to be encouraged to support these teachers as they encounter harsh conditions that are

associated with disruptive classroom behavior, excessive paperwork, and belligerent parents. Rather, administrators' lack of support has left new teachers no other choice but to sink or swim (Caples & McNeese, 2010).

Even if skilled in academic subjects and pedagogy, new teachers find themselves grossly unprepared to deal with student misbehavior (Honawar, 2007; Melnick & Meister, 2008). One teacher said, "Many teachers quit because they do not expect the behavior problems and attitudes that they will get from the kids...The one thing that can make or break a teacher is students' behavior" (Caples & McNeese, 2010). Another teacher said, "I irrationally avoided sleeping at night because I dreaded waking up and going back to school the next day" (Moore, 2016). Sadly, student misbehavior is among the leading causes of teacher attrition among first year teachers whereby more than 25% of teachers who left the profession cited student discipline as the cause (Caples & McNeese, 2010; Honawar, 2007).

Classroom management appears to be a major concern for principals who lead urban schools. Nixon, Packard, and Douvanis (2010) administered a [priority list] survey to urban and suburban principals and found that classroom management was ranked highest among urban principals. For many new teachers, effective classroom management takes time. That is why it is important to have a good support system operating in a school where struggling novice educators prevail.

Theriot and Dupper (2010) conducted a 2-year discipline study on a group of elementary students in a Southeastern school district. The study began during 2003/2004

while these students were fifth graders and ended 2004/2005 (at the end of their sixth grade year). Though they found an increase in disciplinary infractions the following year, they also found that males, ethnic minorities, and low socioeconomic students were disproportionately represented in all discipline categories (e.g., fighting, use of profanity, and cafeteria misconduct).

Ineffective principals lead an organization that is a *hazard* (Petty et al., 2012) to new teachers. Some teachers actually hate going to work especially in hard to staff schools. They can even entertain a listener with their horror stories. One teacher reported an instance when a parent was constantly yelling at her and the principal refused to offer support for the teacher. The teacher began to cry and still the principal offered no support. The teacher felt betrayed and powerless (Petty et al., 2012). Interactions such as the aforementioned were found to occur more frequently among high poverty schools where administrators were reported to use their power in unsupportive and punitive ways (Amrein-Beardsley, 2007; Petty et al., 2012). This is unfortunate because teachers view principals as key figures for support (Hughes, Matt, & O'Reilly, 2015). Lack of support from the administration, according to teachers who left an urban Texas school district after 2007/2008, can be attributed to why 45.2% of them left (Craig, 2014). The real problem in urban schools, according to Petty et al. (2012), is found in its leadership. This may indicate the absence of positive administrative supervision in high poverty schools (Petty et al., 2012).

High-poverty schools have their challenges but the main concern for educators should be to provide a quality education for the students who attend these schools. Teacher preparation programs aimed at preparing teachers for the *real* classroom and professional development involving teachers and administrators (along with an effective mentoring program for new and inexperienced teachers) would be a step in the right direction toward reducing teacher attrition and affording poor/ethnic minority students a positive educational learning experience (with stable and experienced teachers) that many students from the majority race have always enjoyed.

Administrators should heed the warning signs of overworked teachers associated with excessive paperwork, crowded classrooms, the No Child Left Behind mandates, etc. For instance, Darby et al. (2011) conducted a study on a sample of teachers and their reactions to high stakes testing at two categorical types of schools-high poverty schools and nonhigh poverty schools. High poverty schools are those schools where 70% or more of its students received free or reduced lunches; Nonhigh poverty schools are those schools where less than 70% of its students received free or reduced lunches. Teachers at the high poverty schools appeared to be more impacted by high stakes testing due to pressures of No Child Left Behind mandates than their counterparts in the nonhigh poverty schools. For example, one teacher reported that she felt scared and embarrassed and that she also felt that she was to blame for student failure (Darby et al., 2011).

### **Working Conditions**

Research indicates that teachers choose to leave schools with poor work environments, and that these conditions are most common in schools that ethnic minority and low-income students typically attend (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Ladd, 2009; Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005; Shernoff, Marinez-Lora, Frazier, Jakobsons, Atkins, & Bonner, 2011). This suggests that the relationship between student demographics and teacher turnover is driven, not by teachers' responses to their students, but by the conditions in which they must teach and their students are obliged to learn (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012). One issue with perspective teachers is to match them with the school type that they desire (Aragon, Culpepper, McKee, & Perkins, 2014). And urban settings tend to be the least desirable. Conditions at such schools are deplorable whereby a high proportion of beginner teachers are employed and a low proportion of teachers with 20 or more years experience are employed (Aragon et al., 2014).

A group of prospective middle-class White female teachers faced reality when their college professor suggested that classes and field experiences be held at a local urban school. Some snubbed at the idea once they arrived on campus and went inside. They recognized the deplorable and deficient conditions that children of color were exposed to (Leland & Murtadha, 2011). The lack of air conditioning caused one prospective teacher to become aggravated. She threw up her hands and stated, "I just want to go to my classes on campus..." (p. 896). Huidor and Cooper (2010) found that

students of color experience “inferior schooling conditions” (p. 144) as compared to their White counterparts.

The disparity of conditions between wealthy (predominately White) and poor (predominately Black) schools has also led some principals to avoid poor urban schools when there was an administrative vacancy. This was the case at an urban school in a Portland, Oregon school district. The physical and social environment (e.g., gang violence) resulted in only a few applicants. When offered the position, some declined (Peterson, 2013).

Nevertheless, teachers who are satisfied with their careers are equipped to face challenges such as poverty, limited English language, and lack of parent support (Coggins & Diffenbaugh, 2013; Rhodes, Allen, & Nevill, 2004). Black teachers, according to Fairchild, Tobias, Corcoran, Djukic, Kovner, & Noguera (2012), have a positive influence on Black students’ learning. Black teachers desire to give back to their communities by working with black students to improve their lives (Villegas & Irvines, 2010). Petty et al. (2012) found that teachers that grew up in a school community know the school environment and understand the children’s needs. Yet, another study (on alternatively licensed teachers who are in many cases well suited for urban environments) indicated that such teachers are just as likely to leave an urban school as their traditionally trained counterparts (Ng & Peter, 2010).

There are many reasons why teachers leave. The general reason is dissatisfaction with their current employment. Researchers cited conditions (e.g., lack of funding, poor

student behavior, lack of administrative support and teacher autonomy, and heavy workloads) that encouraged teachers to move to other schools, retire, or quit (Moore, 2012; Perrachione, Petersen, & Rosser, 2008). Of course, the flip side of the conditions (above) is a positive environment where students are eager to learn; administrators' support garners democracy; and instructional leadership takes precedence. Such environment produces positive end products such as improved job performance and retention rates (Perrachione, Petersen, & Rosser, 2008; Qureshi & Niazi, 2012). Job dissatisfaction, on the other hand, may lead to stress (Perrachione et al.; Roeser, Schonert-Reichl, Jha, Cullen, Wallace, Wilensky, Oberle, Thomson, Taylor, & Harrison, 2013); and stress may lead to burnout and low morale (Rhodes, Allen, & Nevill, 2004; Roeser et al., 2013).

Davidson (2009) collected data based on interviews and observations in a small, rural Mississippi school. Findings suggest that teachers were most stressed by heavy workloads (excessive paperwork, unfair workloads, and increased workloads for administrators), high student discipline and student interaction problems, and issues exasperated by No Child Left Behind. In addition, it was found that rural schools offered a less stressful learning environment than inner city schools, due to less discipline and management problems and smaller class sizes. In addition to Davidson's study, four other studies that mentioned stress were introduced. Three of these (Bloch (1978), Haberman (1987), and Goodman (1980)) are older studies and are worthy of attention. Bloch and Haberman maintain that urban teachers experience more discipline and



management problems, perhaps due to larger class sizes, and Goodman suggests that urban teachers are highly stressed due to the aggregate of problems students bring to the classroom. Botwinik (2007) states that due to the stress American teachers experience, it is easy for them to become overstressed dropouts.

The teaching profession, according to Watson, Harper, Ratliff, and Singleton (2010), ranks as one of the occupations with the highest incidence of occupational stress. And stress can affect how educators perform their job (Zysberg, Orenshtein, Gimmon, & Robinson, 2017). Surprisingly, Kauts and Mittu (2011) found that teacher effectiveness is higher among high stressed teachers as compared to average and low stressed teachers. Although the Kauts and Mittu study may appear surprisingly impressive, how long can a teacher endure stress? Stress is correlated with health issues (Ablanedo-Rosas, Blevins, Gao, Teng, & White, 2011, Slavich, 2016; Zysberg, Orenshtein, Gimmons, & Robinson, 2017), and, despite these findings, teachers are leaving at an alarming rate. Often times, the best and brightest teachers are the ones transitioning out of education (Kelly & Northrop, 2015; Watson et al., 2010).

### **Parental Support**

Parental involvement/support is one of the most important factors impacting teacher attrition/retention because it is closely tied to student behavior, which is a leading cause of teacher attrition among first year teachers, (Caples & McNeese, 2010; Honawar, 2007) and student achievement, which is a major contributor of stress as a result of No Child Left Behind mandates (Watson et al., 2010). Such parents, according to Ms.

Mentor (2009), a blogger and former teacher with a fictitious name, might be the ones who attend open houses, belong to the Parent Teacher Association, volunteer at school, call with questions about their child's learning, and make sure their child does homework. "They might also do homework for the child, question the teacher repeatedly about grading, make unreasonable demands on a teacher's time, or assume that their child is always correct (Ms. Mentor, 2009, para. 1). In any case, parent-teacher communication represents a primary form of parental support (Thompson & Mazer, 2012).

Though parents and educators may have a different perception of what parental involvement means, there is no doubt about the importance of the parents' presence. Parents may view parental involvement as making sure their children are at school on time and being good parents while educators may view parental involvement as being a part of the education process by helping in the school and by helping out with their children's assignments (Bembenutty & White, 2013; McMahan, 2017; Nunez, Suarez, Rosario, Vallejo, Valle, & Epstein, 2015; Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013). Researchers such as Hayes (2011) and Shumov, Lyutykh, and Schmidt (2011) drew distinctions between home and school involvement. For example, according to Hayes, home involvement was defined as parent-adolescent communication about school and learning, while school involvement was defined in terms of parents' attendance and participation in school events.

Educators know that there is a direct relationship between parental involvement and academics (Jeynes, 2016; Kim & Hill, 2015; Porumbu & Necsoi, 2013), and that

successful students have families who stay informed and involved in their children's education (Boyer & Hamil, 2011). Elish-Piper (2008) makes the following point : “When parents are involved in education, teens typically have higher grade point averages, higher test scores on standardized and classroom assessments, enrollment in more rigorous academic courses, more classes passed, more credits earned toward graduation, and higher graduation rates” (p. 44). Karakus and Savas (2012) implied that when parents are involved, teachers develop trust in them and their children and are more inclined to be patient with their children in conflict situations. In the 1990s and throughout the next decade, researchers placed increased attention on parental involvement to establish a link between parental involvement and academic success (Thompson & Mazer, 2012). Based on interviews with parents and teachers and an analysis of parent-teacher e-mail transcripts, six primary themes emerged with grades (along with student behavior) among them (Chen, Yu, & Chang, 2007; Thompson, 2008).

Unlike administrative support (or lack of), teachers can promote parental support. Of course, teachers like meeting *all* of their students' parents and keeping in touch with them via telephone or e-mail but let us not forget those parents who work multiple jobs to pay bills, those with scheduling conflicts, those who lack transportation, those who have difficulty communicating in English and/or cultural differences, those who are experiencing their own personal or medical problems, or those who stay away because of negative experiences they had as a student (Boyer & Hamil, 2011; Milne, 2016; Ms. Mentor, 2009 ). Ms. Mentor offers more excellent advice for inexperienced and

experienced teachers alike: “It may be hard to believe, but many parents get nervous when visiting their child’s school, so non-threatening, pleasant experiences can help overcome their anxiety” (Ms. Mentor, 2009, para. 5). She went on to say, “We can cope by communicating with parents/caregivers, providing non-threatening opportunities for them to visit the school, and helping them learn how to be supportive” (Ms. Mentor, 2009, para. 7). Boyer and Hamil said, “We must go above and beyond to show these parents that their opinions and thoughts are not only wanted but are valued as well” (p. 5). Hudnall (2009) said, “Find something good to say about every student. And then let the parents know that despite errant behavior, laziness, or a general unpleasantness — their child matters to you” (pp. 14 – 16). Ms. Mentor adds, “If we communicate only negative information (behavior issues, low test scores, missing homework), it is understandable why parents/caregivers might not want much contact. Communication and positive experiences with schools can be the first steps in promoting parent support” (Ms. Mentor, 2009, para. 2 & 3).

Parental support can make a difference in the level of satisfaction teachers experience. Therefore, teachers need their support. With such support (along with mentoring and administrative support) teachers are less likely to leave because they have a strong ally. When teachers prove themselves to be truly working for the child’s success in acquiring an education, they will enjoy a rapport (with parents) that is freeing (Hudnall, 2009).

## Conclusion

The conceptual framework, which pointed out that a high percentage of poor minority students results in school disorder and low teacher moral, was *not* helpful in understanding the findings in the literature that supported the research question: What makes teachers stay at a school where there is a high proportion of poor and ethnic minority students. It *was* helpful in understanding the findings that support what makes teachers leave, however. Teachers leave because of student misbehavior, lack of administrative and parental support, stress from heavy workloads, low pay, lack of funding and resources, pressure from high-stakes testing, negative relations with coworkers, feeling unappreciated, and racial bias toward ethnic minority students. Teachers will stay at such schools when there is an emotional connection with students, parents, coworkers, and administrators. Salary is not always a factor. Instead, many teachers want to make a difference in the lives of students because they care about them. Still, others stay because of the strong support from their mentors. In the next chapter, I will discuss the methodology and the design of the study.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

In Chapter 3, I will discuss the methodology utilized, the organization, and the analysis of the data collected for this study. High-poverty, low-achieving schools nationwide are losing good teachers, and the teachers needed in these schools are not applying for the vacant positions (American Federation of Teachers [AFT], 2013). Teachers who are recruited often leave these schools because working conditions make it impossible for them to do the best job they can, and the turnover typically means a less cohesive and less experienced staff (AFT, 2007). The purpose of the study was to explore the effective teacher retention strategies. In this study, I looked at teacher retention practices utilized by a high school in southwest Georgia with high teacher retention in a hard to staff school district.

### **Literature Related on Method and Differing Methods**

I reviewed the literature related to various research designs and methods, and I chose a qualitative case study research design for this study. Since individuals were not targeted, a narrative or phenomenological strategy was not appropriate. Since my focus was not on culture-sharing behaviors of individuals or groups, an ethnographic strategy was not appropriate. Since I did not seek to develop a theory, a grounded theory strategy was not appropriate. Since I did explore processes and activities, a case study strategy was the most appropriate.

I selected a case study because the design allowed me to explore a process in depth where the cases are bounded in time and activity and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (see Creswell, 2003). The design allowed me to describe a phenomenon that is important not only to me but to the readers as well. According to Briggs and Coleman (2007), research should contribute something that was not already known.

Case studies are carried out largely by means of interviews in settings such as schools, offices, or places of employment--anywhere groups of people are found to be sharing the same environment (Hayes, 2006). Researchers should conduct the research within an ethic of respect for the participants and for the truth (Briggs & Coleman, 2007). They should also look for active involvement of their participants and seek to build rapport with them (Creswell, 2003). In this study, I explored (via teacher responses) which best practices have contributed to teacher success in achieving a low attrition rate at a school in southwest Georgia.

### **Research Design**

The methodology I used in this study was qualitative in nature. Hatch (2002) stressed the importance of qualitative research, which is designed to understand the world from the point of view of participants in the study. According to Creswell (2009),

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The

researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p.15).

The qualitative research design I used was case study. Case studies are a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals in depth (Creswell, 2009). A case study is an appropriate method of research to evaluate programs and develop interventions because of its theory (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Because I examined teachers' perceptions of the best practices that caused them to want to stay at their school in this study, a case study approach was appropriate.

### **Research Questions**

The following research question was the central focus of the study: What makes teachers stay at a school where there is a high proportion of poor and ethnic minority students? In this study, I also explored the following research subquestions:

1. What administrative support strategies does a school with predominate ethnic minority and socioeconomic disadvantaged students provide for its teachers?
2. How do teachers perceive parental involvement at a school with predominate ethnic minority and socioeconomic disadvantaged students?
3. What type of working conditions does a school with predominate ethnic minority and socioeconomic disadvantaged students provide for its teachers?
4. What type of teacher mentoring strategies does a school with predominate ethnic minority and low socioeconomic students provide for their teachers?



5. Why do teachers decide to stay at a school with predominate ethnic minority and socioeconomic disadvantaged students?
6. How has a school with predominate minority and socioeconomic disadvantaged students beat the odds by making Annual Yearly Progress for the past decade?

The answers to the research subquestions emerged from the study. I explored the support strategies in detail through the literature review and in-depth interviews.

### **Context of Study and Participant Selection**

The study took place in a high poverty, high ethnic minority high school located in a high poverty, high ethnic minority school district. The school was considered as a hard to staff high school due to the high percentage of ethnic minority and poverty students; however, this school also had a high teacher retention rate. Through the perspective of veteran and novice teachers, I determined what strategies the school employed to keep their teachers in this study.

The school is located in one of the poorest communities in the nation. According to *USA TODAY*, more than 12% of households in this community had less than \$10,000 in total income in 2012, more than all but one other metro area in the United States (Sauter, Hess, & Frohlich, 2013). Nearly 27% of the area's population lived below the poverty line, among the worst poverty rates in the nation (Sauter et al., 2013). The school has a 82% ethnic minority population (*Public School Review*, 2013).

I used purposive sampling to select participants for this study. This process allows the intentional selection of participants (Creswell, 2009 CITE). Purposive sampling also allows the participants to be chosen that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question (Creswell, 2009).

A sample size of 10 teachers participated in the study. The size appeared small, but the main purpose was to achieve informational redundancy or theme saturation. Sandelowski (1995) indicated that determining adequate sample size in qualitative research is ultimately a matter of judgment in evaluating the quality of the information collected. The 10 participants represented a cross-section (e.g., veteran and novice teachers, male and female teachers, Black and White teachers) of the 77 teachers employed at the school.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Throughout the study, I maintained professionalism by adhering to ethical standards and by ensuring that confidentiality would be provided. Participation in the study was strictly voluntary. Before commencement of data collection, I gained consent from the superintendent of schools, the principal, and teachers at the participating school. The principal signed a written Letter of Cooperation before data collection took place. Next, I requested assistance from the principal in selecting the teachers for the study. I specified the characteristics (e.g., four teachers with less than 3 years' experience and six teachers with 5 or more years' experience). Once the teachers were selected, I gave the principal and the teachers my e-mail address. Each participating teacher signed a consent

form (with IRB approval number 2015.04.07 11:18:04-05'00') from Walden University. In the consent form, I explained the purpose and process of the study, allowing the participants full knowledge of what they were agreeing to participate in as well as the impact it would have on them. For example, the form included information regarding privacy rights, information about me as the researcher, and telephone numbers to call (including the Chair) if there were any questions regarding the study. Participants were also informed that they could ask questions and obtain a copy of the results (see Creswell, 2007). Once the participants signed the form, I then scheduled interviews.

Once the data were collected, I transcribed, analyzed, and crafted a written narrative of the findings. In reporting the findings, no information was used that could identify participants. Participants were not harmed in any way through this study.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I am employed as a full-time American Government and Economics teacher in a southwest Georgia public school. Responsibilities of my position include instruction, lesson plan preparation, cafeteria and outside duty, classroom management, and other duties assigned by the principal. During this research process, I was responsible for conducting and recording interviews and transcribing and coding responses. Since I was familiar with the challenges teachers faced because of my many years in public school education, I allowed other scholars to review the interview guide (to insure a greater amount of objectivity) prior to interviews. Furthermore, I had no past professional

relationships with the study participants, which could otherwise have affected data collection.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

I conducted individual interviews with the participants in this study. These interviews involved open-ended questions. This type of questions allowed participants the opportunity to freely express themselves by addressing issues (e.g., workloads, student behavior, relationships with coworkers, high-stakes testing, administrative support, parental support, resources, salaries, etc.) they faced. Hatch (2002) said, “Qualitative interviews are special kinds of conversations ... that are used by researchers to explore informants’ experiences ....” (p. 91). The interviews began with ice breaker questions, with the intention of creating a relaxed setting for the interviewees. After the interview session (see Appendix), I transcribed the responses and e-mailed them to the participants for verification. Responses from the interviews allowed me to uncover themes and patterns that consistently emerged. Each participant received a hardcopy of the interview guide prior to the interview. The interview sessions were held at the participants’ convenience at the participant school. Only one participant per day was interviewed and the sessions lasted up to 90 minutes.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

After each interview, I transcribed the responses immediately while they were still fresh so that I could make sense of the data collected. I read the contents of each of the 10 transcribed sets of responses from the individual interviews repeatedly (and carefully) in order to uncover what was really taking place at the site. After transcribing, I analyzed the data. A model for analyzing data that Hatch (2002) labeled “inductive analysis” was used (p. 161). Hatch stated that data analysis “means organizing and interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories” (p. 148). Next, I coded the material by placing the data into categories. Similar categories were assigned a code that distinguished it from the other categories. Next, I reported the findings in a narrative. In this study, I was expecting to detect the culture at this site through emerging patterns such as support (or lack of) and team building (or isolationism).

### **Methods to Address Trustworthiness**

During the data collection process, I transcribed, analyzed, coded, and reported the findings in a narrative and sought to secure trustworthiness of the findings, which is important in qualitative research. Trustworthiness consists of the following components: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2003). To secure trustworthiness, data collection and data must be handled carefully.

I used individual interviews as the primary form of data collection, and assured the participants that their responses would be confidential. Further, to ensure accuracy, I utilized a method known as *member checking*, or verification of information developed by the research, to aid in the validity of the study. I took the final report back to the participants to see if they thought the findings reflected their intentions (Creswell, 2003; Hatch, 2002). The findings were also passed on to professional scholars to review the data, ask questions, and offer advice.

### **Summary**

This qualitative case study examined the responses of 10 educators who worked in a hard to staff school with a high teacher retention rate. The method of collecting, organizing, and analyzing their responses were discussed in Chapter 3. The next chapter presents the findings from this research study.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

Highly qualified, experienced, and capable teachers are needed in schools where the vast majority of the students are poor and of the ethnic minority race. School leaders can set the tone for a favorable climate that is conducive to teacher retention in high poverty/high ethnic minority schools by employing best practices. Practices (or strategies) that are effective compel teachers to stay at a school that is considered hard to staff. In Chapter 4, I will present the findings from the data that I collected from the participant school. The purpose of this study was to explore the strategies used in effectively retaining teachers in a high poverty and high ethnic minority school through the perspective of teachers.

### **Setting**

In this study, I interviewed 10 teachers (with an average age of 50). Their demographics consisted of six African Americans and four Caucasians, seven women and three men, and with age ranging from mid-20s to early 60s. One teacher was in her mid-120, two were in their mid- to late 30s, five were in their early to mid-50s, and two were in their early 60s. On average, the teachers had 17 years of educator experience (see the table below).

*Table of Demographics of Participant Teachers*

Teacher	Age range	Race	Sex	Educator experience	Years at present job
1	Mid-30s	Black	Female	14	5 years
2	Early 50s	Black	Female	Not provided	Not provided
3	Early 50s	Black	Female	22 years	22 years
4	Early 50s	Black	Male	15 years	1 year
5	Early 50s	White	Male	23 years	5 years
6	Mid-50s	White	Male	13 years	1 year
7	Late 30s	Black	Female	18 years	1 year
8	Early 60s	White	Female	Not provided	Not provided
9	Mid-20s	White	Female	4 years	4 years
10	Early 60s	Black	Female	23 years	1 year



### **Data Collection**

Ten teachers from a high ethnic minority/high poverty high school in southwest Georgia participated in this qualitative case study. They agreed to participate and I provided them with details of the interview and documentation guaranteeing confidentiality. The interviews were conducted in the participants' classroom after the school day ended. I also followed up with participants via e-mail. The data collection instrument consisted of 16 open-ended questions and interviews lasted up to 90 minutes. The questions were designed to focus on teachers' views of their work environment and relationships among coworkers, students, parents, and the principal.

My plans to tape-record interviews did not work out. Teachers who agreed to participate refused to be audiotaped. Instead, I used a notepad to record their responses.

In 2013, while working on Chapter 2, the district superintendent granted me permission to collect data at the participant school. In 2015, the Walden Institutional Review Board approved the request to collect data at the school. The school's principal decided against having a study conducted at his school. After receiving this news, I contacted my chair for advice. She encouraged me to speak with the principal (face-to-face) and to share with him the approval letter from the district's superintendent. I met with the principal the following day but he could not talk because he was in a faculty meeting. He requested that I slide the manila envelope under his office door. The next morning, the principal sent an e-mail granting me approval to conduct the study at his school.

### **Data Analysis**

After completing each interview and examining the responses, I immediately transcribed the data. By doing so, this enabled me to be knowledgeable of prior responses so that I could triangulate, or verify, such responses. This was a lengthy process. Ten sets of transcribed data were analyzed. Each teacher responded to 16 questions on the interview guide, and for each question, the responses from each teacher were compared to each other. For example, the first item—describe a typical day at your school—served as a title at the top of the page of the graphic organizer. Below it were two columns: respondent and response. This visual provided an efficient way to organize the data and allowed me to see patterns, similarities, and themes. The left column represented the 10 participants. The right column provided space for how each participant responded to the question listed at the top of the table. The process was repeated for Questions 2–16. Once the graphic was complete, commonalities and emerging themes could be seen in the rows of the right column. See Appendix B.

I read the data many times and examined them closely. This enabled me to retrieve pieces of evidence from responses (e.g., quotes and phrases) and put them together to form a meaningful connection (or relationship). Categories of meaning (or domains) were organized around relationships with specific data (e.g., quotes and phrases) supporting them. I kept record of relationships found in the data, and assigned codes (e.g., Administrative Support) to categories of meaning (or domains). Once the categories of meaning (or domains) were established, I could easily distinguish between

them and could easily place pieces of evidence (that support the category) into the appropriate category.

I read the data over and over with a specific category of meaning (or domain) in mind. I also searched for new information until nothing else in the data could be uncovered. The data revealed the following themes: successful environment created by principal, admiration, administrative support, we are like family, mentoring, parental involvement, parental support, student descriptions, negatives, and teacher attrition. The themes were prioritized and reported in a written narrative. In the following subsection I will present two important activities—announcements and teaching—that were mentioned when I asked each respondent to describe a typical day at their school. Their responses invited readers to view a behind-the-scenes picture of what is actually occurring in their world. In addition, the responses to this question addressed the research question and several of the subquestions.

### **Announcements**

The first item I asked respondents to respond to was: Describe a typical day at your school. Like most (if not all) schools, activities were routinely performed (e.g., announcements at the beginning and at the end of the day, preparing lessons, reporting to duty, lunch, teaching, planning, changing of classes, arriving to work, and taking attendance). Since I had prior knowledge of the school's characteristics (e.g., a long history of achieving AYP and a long history of state and national recognition), I felt that the responses to such question would give readers a behind-the-scenes view of what was

actually taking place at the school on a daily basis that attributed to the school's success. The announcements, which I will discuss later, were perhaps the most significant activity. Reports of what took place during the announcements were crucial in generating discussions throughout this study, providing data in support of the research questions and in establishing major themes in the study. This behind-the-scenes view highlighted what was going on at the school when other schools with similar demographics were failing. This led me to infer that such enthusiasm for the school, the teachers, and the students did not exist in other schools.

### **Teaching**

It comes as no surprise that teaching (and learning) is a major activity that occurs at a successful school. When asked about why their school is excelling when surrounding schools are not, R9 replied, "excellent teachers," and R1 replied, "better students." The numerous recognitions for academic excellence that this school has received, according to R3, can be attributed to the hard-working teachers (who "... come early and stay late," said R10) and dedicated students. R4 said, "I am available for students from the beginning of school until the end of the day". Students receive plenty of encouragement and support from their teachers. "I like it when ... students want to work hard and learn," said R9. R6 said, "I like it when people are a success." "We want everyone to succeed," agreed R5. When asked about what they like most about teaching at the school, R5 and R9 stated that they like their students. R5 also added, "I graduated from here. It is like giving back to the school that helped me."

### **Successful Environment Created by Principal**

Research has indicated that students in schools with high ethnic minority/high poverty populations tend to be negatively affected due to the instability of instructors who are usually new and inexperienced teachers (Petty et al., 2012). As a result, teacher attrition is high. The participant school, which has many qualified and experienced teachers, is an exception. “There is high teacher retention,” said R5. “We see the same faces year in and year out.” Teacher stability could be attributed to the principal’s stability. According to R5, this is the only high school principal in the district that has gained a level of stability.

Throughout the data collection process, I asked participants a series of questions covering various topics. From the responses, the overarching theme of successful environment created by principal emerged along with four subthemes: principal as educational leader, principal as promoter of school, principal as galvanizer, and principal as kindhearted. The principal, whether intentional or not, has employed best practice strategies that served to keep teachers at a hard to staff school. Teachers in this study who transferred from a hard to staff school (or who were inexperienced) could quickly see and feel the difference that their new environment had to offer. They recognized early on that their new supervisor was interested in them and that he would do whatever he could to make their work life easier. They agreed that he was a good leader, was visible, and made his presence known. R8 said, “He is assessable.” “If I need him, he

comes. If it's a behavior problem, he will come," said R9. R1 stated, "He has an open-door policy... One doesn't have to go through the secretary to see him."

Additional testimonies shed light on the conditions that were present at respondents' previous job. "I had a contentious relationship at my old job...It was like administration versus teachers", said R7. R10 reported, "I have been here long enough to see the difference between this environment and my previous school. The short time that I have been here, I am now at peace." She (R10) continued, "I dreaded going to work at my previous school. Now I enjoy coming to work. I am beginning to like my job as a teacher. Now I can perform my job like I should."

Respondents indicated that they felt good about working in their present location because it was a happy, safe, and supportive environment. One teacher, R4, has children who attend the school, "I wouldn't want them to attend any other school. I feel like there is support for my children at this school."

### **Principal as Educational Leader**

When asked why their school was excelling when surrounding schools were not, several respondents credited the principal's tireless effort to support teachers and students in achieving academic excellence. "The principal reminds us that academics come first," said R5. Over the intercom, it has become a morning routine for the principal to act as cheerleader in getting his message across: "...We are about education," said R5. R5 also said, "We celebrate academic excellence and even in his office, he has many academic

trophies. Even a college coach who visited him was impressed with the academic trophies in his office.” According to R10, “He always stresses education.”

The intercom has been a vehicle for “indoctrinating” the school body (teachers and students) that education is first and foremost at the school. Many students have bought into this idea. Recently, the school district was rezoned and students from other hard to staff schools were bussed to the school. The idea of academic excellence was challenged. Making AYP every year for over a decade was also challenged. Teachers mentioned the rezoning crisis in their response to what they liked least about working at the school. “The district has gone through redistricting and students from bad schools are coming to this one,” said R8. R9 said, “I have seen a difference in the students here since the school has gone through rezoning.” Though faced with the challenges associated with rezoning, the principal vowed to not be outdone. He said, according to R8, “...despite redistricting, whoever comes here, we will still make AYP.”

### **Principal as Promoter of School**

“*Wow*” is “...a word that he [principal] uses a lot ...when making reference to something good that is happening at the school,” according to R10. Also, according to R10, each Friday, the principal gives a recap or summary of the great things that occurred during the week. His message is filled with excitement and enthusiasm. He actively encourages and supports the school. He also “...asks us to support our school.” said R5.

Respondents believe that the school’s success could be attributed to the principal’s promotion of it. He has planted a seed in the minds of students and parents

that the school is at the top. “Parents at this school think their child is at an elite school,” said R10. Teachers and students have heard the principal say many times, “This school is number one!” noted R7 & R10 and/or “This school is the best in the district!” noted R1 and/or “This school is the best in the state!” noted R1. Respondents also indicated that many students who transfer to the school do not want to return to their old school.

### **Principal as Galvanizer**

“*BREAKING NEWS: This is just in ...*” is an example of what one might hear from the principal over the intercom at the participant school. This is enough to keep any teacher at the school on the edge of their seat. Teachers never know what to expect of the principal, which is one of the qualities respondents admire. According to R1, he excites the staff and builds suspense by saying, for example, “*Breaking News: this is just in ... we pause to say congratulations to ... If you see this person, give him/her a pat on the back.*”

Anxiety is high during graduation ceremonies. Graduating seniors and their parents do not know what to expect; teachers do not know what to expect; and visitors do not know what to expect. Suspense is high until the principal finally makes his move. “He will bring in local celebrities for graduation to disseminate breaking news of an award to a deserving senior,” said R1. Moreover, respondents reported that each week the principal conducts a drawing and salutes a teacher. “I like just being here...It’s a happy environment,” said R5.



### **Principal as Kindhearted**

The respondents in this research study have indicated that the principal likes his staff and he always wants to help them. “He is very generous,” said R10. “I cannot find the words to describe the principal. He is concerned, caring, sympathetic, empathetic, ...,” said R3. While teachers at other schools are paying \$25 for t-shirts, R3 said, “Each teacher receives a free t-shirt at the beginning of school.” R10 reported, “He handed out \$100.00 gift certificates to well-dressed students who were wearing red, white, and blue...He gave a gift card to the best-dressed person on Pink Out Day during Breast Cancer Awareness Week. He bought everyone a honey baked ham lunch.” R3 reported, “He personally hand-delivers gifts to workers during Christmas and Teacher Appreciation Week...During Christmas season, the principal puts on his red Santa’s cap and goes from room to room with his cart to deliver gifts to each teacher.”

R3 shared very stunning details of how she was impacted by the principal’s generosity:

“I get very emotional when I talk about this. Years ago, when I was married, my husband (now my ex-) lost his job. Things were rough but we managed on my lone salary. The Christmas holiday was approaching. The principal found out that my husband was unemployed. So, he inquired about my 12-year old son (who is now 25) to see if he was okay for Christmas. He asked another employee to get in touch with me to check on my son. I was taken aback. With gratitude, I told the principal that my

son is okay for Christmas. I had already gotten my children's Christmas things in advance. As a result, the principal and I have developed a strong reciprocal relationship.”

### **Admiration**

The respondents showed genuine admiration and warm respect for their principal. This is because the principal showed respect and support for his teachers. When asked if they like their principal, all participants gave positive responses. For example, R1 said, “I like his support,” R2, “Yes,” R3 & R4, “I do,” R5, “Definitely,” R6, “The principal is superb! He is great!” R7 & R10, “I love him,” R8, “I like him very much,” and R9, “I really like him a lot.”

“He makes me feel appreciated,” said R4. “He includes everyone.” “One reason why teachers are leaving is because they do not feel appreciated,” said R10. “I even went to his office and told him ‘*thank you!*’” R9 stated, “Some teachers have said that if he goes then we are leaving, too!”

### **Administrative Support**

Research indicates that new and inexperienced teachers are at risk of leaving the classroom shortly after hire. Watson et al. (2010) reported 9% of K-12 teachers leave the profession after their first year in the classroom. They face many challenges (e.g., classroom management, busy workloads, etc.) that only support will help them survive. Teachers, whether new or experienced, want support from the administration. They want

to be recognized and treated with respect. Research also indicates that lack of administrative support is one reason why teachers are leaving. Principals have used their power to drive teachers out the classroom. Why not channel that energy to keep teachers in the classroom?

Teachers in this study were not asked direct questions regarding administrative support. Their responses uncovered this theme, however. They stated that the principal treats them in a professional manner. They also stated that the principal stands in their corner when angry parents challenge them. Further, they stated that he encourages them and works hard to make their work life easier.

A subtheme of administrative support is quick to applaud/quick to reward/always says *thank you*. This subtheme features the little things the principal does to show approval and encouragement to his staff. Although all of the respondents indicated that the principal supports them, four mentioned *support* specifically in their responses. For example, R1 said, “Administrative support is good,” R6, “He has always supported me,” R9, “He is supportive,” and R10, “The principal supports me.” A closely related response comes from R7 who said, “He always tells us that he is here for us.”

The principal is uplifting. He “...encourages teachers,” said R10. R4 shared how the principal motivated him during Parent-Teacher Night while he [principal] was making his rounds from one classroom to another. “He told the parents that their child is in good hands with me.”

The principal "...respects teachers," said R10. "We're treated like professionals," said R5. "The administration believes we are smart enough and mature enough to carry out our duties," said R7. "He lets teachers know that they are in charge," said R10, and "He doesn't interfere with...[them]," said R6.

Two of the respondents who transferred from another hard to staff school compared the conditions at their present school to the previous one. R7 said, "There is less stress..." and R10 said, "We don't have a lot of meetings." Both R7 and R10 stated, "He does not ride us." while R10 went further by saying, "He will not wear you down." R7 added, "At my previous location, I was written up for the simplest things. I was also reprimanded in front of my students."

When asked how (or if) problems are resolved when dealing with disciplinary issues, respondents indicated that the principal showed support for the teacher. "He is fair," said R8. And "He looks at both sides. If a parent accuses me of something, the principal will call me in to ask for my side of the story." R1 recalled an instance when she called a parent from the office phone. Later, the mother arrived at school to request a conference with the teacher in the presence of the principal. The mother accused the teacher of being rude to her over the telephone. The principal, according to the teacher, stood up in the teacher's behalf and said, "This teacher would not be rude to parents."

Another instance recalled by R1 involved a student who was on her roll but was not attending her class. This was because the student was continuously attending In-School Suspension. The teacher addressed her concerns with the

administration stating that the student could not benefit from her class when he is in in-school suspension. For example, lessons requiring laboratory work cannot be performed in in-school suspension. The student was eventually pulled from her roll.

R3 also shared a story where the principal displayed his relentless support. She said,

“Due to my management skills and due to the fact that I will follow up when I refer a student to the administration, the problem is usually resolved. For example, a group of students went to see a movie and I was left to monitor those who did not go. I was not familiar with some of the students. All of a sudden, I heard cursing coming from a female. I spotted this girl with red weaves in her hair. I approached her and told her, ‘Baby, watch your mouth.’ She said, ‘I do not want to be bothered!’ and continued cursing and walked away. I contacted the school resource officer, gave a description of the student, and did a follow up. I spoke with the resource officer. He said that the young lady was just having a bad day. He spoke with her and sent her back to class. I was not satisfied with her discipline, so I spoke with the principal about the matter. The principal said, ‘I will take care of it.’ He radioed the resource officer and asked him to bring the student to his office. The girl walked in with the resource officer. The principal asked, ‘What seems to be the problem?’ The

student said, 'I just don't want to be bothered!' The principal said, 'You will be bothered! Now, you are going to tell me why you were carrying on that way.'"

The respondent stated that she was pleased with how the principal handled the matter. "Toward the end of the school year, the same student came to me and said, 'We didn't start out well at the beginning of the year. Can I apologize to you?'"

The participants indicated that the principal praises, recognizes, honors, and compliments his faculty frequently through public recognitions, drawings, issuing of gifts, and a heart-felt *thank you*. As a result, I included a sub theme – Quick to applaud, quick to reward, and always says *thank you*. "He rewards us often," said R10. "He always says to his teachers, 'I appreciate you!' I feel he is sincere." R6 said, "He always says *thank you* and means it." R9 stated, "He is quick to recognize the accomplishments of teachers and students. He is not quick to criticize."

### **"We are Like Family!"**

When asked what they like most about working at their school, why they think their school is excelling when surrounding schools are not, if they like their principal, and to describe their relationship with coworkers, the theme "We are Like Family!" emerged. Like family, this school body is connected through love, trust, unity, cohesion, harmony, fellowship, compassion, like-mindedness, teamwork, spirit, faith, friendship, and support. Each year during the high school senior graduation ceremony, faculty members are united together as they march into the civic center arena. They are *not* separated by titles

or degrees. Instead, "...custodians are included in the line up along with teachers and counselors," said R3

According to R4, everyone is included at this school. "No one is ostracized." "This is a friendly environment," said R2. "We greet one another daily," said R2 & R3. "We hug each other," said R10, and "We have lunch together," said R7. According to R3, there is "togetherness" and "unity" at this school. "We go to church together and we pray together," said R9.

There is "...a willingness to help out when needed," said R2. Four teachers, R2, R3, R5, and R8, reported that they watch each other's class when one is out. The temporary absence may be due to having to take a restroom break, being called to the office, or an emergency. In any case, "I don't mind filling in ...," said R5. That is teamwork! That is "... work [ing] together," said R1.

R9 described how helpful her co-workers were when she had problems with her vehicle.

"Some of them looked after me and sacrificed their time to serve me. Recently, I had car trouble and was without a car for a week. I didn't know how much it would cost to repair it. I did know that it would be expensive to rent a car. Teachers picked me up from home and took me to work. They took me home from work without my having to pay them. My co-workers have been an inspiration to me."

Respondents also described the emotional bond that is present at the school.

“There is a feeling of belonging,” said R4. Therefore, “We confide in one another,” said R7 & R10. “We express our concerns and feelings for each other,” said R10. “We know each other well. When one is upset, we know it,” said R3.

### **Mentoring**

When asked if they ever had a mentor since working at this location, four teachers stated they had a mentor. One presently has a mentor. R5 stated that his mentor served as an advisor to him. R7 said that an older teacher at the school mentored her. They worked jointly on activities and had a good relationship. R9 said her mentor was the assistant principal at the school.

“We think alike. We also have similar beliefs regarding our religious faith. I would bounce ideas off of him. I would be honest with him and he would tell me things that worked for him when he was a first year teacher.”

Like R9, R10 stated that she and her mentor work jointly on activities such as lesson plans. “My mentor, the instructional coach, will check on me occasionally. I get a lot of assistance and support from my mentor.”

The respondents were also asked if they were mentors anytime during their career. Three teachers stated that they were at one time. R4 indicated that he had been



mentor to several teachers. He used his technological expertise and his effective classroom management skills to assist and advise his mentees.

“... I have helped other teachers set up the CPS on their computer. Using my experience, I have discussed different strategies to deal with parents. At Open House and parent-teacher conferences, I share with the teachers I advise how I deal with parents. I inform parents of the steps and procedures that I take in my classroom. For example, during fire drills, if you line up in ABC order, you get bonus points. If your parents come to Open House or to parent conferences, you get bonus points.”

R3 reported,

“The principal has given me permission to assist new teachers. We have a wonderful, loving relationship. I will offer constructive criticisms to the ones that I am assisting. They will thank me for sharing my advice. Whenever I critique, I make sure that I am critiquing them on important matters. I don't want to nag them about anything.”

Like R4 and R3, R8 also has experience in mentoring teachers. She has thoughtful memories of one of her mentees.

“I had a great relationship with her. She is now in Cameroon [Africa] translating the Bible into the Cameroon tongue. I taught her how to do data and computer technology. I have mentored others but this teacher is more memorable. It's unfortunate that we lost touch with each other after

she left this school. I was also mentor to the assistant principal when he was a teacher working on his Masters degree.”

### **Parental Involvement**

Compared to other schools in the district, parent participation at this school is greater, according to respondents in the study who were asked how parental involvement is perceived at the school. The response coming from R6 and R10, respectively, was almost identical: “Parental involvement is better at this school compared to others” and “Parents are more involved here than in any other school.” Compared to R7’s previous location, “This school has greater parental involvement compared to my old school. Parents are very involved in athletics whereby they will assist the coaches ... [and] will help with fundraising.” “Many volunteer at the school,” said R1. “They help out in different organizations and clubs associated with sports,” said R3.

### **Parental Support**

According to research, parent-teacher communication is the primary form of parental support, which may come in many forms such as attending Open House, meeting with teacher, responding to teacher’s request for conference, questioning teacher about child’s grades, requesting conference with teacher, discussing homework and other assignments, etc (Thompson & Mazer, 2012). Teachers responded to questions about parental support. They were asked if parents were involved in their child’s learning and what attendance is like during Open House/Parent-Teacher Night. Their responses

resulted in the theme Parental Support and two sub-themes, Open House/Parent-Teacher Night: Good turn out! and Concern.

### **Open House/Parent-Teacher Night: Good turn out!**

If attendance determines the level of parental support at the participant school, then one might say that the school has good parental support. Most teachers agreed that there is a good turn out during parent-teacher conference events. The following respondents gave a short description of the attendance: R1, "...full house," R6, "...humongous..." R5, "...good number," and R2, "...very good."

A more detailed description follows. "I have never seen as many parents come to Open House until I started working here," said R10. R9 said, "I speak with a lot of parents. During the four years I have been here, there have been long lines at my door." R6 said, "During Open House, I ran out of sign-in sheets." And, R10, "They were out! They showed up!"

Additional descriptions display the vividness of the event. "It's like a party," said R1. "A table filled with snacks and punch is set for parents to help themselves," said R3. Both R1 and R3 reported that cheerleaders are present. They and other student leaders take parents on a tour of the building.

Despite the good parental support and the excitement of meeting new parents, the event takes its toll on teachers. "Parent-teacher conferences are spread out over a five-hour time period," said R3. "The teachers are ready to go because it has been an extended day for us. It is ... hectic in a positive way," said R1.

**Concern**

Research indicates that successful students have families who are informed and involved in their learning (Boyer & Hamil, 2011). They express concern about their child's progress and will proactively inquire with their child's teacher. Respondents indicated that parents come often to check on their children. They request conferences to speak with teachers about matters regarding grades, absences, and behavior. Not having books is another concern. "Parents are not satisfied with a classroom set of books," said R3.

"Some parents e-mail me," said R4. According to R10, "More parents are checking their children's grades. They continue to monitor Infinite Campus." Infinite Campus is a school district website whereby a parent can log on and register to access their child's grades. Also, according to R1, "Parents request homework and other assignments when their child is out." Further, "Parents of special needs kids come to the school to set up conferences," said R7. "At my old school, the coordinator of Special Education would set up conferences."

"I get in touch with parents and they respond," said R9.

"One student who had been performing at the top of his class began to slack up and not do so well. Both parents (the father is a teacher) came over to the school. His mother sat in on one of his classes. The parents stated that they would take away everything and would deprive him of wearing jeans to school. Now, he comes to school dressed up every day.

Today, he wore a three-piece suit.”

### **Student Descriptions**

Teachers were given a multiple part question whereby they were asked to reflect on, and then describe the students they teach. Responses to that part of the question were coded under the theme student descriptions. A subtheme, demographics, also emerged as teachers described and reflected on the students they teach, and why their school is excelling when surrounding schools are not. Responses to another part of the question were coded under the theme administrative support.

Teachers presented various descriptions of students they taught. Some descriptions focused on academic capabilities (or lack of) while others focused on behaviors and their parents. Four teachers commented on students' academics. R7 said, “I have very bright kids. Many of the good students are in dual enrollment-taking high school and college courses.” R2 commented, “...[I have] all good classes. They perform well academically.” R9 said, “Some are excellent, smart kids who are interested in learning” and R8, “Most of my juniors and seniors are great kids.” To the contrary, R6 said, “They have low general knowledge of history and their culture.” But, according to R7, “Even the ones who struggle try.”

Some respondents aired their frustrations that centered around or resulted in negative student behaviors. “I wish parents would not buy their kids \$500 phones. The students are not very focused because of their cell phones,” said R8. “Electronic devices

influence how they will behave like shorter attention span,” added R5. “They like general entertainment.”

Most respondents have been challenged with negative and inappropriate behaviors. They reported that students are talkative (“As teenagers, they talk a lot,” said R2) and sometimes exhibit inappropriate behaviors (“Many use profanity while adult teachers are standing in the hall,” said R7). Teachers also complained about the extreme loudness. R4 said, “My problem class are ninth graders. They are new, but they will come around.” Yet, some teachers successfully altered behaviors entirely. “A girl changed from a thug to a manner able young lady,” said R6. “I gave a little boy, who I thought may have been hypoactive, a job filing papers. This caused him to calm down,” said R8.

A sub theme, demographics, emerged when respondents continued to mention words or phrases such as *successful parents*, *socioeconomic status of the students*, *middle class*, *upper class*, *affluent*, *high class*, *high status*, and *professional parents*.

Respondents believe that demographics is a factor that influences the success of the participant school. They say that many students at the school live in affluent communities and have middle to upper class parents with professional careers. “I believe the students with successful parents have an influence on the general population of students,” said R6.

### **Negatives**

Though some respondents could not think of anything when asked what they like least about working at their present location, others could. Some mentioned redistricting and the negative effects associated with it (e.g., students from “bad” schools coming over). Two respondents complained about needed upgrades. R7 commented on the lack of updated furniture and technology. R8 also mentioned technology along with outdated textbooks. R1 mentioned morning duty (“...having to get to school earlier”) and monthly (first Monday of the month) staff meetings (“...can’t make appointments that day”). Other negatives that were shared by only a few respondents included students with their electronic devices, large class sizes, student behavior, and negative parents.

### **Teacher Attrition**

Thousands of teachers leave the classroom each year. Research indicates that this exodus is greatest in hard to staff schools (Greenlee & Brown, 2009; Irvine & Fenwick, 2011; Martinez, Frick, Kim & Fried, 2010). Teachers were asked what they think are the factors that are causing teachers in surrounding schools to leave. The responses were many. The first two responses (“...to be near an aging parent” and “They just want to leave the classroom... [and] pursue other goals and interests,” said R8 and R1, respectively) are not as dismal. The responses that follow seem to indicate that many “Teachers are unhappy,” said R6.

Four teachers (R2, R3, R9, and R10) mentioned the excessive paper work that gets in the way of teachers being able to teach. R3 said, “Teachers are doing things that

counselors and administrators ought to be doing (e.g., calling parents and keeping students after school).” Two teachers (R6 and R9) believe overcrowded classrooms pose a problem. “With so many students in the classroom, it is difficult to give timely feedback after assessments,” said R6.

R8 and R9 believe the emphasis on data and the value placed on high-stakes testing are putting pressure on teachers. R3 stated that teachers are blamed and threatened for low performance scores. “Everything is the teacher’s fault,” said R10. “There is too much pressure on teachers and not enough pressure on students and parents.” R7 agreed, “Parents and students are not held accountable.” In addition, negative student behaviors and lack of parental support are also believed to be factors that are causing teachers to leave.

Teachers also cited lack of administrative support as a factor. They are “callous,” said R3, and “will listen to kids before listening to teachers.” “Administrators are removed and out of touch,” said R10. They “...are not compassionate toward teachers.” She (R10) also stated that administrators do not respect teachers. Instead, they devalue teachers and treat them as objects.

Respondents indicated that circumstances at other surrounding schools seem too much to bear. “Other schools are under too much pressure,” said R7. “Teachers are stressed out,” said R9, and “...make mistakes by yelling at students,” said R6. “The many demands and expectations [are] heaped on us,” said R9. “Demands [are] placed on teachers to work extra time and extra hours,” said R8. They are also “...bombarded with



numerous programs and teaching strategies. They don't have time to implement one before another is thrown at them," said R7. In addition, meetings such as "Professional learning time takes away from planning period," said R8.

"Teaching is a hard job," said R10, and "The pay is not that good. Teachers are given a 30-minute lunch break." "Many teachers are tired ... " said R3. "[They] can't take it anymore," said R9.

### **Discussion**

The overall research question – What makes teachers stay at a school where there is a high proportion of poor and ethnic minority students – and its subquestions:

- (1) What administrative support strategies does a school with predominate ethnic minority and socioeconomic disadvantaged students provide for its teachers?
- (2) How do teachers perceive parental involvement at a school with predominate ethnic minority and socioeconomic disadvantaged students?
- (3) What type of working conditions does a school with predominate ethnic minority and socioeconomic disadvantaged students provide for its teachers?
- (4) What type of teacher mentoring strategies does a school with predominate ethnic minority and low socioeconomic students provide for their teachers?

- (5) Why do teachers decide to stay at a school with predominate ethnic minority and socioeconomic disadvantaged students?
- (6) How has a school with predominate ethnic minority and socioeconomic disadvantaged students beat the odds by making AYP for the past decade?

were addressed by 10 teachers at a high ethnic minority/high poverty high school in southwest Georgia.

The data indicated that the qualities of the principal were a major reason why teachers at this southwest Georgia school continued working there. The principal's liveliness stimulated interest and excitement among the faculty. Each employee felt appreciated and included at the school. As a result, teachers held a strong admiration for this principal.

The principal showed a caring interest for his teachers through his generosity. He was also fair and showed respect toward them. He would frequently honor and reward his teachers. He protected them from angry parents and was visible (and assessable) throughout the school.

A strong emotional bond existed at the workplace. The environment was described as happy, friendly, safe, peaceful, and supportive. And it was not as stressful compared to other schools. In addition, the findings revealed needed upgrades (e.g.,

furniture, technology, and books), some behavior problems, large class size, and negative parents.

The participant school ranks as one of the top schools in the state and achieved AYP for 10 consecutive years. This can be attributed to the bright and hard-working students, and the excellent, supportive, and dedicated teachers. Moreover, it can be attributed to the educational leadership of the principal. At his school, education is the first priority. The principal leads the school in celebrating the numerous academic achievements and he puts the school on a pedestal. The principal encourages the student body (daily) to do their best.

Teacher mentors also played a role in retaining teachers at the school. Some respondents had mentors; some did not. And, some were mentors. The mentors served as advisors (e.g., on classroom management), gave constructive criticism, worked on activities (e.g., lesson plans), built strong relationships, checked on and assisted their mentees regularly.

Teachers appreciated how parents were involved in their child's learning. Parents would e-mail teachers and would respond to teachers' e-mails. Parents would also schedule conferences with the teachers, surprise-visit their child's class, involve themselves in academics and sporting activities, and would show up in large numbers at Open Houses. The teachers recognized that no other school in the area received more parental support.

In this study, a favorable environment exists with a principal who is lively and likable, teachers who are united and excited about their school, students who excel (academically) year after year, and parents who are enthusiastic and concerned about their children. This is not normal considering the school's demographics – a Title 1 school with a high ethnic minority population. The conceptual framework predicts chaos, low-test scores, and high teacher attrition. As a result, the conceptual framework does not help with understanding the findings.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

I attempted to establish trustworthiness of data through the implementation of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability strategies. Regarding credibility, I informed each participant that the study was strictly voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. Before the interview, I established a rapport with the participants and encouraged them to be open and honest in their responses. During the interview, I used probing questions or asked the participant to elaborate. I also rephrased some questions. In addition, I verified specific details from other respondents in order to arrive at consistency. Moreover, member checks occurred during and after the interview. During the interview, I recapped and verified the responses. After the interview, I transcribed the data. I then attached a copy of the transcribed interview to an e-mail for the respondents to verify. This enabled me to fill in gaps when there was a lack of clarity. This method allowed respondents two opportunities to verify their responses.

Regarding transferability, I believe it would be unsafe to make generalizations from this single study and apply it to other situations. This is a unique study – one that was conducted in the South. Research is needed in other geographical environments across America. More research on this topic may increase the possibility of similar results.

I also addressed dependability when I utilized proper research practices in this study. The research processes were characterized by detailed and in-depth reporting. This will enable readers to gain a thorough understanding of the methods used. A future researcher could repeat the work in a similar situation and gain the same results.

In addressing confirmability, objectivity was a challenge. I have worked in hard to staff schools in Memphis, Atlanta, and Baltimore. As a result, I have a predisposition through employment to develop a certain attitude about hard to staff schools. I created a list of interview questions. To minimize bias, fellow doctoral students reviewed and critiqued the questions. The doctoral chair made the final edits. Prior to data collection, I selected unknown participants of a high school in a local school district. During the interview, I was mindful to *not* use nonverbal cues or leading questions in order to influence the results.

### **Implications for Social Change**

I am passionate about a problem that is plaguing schools, especially urban schools, across America – teacher attrition. This problem has an effect on teaching careers and the urban poor. It is with great hope that this study impacts the lives of urban

ethnic minority students and the teachers who teach them, while simultaneously impacting schools and school districts.

I envision a society where students who live in poor and/or urban environments can enjoy the benefits of having stable and experienced teachers. Teachers who are satisfied with their job will remain year after year, thus establishing stability. This will also lessen the burden of recruiting and replacing teachers, which is costly for school districts.

I believe that it would be in the best interest of school leaders (of hard to staff schools) to adopt such strategies. Such leaders would witness improved relations with teachers, an improved school climate, and an improved school. Before long, other schools will adopt these strategies.

I also believe that adopting such strategies could be a challenge. For example, the culture of some hard to staff schools and the demeanor of principals at such schools could hinder the success of the proposal. The study may not solve the problem of teacher attrition, but it is a positive step forward.

### **Summary**

It appears as though the principal of the participant school has perfected upon or even mastered the art of developing strategies for retaining teachers at his hard to staff school. He has created a positive family environment where love and happiness exist, and where relationships are built on trust and concern for each other. Here, the principal loves and respects his staff and treats them like professionals. He will support his

teachers when angry parents are ready to devour them. He is a thoughtful, energetic, and exciting principal who appreciates his teachers. This is also an environment where teacher mentors will take you under their wings to advise, assist, support, and provide constructive criticism.

The principal is an educational leader who promotes the school and solicits buy-ins from students and parents who are willingly involved and concerned about their child's academic progress. He is an enthusiastic cheerleader for education and celebrates the many academic achievements the school earned. He is also steadfast despite challenges to making AYP. The principal has inspired his teachers. They are imbued with the spirit of endurance, devotion, and love for their students. Chapter 5 will report the importance, meaning, and significance of the findings in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

My review of the literature indicated that schools with large populations of ethnic minority and poor students tend to suffer academically and that teachers who work in such schools tend to be dissatisfied, which leads to high rates of attrition. In this study, I looked at a high school in southwest Georgia that had a large proportion of ethnic minority and poor student. A group of 10 teachers at the school participated in lengthy individual interviews with me. Based on data analysis, their responses did not confirm the literature.

The purpose of this study was to explore the effective strategies used in retaining teachers in a high poverty and high ethnic minority school through the perspective of teachers. The nature of the study was to focus on solutions to the teacher attrition rate. I analyzed school with low teacher attrition that shares the same demographics as schools with high attrition for their current best practices in teacher retention. The study was conducted because a school with a large number of poor and ethnic minority students was discovered and did not fit the mold. All of the surrounding schools with the same characteristics witnessed high teacher attrition. This prompted me to explore what was going on at this school that made it different from the others. In this section, I will review, analyze, and discuss the findings of the study; make recommendations for administrators; and describe recommendations for further research.



## Discussion

The central research question that guided this study was: What makes teachers stay at a school where there is a high proportion of poor and ethnic minority students? I also explored the following research subquestions:

1. What administrative support strategies does a school with predominate ethnic minority and socioeconomic disadvantaged students provide for its teachers?
2. How do teachers perceive parental involvement at a school with predominate ethnic minority and socioeconomic disadvantaged students?
3. What type of working conditions does a school with predominate ethnic minority and socioeconomic disadvantaged students provide for its teachers?
4. What type of teacher mentoring strategies does a school with predominate ethnic minority and low socioeconomic students provide for their teachers?
5. Why do teachers decide to stay at a school with predominate ethnic minority and socioeconomic disadvantaged students?
6. How has a school with predominate ethnic minority and socioeconomic disadvantaged students beat the odds by making Annual Yearly Progress for the past decade?

I addressed the research question and research subquestions with the themes that emerged from the interviews (and were reported in Chapter 4).

In the following subsections, I will summarize the key findings. Unlike in Chapter 4, where I created numerous themes as a result of how the participant teachers

responded to the interview questions, in Section 5 I will only have four themes as a result of consolidating several themes and subthemes. The rationale for this consolidation was that some of the themes (and subthemes) that emerged in the data collection process and were incorporated into Chapter 4 could not be aligned with my literature review findings in Chapter 2. My goal was to align the interview guide with the literature review findings in Chapter 2. However, since this was a qualitative study that consisted of open-ended responses, it should come as no surprise that some deviations occurred, and deviations should not be considered negative but could be the basis for further research. The themes I will present in Chapter 5 are: (a) successful environment created by principal, (b) mentoring, (c) parental involvement/parental support, and (d) teacher attrition.

### **Theme 1: Successful Environment Created by Principal**

Researchers agreed that teachers stayed at their schools when they were satisfied with their work environment. Liu and Ramsey (2008) reported that when there is positive interaction between teachers and school leaders, teachers are less inclined to leave. Participants in this study reported several instances of positive interactions with their principal. The principal celebrated (along with his teachers) academic excellence. He showed excitement about the school's accomplishments. He also showed gratitude toward his teachers by honoring and rewarding them. Further, he actively encouraged and built excitement among his teachers through ticket drawings and unexpected exhilarating announcements.

Petty et al. (2012) found that teachers who work under democratic and respectful administrators reported greater job satisfaction. Several respondents in this study indicated that the principal has a kindhearted and sympathetic nature and that he did not mind extending acts of benevolence toward them. Respondents spoke about free t-shirts, gift certificates, free lunches, and other gifts from the heart. One respondent, R3, shared how she was moved by the principal's act of kindness when she experienced a family crisis. As a result, the respondent developed a strong relationship with the principal. Other respondents have shown their appreciation by supporting the principal and the school by doing whatever they can in furthering academic excellence. R10 transferred to the school from another hard to staff school. She stated that prior to working at the school, she dreaded going to work. Now, she loves her job, comes early and stays late, and does not mind volunteering.

According to Petty et al. (2012), a major problem in hard to staff schools is found in its leadership. They stated that principals at such schools lack positive supervision. Youngs (2007) states That these principals are a problem to their teachers because they show no support. Petty et al. (2012) provided an account where a teacher reported an instance when a parent was constantly yelling at her and the principal refused to offer support for the teacher. The teacher began to cry and still the principal offered no support. Respondents in this study, on the other hand, stated that they received support from their principal when a parent accused them. R1 recalled an instance when a parent falsely accused her. She stated that she used the office telephone to call the parent.

When the parent arrived at the school, the parent requested a conference in the presence of the principal. The parent accused R1 of being rude to her over the telephone. The principal stood in R1's defense by telling the parent that the teacher would not be rude to a parent. R8 said that the principal is fair and will listen to both sides. He will ask the teacher to report to his office so that he will hear the teacher's side before the three-way conference. Contrary to my research findings of principals in hard to staff schools, respondents in this study reported that the principal treated them with respect and in a professional manner.

One of the greatest challenges that a new or inexperienced teacher has to face is classroom management. Classroom management appears to be a major concern for principals who lead hard to staff schools, and their lack of support has left new and inexperienced teachers no other choice but to sink or swim (Caples & McNeese, 2010). Nixon et al. (2010) administered a (priority list) survey to urban and suburban principals and found that classroom management was ranked highest among urban principals, which seems to indicate where the priorities of principals of hard to staff schools lie.

According to Petty et al. (2012), a high school social studies teacher was quoted as stating, "We hire them, give them the worst schedules with very little meaningful support from the administration and the culture of the school is if you ask for help, you are having trouble." Respondents in this study stated that the principal supports and encourages them and works hard to make their work life easier. R7 said, "He always tells us that he is here for us." She (R7) also said that at her old hard to staff school, she was

written up for simple things and was reprimanded in front of her students. R9, a novice teacher, said, “If I need him, he comes. If it’s a behavior problem, he will come. He is not quick to criticize.”

## **Theme 2: Mentoring**

In my review of the literature, I found a definition of teacher mentors that clearly stated their purpose: To support teachers by assisting them in developing their knowledge and expertise in teaching and learning (Monroe, 2009). The support consists of working with the teacher in planning and designing instruction, classroom management, assessment, providing resources and professional development, and providing feedback on classroom management and instructional practices (Darling-Hammond, 2013).

Responses from participants who reported that they either had a mentor or were a mentor themselves were aligned with research on the purpose and goal of teacher mentoring.

Former mentees reported that they received valuable assistance and support from their mentors. R9’s mentor was the assistant principal. He used his experience and expertise to share with the respondent the best practices that worked for him when he was a first year teacher. R10’s mentor assisted her in lesson planning. R3, a former mentor, stated that she would provide constructive criticism and would be careful not to “nag” her mentees. R4 and R8 used their technical expertise to advance teaching and learning. R4 also shared his knowledge of effective classroom management with his mentees.

Yonezawa et al. (2011) suggested (as a mentoring device) that teachers, both novice and experienced, communicate and support one another, learn from one another, and lead one

another as they face the challenges in their work environment. In doing so, they would benefit from experienced mentors who know about the district, the students, and other challenges teachers might face (“Teacher Mentors Open,” 2013).

The respondents reported a good, loving, and memorable mentoring relationship. Such behaviors align well with the research. According to Huysman (2008), Darby et al. (2011), and Petty et al. (2012), these interactions were described as pleasant and supportive when teachers planned and collaborated with one another. R9 said that she and her mentor think alike. R3 said that she and her mentee had a wonderful, loving relationship. And R8 cannot forget her former mentee with whom she lost contact, “I had a great relationship with her...I have mentored others but this teacher is more memorable.”

### **Theme 3: Parental Involvement/Parental Support**

According to Hayes (2011), parental (school) involvement is defined in terms of parents’ attendance and participation in school events. Parental involvement is evident at the participant school, according to respondents. Some participants said that parental involvement is better at this school compared to surrounding schools. Parents volunteer in various capacities, engage in fundraising for different clubs and organizations, and also assist coaches at sporting events.

Parent support, on the other hand, may include parents attending open houses; belonging to the Parent-Teacher Association, volunteering in their child’s classroom; and calling with questions about their child’s learning, grades, and homework (Ms. Mentor,

2009, para. 1). According to respondents, parental support is also evident. For example, R4 stated that he receives e-mails from parents, and parents will respond to e-mails sent by teachers. Several respondents reported that parents come to the school often to check on their child's grades and to inquire about homework. Parents will also go online to check their child's grades, said R10. Further, attendance at open houses is a clear indication of good parental support at the participant school. Respondents reported turnouts in large numbers. R9 said that there has been a long line at her door each year during open house. R6 stated that he runs out of sign-in sheets. And R10 said, "I have never seen as many parents come to Open House until I started working here."

Researchers believe that parental support is closely linked to student behavior (Caples & McNeese, 2010; Honawar, 2007). A response from R6 confirmed that finding when he said that intervention caused a student to transform from a "thug" to one with manners. Also, according to R9, parental intervention had an effect on a student who was performing at the top of his class then later became less productive. Both of his parents got involved and met with the teacher. They punished him by depriving him of things he took for granted (e.g., wearing jeans).

Researchers also believe that there is a close link between parental support and academic success (Thompson & Mazer, 2012). "A young man's grade improved from F to B", said R6. "That gives me joy..." Elish-Piper (2008) made the following point: "When parents are involved in education, teens typically have higher grade point averages, higher test scores on standardized and classroom assessments, enrollment in

more rigorous academic courses, more classes passed, more credits earned toward graduation, and higher graduation rates” (p. 44).

#### **Theme 4: Teacher Attrition**

Ingersoll (2001) stated that there is a revolving door in education. Teachers are continuously leaving the classroom for another school within the district, outside the district, or leaving altogether. Researchers say that teachers have one of the biggest attrition rates of any profession and that new and inexperienced teachers are particularly at risk for leaving (Cagle & McNeese, 2010; Perrachione et al., 2008). The rate at which teachers are leaving is significantly higher in schools where there is an overwhelmingly high ethnic minority/high poverty student population ( Hare, 2012; Irvine & Fenwick, 2011; Watson et al., 2010). Such schools, known as hard to staff schools, have high turnovers (Amrein-Beardsley, 2012; Liu & Ramsey, 2008).

The present study examines a Title 1 high school in southwest Georgia that has more than 80 percent ethnic minority population but low attrition. I interviewed 10 teachers to inquire about their perceptions on various topics. For instance, I asked them why teachers in surrounding schools are leaving. R5 stated that the participant school is the only high school with stable leadership, and “... we see the same faces year in and year out.”

A review of the literature suggests that there are several factors that contribute to teacher attrition among new and inexperienced teachers and among teachers in general at hard to staff schools. These factors include inadequate support from the administration,



parents, and colleagues, low wages, lack of resources, work overload, stress, high-stakes testing, and student misbehavior (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Fry, 2007; Paulik, 2012; Sass et al., 2012). Contrary to research findings, respondents agreed that the principal is very supportive and respectful to them. They also agreed that parents are involved at the school and are concerned about their child's progress. Moreover, they agreed that coworkers work in harmony at the school and have a close-knit relationship. This relationship was discovered by R7 after she transferred to the school from another hard to staff school. She said, "I had a contentious relationship with the coworkers at my previous location."

*Low wages and lack of resources* emerged when asked what they think are the factors that are causing teachers in surrounding schools to leave and what they like least about working at the school. In response to the factors that are causing teachers to leave, R10 said, "The pay is not that good." Tamir (2009) points out the teachers are not paid well and that highly talented and capable professionals are choosing careers that are more economically rewarding. When asked about what they like least about working at the school, R8 said, "I use my projector when it is working. [and] I have outdated books." R7 said, "...lack of updated furniture and technology." Such responses seem to confirm research findings that low wages and lack of resources could be frustrating to teachers and could contribute to their leaving. However, these deficiencies were not a major factor that would make teachers at the participant school want to leave.

Studies indicate that teachers leave the profession due to high levels of stress caused by large amounts of work (Paulik, 2012; Sass et al., 2012). Davidson (2009) conducted a study at a small school in Mississippi. The findings suggest that teachers were most stressed by excessive paperwork, unfair workloads, and increased workloads for administrators. Evidence of such findings could also be found in southwest Georgia. R3 believes that teachers are doing things that counselors and administrators should be doing (e.g., calling parents and holding afternoon detention). R9 believes that there are too many demands and expectations placed on teachers. R8 said that having to work extra hours and meetings take away from planning. And R7 said that schools are “bombarded” with programs and initiatives.

The extra workloads and the numerous demands and expectations are putting pressure on teachers, according to R8 and R9. For some, it could be too much to bear. “Teachers are stressed out”, said R9. Botwinik (2007) stated that due to the amount of stress that American teachers experience, it is easy for them to become overstressed dropouts. The teaching profession ranks as one of the occupations with the highest incidence of occupational stress (Watson et al., 2010). And stress is correlated with health issues (Ablanedo-Rosas, Blevins, Gao, Teng, & White, 2011). Now, one should understand why teachers are leaving the profession in large numbers.

Respondents in this study noted the impact they believe high-stakes testing has on teachers in surrounding schools. Some respondents (e.g., R8 and R9) believe high-stakes testing is one of the reasons why teachers are leaving. “They could be discouraged by the

emphasis on data”, said R8. R3 said, “When kids are not learning, teachers are to blame. Teachers are losing their jobs because of test scores.” These findings are very similar to those of another study. Darby et al. (2011) conducted a study on a sample of teachers and their reactions to high-stakes testing at two categorical types of schools-high poverty schools and non-high poverty schools. Teachers at the high poverty schools appeared to be more impacted by high-stakes testing due to pressures of No Child Left Behind mandates than their counterparts in the non-high poverty schools. For example, one teacher reported that she felt scared and embarrassed and that she also felt that she was to blame for student failure.

Student behavior is among the leading causes of teacher attrition among first year teachers whereby more than 25% of teachers who left the profession cited student discipline as the cause (Caples & McNeese, 2010; Honawar, 2007). Research also indicates that teachers choose to leave schools with poor work conditions, and that these conditions are most common in schools where ethnic minority and low-income students typically attend (; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Ladd, 2009; Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005; Shernoff, Marinez-Lora, Frazier, Jakobson, Atkins, & Bonner, 2011). Behavioral challenges were also felt at the participant school. Respondents reported negative behaviors inside and outside the classroom. For example, two respondents (R5 and R8) shared their aggravation with students’ use of cell phones. Other respondents (R2, R4, R6, R7, R8, and R9) said that some are talkative and extremely loud, engage in “thuggish” behaviors, and use profanity in the presence of adult teachers.

Theriot and Dupper (2010) found that poor minorities (especially males) were disproportionately represented in all discipline categories such as fighting and the use of profanity. Milner and Tenor (2010) believe that the disciplinary behavior of students of color is another reason why teachers do not have a satisfying experience in hard to staff schools because a considerable amount of time is spent disciplining rather than instructing. Other research findings show the disdain that teachers have for poor and ethnic minority students. Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin (2004) illustrated in their study that student demographics are important to teachers' transfer decisions. Another group of researchers found that as the black population increases, whites are likely to leave (Fairchild et al., 2008; Scafidia, Sjaquestb, & Stinebrickner, 2007). To the contrary, respondents in the present study appear excited about their school despite the large African-American population. When asked what they like most about working at their present location, two Caucasian respondents (R8 and R9) stated that they love their students.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Following are limitations to this study that need to be addressed:

1. The study was limited to 10 teachers in one public high school in Georgia.
2. The study was not intended to represent other public schools in Georgia or any other state.

3. The participants were chosen based on purposeful sampling whereby the collected interview data came from one specific site and from participants who were easily accessible.
4. Bias could be embedded in the interview questions as a result of my predisposition through employment at hard to staff schools.

### **Recommendations as a Result of This Study**

Recognizing that hard to staff schools face a variety of issues such as inexperienced and incapable teachers, low teacher morale, lack of administrative support, lack of parental support and involvement, heavy workloads, negative student discipline, overcrowded classrooms, and anxieties as a result of high-stakes testing, principals are faced with the challenge of leading such schools using a variety of best practices techniques. The culture of such schools causes principals to lead in a manner that is considered “normal” for hard to staff schools. Principals of hard to staff schools are challenged to adopt best practices that will improve the conditions at their school, increase student performance, and retain teachers. The findings of this study point to four recommendations for addressing issues that are critical for successfully retaining teachers:

- (1) Principals should strive to create a successful school environment that will retain teachers,
- (2) Principals should oversee the appointment of strong mentors,
- (3) Principals should monitor and assess parental involvement/support,

(4) and Principals should attempt to retain teachers by being thoughtful caretakers.

### **Recommendation 1: Principals Should Strive to Create a Successful School**

#### **Environment that will Retain Teachers**

Recommendation 1 will encompass the following themes (along with their sub-themes) that were employed in Chapter 4: (a) successful environment created by principal (principal as educational leader, principal as promoter of school, principal as galvanizer, and principal as kindhearted); (b) We are like family; (c) admiration; and (d) administrative support (quick to applaud/quick to reward/always says *thank you*).

Principals should strive to create a successful school environment for the sake of their teachers and staff, students, parents, the school community, the school district, and the business community. A successful school is important because it entices parents, members of the community, and businesses to be involved in a worthwhile investment. Such an effort begins with training at principal's meetings. The essential question for the principals is: "How do I keep teachers at my school?"

It is recommended that principals create stability among their teaching staff. First, stability must start at the top – the principal. This is where the district superintendent should get involved. The superintendent should relax his/her frequent assignment of principals if stability is to occur. A school needs a stable, understanding principal who is thoughtful and looks at the big picture for school improvement. At the principals meeting, superintendents should recommend a successful principal(s) that principals in the district can shadow for a day. R5 noted that the principal of the

participant school is the only high school principal in the district that has established a level of stability.

Principals should do whatever they can to create a positive environment at their school for the purpose of retaining teachers. Assuming that satisfied teachers will perform well and that good job performance results in good student performance, principals should continuously ask themselves, “What can I do to make my teachers happy?” They should remove their thick skin and go out in the “field” to see what teachers are thinking and experiencing. R10 said, “Administrators are removed and out of touch,” when asked about the factors that are causing teachers in surrounding schools to leave. Whenever complaints are left unattended, teacher dissatisfaction will increase. It is suggested that department leaders and teachers engage in dialog. Department leaders will “collect” the complaints and share them in their leadership meetings.

Also, principals should be friendly and cordial toward their staff. Many principals appear to be unfriendly and distant as if being friendly would compromise their authority. This is not the case with the principal at the participant school. There is a line teachers dare to cross, however. For example, R3 said, “There is open communication between us. I offer critiques to him and he accepts them. And there are times when I withhold critiques knowing he may not accept them.”

It is recommended that principals advocate education above all programs. Like the principal at the participant school, principals should lead the way in the quest for academic excellence. If he/she is at the forefront, then teachers, students, and parents

will join in. Also, like the principal at the participant school, principals should never waiver in the quest for academic excellence – even during challenging times. The principal in the study was faced with undisciplined students transferring to his school as a result of rezoning. But, he still held fast to his goal of excellence for his school. Quoting the principal, R8 said, “Whoever comes here, we are still going to make AYP.”

It is recommended that principals use as many mediums as possible to spread the message of academic excellence at their school. Assemblies would be an opportune time to encourage students to do the best that they can. Banners posted throughout the building will also aid in spreading the message. The intercom was the most important medium used at the participant school. R10 stated that the school’s website is also used. Such acts tell students that the principal is serious about the business of education. When success is achieved, principals should lead in the celebration of academic excellence. They should praise and encourage teachers and students to continue their excellent performance. If, on the other hand, success is not achieved, principals should *not* threaten teachers but encourage them to do the best they can. Failure is upsetting to teachers, too! Therefore, principals should encourage teachers to work hard and not give up.

Principals should show enthusiasm about their school. After all, if they do not, who will? This is one way of building excitement among teachers and students. Like the principal in the study, they should share the positive things that are occurring or have occurred at the school. Principals should let teachers know that they are the best and that



they are appreciated. They should let students know that they are smart and capable and that the best teachers teach them. The principal of the participant school applied this strategy during Open House while going from room to room while teachers were addressing parents. While in R4's classroom, the principal told the parents that their child is in good hands. Such strategies create a positive school climate where teachers are satisfied and feel appreciated and where students are motivated to do better.

In order to avoid cliques and divisiveness among staff members, principals should try to promote unity at their school. A unified staff works toward one goal – to educate students. Unity among staff members will minimize negativity expressed in the teachers lounge and throughout the work place. R7 stated that at her old school it felt as though the administration was at odds with the staff.

It is recommended that principals practice being friendly and thoughtful. They should create a hospitality committee that will deliver flowers, cards, and other gifts of love to teachers who are ill or had family emergencies. The principal should appoint a well-respected and caring staff member to head it. But, that personal touch or that personal visit from the principal makes a difference in comforting a teacher or staff member who may be feeling down. The principal in this study is a one-man hospitality committee. According to R10, he "...is personable." Like the principal in this study, principals should work on developing a rapport with their staff based on genuine trust.

Principals should show an intense interest in new teachers and be patient with them because they are only "babes" in the field of education. They should show an

interest in the lessons they develop and teach by being a surrogate mentor. This will help new teachers grow professionally and become seasoned, veteran teachers.

Veteran teachers should get special treatment from principals, too. They should be treated like professionals and not like children. R5 and R7 commended the principal at the participant school for treating them professionally.

Principals should attend workshops (e.g., conflict resolution) so that they will develop their problem solving skills. Parents are often concerned about matters involving their child and sometimes become angry with their child's teacher. A wise problem solver can turn a situation that would otherwise be a disaster. It is suggested that principals, if a heated parent conference is suspected, meet with both parties separately before the initial conference. Principals should articulate the expected decorum rules in the conference (e.g., allow the parent to speak first without interruptions from the teacher). The principal's aim should be to end the meeting on an amicable note for the sake of the child who will interact with the teacher for the remainder of the academic school year. Respondents in this study stated that the principal exhibits qualities that will ameliorate situations in parent conferences. R8, for example, said that the principal is fair and will ask for the teacher's side of the story before proceeding with the conference.

### **Recommendation 2: Principals Should Oversee the Appointment of Strong Mentors**

It is recommended that the principal take the lead in appointing mentors to new or inexperienced teachers. New or inexperienced teachers are at risk of leaving the teaching

profession the first few months of their career. That is why it is important that they are matched with a good mentor.

A mentor should be someone with teaching experience (e.g., another teacher, a counselor, or administrator). According to respondents at the participant school, mentors served in a number of capacities. Some were advisors and helped with classroom management. Others helped with lesson planning, technology, and other activities. But, mentorship should not be limited to matters on education. A mentor should offer moral guidance if the need arises.

Age should not be a factor when selecting a mentor for a new or inexperienced teacher. Some younger teachers are very mature and could connect well with new or inexperienced teachers. The important thing is that the mentor and the mentee have open communication and a good relationship and that growth is seen on the part of the mentee. Mentors should model good teaching behaviors by allowing mentees to observe their classroom. Mentors should also have local school meetings (with the principal in attendance) to discuss the progress of their mentees. Finally, the principal should dialogue with the mentor in the decision to lift mentoring. Lifting supervision too soon without adequate growth could affect the new or inexperienced teacher in a negative way.

### **Recommendation 3: Principals Should Monitor and Assess Parental**

#### **Involvement/Support**

Since the research indicates that successful students have families who are informed and involved in their learning (Boyer & Hamil, 2011), then school leaders

should be concerned about parental involvement/support at their school. They should ask themselves, “What can I do to improve parental involvement/support at my school? How can I get more parents to attend open houses and parent conferences?” Students tend to do better academically and behaviorally when their parents are involved (Caples & McNeese, 2010; Honawar, 2007; Thompson & Mazer, 2012).

Prior to open houses and parent-teacher conferences, it is recommended that principals reiterate the importance of parental involvement/support at the staff meeting. He/she should request that teachers remind their students of the event and that students ask their parents to come. R4 encourages his students “If your parents come to Open House or to parent conferences, you get bonus points.” Also, the principal should ask the school’s secretary or the parent facilitator to send an automatic telephone message to each student’s home apprising the parents of the open house event.

The parent conference event should be well planned. According to R3, a table with snacks is prepared for parents. Also, cheerleaders and other student leaders take parents on a tour of the building.

It is recommended that the principal get an assessment of the number of parents who attend the event. This will serve as data whereby principals will be able to determine the upward or downward trends in parent participation. The secretary will place sign-in sheets in each teacher’s box. The sign-in sheet should contain spaces for the parent to sign his/her name, their child’s name, and their telephone number and/or e-mail address. The sign-in sheets should be submitted to the secretary the next morning.

Even if a good turn out is determined, it still may not be enough. What about parents who did not attend? “Parents who really need to come never show up,” said R8. There is a concern for such parents. How are their children doing academically? Teachers should contact parents if their child is not performing.

There are various reasons why parents do not show up. Reasons for “absentee parents” (and ways to accommodate them) should be addressed in faculty meetings and department meetings. Ms. Mentor (2009) shared excellent advise:

“It may be hard to believe, but many parents get nervous when visiting their child’s school, so non-threatening, pleasant experiences can help overcome their anxiety. We can cope by communicating with parents/ caregivers, providing non-threatening opportunities for them to visit the school, and helping them learn how to be supportive” (Ms. Mentor, 2009, para. 5 & 7).

#### **Recommendation 4: Principals Should Attempt to Retain Teachers by Being Thoughtful Caretakers**

Respondents reported that teachers in surrounding schools are burdened with excessive workloads along with overly crowded classrooms and issues with student discipline. They also have anxieties associated with high-stakes testing. In addition, they reported that there is no support from the administration. Such demands and expectations

(and lack of support) are causing teachers to look elsewhere for relief. Some are seeking transfers within the district while others are leaving the district or quitting.

Teacher attrition is a student problem and a district problem in hard to staff schools. It is a student problem because ethnic minority students are the ones affected. Mass teacher attrition in hard to staff schools results in ethnic minority students left with new and inexperienced (sometimes incapable) teachers. These students need well-qualified and experienced teachers.

It is a district problem because for every teacher that leaves, that teacher must be replaced. The district would have to recruit and hire new teachers. That is a huge expense (NCTAF, 2003).

Principals should be more sensitive about the physical and mental health of their teachers. They should be mindful of the consequences that heavy work demands and strict timelines have. Though there are some things that are beyond the principal's control (e.g., teacher initiatives or other programs handed down from the central office or from the state, large classrooms due to budgetary constraints and high-stakes testing), these should not prohibit him/her from being there for his/her teachers every step of the way. There are some cases in which the principal has the discretion to refuse some initiatives, however. It is recommended that the principal refuse any initiatives that may not be important at the moment. Such refusal would be an example of the principal looking out for the best interest of his/her teachers. That is administrative support! Only a principal who is concerned about the welfare of his/her teachers would act as caretaker

because he/she wants his teachers to be mentally and physically ready to perform well for their students who will, in turn, achieve proficiently. R6 stated that when teachers are stressed, they make mistakes by yelling at students. The principal at the participant school gave me the impression that he was a “caretaker” for his teachers when he was hesitant to allow me to conduct the study at his school.

Crowded classrooms are a reality; and, good classroom management is a solution. That is why it is recommended that classroom management strategies be emphasized in pre-planning, professional learning sessions, and in other classroom management workshops. There will be times when teachers request disciplinary assistance from the principal. The principal should be consistent in administering punishment, and the punishment should serve as a deterrent.

High-stakes testing is also a reality and it is not going away anytime soon. All of the schools, including the participant school, are required to engage in high-stakes testing. For years, the participant [high] school has out-performed the other surrounding high schools.

All principals are not as fortunate as the principal at the participant school – to have an outstanding academic track record. Like the principal at the participant school, principals should always encourage teachers (and students) to do the best that they can and be prepared each day. Principals should encourage instructional coaches and lead teachers to prepare teachers (using academic games and other strategies) for the high-stakes testing event and hope for the best. If the testing results did not turn out as

expected, *do not* blame or chastise teachers. It is emotionally damaging for teachers to feel that they were to blame for student failure.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The intent of this study was to enable the reader to gain a greater understanding of why teachers chose to remain at a school with a large poor and ethnic minority population. Though further research is necessary, this study represents a start for developing a larger body of research focusing on strategies school leaders can employ to retain teachers. Previously, the topic on ways to keep teachers in such schools has lacked sufficient research. Research on topics about high teacher attrition rates, failing schools, and schools that are unsafe are plentiful. This qualitative case study offered a detailed examination of the perspectives and experiences of 10 teachers who were employed in a hard to staff school with a high percentage of poor and ethnic minority students.

A future study should focus on leaders of good schools with the same demographics and low teacher attrition (as the participant school). Unless the data is collected in a technologically innovative manner (e.g., Skype) by way of interviews, and assuming that good schools with characteristics similar to the participant school are not clustered together, face-to-face interviews would pose a disadvantage to the researcher considering the number of miles the researcher would have to travel. On the other hand, it would be well worth the time and expense to collect potentially valuable data in order to obtain a vast knowledge of what is actually going on in the world of good schools.



It is recommended that a national initiative (beginning with a pilot study) to retain teachers in hard to staff schools be proposed. Principals would utilize proposed best practices. Teachers would complete an online survey confirming (or disconfirming) whether the principal attempted such practices. The results would be kept in a database to determine yearly growth or decline. The results may also be used to compare with other participating schools.

### **Implications**

Certain conditions are important for teacher success in hard to staff schools as they face the many challenges that are characteristic of such schools. These conditions are contingent on the principal's positive, effective, and creative leadership abilities. The principal's leadership style determines, for the most part, whether teachers are satisfied or dissatisfied with their job. A review of the literature documents teachers as leaving hard to staff schools in large numbers each year. Unfavorable working conditions (e.g., lack of administrative support, lack of parental support, heavy workloads, negative student discipline, overcrowded classrooms, and anxieties as a result of high-stakes testing) challenge teachers' desire to remain at their school. Principals who are "on the front line" when challenges (e.g., parent issues, too much paperwork, student misbehavior, overcrowded classes, and state-mandated testing) occur can thwart these challenges through their leadership.

### **Conclusion**

The findings produced four consolidated themes that revealed (a) aspects of a

successful environment created by the principal – positive interactions with the principal, administrative support, and mutual respect; (b) an effective mentoring program that is aimed at assisting, developing, and supporting new and inexperienced teachers; (c) good parental involvement where parents are enthusiastic about supporting the school and their child’s educational progress; and (d) stable and charismatic leadership that promotes retention and deflects attrition. Recommendations challenge principals of hard to staff schools to utilize best practices to improve working conditions for the retention of teachers. While simultaneously improving academic achievement, these practices could attract parental and community involvement, and cooperation from the business community. District superintendents are also encouraged to meet the challenge in the quest for school stability and the retention of teachers. Recommendations further suggest additional research on strategies school leaders can use to keep teachers at their school.

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**Appendix A**  
Interview Questions

1. Describe a typical day at your school.
2. What do you like *most* about working at this school?
3. Why do you think your school is excelling when surrounding schools are not?
4. What do you think are the factors that are causing teachers in surrounding schools to leave?
5. Describe the relationship you have with your co-workers.
6. Have you ever had a mentor since working at this location? If so, describe the relationship with this mentor.
7. Have you ever been a mentor while at this location? If so, describe the relationship with your mentee?
8. How do you perceive parental involvement at your school?
9. Are parents (of your students) involved in their learning? Explain.
10. What is attendance like during Open House and during Parent-Teacher Night?
11. Do you like your principal? Why or why not?
12. How does the principal make your working life easier? How does he make it miserable?
13. Describe the students that you teach. Is there a particular student or a particular class (that stands out your mind) that gives you the most problems? If so, have you sought help? If yes, from whom? If the problem was resolved, are you pleased with the outcome?
14. What do you like *least* about working here?
15. Is there anything we did not talk about that you would like to discuss?

16. Do you have any questions that you would like to ask me?



### Appendix B

#### Sample Graph of how Participants Responded to Various Items

Describe a typical day at your school	
Respondent	Response
R1	The principal makes his announcements over the intercom.
R2	A typical day involves teaching six classes and a planning period.
R3	The principals makes his announcement ... and tells how great the week was.
R4	I am up and attending to my students and using strategies that will maximize their learning.
R5	We start with the Pledge of Allegiance, a moment of silence, and the announcements.
R6	I arrive at school between 7:30 and 7:45.
R7	School is very structured. Students are familiar with the routine.
R8	Busy
R9	A typical day is very busy and fast-paced.
R10	In the morning, the principal is on the intercom.