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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, THE QUEST TO RETAIN TEACHERS: ONE URBAN-SUBURBAN SCHOOL SYSTEM'S STORY OF TEACHER MOVEMENT, by KAREN SMITS, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all the standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

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ABSTRACT

THE QUEST TO RETAIN TEACHERS: ONE URBAN-SUBURBAN SCHOOL SYSTEM'S STORY OF TEACHER MOVEMENT
by
Karen Smits

Recent data on teacher attrition indicate that approximately 15 percent of teachers either leave the profession or move from one school to another each year. The attrition rate is highest for teachers new to the profession with 30-50 percent leaving within five years. High rates of attrition are a contributing cause of various educational problems including reduced student achievement, teacher shortages, declining teacher morale, and organizational discontinuity.

The purpose of this study was to examine the reasons why teachers choose to leave the profession or move to another school from one year to the next. A qualitative case study was conducted to explore the reasons teachers from one urban-suburban school system voluntarily resigned at the end of one school year and what changes could have been made to keep them from leaving. The study answers three questions: Why do teachers leave? Why do some move to other schools while other teachers leave the profession? What could keep teachers from leaving?

Data were collected using exit questionnaires, exit interviews, and semi-structured interviews of teachers leaving after the 2006-2007 school year. Data were analyzed using both deductive and inductive methods. Teachers who participated in this study made the

decisions to move or leave for two primary reasons: administrative support and new opportunities. Administrative support took many forms and was described in a variety of ways including the following: administrative visibility, communication, use of time, support with student behavior, workload, implementation of new initiatives, and school climate. Teachers who left for new prospects were seeking different teaching opportunities or a better chance of moving into administration. The greatest difference between the teachers who moved and those who left the profession was hope. Teachers who moved to another school system believed the situation would be better elsewhere. Teachers who left the profession saw the struggles they endured as likely to occur in any teaching situation. Teachers indicated that they may have considered staying if they had received more administrative support, experienced better working conditions, had more supportive mentors, or had a teacher advocate who could have intervened on their behalf.

THE QUEST TO RETAIN TEACHERS: ONE URBAN-SUBURBAN SCHOOL SYSTEM'S STORY OF TEACHER MOVEMENT

by

Karen Smits

A Dissertation

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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

> Conditions that undermine the power and effectiveness of the public school system need to be identified and promptly rectified…This includes, above all, creating a work environment that will continue to draw the bright, committed new teachers we need…But our track record over the past 40 years isn't very promising. Too many will quit permanently because they are fed up. Their ambition and self-respect will take them into business or other professions…They leave behind an increasing proportion of tired time-servers.
>
> Life, November 16, 1962 (as cited in Krieg, 2006, p. 13).

Introduction

I am one of a number of first year teachers who, at one time, made the difficult decision to quit teaching before completing my first year in the classroom. It was the most difficult and distressing decision I had ever made. I was giving up on my life-long dream to be a teacher, to make a difference and no one, but me, seemed to be bothered by my decision. In some ways, it seemed expected by those with whom I worked. I am one of the fortunate ones who found my way back into education. My interest in teacher attrition stems from my experience, my reflections on my decision to quit, and from watching others make the same decision today for the same reasons I did nearly 20 years ago. The conditions that lead teachers to quit or move from one school to another each year need to be examined through the eyes of those affected in order to develop an

understanding of the phenomenon of teacher attrition.

As demonstrated through the quote from *Life* magazine in 1962, teacher attrition has been a concern for many years and recent research indicates there is little, if any, improvement. A greater percentage of teachers made the decision to leave the profession in the most recent national collection of data on teacher attrition (Marvel, Lyter, Peltola, Strizek, & Morten, 2007). This number has grown each of the five times data have been collected since the 1988-1989 school year when it was at its low of 5.6 percent to a high of 8.4 percent for the 2004-2005 school year. The percentage of teachers moving from one school to another for this same time period has also increased although not as dramatically. Although teacher attrition has long been a problem and has been the topic of numerous studies, little is understood about the specific reasons why teachers leave the profession or move from one school to another.

A study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) predicted that as many as 2.7 million public school teachers would need to be hired in the decade between 1999 and 2009 (Hussar, 1999). This is compounded by the fact that approximately 150,000 teachers need to be hired annually to replace those educators who retire or leave the profession each year (Natt, 1999). This need for teachers is often referred to as a shortage. Although there are shortages of teachers for certain fields (i.e. math, science, and special education) and certain types of schools (i.e. rural and urban), the issue that factors more predominantly into what appears to be a shortage of teachers is something Ingersoll (2001a) refers to as the “revolving door” on many of the nation’s classrooms. The revolving door is the large numbers of teachers who leave their positions, and often the profession, for reasons other than retirement each year.

Consequently, it is the large number of openings each year that creates the perception that there is a teacher shortage. The number of individuals currently trained to teach and available to fill openings adds credence to this argument. Approximately 40 percent of those who are trained to teach never enter the teaching profession. A recent study suggests there were about four million individuals in the United States trained to teach but who are currently not employed in the teaching profession (Curran, Abrahams, & Manual, 2000).

The percentages of public and private school movers and leavers have been monitored regularly through the largest national studies of teacher attrition, the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and the Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS). These studies referred to teachers who leave their current position for a position at another school as "movers" and to those leaving the profession altogether as "leavers". Teachers who remain in the same school are considered to be "stayers". The SASS has been administered five times since the 1987-1988 school year. The TFS was subsequently administered each following year. In the most recent study that tracked teachers from the 2003-2004 school year to the 2004-2005 school year, approximately 16 percent of public school teachers were identified as either movers or leavers from one year to the next. Of this 16 percent, eight percent left the profession that year and eight percent moved to another school. This same study reported that 25 percent of the former public school teachers who left the classroom noted that pursuing a position other than that of a K-12 teacher was either very or extremely important in their decision to leave teaching (Marvel et al., 2007).

It is difficult to identify what an acceptable rate of attrition would be in the

teaching profession but when growing numbers of teachers are voluntarily making the decision to leave their current positions or the teaching profession before retirement each year, it raises concerns (Marvel et al., 2007). Ingersoll (2001b) used data from the 1998 Bureau of National Affairs to determine that the turnover rate for teachers exceeds the nationwide rate of total employee turnover. The total employee turnover rate in 1998 was 11 percent compared to the teacher turnover rate of 15 percent that same year. Ingersoll also compared the attrition rate of teachers to that of a similar female-dominated service profession, nursing. The turnover rate for registered nurses in the mid 1990s was 12 percent compared to a rate of over 14 percent for teachers for the same time period.

Additionally, the most recent TFS data indicate the teacher attrition phenomenon is becoming more acute. The overall attrition rate and the percentage of teachers leaving were greater in the most recent study than in the previous four similar studies conducted by NCES (Marvel et al., 2007). In the 2000-2001 TFS, 15 percent of public school teachers moved or left their positions the previous year with eight percent moving to another school and seven percent leaving the profession (Luekens, Lyter, & Fox, 2004). The percentage of teachers moving or leaving increased by one percent between the 2000-2001 and 2004-2005 studies. The increase is more significant when it is compared to the findings from the first TFS conducted in 1988-1989. The percent of movers and leavers that year was 13.5 percent with only 5.6 percent of teachers leaving the profession (Bobbit, Faupel, & Burns, 1991). Significantly higher percentages of teachers are choosing to leave the profession today than twenty years ago and the figures are even greater in urban schools (Howard, 2003; Lankford, Loeb, & Wycoff, 2002). In urban districts in the New York City area, an analysis of the state teacher database found that

only 38 percent of teachers were in the same schools five years after the data were first collected compared to 46 percent in the suburban schools. For other large metropolitan areas, the numbers of teachers staying in the same school for five years were 29 percent for urban schools and 43 percent for suburban schools (Lankford et al., 2002).

The attrition rate is highest for teachers new to the profession. It is estimated that 30 percent of new teachers leave the profession within the first five years (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Some studies place this number as high as 50 percent in urban school systems with close to 16 percent of first year teachers leaving without making it through the first year (Howard, 2003). In a recent study of teachers in Illinois, researchers found that 67 percent of teachers moved or left within their first five years of teaching (Rossi & Grossman, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

For the purposes of this study, teacher attrition or teacher turnover refers to the teachers who move or leave from one year to the next. Although movers do not leave the profession, their decision has the same effect as leavers on the schools they exit. Excessive teacher turnover rates are a contributing cause of many educational problems including reduced student achievement, teacher shortages, declining teacher morale, and discontinuity within the organization. High rates of teacher turnover cause schools to hire new, often inexperienced teachers annually, and contribute to a shortage of teachers in some schools and in specific subject areas. This creates a number of obstacles for schools and school systems that can hinder student achievement. These obstacles include: hiring individuals unfamiliar with the organization; hiring inexperienced or uncertified teachers to fill open positions; and the costs associated with recruiting, hiring

and training new teachers (Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, & Weber, 1997; Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2006; Futernick, 2007; Ingersoll, 2001a, 2001b).

Hiring a number of new teachers each year contributes to organizational discontinuity. Organizational discontinuity refers to the lack of coherence and consistency that often occurs in schools when teachers frequently move or leave. Introducing new members into the organization each year to replace those who leave makes it difficult for a school to become a cohesive community. New teachers are typically unfamiliar with school policies and procedures, the vision and goals, the curriculum, accepted instructional strategies and programs, and the students the school serves. A cohesive community with a strong vision has been attributed to increased student achievement. "Indeed, the presence of a positive sense of community among families, teachers, and students has long been held by education researchers to be one of the most important indicators and aspects of successful schools" (Ingersoll, 2001b, p. 505).

When a school lacks a cohesive community, it is difficult for the school staff to develop the trusting relationships necessary for collaboration and professional support (Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, et al., 1997; Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2006; Futernick, 2007; Ingersoll, 2001a, 2001b). In reference to how a lack of community can negatively affect a school, Loeb, Darling-Hammond, and Luczak (2005) state, "the 'collective knowledge' of a school is weakened, and the overall expertise in the school may be inadequate to support educational decision-making or collegial learning" (p. 49). Collegiality and teacher autonomy or decision-making not only contribute to increases in student achievement, they also are linked to teacher satisfaction and teacher retention.

Once the cycle of teacher attrition and organizational discontinuity begins it is difficult to halt as each further contributes to the conditions that increase the rates at which teachers move or leave (Futernick, 2007).

Another way high rates of teacher attrition hamper student achievement is through the new hires chosen to fill the open positions. Attrition often results in filling open positions with inexperienced or uncertified teachers. Both have been shown to be detrimental to student achievement (Bempah, Kaylen, Osburn, & Birkenholz, 1994; Howard, 2003; Wald, 1998). In some cases, teacher attrition results in positions going unfilled which forces systems to close classes thereby increasing the number of students in others (Wald, 1998). As noted by Ingersoll (2001a), "teacher turnover is a significant phenomenon and a dominant factor behind the demand for new teachers and the difficulties schools encounter adequately staffing classrooms with qualified teachers" (p. 5). As a result, schools and systems that have high rates of teacher attrition have greater percentages of students who have new and less experienced teachers year after year which can hinder student learning. Teacher quality has been linked to experience and is a vital component of student academic achievement (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2006; Greenwald, Hedges, & Laine, 1996; Hanushek, 1986; Howard, 2003; Rockoff, 2004). Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin (1998) found that at least 7.5 percent of variation in student achievement is explained by teacher quality. Moreover, they found this effect to be greater than the impact of the organization, school leadership, and the financial position of the school.

The impact of teacher turnover is more critical in urban schools. Urban schools, typically located in high poverty areas, often experience greater rates of teacher attrition,

which can result in shortages of teachers and high numbers of inexperienced teachers (Howard, 2003). Urban districts are more likely to fill vacant positions with substitute teachers, underqualified teachers, or by increasing class sizes. Howard (2003) reported the results of the Recruiting New Teachers survey which found more than 80 percent of urban districts hired noncertified teachers and 60 percent filled positions with substitute teachers. In one study of the Milwaukee School System, almost none of the new teachers hired in the early 1990s had previous teaching experience (Imazeki, 2005). With teacher experience being one of the characteristics found to be significantly correlated to increased student achievement, it is critical that schools and school systems, especially those in urban settings, increase the rates of teacher retention (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2006; Futernick, 2007; Greenwald, et al., 1996; Hanushek, 1986; Howard, 2003).

Hiring teachers with little or no experience to fill open positions can also burden a school system's resources. These new teachers need significant amounts of training before they become effective in the classroom, which amounts to a significant investment and the expenditure of additional resources. A continuous turnover of staff requires additional resources of time and money to provide the orientation and training to bring new members into the organization. This includes training new teachers in policies and procedures, curriculum, instructional programs and strategies, and the vision and goals of the school and system (Boe, Bobbitt, & Cook, 1997). The recruiting, hiring, and training of teachers needed each year is costly and time consuming and is an investment that is lost each time a teacher leaves (Adams & Dial, 1993; Theobald, 1990). A Texas study utilized several business models to determine the fiscal cost of teacher attrition. It was determined that the expenses associated with recruiting, hiring, and training a new

teacher cost a school system $8,000 or more for each teacher who leaves during the first few years of teaching (Texas Center for Educational Research, 2000). Charlotte-Mecklinburg figured the cost of recruiting, hiring, and training new teachers at $11,500 per teacher (Charlotte Advocates for Education, 2004). In Milwaukee, the average cost per teacher who leaves the district is $15,325 and in Chicago it is $17,872. The total cost of teacher turnover in the Chicago Public School System is estimated to be in excess of $86 million each year (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2006).

Although some attrition can be healthy for an organization when it brings in new ideas, too much annual attrition can be detrimental. The aim is to establish a balance between those who stay and those who leave or move. Although it would be difficult to determine in advance what the ideal balance should be, when too many teachers leave a school year after year, it raises risks that ultimately serve as detriments to student achievement.

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to examine the reasons why teachers chose to move or leave. Although researchers have been studying this issue for a number of years and have conducted many studies on the topic, the vast majority of research on teacher attrition has been quantitative. Quantitative data results provide some general statements on why teachers leave and what teachers report could be done to retain them but they fail to provide qualitative, descriptive stories necessary to get a clear understanding of the causes of and potential solutions for teacher attrition. In addition, quantitative data are typically collected on a national or state level, which fails to provide individual school systems insight into the local causes of attrition. This study adds to the literature on

teacher attrition by providing the stories, experiences, and voices of teachers who made the decision to move or leave. Liu and Ramsey (2008) state the need for this type of research:

> Although past research has provided many insights into the factors that influence teacher career decisions, little is known about which unfulfilled needs persuade teachers to leave the field and which job conditions leave them satisfied or dissatisfied. Understanding the multiple determinants that lead to teachers' job satisfaction may help identify the factors and changes needed to support teacher retention (p. 2).

Significant percentages of teachers leave their current positions or the profession each year yet few school systems fully investigate the reasons behind teachers' decisions. This study sought to develop an understanding of why teachers in one school system transferred from the district or left the teaching profession altogether.

Research Questions

The study is a qualitative case study of all teachers who voluntarily left one urban-suburban school system at the end of one school year. The participants were teachers who moved from the system to teach elsewhere and those who exited the profession altogether.

Three research questions guided the study:

1. What are the reasons movers leave their current school or system? What are the reasons leavers exit the teaching profession? What are the similarities and differences between the reasons given by movers and leavers?

2. Why do movers move rather than leave? Why do leavers leave rather than move?
3. What do movers report could have been done to keep them in their current position? What do leavers report could have been done to keep them in the teaching profession? What are the similarities and differences between the reasons given by movers and leavers?

Scope of the Study

In order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of why teachers left the profession or moved to teach in another system, I conducted a qualitative case study that explored the phenomenon of teacher attrition. A qualitative study allowed me to focus on the context of the phenomenon and explore the organizational factors that impacted teachers' decisions to leave (Creswell, 1994). I used the research design of the case study because it best fit a study that explored a single entity or phenomenon that was time-bound and limited to one organization (Yin, 1989). Data were collected from three sources including exit questionnaires, exit interviews, and semi-structured interviews of teachers who voluntarily left their positions at the end of the 2006-2007 school year. Participants included teachers who voluntarily resigned from the Central City School System (CCSS) to take a position in another system or to leave the teaching profession.

Annually, CCSS collected data on teachers who notified the system they were leaving through brief exit interviews and exit questionnaires. I used an analysis of these documents from the 2006-2007 school year to determine the reasons teachers stated for leaving the system. These documents also helped determine which teachers were moving to another system and which were leaving the profession. In addition, I used data from

these documents to select participants for the semi-structured interviews. All teachers who identified reasons for leaving that were specific to conditions in the school system or the teaching profession such as workload, administrative support, working conditions, student discipline, student demographics, or salary and benefits were considered for participation in the semi-structured interviews. Twenty-one participants identified agreed to participate in a semi-structured interview.

Approximately 85 teachers left CCSS at the end of the 2006-2007 year. Some of these teachers left for reasons not appropriate for participation in the study such as retirement, non-renewal of contract, health concerns, or a family move to another geographic location. Of the 85 teachers who left CCSS, 63 made the personal decision to leave the system due to factors that could be attributed to specific conditions in the school system or the teaching profession. At the end of the 2006-2007 school year, I contacted these 63 teachers to offer them the opportunity to participate in the study and requested information that could be used to contact them upon final approval of the study. Thirty-five teachers expressed a willingness and desire to participate in a semi-structured interview. Of these, I was able to contact and interview 21 of them once the study was approved.

CCSS serves approximately 8,000 students in an urban school system on the outskirts of a large southeastern metropolitan city. All but one of the eleven schools in the system qualifies for Title I services. To qualify as Title I, a school's free or reduced lunch rate must be 35 percent or greater. Three schools in the system have more than 75 percent of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. The student body is 44 percent African America, 29 percent Latino, and 21 percent white. Approximately 20 percent of

students speak English as a second language.

The system employees about 650 certified teachers. During the 2005-2006 school year, 15 percent of the teachers either left the system for another teaching job or left the profession. During the 2006-2007 school year this rate was about 13 percent with a range from a low of 2.5 percent to a high of 23 percent at one school. Although the system had previously collected exit questionnaire data on teachers who left and some exit interviews were conducted at the end of the 2005-2006 school year, there had not been a comprehensive effort in the past to interview all teachers who left the system until the spring of 2007.

Significance of the Study

This study explored the factors that contribute to the attrition of teachers. Although numerous studies have been conducted on teacher attrition, few have included teachers' voices, stories, and experiences about how and why they made the decision to leave. This study is significant because it gave teachers the opportunity to voice their stories about their experiences. Deciding to quit one's job or change one's career is not a decision made quickly or easily and can be the cause of tremendous stress, yet few have asked teachers about their experiences in making these decisions. This qualitative case study used teachers' own stories to help create greater understanding about what contributes to teachers' decisions to voluntarily resign their positions. Billingsley (1993) affirmed the need for more descriptive data:

> teachers' perceptions and experiences are a critical missing piece of the data base on teacher attrition…educators need opportunities to frame attrition/retention decisions in the context of their experiences.

> Alternative methodologies such as in-depth interviews and open-ended questionnaires may uncover previously unidentified variables as well as the specific contextual factors influencing [special] educators' career decisions (p. 167).

Although Billingsley pointed out the need for more qualitative data nearly 15 years ago, there is still very little descriptive data on the issue of teacher attrition. More descriptive data are needed in order to achieve a more complete picture of the phenomenon.

Assumptions and Limitations

This study focused on the reasons teachers stated they left one urban-suburban school system. It was limited to teachers from one school system. It was also limited by what the participants were willing to share with the interviewer. My position with the system as a director could have inhibited the interviewees, although the study was designed to decrease these inhibitions. I did not supervise teachers during the study, thus eliminating the possible interference of supervisor/supervisee relationships. Also, the semi-structured interviews did not take place until approximately six months after the end of the year when the participants were no longer employed with the system. Since all interviewees had already left the system, an assumption was made that they would be open and honest in their responses.

Since I was once a teacher who made the decision to leave the profession, I knew I needed to be aware of my own experience and possible assumptions. I did this by keeping a journal throughout the study. I began the journal by writing about the decision I made to leave teaching 20 years ago and the factors that figured prominently in my decision.

Definition of Terms

Attrition rate: The percentage of teachers who move from one school to another or leave the teaching profession each year

Exit: The process of teachers leaving the profession

Job satisfaction: An employee's positive feelings resulting from their job experiences

Leavers: Teachers who exit the teaching profession

Migration: The process of teachers moving or transferring from one school to another

Mobility: The process of teachers moving or transferring from one school to another

Movers: Teachers who transfer or move from one school to another

SASS: Schools and Staffing Survey

Teacher autonomy: The perception that teachers have regarding whether they control themselves and their work environments (Pearson and Moomaw, 2005, p. 41)

Teacher turnover rate: The percentage of teachers who leave their positions each year to either move to another school or to leave the profession

TFS: Teacher Follow-up Study

Transfers: Teachers who move from one school to another

Urban school district: A school district with 70 percent or greater urban population (NCES)

Urban-Suburban District: A school district with 70 percent or greater urban population located in a suburban area of a large metropolitan city.

Summary

Teacher attrition is a significant and growing problem in education. Numerous quantitative studies have examined which teachers are most likely to leave and the

reasons they state for leaving. What is missing from the discussion is qualitative data that provide opportunities for those leaving or moving to tell their stories. The voices of teachers choosing to leave their positions are integral to understanding the issue of teacher attrition.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature review is presented in three sections. The first section of the review focuses on what is known about teachers who typically move from one position to another or who leave the profession. The categories most often studied include age, experience, ethnicity, gender, subject or level taught, and the quality of these teachers. The second section of the review focuses on the reasons teachers move or leave. The factors most often examined include salary, school and student characteristics, and working conditions. The final section examines methods of decreasing teacher attrition including teacher preparation, teacher induction programs, and improvements in working conditions.

Who Stays, Who Moves, and Who Leaves

Teacher attrition rates are often reported in correlation to a variety of demographic characteristics including age, ethnicity, and gender. Although these variables cannot be directly addressed through policies aimed at increasing teacher retention, an understanding of the relationships between these characteristics and the phenomenon of teacher attrition does provides some insights into the issue. Much of the data on the relationship between teacher demographics and attrition come from the SASS and TFS surveys.

Age and Experience

The most consistent findings in teacher attrition research are those of age and experience. The teacher turnover rate follows a U-shaped curve with highest rates for young teachers in the first few years of their careers and for older teachers reaching retirement and lowest rates for teachers in the middle of their careers. Attrition rates are greatest among full-time teachers who are 60 and older and those who are under 30 years of age. It is lowest for teachers in their 40s (Bobbitt, Leich, Whitener, & Lynch, 1994; Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, et al., 1997; Grissmer & Kirby, 1987; Ingersoll, 2001a; Krieg, 2006; Luekens et al., 2004; Murnane, Singer, Willett, Kemple, & Olsen, 1991). Teachers under the age of thirty have the highest annual rate of attrition at nearly 19 percent (Bobbitt et al., 1994).

Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, et al. (1997) took a closer look at this data using the results from the 1988 SASS and the subsequent 1989 TFS. The study examined teacher retention and turnover of special education teachers (SETs) in comparison to general education teachers (GETs). The study sought to analyze a number of variables as potential predictors of teachers' decisions to stay in, move from, or leave the teaching profession from one year to the next. Specifically, they sought to identify any differences between special and general education teachers. The variables identified as possible predictors were demographic characteristics, teacher qualifications, working conditions, and school characteristics.

One finding from the study shed new light on the relationship between age and teacher turnover. This is one of only a few studies to disaggregate data for teachers exiting the profession and those moving from one school to another. Their findings for

teachers who exit the profession followed the typical U-curve with teachers leaving most often at younger and older ages and the greatest stability occurring between the ages of 45 and 50 years. In contrast, the percentage of teachers who move from one school to another continues to decline with increasing age reaching a low of about four percent at age 58 (Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, et al., 1997).

Years of teaching experience is typically correlated to age with the youngest teachers having the fewest years of experience. As with age, those with the fewest years of experience tend to leave teaching at higher rates than those with more years of experience (Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, et al., 1997; Luekens et al., 2004). Allen (2005) found strong evidence that teacher attrition is greatest in the first three years of experience and that it decreases considerably with four or five years of experience. Approximately 30-50 percent of teachers leave their first teaching assignment within the first five years of their career (Allen, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Kirby, Berends, & Naftel, 1999). The rate then increases significantly again when teachers reach retirement with 25-30 years of experience.

Murnane et al. (1991) conducted an extensive, longitudinal examination of teacher databases in North Carolina and Michigan. They found that beginning teachers in Michigan had an attrition rate of over 20 percent by the end of the first year and 13 percent at the end of the second year. The rates for teachers in North Carolina were 11 percent at the end of the first year and eight percent at the end of the second year. In both states, the attrition rate at the end of the tenth year of teaching was only about four percent.

Although the relationship between teacher attrition and age or experience is strong, what is less clear is why the relationship exists. The research does support that the reason for the sharp increase in exits from the profession as teachers age is due to retirements (Guarino, Santibanez, Daley, & Brewer, 2004; Hanushek, et al., 1998), but less is known about the reasons young teachers move or leave. According to Allen (2005) in an in-depth review of the literature on teacher recruitment and retention, there is moderate evidence that pregnancy and caring for young children are key reasons for the increased numbers of young teachers who leave the profession. Nearly 80 percent of the teaching workforce is female and the evidence indicates that one reason women state they choose to teach is that the profession allows for them to take time out to raise children (Allen, 2005). This is confirmed through the finding of Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, et al. (1997). This study suggests that teachers with children under the age of six were much more likely to leave the profession than were those with older or no dependent children.

A second and possibly related reason for the higher attrition rate for young teachers is marriage. Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, and Whitener, et al. (1997) found that teachers who experienced a change in marital status were nearly twice as likely to move to a different school or to leave teaching. However, the sample size in this study was small and researchers could not differentiate between those getting married and those getting divorced, just that there was a change in marital status

A third potential reason for the high turnover rate for young teachers is the tendency for these teachers to transfer between schools and school systems until they find a school which is a good fit for them or that they learn early on that teaching is not the

right profession for them. In those cases, new teachers may leave to pursue other options before they are vested in the profession. There is also evidence that teachers prefer to teach in schools similar to those they attended and to teach students similar to themselves (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2006). Consequently, since the vast majority of teachers are white and middle class (Broughman & Rollefson, 2000) many tend to migrate to suburban schools that serve middle class, white students after gaining a few years of experience in rural or urban school settings (Adams, 1996; Allen, 2005; Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2006). Another explanation often attributed to the high attrition rate for less experienced teachers is the struggles new teachers face with the reality of their own classroom. These struggles typically include the following: classroom management and student discipline; time management and organizational skills; and lesson planning to meet the diverse needs of students (Berry, 2006; Henry, 1986; Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2001).

Ethnicity

Although findings linking ethnicity and teacher attrition tend to be inconsistent, in an extensive review of research on the topic, Guarino et al. (2004) found evidence that, in general, white teachers have greater rates of attrition than African American and Latino teachers. Similarly, Murnane et al. (1991) utilized state databases from North Carolina and Michigan and found that white teachers were more likely to leave than African American teachers. Seventy-five percent of African American teachers in North Carolina remained in teaching for at least five years compared to only about 60 percent of white teachers. In Michigan, the pattern was the same but less significant. Thirty-two percent of African American teachers in Michigan remained for five years compared to 30

percent of white teachers. Ingersoll and Alsalam (1997) also reported that minority teachers are less likely to leave teaching than are white teachers. Kirby et al. (1999) used longitudinal data from Texas on teachers who entered the profession between 1987 and 1996. They determined that Latino teachers had the lowest attrition rates early in their careers. The median number of years spent teaching was six years for white female teachers, seven for white male teachers, ten for Latino male and female teachers, and nine and six years for African American female and male teacher respectively.

In his review of existing literature, Allen (2005) found moderate evidence in the literature he reviewed to indicate that white teachers have higher attrition rates than both African American and Latino teachers. He also found some evidence that white teachers were less likely than minority teachers to stay in schools with greater percentages of minority students. Allen (2005) does caution against generalizing from the research he used as much of it was specific to individual states, some with higher than average minority populations. In addition, much of the data on ethnicity and teacher attrition to be from the 1970s and 1980s so this may not hold true today when minorities have more opportunities for careers outside of the education field. That seems to be the case with more recent research that was not included in reviews completed by Guarino et al. (2004) and Allen (2005).

More recent data has found the converse of some of the earlier data regarding ethnicity and attrition rates. Imazeki (2005) analyzed data from the Wisconsin public school teacher database and found that minority, female teachers were more likely to leave teaching in general. Pyle (1994) reported that African American teachers had higher attrition rates than non-minority teachers the first two years, and that African

American male teachers had the highest attrition rates in general. On the other hand, some researchers found no relationship between race and attrition rates in public schools teachers. Krieg (2006) studied teachers in Washington state and Luekens et al. (2004) analyzed data from the 2000-2001 TFS and found no differences in the percentages of African American and white teachers who left the profession.

There is evidence that minority teachers are more likely to remain in schools with greater percentages of minority students than are white teachers (Allen, 2005; Imazeki, 2005). Consequently, although minority, female teachers were more likely to leave as evidenced by the database from Wisconsin, teaching in schools with greater proportions of minority students decreased the effect (Imazeki, 2005). Moreover, when African American teachers move from one school to another they tend to move to schools with higher percentages of minority students (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004).

Gender

As with ethnicity, the research relating gender to teacher attrition suggests inconsistent results. Earlier studies with large, national samples of teachers found that women are more likely to leave the teaching profession than men (Heyns, 1988; Murnane, Singer, & Willett, 1989). In their large review of literature on teacher retention, Guarino et al. (2004) found that women tended to have higher attrition rates than men. A few studies they analyzed indicated that marriage and maternity were predictors of teacher attrition for women. A study linking gender and age to attrition appears to confirm this. Theobald (1989) found that younger women, those around the typical age of marriage and child bearing age, were more likely to leave than younger men. In this same study, older women were less likely to leave than older men.

Ingersoll (2001b) also reports that males are less likely to leave than are female teachers. These results have been attributed to women leaving the profession for a period of time to get married, to relocate because of a spouse's job move, or to raise children. Stinebrickner (2001a) used data from the National Longitudinal Study of the Class of 1972 (NLS-1972) and determined that female teachers had a greater probability of leaving the profession than males and that the rate of staying in teaching declined with marriage and as the number of children increased. One problem with many of the studies examining the relationship between gender and attrition is that much of the data used was from the 1970s and 1980s (Heyns, 1988; Murnane, et al., 1989; Stinebrickner, 2001a, 2002). The link between gender and attrition may not be as strong with more recent data. This could be an indicator of the changes in sociological patterns including the changing roles of women, the preponderance of single-parent families, and the increasing numbers of dual career couples (Billingsley, 1993). The most recent TFS found no differences in the percentages of male and female teachers who left the profession the previous year (Luekens et al., 2004).

Subject Area and School Level

As with other disaggregations of the data, studies linking subject area and school level (elementary or secondary) with rates of teacher turnover suggest conflicting results. Allen (2005) found strong evidence in his review of literature on teacher attrition that greater numbers of middle and high school teachers leave each year than do elementary school teachers. Similarly, Murnane et al. (1991) found that secondary school teachers have shorter career durations than do elementary school teachers. In Michigan, elementary teachers remained in the profession for an average of six years, but secondary

teachers averaged a minimum of slightly more than two years to a maximum of 4.5 years. This finding is supported by the 2000-2001 TFS that found more secondary teachers left the profession than elementary school teachers however, the most recent TFS data from 2004-2005 found no difference between attrition rates of elementary and secondary teachers. Ingersoll (2001a) suggests similar results and actually found in his research that teachers in secondary schools actually have slightly lower attrition rates than do teachers in elementary schools.

Teachers of math and science have been found by some researchers to be more likely to leave teaching than those of other subject areas (Ingersoll, 2001a; Liu & Ramsey, 2008; Murnane et al., 1991; Stinebrickner, 1998). These teachers' skills are easily transferred to and rewarded in the private sector where they can often make a higher salary. Allen (2005) found moderate evidence in the literature he reviewed on teacher retention to support that science and math teachers leave at greater rates than do secondary teachers of other subjects. In Michigan, nearly half the physics and chemistry teachers left the profession by the end of their second year in the classroom. In North Carolina, more than half of the physics and chemistry teachers left within six years (Murnane et al., 1991). Conversely, Murnane and Olsen (1990) found that high school math and science teachers stayed longer than other subject area teachers. Three other studies however found little evidence to support differences in attrition rates for teachers of math and science (Bobbitt et al., 1994; Imazeki, 2005; Mont & Rees, 1996).

In contrast to all other categories of teachers studied, special education teachers have consistently been found to suffer from higher rates of attrition than regular education teachers. According to Boe, Bobbitt, and Cook (1997) 20 percent of special

education teachers move or leave each year compared to 13 percent for general education teachers. The attrition rate for special education teachers has been found to be as high as 24 percent (Macdonald, 1999; Pyecha & Levine, 1995). This phenomenon has been attributed to the stress involved with teaching students with disabilities and to the increased paperwork special education teachers are required to complete (Billingsley, 1993).

Teacher Quality

Although it has long been believed that the best teachers leave, there is limited evidence to support this belief. Studies that examine whether more proficient teachers leave at a greater rate than less able teachers tend to look at two areas: intellectual proficiency and teacher performance. The greatest problem in studies examining the relationship between either intellectual proficiency or teacher performance and rates of teacher attrition is defining and measuring either quality.

Intellectual Proficiency.

Researchers tend to look at standardized test scores when studying teacher intellectual proficiency. Two issues arise with using this type of data to determine whether these scores can define a good or a poor teacher. The first are questions focused on how well standardized test scores measure intellectual proficiency. This is particularly problematic with minority groups as it has been shown that standardized tests are biased against minority populations (Jencks, 1998). Another problem is that using intellectual proficiency to determine teacher quality assumes there is a link between good teaching and performance on standardized tests. Most of the studies examining the link between intellectual proficiency and teacher attrition have been state databases. This

creates another problem because different states use disparate tests to determine proficiency.

Murnane and Olsen (1990) analyzed data on nearly 14,000 white teachers in North Carolina who began teaching between 1975 and 1984. They used the state database to follow the careers of these teachers to determine if they moved schools or left the profession between their start date and the 1985-1986 school year. They found that teachers who had above average scores on the NTE had shorter teaching careers but that those with the highest scores actually had longer than average careers in teaching. In a similar study Murnane et al. (1989) found that secondary teachers with high NTE scores were almost two times more likely to leave teaching after their first year than teachers with low NTE scores.

Stinebrickner (1998, 2001a, 2001b) used NLS-72 survey data to study the relationship between SAT scores and teacher attrition. What is most interesting about his work is that although he used the same data sources and similar statistical methods to analyze the data he reached different conclusion in the three studies. In the first study (Stinebrickner, 1998) he found no significant relationship between high math SAT scores and teaching duration. In the second and third studies (Stinebrickner, 2001a, 2001b) he found that over time the probability of remaining in teaching declines more quickly for those with high SAT scores than those individuals with low SAT scores.

Podgursky, Monroe, and Watson (2004) found that public school teachers with higher ACT scores were more likely to leave than those with lower scores. In addition to test scores, these researchers also linked intellectual proficiency to the undergraduate institution teachers attended. They determined that those who selected universities from

the most selective tiers in Barron's Profiles of American Colleges would be more intellectually proficient. They found that those who attended highly selective universities were less likely to remain in teaching than those graduating from less selective colleges. Teachers who graduated from highly selective institutions had an exit hazard rate 53 percent higher than teachers graduating from less selective colleges.

Shin (1995) analyzed teacher attrition in relation to college grade point averages (GPA) using NLS-72 survey data. Shin found that teachers with college GPAs in the middle range stayed in teaching longer than those with high or low GPAs. Middle range GPA teachers stayed an average of almost nine years compared to only six years for teachers with high college GPAs.

Teacher Performance.

Fewer studies have attempted to link teacher quality to attrition rates by examining teacher performance in the classroom. Most likely this is due to the difficulty in measuring teacher performance. This is especially true when seeking means to measure teacher performance quantitatively.

Krieg (2006) used average gains on two standardized tests to determine teacher performance. By merging student test score data with Washington state teacher data files he was able to examine the performance of nearly 2,300 teachers. He found that teachers who performed less satisfactorily as determined by lower average test score gains were significantly more likely to exit the profession. It has generally been believed that higher performing teachers leave more often, but Krieg found the opposite. He attributes the negative relationship between teacher performance and attrition to possible intangible benefits such as the esteem of their colleagues that higher performing teachers receive.

Why Teachers Move or Leave

The quantitative methodology used to study the issue of teacher attrition lends itself to the examination of the characteristics of teachers who move or leave such as age, experience, gender, and ethnicity. Explaining the complex reasons why teachers choose to stay, move, or leave is more difficult to do using surveys and state databases. The three areas researchers have examined most often to explain why teachers move or leave are compensation, school and student characteristics, and working conditions.

Compensation

In his extensive review of literature on teacher attrition, Allen (2005) found strong support for the conclusion that compensation is related to teacher turnover. Many studies have found a correlation between low salaries and higher rates of teacher attrition (Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, et al., 1997; Brewer, 1996; Grissmer & Kirby, 1992; Gritz & Theobald, 1996; Hanushek et al., 2004; Imazeki, 2005; Ingersoll, 2001b; Ingersoll & Alsalam, 1997; Kirby et al., 1999; Krieg, 2006, Lankford et al., 2002; Liu & Ramsey, 2008; Mont & Rees, 1996; Murnane & Olsen, 1990; Murnane et al., 1989; Murnane et al., 1991; Rumberger, 1987; Stinebrickner, 1998; Theobald, 1990; Weiss, 1999). The 2000-2001 TFS found that public school movers and leavers were more likely to earn less than $30,000 compared to those who stayed. This same study also found that 20 percent of teachers who left the profession reported that they left to obtain a higher salary and better benefits (Luekens et al., 2004). Boe, Bobbit, and Cook (1997) analyzed data on about 600 special education and 4,000 general education teachers and found that teachers' base salary was a significant predictor of retention or attrition. About 18 percent of teachers who earned $20,000 or less a year left their teaching position the next

year. This is compared to about nine percent of teachers making $30,000 or more a year who left. Grissmer and Kirby (1992) found that a ten percent increase in salary was correlated to a ten percent increase in teacher retention in their study of 43,000 teachers in Indiana.

Salaries tend to have the greatest impact on teachers already at risk of moving or leaving. Murnane et al. (1991) not only found low salaries to be significantly correlated to teacher attrition, they also found low salaries to have the greatest impact on teachers during their first few years in the classroom when teacher attrition rates are highest. Teachers found to have below average salaries were one and a half times more likely to leave at the end of the first year than teachers with above average salaries.

The impact of low salaries has also been found to have the greatest effect on teachers in fields such as math and science who can make higher salaries in competing occupations outside of education (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2001; Murnane et al., 1991). Rumberger (1987) also found that the rate of teacher turnover in a school system was related to the salary differential between engineers and teachers. Eliminating the difference in salaries between the two occupations would cut the attrition rate for math and science teachers in half.

The relative salary between school districts in the same area has been found to be a significant factor in teacher movement. Brewer (1996) analyzed data on nearly 5,500 new teachers in New York state and found a much greater likelihood that teachers would move from one system to another if the receiving systems offered greater average salaries. Lankford et al. (2002) found similar results. Teachers in their study who moved from one district to another in New York City experienced an average salary increase of

12 to 22 percent. This finding is further confirmed by Gritz and Theobald (1996) who concluded that white female teachers were much less likely to move from one system to another if their current systems' salaries were greater in relation to those in other systems.

Some researchers have found that although salary plays a role in teachers' decisions to stay, move, or leave, other factors may be more significant. Hanushek et al. (2004) found that the link between teacher salaries and their decision to move to another school or another system was not as strong as the link between the percentage of minority, low achieving, high poverty students and teacher movement. They found that schools serving predominantly minority, low achieving, low income student populations would need to pay between 20 and 50 percent more to increase teacher retention. Ingersoll and Alsalam (1997) used SASS and TFS data on more that 53,000 teachers to determine that the level of teacher autonomy and support for new teachers had a greater impact on teachers' decisions to stay, move, or leave than did salary. A recent study (Futernick, 2007) found that teachers are not as concerned with compensation as they are with the variables that create their work environment. When working conditions were poor, teachers saw their salary as inadequate but when teachers where satisfied with the learning and teaching environment they were also satisfied with their compensation.

School and Student Characteristics

Much of the data on school and student characteristics is problematic because it relies almost exclusively on state teacher databases rather than teacher perception data so although there are patterns that indicate correlations, it is difficult to assign causality. An additional problem with data on student characteristics is that studies do not always identify the independent variable or operationalize the terms of the study. For example, a

study may correlate teaching in an urban school with teacher attrition but not define how schools identified as urban were selected. These issues likely contribute to the inconsistent findings in many of the studies on school and student characteristics and teacher attrition.

Some studies have found no correlations between the percentages of minority and poverty students and the rate of teacher attrition. Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, et al. (1997) used SASS and TFS data to determine there was no link between minority enrollment and the rates at which teachers moved schools or left the profession. Ingersoll and Alsalam (1997) came to the same conclusion in their study that also utilized TFS data. More recent studies have found a link between the two. Ingersoll (2001b) found that teacher turnover in public schools with high rates of poverty was 45 percent higher than that in more affluent schools. Johnson and Birkeland (2003) interviewed 50 new teachers after their third year in the classroom and determined that those who transferred to other schools moved to schools that were more affluent. In a large study that utilized teacher database information from the state of New York, the researchers found that teachers who moved went to systems that had about 50 to 60 percent fewer poverty and minority students (Lankford et al., 2002). Hanushek et al. (2004) found that new, white teachers were much more likely to leave schools with a high percentage of minority students but that minority teachers were less likely to leave when the student population was majority minority.

Student achievement levels have also been linked to teacher attrition. Mont and Rees (1996) found that higher levels of student achievement reduced the rate of teacher attrition. This finding was corroborated by Hanushek et al. (2004) who found that

student achievement was one of the most influential factors in determining the rate of teacher attrition; the higher the student achievement the lower the rate of attrition. This is significant because as teachers leave schools with lower student achievement, they are typically replaced with teachers with little or no experience. Teacher effectiveness has been correlated to experience and is a critical component of student achievement (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2006; Greenwald et al., 1996; Hanushek, 1986; Howard, 2003; Rockoff, 2004). As teachers leave poor performing schools and are replaced by new, inexperienced teachers, student achievement is often jeopardized as the new teachers gain needed skills and experience. High teacher turnover in this case is both a cause and an effect of diminished student achievement. This creates a cycle of poor student performance and teacher attrition that can be difficult to break.

Working Conditions and Teacher Satisfaction

The majority of the research on working conditions in relation to teacher attrition "is not sufficiently robust or fine-grained to support more than the most general observation" (Allen, 2005, p. 73). Part of the problem with the literature in this area is that the majority of it is quantitative, which makes it difficult to get at the intricate components that combine to create the broad category of working conditions. An example of this is the frequently utilized TFS database. When asked the reasons for moving or leaving, teachers were asked to select from among statements such as "better teaching assignment", "dissatisfaction with support from administrators", and "dissatisfaction with workplace conditions". Each of these indicates dissatisfaction with working conditions but only in the most general terms.

Weiss (1999) used data from the 1987-1988 and 1993-1994 SASS to examine how the social organization of schools affects new teachers' commitment and willingness to remain in the profession. The hypothesis guiding the study was that the perceptions new teachers had of their workplace conditions (i.e. school leadership, student behavior, and teacher autonomy) would predict their morale, their commitment to the teaching profession, and their plans to remain in the field. The sample for this study included over 5,000 first-year teachers. Three survey items were selected from SASS and used as dependent variables. These items were intended to measure morale, career choice commitment, and plans for remaining in the teaching field. Morale was measured with the item "I sometimes feel it is a waste of time to try to do my best as a teacher". Career choice commitment was measured using the indicator "If you could go back to your college days and start over again, would you become a teacher or not?". Plans for remaining in teaching were measured with the item "How long do you plan to remain in teaching?". The independent variables included demographics, academic background, degrees, certification field, salary, class size, and teacher perceptions of workplace conditions. The specific working conditions examined in this study included school leadership, teacher autonomy, and the social climate.

The results of the study supported the hypothesis that new teachers' perceptions of their working conditions are significantly related to morale, career choice commitment, and plans for remaining in the profession. This is significant because attrition is greatest in the first few years of teaching. If teachers begin their careers in a school with poor working conditions, their chances of leaving the profession or moving to another school are greater. This continuous turnover of teachers creates a cycle that is

difficult to halt as the more teachers who leave the greater the organizational discontinuity which contributes to less-favorable working conditions (Futernick, 2007).

In a more recent, large-scale study of teacher attrition, Futernick (2007) surveyed nearly 2,000 current and former public school teachers in California to examine personal and professional reasons teachers cite in their decisions to stay in or leave teaching. In general, he found that teachers were less concerned with salary than they were with the factors that create their work environment. The factor cited most often as contributing to teachers' decisions to leave was bureaucratic impediments. These are aspects of the job that keep teachers from teaching including excessive paperwork, too many meetings, frequent classroom interruptions, and restrictions on what and how to teach. Another factor cited frequently by those who choose to leave included inadequate system supports. This category included lack of planning time, little or poor professional development, insufficient resources and materials, and a lack of support from the district office. The third factor that was noted as contributing to the attrition rate was the lack of collegial support. Collegial support includes collaboration between teachers and school administrators; trusting, professional relationships; being included in school decisions; and a sense that everyone is working together to foster a climate focused on student learning. Perhaps the most important finding in this study was that many teachers (28 percent) who had left teaching reported that they would return if working conditions improved.

In order to develop a clearer picture of how working conditions affect teacher attrition, it is important to look at the various components individually. These

components include administrative support and teacher autonomy, class size and workload, and student behavior.

Administrative Support and Teacher Autonomy.

In most studies of working conditions, administrative support and teacher autonomy are examined together. Pearson and Moomaw (2005) administered the Teacher Autonomy Scale to 300 teachers in Florida. They found that teacher autonomy, the perception that teachers have control over their work environments, is critical to teachers' decisions to stay in or leave the teaching profession. The 2000-2001 TFS reported that of the public teachers who moved from one school to another the previous year, over one-third indicated it was due to dissatisfaction with support from administrators. Nearly 24 and 14 percent of movers and leavers respectively from the 2000-2001 TFS reported that they did not have enough influence over their previous school's policies and practices. The same study reported that significant percentages of movers and leavers did not indicate that they were satisfied with the amount of autonomy or control over their own classrooms. This same database was reanalyzed in additional studies, which also confirmed that there were lower rates of attrition in schools where teachers reported greater levels of administrative support and more faculty influence. Ingersoll (2001b) found that teachers in the TFS study who moved or left reported that inadequate administrative support was the main reason for their decision (38 percent and 30 percent respectively).

Johnson & Birkeland (2003) conducted one of the few qualitative studies on teacher attrition. Their study focused on career decisions of new teachers. They originally interviewed 50 first and second year teachers who worked in a variety of

Massachusetts's public schools in 1999. A year later, in the summer of 2000, they contacted each of the original participants to find out if they were still teaching and where they were teaching. A third interview was conducted the following year. Three years into the study, eleven of the fifty teachers had left the profession. Six of these left after the first year of teaching. Eleven teachers in the same period had also moved from one school to another. The researchers found that the greatest factor in teachers' career decisions were whether or not they believed working conditions supported them to be successful with the students they taught. The participants correlated their feelings of success to various school specific factors including the role of the principal and other colleagues, their workload and teaching assignment, and the availability of resources. They found that those who moved or left within the first three years of teaching reported that inadequate administrative support was one of the primary reasons for their decisions.

Class Size and Workload.

The issues of class size and workload are often examined together. Teaching a greater number of students typically includes a greater workload as there are more papers to grade, parents to contact, and forms to complete. Macdonald (1999) found that "…teachers have become dissatisfied with burdensome administrative tasks and expectations for curriculum change, while at the same time have a sense of increased levels of accountability, surveillance and role conflict, especially young and beginning teachers" (p. 840) and that these factors led to higher rates of attrition. The 2000-2001 TFS reported that almost one-third of movers and one-quarter of leavers indicated that their workloads were too heavy. Johnson and Birkeland (2003) reported that excessive workloads factored into teachers' decisions to move or leave in their first three years of

teaching.

Although one study (Hanushek et al, 2004) did not find that class size was a factor in teacher attrition rates, others have found a link. Grissmer and Kirby (1992) found that as class sizes in Indiana decreased so did the rate of teacher attrition. Between 1965 and 1988 class sizes declined 24 percent and the teacher attrition rate fell from 12 percent to 6 percent the same period. Although there is a correlation between the two factors in this study, it is difficult to determine how, if at all, changes in class sizes impacted teachers' decisions to move or leave as teacher perception data were not included as part of the study. Kirby et al. (1999) also found that an increase in the student-teacher ratio was correlated to an increase in teacher attrition. A one-point increase in the student-teacher ratio was linked to a three to seven percent increase in teacher attrition. As with the study by Grissmer and Kirby (1992), no teacher perception data about class size was used so although the two rates are correlated there is not necessarily causality. Two other studies (Lankford et al., 2002; Mont & Rees, 1996) used state teacher database information and found positive correlations between class sizes and teacher attrition as well.

Student Behavior.

Allen (2005) determined that the role student discipline plays in teachers' decisions to stay, move, or leave was inconclusive in his in-depth review of the literature. This is due in part to few studies examining the issue of student discipline. Ingersoll (2001b) did note in his analysis of TFS data from 1991-1992 that student discipline was an important factor in teachers' decisions to move or leave. About 18 percent of teachers who moved and 30 percent of teachers who left the profession that year cited student discipline as a significant factor in their decision. A recent qualitative study by Smith

and Smith (2006) found that the threat of violence contributes to teachers' stress levels and their decisions to leave. In their interviews of twelve teachers who left urban schools, ten recounted violent episodes that had occurred at their schools during the time they taught there. All of the teachers talked about school violence even though some had not been witness to it. It was a dominant topic in their interviews with teachers, "Violence was a strong theme that surfaced in every interview and acutely strained some of the teachers, yet the responses of the teacher ranged from fear to indifference and only added to the stress of teaching in the inner city in a peripheral way for some" (p. 40). The small sample in this study limits the generalizability.

Student discipline was not noted as a significant contributing factor in teachers' decisions to leave in the 2000-2001 TFS but a related area, student motivation, was cited as a problem by teachers who moved or left. The 2000-2001 TFS asked teachers who moved or left if their students were motivated to learn. Only 17 percent of movers and 20 percent of leavers stated that their students were motivated (Liu & Ramsey, 2008; Luekens et al., 2004; Marvel et al., 2007). Johnson and Birkeland (2003) also found that a lack of student seriousness towards school and learning was a factor that led to teachers' dissatisfaction and their decision to move or leave early in their careers. The relationship between student behavior, discipline, and motivation is an area in need of more investigation.

What Increases Teachers' Chances of Staying

The majority of the research on retaining teachers focuses on new teachers within their first few years. This is logical since new teachers are most at risk with as many as 30-50 percent leaving within their first five years of teaching (Howard, 2003; Darling-

Hammond, 2000). The attempts aimed at retaining new teachers include better preparation prior to entering the classroom and comprehensive induction programs at the beginning of their careers. Improving working conditions is aimed at retaining both novice and experienced teachers.

Teacher Preparation

Evidence indicates that teachers who participate in a strong teacher preparation program are more likely to stay in the profession. Darling-Hammond (2000) found that teachers who graduate from four-year and five-year teacher preparation programs are more likely to remain in teaching that those who go through alternative preparation programs. Teachers who graduate from five-year preparation programs stay in teaching at higher rates than those who participate in traditional four-year programs. About 60 percent of teachers who receive training through short-term, alternative certification programs leave the profession by their third year, compared to about 30 percent from traditional programs and only 10 to 15 percent of those who are trained through an extended, five-year program (Andrew & Schwab, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 2000). Five-year programs allow for a full year of supervised student teaching that provides new teachers with twice as much experience than traditional four-year programs before stepping into their own classrooms.

A Texas study compared retention rates for teachers who were prepared through three various methods: alternative certification programs (ACPs), Centers for Professional Development and Technology (CPDTs), and traditional certification programs (TCPs). The researchers examined employment records for five years for those teachers completing training through one of the three methods in 1995. Although more

teachers trained through ACPs entered the profession, they left at significantly greater rates than teachers trained through CPDTs and TCPs. This was true for each of the five years data were collected. The attrition rate at the end of five years for ACPs was 19 percent compared to 14 and 11 percent respectively for CPDTs and TCPs. The teachers in this study who were trained through traditional programs of study were more likely to remain in teaching. One limitation of this study is that if teachers moved out of the state, public school system, either into a private school or out of state, they could no longer be tracked and were then considered to have left teaching (Harris, Camp, & Adkison, 2003).

Increasing the standards for teachers within traditional teacher preparation programs appears to produce teachers most likely to remain in the classroom. Connecticut raised standards for teacher preparation while also raising starting salaries in 1986. Not only did they attract more teachers, they also managed to maintain greater numbers of these teachers. Within a three-year period they had a surplus of teachers to choose from and student achievement rose to the top in the nation in both reading and mathematics (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

Teacher Induction Programs

Teacher induction programs refer to a variety of activities to assist teachers as they transition into the profession or into a new school system. These activities can include mentoring, orientations, classes, and workshops. New teacher induction programs are designed to serve “as a bridge from student of teaching to teacher of students” (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004, p. 29). New teacher induction programs vary widely from comprehensive programs lasting for a few years to one-day orientation programs (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; Wayne, Youngs, & Fleishman, 2005). This

variety makes it difficult to determine how participating in an induction program influences teacher attrition rates. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2004) defines comprehensive induction as, “a combination of mentoring, professional development and support, and formal assessments for new teachers during at least their first two years of teaching” (p. 2). They found that only about one percent of teachers participate in what they designate as a comprehensive program but for those who do, the rate of attrition is cut in half.

Although few systems offer a comprehensive program with the full range of support activities, more teachers participate in some type of induction today than in the past. Participation in induction programs has increased since 1990 when about 40 percent of new teachers participated to about 80 percent by the 1999-2000 school year (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Ingersoll & Smith (2004) used 1999-2000 SASS data to examine correlations between participation in induction programs and rates of teacher attrition. In general, they found that those teachers who participated in collective induction activities were less likely to move to other schools or to leave the profession after their first year of teaching. The effect was greatest for teachers who participated in a combination of activities including mentoring, seminars prior to the start of the school year, collaboration with other teachers, and support from administration. The attrition rate for teachers who did not receive any induction activities including mentoring was 40 percent after the first year. Those who received support through mentoring, common planning time with teachers in their field, and scheduled time for collaboration had a reduced attrition rate of about 28 percent after their first year. Those receiving all

components of a comprehensive induction program had an attrition rate of less than half of those who did not participate in any activities.

Mentoring.

Mentoring is one component of new teacher induction. It is the process of pairing an experienced teacher with a new teacher to provide personal support and on-going training throughout the year (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). About 70 percent of public school teachers reported they were paired with a mentor during the 1999-2000 school year. Mentor programs, as with other aspects of induction programs, vary widely. Some include extensive training for mentors, careful pairing of the mentor and the new teacher, and compensation for the mentor. Some mentoring programs pair the mentor and the protégé for a period of three years while others are only in place for the first year.

Mentoring programs that are carefully planned and implemented have been found to successfully increase job satisfaction and teacher retention but there are concerns about much of the existing research on mentoring. Existing studies of mentoring often did not include a control group making it difficult to know what the outcome would be if teachers did not receive mentoring. In addition, previous studies often did not control for other factors that might contribute to teacher attrition such as salary, school characteristics, or working conditions. This makes it difficult to know what factor primarily determined whether teachers chose to stay or leave. Other studies measured only teacher attitudes about the mentoring they received rather than the actual impact on teacher retention (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004).

Ingersoll and Smith (2004) used data from the SASS and TFS to examine the

impact of mentoring on teacher attrition. Having a mentor who worked in the same field or grade level reduced the risk that teachers would leave at the end of the first year by 30 percent. Mentoring did not have an effect on reducing the chances that a teacher would move from one school to another after the first year.

Collaboration.

Teaching continues to be an isolating profession with teachers spending the majority of their time in separate classrooms with little interaction with other professionals. Regularly scheduled common planning time helps teachers who teach like subjects or grade levels creates a collaborative culture. Common planning time allows teachers to discuss what and how they teach and to solve problems of student achievement or behavior together. Teachers work together to develop lessons, analyze student data, and prepare resources. This collaboration is especially important to new teachers who are still learning themselves (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004).

Another important form of collaboration for new teachers is to be involved in an external network. This could be a group of new teachers from within the school system who meet together to share, learn, and support each other. Participation in a network of other novice teachers helps alleviate feelings of isolation and failure common to new teachers, which could reduce rates of attrition (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004).

Improved Working Conditions

Positive working conditions increase teacher attendance, staff morale, and a sense of autonomy, all of which are related to teacher retention (Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990). Positive working conditions include strong and supportive school principals, clean and safe facilities, collegial staff, teacher autonomy in areas of curriculum and instruction,

and teacher involvement in decision-making (Stotko, Ingram, & Beaty-O'Ferrall, 2007). The key to improving working conditions is developing an awareness of the areas that are problematic within specific schools. A few states have begun using working condition surveys to identify problem areas and monitor improvements. North Carolina has been monitoring school working conditions using a statewide survey beginning in 2002. The survey was readministered in 2004 and 2006. The state has collected significant amounts of data on working conditions and has used the results to improve school environments. "North Carolina data indicate that improving teacher working conditions-time, professional development, leadership, empowerment, and facilities and resources-will improve student learning conditions and help retain teachers" (Hirsh, Emerick, Church, & Fuller, 2007, p. 1).

Teachers who perceive their working conditions positively are much more likely to remain in their current schools than are those with negative perceptions. The two areas found to be of greatest importance in the most recent North Carolina survey were leadership and empowerment. Teachers who indicate their principals are working to improve conditions in their schools are more likely to stay. Two-thirds of teachers who want to stay in their current school believe their principal is addressing areas of empowerment and leadership. On the contrary, less than one-quarter of teachers who indicate they plan to move to another school believe their principals are working to improve conditions. Schools with low teacher attrition rates had teachers who believe their school principal creates a trusting, supportive environment and that the principal protects instructional time from interference (Hirsh et al., 2007). The influence of strong school leadership has been correlated to higher retention rates in other studies as well.

School principals who foster collegial, supportive, positive teaching and learning environments have increased rates of retention (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004). In a survey of Washington state teachers, 87 percent indicated that the support of a school administrator was an important or very important reason in their decision to stay at their current school (Loeb, Elfers, Knapp, & Plecki, 2004).

In addition to a supportive school administrator, teachers in Washington also indicated that a positive school climate and a collaborative work environment influenced their decisions to remain in their current teaching positions. The areas teachers in this study reported in need of improvement included excessive workloads and a lack of time to do their jobs well (Loeb et al., 2004). Lack of time for planning was also an indicator cited by teachers in North Carolina (Hirsh et al., 2007).

The key to working conditions is using the results to drive change. Gaining knowledge about working conditions through surveys of teachers is important because typically school administrators rate the conditions in their schools much more positively than do the teachers. Schools that openly and honestly discuss the results and implement changes that address the weak areas, report improvements in teaching and learning conditions and, ideally, teacher retention rates (Hirsh et al., 2007).

Although neither the North Carolina nor Washington working conditions survey studies indicated issues with school facilities, a recent study of Washington D.C. teachers indicates that improving the school facilities could increase teacher retention. The researchers found that "…even when a host of other factors are controlled for, the quality of school facilities is an important predictor of retention/attrition" (Buckley, Schneider, & Shang, 2005, p. 1108). On average, school buildings in the United States are over forty

years old. Poor quality buildings can hinder teachers' abilities to teach, decrease morale, and jeopardize the health and safety of students and teachers. Two-thirds of teachers surveyed in Washington D.C. reported poor air quality in their schools. Twenty percent indicated lighting was inadequate and 70 percent reported that soundproofing was so inadequate that classroom and hallway noise interfered with instruction. Overall, the researchers found that poor quality teaching facilities had a greater effect on teacher attrition than did dissatisfaction with pay and that this effect was statistically significant (Buckley et al., 2005).

Summary

This chapter provided a review of the literature on teacher attrition. The review focused on three main areas. The first of these was the characteristics of teachers who stay, move, or leave including age and experience, ethnicity, gender, subject area and school level, and teacher quality. The most consistent finding is that young teachers in the beginning of their careers and experienced teachers nearing retirement age are most apt to leave. Those in the middle of their careers have the greatest rates of retention.

The second section looked at the reasons teachers move or leave. This section focused on compensation, school and student characteristics, and working conditions. Although much research supports a negative correlation between salary and attrition, more recent research indicates that working conditions may be the primary factor in teachers' career decisions. When teachers identified that their working conditions were acceptable, they were more satisfied with their salary. Teachers who were dissatisfied with the conditions in their schools were also more likely to be dissatisfied with their salaries. The category of working conditions is relatively new in the research and is in

need of more study to determine what components are most critical.

The final section looked at factors that increase teachers' chances of remaining in the classroom including teacher preparation, teacher induction programs, and improving working conditions. Traditional preparation programs appear to be more successful in retaining teachers than alternative routes. New teachers who participate in comprehensive induction programs are more likely to stay in teaching. Teachers who believe their principals are working on improving conditions in the school are more satisfied and less likely to leave.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the reasons teachers from one urban-suburban school system moved or left at the end of one school year. The qualitative case study method was chosen because although the issue of teacher attrition has been extensively studied using quantitative methods, few studies have examined the issue at the local level with the depth and richness achieved through qualitative research. Quantitative research methods use standardized measurements and instruments to answer specific questions and to provide general findings. Qualitative methods allow for the gathering of rich, detailed information and insight into subjects' perceptions and perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Patton, 1988). In this study, the qualitative case study method also allowed for the voices of the teachers who moved or left to be heard, which was critical to understanding the problem. As stated by Barritt (1986), "By heightening awareness and creating dialogue, it is hoped research can lead to better understanding of the way things appear to someone else and through that insight lead to improvements in practice" (p. 20).

The Setting

The Central City School System (CCSS) is located near a large, metropolitan city in the southeastern United States. CCSS was created in February of 1892, when its citizens voted in favor of a public school system for the city. The first schools opened in September of 1892 when approximately 700 students attended classes in four different

locations. Today, the school system serves approximately 8,000 students in grades K-12. The system features seven elementary schools, one elementary magnet school, one sixth grade academy, one middle school, one high school, and an alternative program. The student population of CCSS has declined by about 500 students in the past two years. Much of this decline can be attributed to redevelopment in the area. The city recently closed three large public housing complexes. These will eventually be replaced with middle to upper middle class housing.

All but one of the eleven CCSS schools qualifies for Title I services. To qualify for Title I services, a school's free or reduced lunch rate must be 35 percent or greater. Three schools in the system have over 75 percent of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch rates. The student body is 44 percent African American, 29 percent Latino, and 20 percent white. Approximately 20 percent of students speak English as a second language. The average pupil-teacher ratio for the 2006-2007 school year was 18 to 1. The per-pupil expenditure for the same year was $9,828. CCSS serves a highly mobile student population. The state department of education for CCSS defines mobility as the percentage of students who either enter or withdraw from school after September 1 of the school year. The mobility rates for each level are: 37 percent at elementary; 33 percent at middle; and 42 percent at the high school level.

CCSS employs approximately 1,250 individuals. Approximately 650 of these employees are certified teachers. Almost 66 percent of the system's certified staff have a Masters degree or higher. CCSS offers teachers a competitive salary and benefits package. Starting salary with a Bachelors degree for the 2006-2007 school year was approximately $38,000. Starting salary for those with a Masters degree was about

$44,000. At the time of the study, starting salary in CCSS was greater than all but four other systems in the same metropolitan area. When comparing salary for CCSS to that of other medium sized systems in the same area, the system's salary with a Masters degree and 10 years of experience is greater than all other comparably sized systems.

In addition to the competitive salary, the system has recently instituted a number of other policies to encourage teacher retention. The system has a formal teacher induction program. This program includes three days of orientation and training prior to the start of the school year as well as additional training that is specific to new teacher needs throughout the year. The system also has a strong mentoring program. Two individuals serve as system-wide mentors. Their sole responsibility is to work with new teachers by modeling lessons, observing instruction, assisting with classroom management and lesson planning, and offering specific professional learning. Each new teacher is also assigned a school mentor. This individual is another teacher in the same school who helps with lesson planning, offers support and encouragement, and provides school specific information.

The school system made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the second consecutive year in 2007. This means the system is no longer defined by the state as Needs Improvement. In 2007, all schools in the system made AYP for the first time. Only one school is currently labeled as Needs Improvement. Six of the elementary schools and the middle school have been recognized as Distinguished Schools. A Distinguished School is a Title I school that has made AYP for three or more consecutive years. The high school graduation rate for 2007 was approximately 79 percent, which is a six-point increase over the previous year's rate. SAT scores for high school students in

CCSS exceeded the state mean in Critical Reading, Math, and Writing by thirty-three points for a total score of 1510. CCSS has consistently ranked among the top 15 percent of public school systems nationally for the past several years and is home to four state Schools of Excellence and one National School of Excellence. A recent *Newsweek* magazine poll named the high school one of the best high schools in the nation, ranking it among the top five percent.

Although the system serves an urban population with high rates of poverty and mobility and high percentages of minority and English language learners, parent and community involvement in the schools is high. Over 90 percent of elementary parents attended biannual conferences during the 2006-2007 school year and nearly 89 percent of middle school parents attended conferences.

Some of the school system characteristics have been linked to higher rates of teacher attrition. One of these is the urban student population the system serves including high levels of poverty, high percentages of minority students, high rates of student mobility, and a significant population of English language learners. Conversely, some of the characteristics of the system have also been typically linked to lower rates of attrition. One of these is salary. Salaries in CCSS are comparable to or greater than surrounding systems. The system also has strong student achievement results and high levels of parent involvement which have both been associated with lower rates of teacher attrition. During the 2005-2006 school year, 15 percent of CCSS teachers either left the system for another teaching job or left the profession. The attrition rate for the 2006-2007 school year decreased to 13.1 percent. The statistics on attrition within the system take on greater significance when one looks at the individual schools. The lowest rate of attrition

for a school in CCSS at the end of the 2006-2007 school year was 2.5 percent at one school but was as high as 23 percent at another. Eight of the eleven schools had attrition rates between 12 and 16 percent. Although the system had previously collected survey data on teachers who left the system and some exit interviews were conducted during the 2005-2006 school year, there had not been a comprehensive effort in the past to interview all teachers who left the system until the 2006-2007 school year.

Research Design

I chose to examine the issue of teacher attrition in this study using the qualitative case study method. I chose this method to provide insight into the reasons why teachers left one school system at the end of the 2006-2007 school year. Although much quantitative data have been collected on teacher attrition, this case study allowed the problem to be explored in ways not possible with quantitative methods. According to Creswell (1998), "Conducting the case study provides a picture to help inform our practice or see unexplored details of the case" (p. 95). In order to provide this picture, the study included the collection of multiple sources of data to provide a more holistic view of the problem. The three sources of data I collected and analyzed included exit questionnaires, exit interviews, and in-depth interviews.

Exit Questionnaires

All teachers who resigned from CCSS in spring of 2007 were asked to complete an exit questionnaire (Appendix A). This questionnaire was created by the CCSS human resources department and had been used with exiting teachers for the past three years. The questionnaire is anonymous and provides general information about the teachers who are moving or leaving and the reasons for their decision. These movers and leavers

identify how long they have worked with CCSS and their most recent job category. They then select a primary and secondary reason for resigning from the system. The choices for the primary reason include the following: retirement, family, advanced study, non-renewal of contract, medical/health concerns, accepted position with other school system, reduction in force, failure to meet certification/HiQ requirements, career change/leaving profession, and resignation. The options for the secondary reason include the following: salary, benefits, workload, school climate, burnout, travel/work closer to home, moving from area, lack of parental support/student discipline, lack of administrative support, and maternity/paternity – raising children. The final question on the survey asks whether the subject would recommend CCSS as an employer to others in their field. I examined the exit questionnaires to gain some general information on who left the system and why.

Exit Interviews

The exit interview was used to provide those who were leaving the opportunity to discuss and detail why they were leaving the system (Appendix B). All teachers who resigned from CCSS at the end of the 2006-2007 school year were given the opportunity to participate in an exit interview. The two school system employees who work as system-wide mentors conducted the exit interviews. These two individuals work closely with teachers and have established trusting relationships. The exit interviews were anonymous, but for the purposes of this study, each survey was assigned a number that corresponded with a list I maintained in a secure, separate location. The exit interviews were designed to last approximately 15-20 minutes, but some individuals extended the length of the interview to 45 minutes. These interviews allowed participants the opportunity to share their reasons for leaving. Interviewers marked participants'

responses on a standard form and made general notes but did not tape record or transcribe responses. Exit interview participants were given the opportunity to write comments in support of their responses.

In addition to sharing why they made the decision to leave the system, participants were also given the opportunity to provide input on specific aspects of the system. Interviewees were asked to rate and comment on system services including new teacher orientation, training and staff development, communication within the system, and salary and benefits. They were also asked to rate and comment on issues specific to their school site such as the condition of their classroom, interruptions in the instructional day, workload, evaluation procedures, school schedule, student behavior, the grading system, and school climate. Participants were also interviewed about school-level administrative practices including support, modeling positive behaviors, treatment of staff, accessibility, handling of student discipline, and levels of staff autonomy. For the final section of the exit interview, teachers rated and commented on modifications that could influence them to return to CCSS. The items included were class size, paperwork, resources, planning time, parent and administrator support, and pay and benefits.

I analyzed the information from the exit interviews to gather more information on why teachers reported that they left the system and what they stated could have influenced them to return. In addition, I used the exit interview data to identify participants for the semi-structured interviews I conducted.

Semi-structured Interviews

The primary source of data collection for this study was the semi-structured interview (Appendix C). Although the documentation from exit questionnaires and exit

interviews provided general information on the reasons teachers reported they left the system, more detailed, narrative data were needed to provide a rich description of the phenomenon of teacher attrition. I gathered this type of data from 21 qualitative, semi-structured interviews of teachers who left the system. Smith and Smith (2006) state:

> Qualitative interview research enables inductive analysis; the interviews provide a detailed narrative, which allows the researcher to interpret and draw his/her own inferences. It allows the researcher to capture the perceived experiences of the people and interpret their stories, recognizing that the accounts were filtered through the researcher's concept of reality (p. 37).

Each interview lasted at least 45 minutes but many continued over an hour with some extending to 90 or 120 minutes. Interviews focused on why teachers made the decision to move to another system or to leave teaching and what could have been done to retain them. I personally conducted all of the semi-structured interviews.

Although I worked in the same school system as the teachers who were interviewed, all interviews occurred about six months after participants had resigned. All interview participants were assured confidentiality. Interviews were conducted at a location identified by each participant to ensure their level of comfort and confidentiality. Responses were kept confidential and completely anonymous. I used pseudonyms rather than names on study records. Participant names and other facts that could be used to identify individuals do not appear anywhere in the results of this study. Participants cannot be identified personally.

The semi-structured interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. All records

were kept private to the extent allowed by law. I used pseudonyms rather than any names on study records. I am the only person who had access to the information participants provided. The audio recordings of the interviews were kept in my home office in a locked filing cabinet. I transcribed the audio recordings of the interviews. The transcripts were stored on a password- and firewall-protected computer in my home office. Each individual transcript document was also password-protected. A hard copy of each transcript was kept in a locked filing cabinet at my home office. The key used to identify research participants was stored separately from the data to protect the privacy of participants. This key was stored on a jump-drive and was also password-protected. It was kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Participant names and other facts that might identify individuals will not appear when I present this study or publish its results.

Data from the exit questionnaires, exit interviews, and semi-structured interviews were used to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the reasons movers leave their current school or system? What are the reasons leavers exit the teaching profession? What are the similarities and differences between the reasons given by movers and leavers?
2. Why do movers move rather than leave? Why do leavers leave rather than move?
3. What do movers report could have been done to keep them in their current position? What do leavers report could have been done to keep them in the teaching profession? What are the similarities and differences between the reasons given by movers and leavers?

Participants

I chose to conduct the case study in CCSS for a number of reasons. First of all, as an employee in the system, I saw the problems resulting from teacher turnover. These included the difficulty finding suitable teachers to replace those leaving, the costs associated with recruiting and training new hires, and the negative impact on the organization when experienced teachers were continuously replaced by those with little to no experience. Secondly, the system had experienced a significant attrition rate, especially at some of its schools where the attrition rate was as high as 23 percent in 2006-2007. In addition, CCSS provided for a case that was both typical and atypical of systems suffering from problems of teacher attrition. It was typical of other systems with high teacher turnover in that it serves an urban population with high poverty, high percentages of minority students, high rates of student mobility, and a significant population of English language learners. It was atypical in that it is also considered a suburban school system on the outskirts of a large metropolitan area. Salaries in CCSS are comparable to or greater than surrounding systems. Higher salaries are generally tied to lower attrition rates. Community and parent support is also high.

My final reason for choosing CCSS to conduct the study was that since I had been employed in the system I had formed relationships with others that were integral in collecting the qualitative data for the semi-structured interviews. These relationships assisted me in identifying participants for the study and in establishing the trust necessary to get participants to speak openly and honestly in the interviews.

I conducted one-on-one interviews with 21 teachers who resigned their positions at the end of the 2006-2007 school year. I used purposeful sampling to identify these

individuals. All teachers leaving the school system at the end of the year were asked to participate in a system-sponsored exit interview. I used the results of the exit interviews to identify teachers who cited reasons for leaving that were specific to conditions in the school system or the teaching profession. The system had approximately 85 teachers leave at the end of the year. Some of these teachers left for reasons not appropriate for participation in the study such as retirement, non-renewal of contract, a family move to another geographic location, or a desire stay home to care for children.

Of the 85 teachers who left, I identified 63 teachers who made the personal decision to leave the system due to factors that could be attributed to specific conditions in the school system or the teaching profession. At the end of the 2006-2007 school year, I contacted these 63 teachers to offer them the opportunity to participate in the study and to request contact information that could be used to get in touch with them once the study was approved. Thirty-five teachers expressed a willingness and desire to participate in a semi-structured interview. Of these, I was able to contact and interview 21 of them once the study was approved.

These 21 participants who voluntarily resigned from the system due to factors attributed to specific conditions in the school system or the teaching profession allowed me to interview a large percentage of teachers who made the choice to leave. This number also made it possible to involve a variety of teachers in the study including those from all levels (elementary, middle, and high school); from a variety of subject areas; various ages and years of experience; and both genders.

The purposeful sampling used included a combination of criterion sampling and snowball or chain sampling. With criterion sampling I identified specific criteria and

then selected cases that met these (Creswell, 1998; Mertens, 2005). The criteria used to select participants for the semi-structured interviews were that they had identified specific conditions present in the school system, their school, or the teaching profession as their reasons for leaving. These included working conditions, workload, administrative support, salary, benefits, student discipline, parent support, or communication.

Snowball or chain sampling is used when key informants are able to recommend participants who would be critical to the study (Creswell, 1998; Mertens, 2005). I relied on this type of sampling when I discussed the exit interviews with the two individuals who conducted them. These individuals were able to flag participants for me who they were able to identify through the exit interview process as good candidates for the study. Good candidates were those who fit the criteria and who seemed to be willing to openly discuss their reasons for leaving.

Role of Researcher

The role of the researcher is critical in qualitative studies. As the researcher, I served as the primary research instrument in this qualitative case study. Data were filtered through me during both the interview and the data analysis processes. My own perceptions and experiences were meaningful to the study (LeCompte, Schensul, Weeks, & Singer, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My role as researcher was especially critical in this study for a number of reasons. I was not only an instrument in the study but I also had a relationship with the system being examined and with individuals who participated in the interviews. In addition, I also made the decision to quit teaching before the end of my first year in the classroom. These reasons made it especially important for me to

practice what LeCompte et al., (1999) call disciplined subjectivity: “Disciplined subjectivity is the practice of rigorous self-reflection about one’s own impact on the field, as well as how one’s preferences, prejudices, biases, hopes, and concerns affect the course and outcomes of research” (p. 67). I examined my own preferences, prejudices, and biases regularly throughout the study to ensure they did not lead the collection or analysis of the data. This was done through a journal I kept throughout the length of the study. One part of this journal included my own reflections on the decision I made to leave teaching 20 years ago. I also included member checks as part of the data collection and analysis. These member checks included the interview participants and my two key informants who conducted the exit interviews.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is a complex and continuous process (Creswell, 1998; Mertens, 2005; Stake, 1995). The purpose of data analysis is to reduce the data into more manageable and meaningful forms so patterns and themes can be discovered (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). The process of analyzing the data commenced as soon as I began collecting it. The first pieces of data I collected were the exit questionnaires and exit interviews. I organized and coded this information using both the inductive and deductive processes described by LeCompte and Schensul (1999).

I used the deductive process to identify data linked to primary reasons previous studies had determined that teachers leave or move each year. These reasons were broken into two main categories, those that were related and those unrelated to school, system, or teaching conditions. The motives related to school, system, or teaching conditions included workload, administrative support, salary and benefits, student

discipline, parent support, communication, and the demographics of the student population. The reasons unrelated to the school system or teaching conditions included retirement, medical or health concerns, moving, long commute, maternity/paternity or child raising, non-renewal of contract, reduction in force, or failure to meet certification requirements.

I used the inductive process to identify new themes and patterns in the data from exit questionnaires and exit interviews. This process was used specifically to analyze the responses to questions that had participants rate and comment on specific aspects of the system and their individual school sites. I attended carefully to the comments listed to determine patterns of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the system and individual schools as strong feelings of dissatisfaction can influence an individual's decision to stay or leave. Any patterns I found in areas of satisfaction or dissatisfaction were included in the semi-structured interviews so I could further probe these areas.

The semi-structured interviews were my primary source of data collection and provided the rich description necessary to answer the study's research questions. For the interviews, I used the constant comparative method of analyzing the data. Constant comparative data analysis is a method where the data are coded into emerging themes or patterns. The data are constantly revisited and reanalyzed until no new themes or patterns emerge (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this study I used a combination of the data analysis spiral described by Creswell (1998) and the three levels detailed by Stainback and Stainback (1988).

This data analysis process began with the first semi-structured interview. While conducting, transcribing, and reading each interview, I reflected on patterns and

impressions. Since this portion of the data analysis was inductive in nature, the patterns and themes emerged from the data rather than being generated in advance. I then began taking notes on the patterns and developing basic codes. As more data were collected and the patterns and themes became clearer, I began describing, classifying, and interpreting the data (Creswell, 1998). Description involved writing down what was heard, seen, and discovered. This type of thick description created a narrative that helped "to create a portrayal of the soul and heart of a group, community, organization, or culture" (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 17). These descriptions helped to define the context of the case study. Classifying the data involved taking the information or text apart and reducing it so patterns, themes, concepts, and categories became apparent (Creswell, 1998; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; Stainback & Stainback, 1988). The interpretation helped to make sense of the information and formed the bigger picture of what was happening (Creswell, 1998).

Through the process of describing and classifying the data I began to create codes for more in-depth analysis of the data. According to LeCompte and Schensul (1999), "Codes are names or symbols used to stand for a group of similar items, ideas, or phenomena that the researcher has noticed in his or her data set" (p. 55). I transcribed all interviews and coded them by phrases, sentences, paragraphs, or whole sections. A codebook was developed to ensure that codes remained consistent and established a clear decision-making path (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). While coding, I made notes as to how decisions were made and what questions arose. All interviews were read multiple times in order to continue to look for similarities, differences, new categories or themes, and any gaps in the data (Stainback & Stainback, 1988).

The coded data from all data sources, semi-structured interviews, exit interviews, and exit questionnaires were organized in within and across case data displays (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These visual representations assisted with the structural or constitutive analysis described by LeCompte and Schensul (1999). This process involved linking data together and finding relationships among themes and patterns. This led to the final interpretation of the data and the answering of the three research questions.

Verification

It is critical that qualitative researchers have planned means for verifying the results of their studies. I used three different means to verify the results. These included member checks, peer debriefing, and triangulation.

Member checks are considered to be the most important means of verifying qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Creswell (1998) the process of member checking "involves taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account" (p. 203). I engaged in two types of member checking. The first of these involved the participants of the semi-structured interviews. Once the interviews were completed and transcribed I sent a copy to the individual participants via email or postal mail to ask for any additions, deletions, or clarifications in their interviews. Two participants sent me additional information that they realized after the interview they should have shared with me. The other participants either stated they did not have any additions or changes or did not respond.

I also relied on the two individuals in the school system who conducted the exit interviews for member checking. These two individuals interviewed nearly all teachers

who left the system at the end of the year. Both likely formed their own ideas of why teachers left and what they system could have done to retain them. Throughout the analysis of the data, I met with these two individuals on three occasions to share with them information on the themes and patterns that emerged and the interpretations and conclusions I drew from the data. Although neither of these individuals participated in the study, their knowledge on the subject and their relationships with the participants assisted me in verifying the accuracy of my interpretations and conclusions.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) define peer debriefing as "a process of exposing oneself to disinterested peers in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (p. 295). I relied on a peer who had knowledge of and experience with qualitative research design to expose my thought processes, data analysis, descriptions, and interpretations of the data. This individual pushed me to explain and justify my processes and procedures and challenged me to verify my findings.

Triangulation involves using multiple methods or sources of data to provide for consistency or corroboration of evidence (Creswell, 1998; Mertens, 2005). This study collected data from three sources: exit questionnaire, exit interviews, and semi-structured interviews. I analyzed data from 85 exit questionnaires, 76 exit interviews, and 21 semi-structured interviews. Each source of data collection was used to reveal consistent patterns and to corroborate my findings.

Summary

In this chapter I presented the research methodology for the study including descriptions of the participants, the data collection processes, the processes of analyzing

and verifying the data. This study utilized the case study method in order to collect descriptive data on why teachers resigned from one urban-suburban school system at the end of the 2006-2007 school year. Although a number of collection methods were used, the primary source was the qualitative, semi-structured interview. Through these interviews I collected the stories of teachers who made the decision to leave the school system.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of the research study. The intent of this study was to develop an understanding of why teachers in one school system transferred from the district or left the teaching profession. Three types of data were collected: exit questionnaires, exit interviews, and semi-structured interviews. The study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the reasons teachers identified as movers report they left their current school or system? What are the reasons teachers identified as leavers report they left the teaching profession? What are the similarities and differences between the reasons leavers and movers cite for their decisions?
2. Why do movers move rather than leave? Why do leavers leave rather than move?
3. What do movers report could have been done to keep them in their position? What do leavers report could have been done to keep them in the teaching profession? What are the similarities and differences between what movers and leavers cite could have been done to keep them from moving or leaving?

Participants

I collected exit interview and exit survey data on 85 teachers who left CCSS at the end of the 2006-2007 school year. Of these, 27 were leavers and 58 were identified as movers. I then conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 21 teachers who left

the school system. Of these, seven had left the teaching profession and 14 had moved to teach in other school systems. Two of the movers moved to teach in private schools and the remaining 12 moved to another public school system. Each of the 21 individuals I interviewed seemed to be very open and honest with his/her responses. A few of the interviews became emotional with participants expressing anger or sadness or both. All had specific reasons for leaving and were able to make suggestions on how the system could retain more teachers in the future. Table 1 below provides some brief information on each of the semi-structured interview participants.

Table 1

Semi-structured Interview Participants

Name	**Mover or Leaver**	**Length of time in CCSS**	**Grade Level/ Subject Taught**	**Main Reason for Leaving**
Mary	Leaver	16 years	Elementary	Time on the job interfered with family
Meredith	Leaver	1 year	Middle school Spanish	Lack of administrative support and materials
Sue	Leaver	< 1 year	Elementary	Lack of administrative support
Alexa	Leaver	6.5 years	Elementary	Lack of administrative support
Beth	Leaver	7 years	Middle school Science	Lack of support with student discipline and lack of concern for certain groups of students
Frank	Leaver	11 years	High school Math	Lack of administrative support
Iris	Leaver	19 years	Elementary	Workload and lack of administrative support

Semi-structured Interview Participants

Name	Mover or Leaver	Length of time in CCSS	Grade Level Subject Taught	Main Reason for Leaving
Priti	Mover	7 years	Elementary	Concern for anticipated workload
Kevin	Mover	6 years	High school Math	Looking for greater freedom to teach
Clay	Mover	1 year	Elementary	Lack of administrative support
Steven	Mover	8 years	High school English	Seeking an administrative position
Marta	Mover	1 year	Middle school Science	Lack of administrative support
Gwen	Mover	10 years	Elementary	Seeking an administrative position
Jennifer	Mover	1 year	Middle school Language arts	Lack of administrative support
Ari	Mover	6 years	Elementary	Frequently moved against her will to other schools
Shawni	Mover	19 years	Elementary	Lack of administrative support
Ivy	Mover	1 year	Elementary	Student discipline and lack of administrative support
Rosa	Mover	4 years	Middle school Math	Tense work environment
Sara	Mover	7 years	High school Special education	Unsubstantiated accusation of improper behavior
Rey	Mover	4 years	Elementary	Workload

Why Teachers Move or Leave

The data I collected indicated that teachers made the decision to move or leave for a variety of reasons. The results from the study verify findings from many of the previous studies and contradict others. The most commonly cited reasons teachers in this study decided to move or leave included administrative support, time and workload, student discipline, and the desire to seek new opportunities. A lack of administrative support was the most commonly cited reason teachers decided to leave CCSS as evidenced in all three types of data collected. It was also the factor that appeared to interact most closely with other common reasons teachers cited for moving from the system or leaving the profession. Teachers included in the study frequently made statements that linked a lack of administrative support to student discipline, time, workload, new initiatives, communication, and school climate. Figure 1 on the next page shows how these various factors are linked in this study.

Administrative Support

Administrative support was consistently noted as an influential factor in teachers' decisions to leave CCSS. In the exit questionnaires, 17 percent of participants noted that a lack of administrative support factored into their decision. Large percentages also indicated other factors that are often influenced by school administrators including workload (25%), school climate (22%), and student discipline (19%). The issue of student discipline was most closely linked to administrative support through numerous written comments. One survey participant commented, "Seeking employment elsewhere because unhappy with administration and lack of support with student discipline." Another wrote, "Better discipline support from administration. They shouldn't call the

parent of a child who has just thrown a chair across the room and send them back to class."

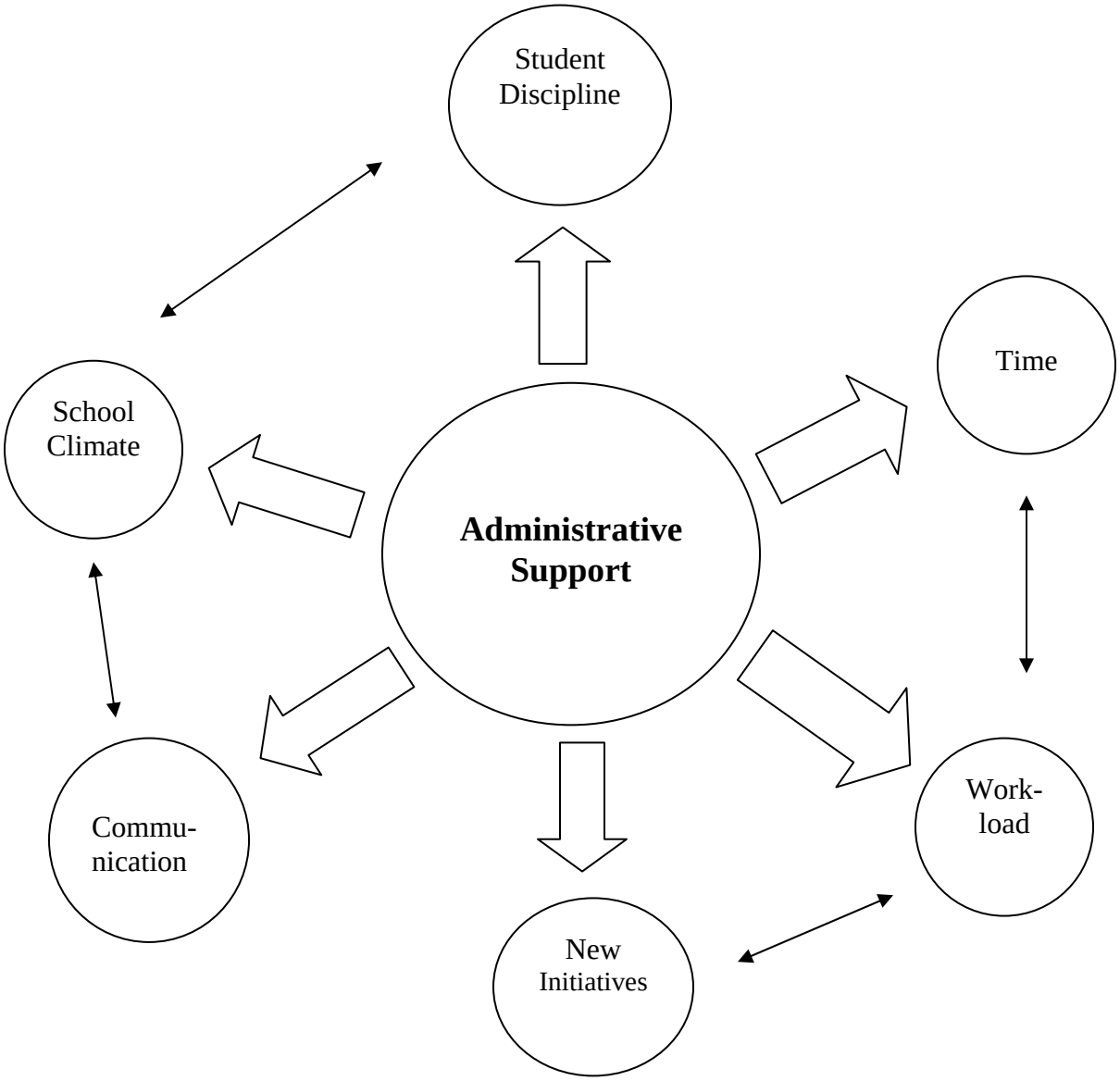

Figure 1. Factors Affected by Administrative Support.

Teachers' perceptions of their administrators and the support they received from them were dominant factors in both the exit and semi-structured interviews that contributed to their decisions to leave the system. As stated by Sue, "I was not so much

leaving my job as I was leaving my boss. I just couldn't take it anymore." Sue taught fourth grade for less than a year before leaving the profession. She was hired after the start of the year to open a new fourth grade classroom in a school that had more students than expected. Her classroom was a combination of students who had started the year with various fourth grade teachers in the school. Although she was told that the selection of students who were moved into her classroom was random, she felt that she had a disproportionately high number of students with behavior and learning problems. She had twice as many male students than female students. Six of the students were in special education and seven were receiving ESOL services. None of her students were in the gifted program. Because she was hired after the start of the school year, she did not attend new teacher orientation and did not get a formal orientation to her school. She learned processes and procedures as she went along and usually after she did things incorrectly the first time. Sue felt overwhelmed all of the time and never felt that she was able to really handle her class. She stated that she did not feel supported by her grade level team or by her administrators. Although she was assigned a mentor, she rarely saw her and only received information or assistance when she asked for it. Sue expressed a great deal of sadness and anger as she believed that she had given up a dream she had strived for most of her life.

Administrative support was also a common theme in the exit interviews with both movers and leavers. Although a few participants spoke positively about the support they received from administrators in the building, the majority of the interviewees attributed their decision to move or leave to a lack of support. Most of the participants who spoke positively were individuals who were moving or leaving due to circumstances other than

dissatisfaction with their current position. These individuals' decisions were based on a move away from the area, a sick child or parent to care for, a spouse's transfer to another area, or a chance at a new or better opportunity. Many of the comments from these individuals reinforced how important supportive administrators are to teachers. One leaver who was moving from the area for her husband's job and staying home to raise children stated, "My administrators are very supportive. If I come back to CCSS I would not accept a position where the administrators were not as supportive." Another teacher who followed her husband's job transfer out of state and who planned to return to teaching in the new area commented, "My principal and assistant principal have been extremely supportive and wonderful to work for. They both expect a lot, however, they give you the tools and support to do so in the way that is best for you." This comment clarifies how important administrative support is. This teacher acknowledged that her administrators held high expectations for teachers but that along with these expectations came the support and tools to fulfill them. This implies that teachers do not mind working hard if they feel supported.

The importance of administrative support for movers and leavers was a strong and consistent theme in the semi-structured interviews. Two teachers, Kevin and Gwen, expressed the difficulty they had leaving CCSS because they enjoyed such positive support from their administrators. Kevin was a high school math teacher who had worked at the high school in CCSS for six years. He entered the teaching profession later in life after serving as a lawyer for a number of years. During his time as a lawyer he served as a mentor to students who were considered to be potential dropouts. He worked in a high school during the day helping students with their homework and mentoring

them. Two years later he went back to school to get his education degree. He decided to move from his public high school in CCSS to a highly regarded private school. He was heavily recruited by this school for a number of months and he finally took them up on their offer mostly because they promised him greater freedom to teach. During the interview he expressed frustration with the standardized state curriculum and the inability to tailor curriculum to meet the needs of his students. In his new position, he has the freedom to do that. Although Kevin believed strongly that he was making the best decision for himself, he struggled with making the move because of the strong administrative support he received at the school he was leaving. He stated:

> This was the most difficult decision I had to make-exceedingly difficult. It was easily the most painful thing I have had to go through professionally-easily. For about a week and a half I couldn't sleep. I was just overly involved in everything because I did not want to think about it so much. I found sometimes as I was walking down the hallway of the school, thinking about it, my knees got weak. It was tough because I had three good options, my current school and these two other private schools. It was so hard because I knew I would be leaving a great thing. My school principal believed so strongly in my profession and me and I didn't know if I would get that where I was going. The support from administrators, especially the principal, at [the high school] was amazing. She believes in children and teachers and that is what she bases every decision on. Her integrity and the respect and support she gives teachers are top-notch. Her support for me and what I did is what made my decision extra difficult to

> make-very difficult. I knew from talking to others that you don't find that in all schools.

Moving to another school was a very difficult decision for Kevin to make, but when he compared the two options, he realized that the opportunity was too great to pass up.

Gwen taught elementary school in CCSS for ten years before deciding to move to a neighboring system. Gwen had not initially planned to teach. She left college after her first two years and joined the workforce. She returned to college to get her teaching degree in elementary education after about five years. She accepted the offer to work in CCSS because it was close to her home and she liked the smaller size of the system. Gwen eventually returned to school to earn her degree in administration. Although she enjoyed working for CCSS, she did not feel she would be offered a position in administration within the system because of its small size and lack of administrative openings each year. She also noted that the system seemed to place a priority on advancing males and minority teachers into administrative positions more quickly than white females. Nevertheless, like Kevin, Gwen found it hard to leave the system because of the administrative support she received at her school:

> I never thought I would leave CCSS. I had very positive experiences there and learned so much from my principal. She was wonderful. She was very supportive and gave me many opportunities to be a leader in the school. Anything I wanted to try, she would allow me to, and she always was offering her suggestions and her help. She really listened to teachers and fought to make things better for us. She worked to buffer us from some of the demands of central office and I know there were things that

teachers in other schools were having to do that she did not make us do because it would take too much of our time. I hope I get to be a principal like her one day.

Although both Kevin and Gwen had positive experiences with the support from their administrators, the majority of participants in the semi-structured interviews spoke frequently and emotionally about the lack of administrative support and what some of them perceived to be not just a lack of support but intentional harassment by school or system administrators. Again, the lack of administrative support was linked closely to other factors.

Administrative support is a complex term. This was evident in the many ways teachers referred to this support through their comments from both the exit interviews and the semi-structured interviews. Some identified administrative support to be how visible administrators were and how often they were in their rooms. A number of teachers equated administrative support with whether or not they felt empowered, their voices were heard, or their opinions were acknowledged. Others had stories of unfounded accusations, unfair practices, and self-defined harassment that they identified as being a lack of support. Still others felt the lack of administrative support was reflected in the ways administrators handled student discipline, parent complaints, and the use of teacher time.

Administrator Visibility.

Whether or not administrators were visible and available was an important factor to teachers who made the decision to move or leave. Gwen, who moved from CCSS to pursue a future leadership opportunity in a larger system, stated, “As a teacher who

worked with this principal here and at another school, I know she values her time with children and teachers in their classrooms. This is important to me and when I interviewed for my new position, I looked for a principal like her-one who showed respect for the work of teachers." Gwen continued to acknowledge that she knew there were times her principal was overwhelmed with paperwork and other tasks which made her visibility that much more important. Her principal was willing to put her work on hold to show her support for her staff. Gwen also stated that as she interviewed for positions, she asked the principal or other teachers about the school administrators' visibility and that this played a large part in her decision to take her current job. More often than not, the comments concerning the visibility and availability of administrators were negative and numerous teachers stated that this contributed to their decisions to move or leave.

A number of movers and leavers commented on the fact that their administrators' doors were often closed, even when the administrator stated that he or she had an open door policy. In an exit interview one mover stated:

> I rarely ever saw my principal's door open. If I needed to see her, I had to make an appointment with the secretary. Often it would be many days before there was time on her schedule to see me. I just quit going to her when I needed something.

Another mover commented in the exit interview, "My principal's open door policy was a joke among the staff. The only time that door opened was when she got there in the morning and when she left in the afternoon-usually before all the teachers left."

In her semi-structured interview, Sara spoke angrily about the lack of visibility from her administrators. Sara's last position in CCSS was teaching special education. She was attracted to the system because of its small size and she believed a smaller system would have less bureaucracy. She first came to CCSS as an administrator but decided to return to the classroom three years ago to teach special education. She expressed great passion for her special education students and wished she had not felt compelled to move from CCSS to another system. She moved from the system due to issues at the school and system level. She contended that the administrators at the school interacted so infrequently with the staff that they did not know the teachers' names. She continued on to say that the administrators rarely greeted teachers when they were out in the building and she believed that was because the administrators were not sure who they were: teacher, parent, or volunteer. Sara also claimed she did not even see the administrator who observed her for her annual observation in her classroom. She stated:

> He [assistant principal] was new last year-just an idiot. So do you know what my observation was, my professional observation? It was me standing at the board and teaching geometry and explaining angles in a geometry class. I never, ever, went to the board and wrote anything on it. The whole observation he wrote up never happened. He never came in to see me teach and certainly didn't see me teach that lesson. I team taught in the geometry class. I was not the main teacher and only went around helping my students with the lessons. I never taught the lesson to the class. My observation was an utter, complete lie-an utter complete lie.

At mid-year Sara was called into a meeting with several district administrators including the human resources director. At that time, she was accused of having an inappropriate relationship with a parent. She made her decision to find another position in another system after that meeting. The inappropriate relationship accusations were not substantiated.

Shawni also expressed strong concern for the lack of administrator visibility. Shawni spent 19 years teaching in CCSS. Her first 18 years were spent between three elementary schools teaching first, third, and fourth grades and gifted education. After 12 years at her second school, she decided she was ready for a new challenge and transferred to another elementary school in the system to teach fifth grade. After the first three weeks she was involuntarily moved into a gifted position within the school as the principal was unable to hire a certified gifted teacher to fill the open position. Shawni had been looking forward to being a homeroom teacher again with her own class. She was disappointed to be moved away from her class of students but was familiar with the gifted program so she knew she would adjust. Shawni had considerable conflict with her co-worker in the gifted program and felt she was under constant scrutiny by her principal. Her relationship with both grew more stressful as the year progressed.

At times, Shawni did not know if she would make it through the year. Her principal often became angry to the point of yelling at staff, including Shawni, and did not lend any support in the ongoing conflict with Shawni's co-worker. After the Christmas break, she decided to resign at the end of the school year. The only time Shawni saw her principal was during meetings. These meetings were typically very

negative with the principal confronting the staff on what was not being done correctly. Shawni stated,

> Every couple of weeks we had a faculty meeting. We all knew we were in trouble when we had a meeting because the only times we had meetings was when something was wrong. What none of us could figure out was how she knew what was wrong since she was never in our classrooms or out in the building. We began to believe that some others were spies for her because we knew she never saw anything herself. The teachers began to become very distrustful of each other. Someone had to be passing her information.

She continued on to reflect that if the principal had taken the time to come out of her office she would have been able to see all the wonderful things that were happening and be able to give staff and students some positive feedback. Shawni made it clear that positive feedback and interactions were important to her and that she sought both in her new position. For a period of time at her last school in CCSS there had been rumors that the school might get a new principal for the next year. If that had happened Shawni stated that she would not have left.

Communication.

Closely related to administrator visibility was communication with and from school administrators. Communication in this context is not limited to the passing of information but also includes teacher voice and whether or not teachers were allowed to express opinions without fear of reprisal. A number of teachers spoke of their frustrations with poor communication from administrators. Some complained that

questions were not answered and emails did not receive responses. Others grew frustrated with getting information and directions at the last minute because administrators were unorganized.

Mary had taught elementary school for 16 years and spent the majority of this time in three schools in CCSS. She left the profession once before to raise her two children but returned after eight years. Her decision to leave this time was also, in part, based on the needs of her family. Her mother passed away during the 2006-2007 school year and extensive work had to be done to finalize her estate. In addition, her special needs son started his senior year during the 2007-2008 school year and required her support in order to graduate on time. Although the needs of her family played a part in her decision, she made it clear that recent changes in the teaching profession and at her particular school required increased commitments of her time and energy. She believed she would not be able to balance the needs of her family and the requirements of her teaching position. She indicated that she hoped to return to teaching in the future but would prefer to work at a different school. Mary believed that her administrators' lack of organization and time management interfered with her own time as communication was frequently last minute:

> …it is so much more now because neither [the principal] nor [the assistant principal] know how to plan ahead or manage anything so they are always trying to play catch-up. We get all information last minute so if you had something planned with your family, forget it, now you have to do this other thing.

The primary reason Mary left the profession was to spend more time with her family. She claimed she consistently worked 11 hours a day and often this was because she received communication about paperwork, meetings, or tasks from the administration with little notice. She directly attributed this to the administration at her last school as the problem did not exist with the previous administrative team.

Jennifer also complained about getting information at the last minute and often via email. Jennifer taught middle school language arts for one year in CCSS before deciding to resign and seek a position in another system. She came to CCSS with 18 years of prior experience in education. She was attracted to CCSS specifically because of the diversity of the student population. Her previous teaching experiences had been with high poverty, high minority student populations and she felt most successful working with these students. She made the decision to move out of CCSS because she believed she was being harassed by the principal at her school. She was frequently observed without feedback and was often called into the principal's office to be reprimanded for a variety of issues. She did not feel she had support from her principal and believed her principal was looking for a way to get rid of her. She was often in tears when she left meetings with her administrators and then had to return to class. Jennifer submitted her letter of resignation in November for the end of the school year in the hope that she could finish the year with fewer conflicts with her principal.

One of the issues that Jennifer was reprimanded for a number of times was not sending information to the principal on time when the request came through email. Often the requests that came through email were asking for information within the same school day. Jennifer did not often have time to check email during the day as her planning

period was first thing in the morning. She did not feel like she needed to take time from her students to check email throughout the day and respond with information that would take time away from her classes to gather and report. She and a number of other interviewees complained about an over-reliance on email as the main means of communicating with school staff members. Many expressed a desire for more direct contact and meetings as a way of improving communication. Others felt that more personal contacts and group meetings would have allowed teachers to voice their opinions and have their voices heard by the group.

Not having a voice in the school was a concern many teachers expressed throughout their exit and semi-structured interviews. Others had avenues for expressing their opinions but often their opinions were either not acknowledged with action or those expressing their opinions received reprisals from administration. Many teachers made statements in their exit interviews about frustrations with their opinions not being heard. These statements included the following: “Teachers’ opinions were not valued or considered even though it is an open door policy at the school”; “I feel comfortable vocalizing my concerns but wish there was more follow-through from administration”; and “Concerns were listened to but not followed up on or taken seriously”. As frustrating as it was for teachers to feel ignored, it was sometimes worse when action was taken by administrators.

One mover stated in the exit interview that, “There is always a fear of being called into the office when you make a comment or give your opinion which is a very negative experience and then it lowers staff morale.” Another maintained, “Administration was not supportive when staff voiced their opinion. Staff was called into the office when

voicing their opinion. This made everyone feel like they could not express themselves. You just did what you were told to do."

Alexa made her decision to leave the profession after being called into her principal's office after voicing her opinion at a meeting. Alexa began teaching at an elementary school in CCSS in the middle of the year about six and one-half years ago. Although her first year was tough, she loved the students she worked with and the other members of her grade level team. During the time that Alexa taught in the system, the administration at her school changed. She did not feel that teachers at the school were supported by the new administration and reported that although the administrators claimed to have an open door policy, they were rarely visible or available. The administrators rarely visited the classrooms and the students often did not know who the administrators were when they saw them. Alexa made the decision to resign after she was called into the principal's office and reprimanded after expressing her opinion in a faculty meeting. Alexa stated:

> I made my decision to leave in October. We were in an in-service meeting and I guess I spoke my mind and asked-it was-I guess it was pretty early in the year, and I just, I mean it was great information in the in-service and everything, but I just happened to ask, 'When are we going to have time to implement all this stuff? Whatever happened to teacher workdays when we could actually work together to actually, you know, work on implementing all this wonderful information we keep getting fed and don't have time to put into play?' And then I was called into the principal's office and was told that I was being disrespectful and unprofessional

> because I asked the question. She was actually yelling at me and pointing at me. She said I had no right to question why we were doing something. I was pointed at and it made me very, very uncomfortable. I bawled my eyes out the whole time.

Rosa had a similar story. Rosa entered the teaching profession later in life after a successful career in the corporate world. Rosa grew up poor and attributed her success to her parents and her teachers. She wanted to be able to give back by becoming a teacher herself. She taught middle school math for four years with CCSS. Although Rosa related well to the students in her classes, she often had conflict with other adults in the building, especially the administration. Rosa was outspoken during her years with CCSS and often openly disagreed with policies and procedures that influenced the education of her students. She acknowledged that although she did not always handle these disagreements with tact, she did not feel she needed to offer any apologies. Rosa expressed a strong belief in the power of education to transform students' lives and implied that she would always fight against decisions or behaviors that hindered the educational process. She grew increasingly frustrated with complacency from teachers and administrators in reaching the neediest students in the school. Her candidness in confronting others resulted in increasing tension, scrutiny, and feelings of isolation. Rosa wanted to move to another middle school to escape the situation. Since the system had only one middle school, she made the decision to transfer to another system. Rosa told a story similar to Alexa's after asking a question about what the school was going to do about student discipline issues. She was also called into the principal's office. Rosa recounted:

> I asked the question and I immediately knew I was in trouble. Everything got silent and my principal just looked at me. It became very uncomfortable for everyone. She did not even acknowledge that I spoke, just ended the meeting. I worried all night about what would happen--couldn't even fall asleep. The next morning she called me in to her office first thing. She asked me why I was trying to give everyone the impression that the school had a problem with behavior and why I wasn't supporting the school. Her eyes were on fire and she was very angry. She said if I was having a problem with discipline in my class that was my problem and I needed to fix it. I held it together in her office but began crying as I walked down the hall. I did not feel I could continue to teach there for one more minute. That is when I began looking for another job.

Those who were reprimanded for speaking out were not the only ones who felt the repercussions. Others also felt the tension in the work environment.

Meredith taught middle school Spanish for one year before making the decision to leave the profession. She entered the teaching profession later in life after she stayed at home for a number of years raising her children. When her youngest child started preschool, she started working at the school. The private preschool then asked her if she would be interested in teaching Spanish since she was fluent in the language. She enjoyed it so much she made the decision to return to college to earn her teaching degree and become a certified teacher. After six years of school, work, and raising her family, she earned her degree. A special technology program for students attracted Meredith to CCSS. Her first year was difficult as the program was new and certain aspects were not

fully developed. She began the year with no materials and little support. She expressed a desire to leave prior to the end of the year but decided to fulfill her commitment and remained in her position until the end of the school year. At the time of the interview, she had no desire to return to teaching. For Meredith, the tense climate in her school from others being chastised for speaking out was not the deciding factor but figured into her decision to leave. She stated:

> Maybe if all those things had been in place possibly I would have given it another year. I don't know though. I just did not care for the environment, the climate, of that particular building. People were always on edge because the administration was not supportive and could be rather mean. I heard about people getting called in and yelled at if they said anything or complained about anything. People were written up for every little thing. It was a tough situation.

A number of interview participants attributed similar negative interactions to a poor climate or work environment within some of the school buildings. A school's climate was linked to administrative support numerous times in both exit and semi-structured interviews.

School Climate.

A school's climate or work environment is closely related to the conditions within which teachers teach and students learn. Climates are generally referred to as positive or negative. Many factors can affect a school's climate such as parent involvement, student discipline, the workload, communication, and time to complete the job. Again, many of

these factors are under the auspices of the school principal. (Futernick, 2007; Hirsch, Emerick, Church & Fuller, 2007)

School climate was a predominant factor teachers named as contributing to their decision to leave or move on the exit survey. On the survey, 22 percent of respondents said school climate influenced their decision to leave the school system. Teachers who participated in the exit and semi-structured interviews also spoke frequently about the influence of school climate on their decision to move or leave at the end of the school year. In some cases, school climate was more important than other factors such as salary and long commutes. As stated by a mover in an exit interview, "I will be taking a pay cut to go to another system, but I will be looking for a positive working environment." Another commented, "I could handle my long commute if I was happier at work, felt appreciated, and had a better climate to work in."

In most cases, the negative climate was attributed to the treatment of staff by the administration. One example from a participant in an exit interview was, "Morale is low because we are constantly shot down. I feel under the microscope because every negative detail is noticed and commented on and sent to everyone. There isn't a positive balance in this school." In schools where principals were reported to call teachers in to reprimand them, teachers spoke frequently about the negative climate of their schools. Participants in the semi-structured interviews spoke frequently about school climate and the negative influence the climate had on them mentally, emotionally, and physically. Clay is one example of this.

Clay came to CCSS with three years of teaching experience in a small system in the Midwest. He taught elementary school for one year in CCSS before deciding to move

to a private school. He knew he would make considerably less money at his new school but felt that it was worth it because he believed he would have much greater administrative support at his new school. The main reasons he made the decision to move from CCSS were the overwhelming workload, inability to voice teacher opinions or concerns without reprisal, a negative school climate, and poor administrative handling of student discipline. Clay reported that he hated coming to school and felt sick to his stomach everyday before entering the building. He knew he would move to another school or another system at the beginning of September and began actively looking for a new job in January. Clay recalled the feelings he had driving to work each morning in CCSS:

> The morale of my school was so low it wasn't even funny. I hated coming to school in the mornings. I hated waking up in the morning. I hated waking up and driving to the job. When I would pull into the school's parking lot, I was like, not again. I would be sick to my stomach. I couldn't take the negativity anymore. I couldn't take the fear I felt anymore.

Other teachers also reported the ill effects of a negative climate. One reported having to go on medication for anxiety and depression because she was surrounded by negativity all day. Others lost considerable amounts of weight from the stress of trying to satisfy their administrators and to keep from getting written up or criticized. Marta's doctor warned her that she could either quit her job or risk losing her life.

Marta taught middle school science for one year in CCSS before making the decision to move to another system. She came to the system with five years of teaching

experience in another state. She had two job offers when she first came to CCSS. She took the position for a grade level she had never taught and wished she had listened to her gut and accepted the other position. She believed she would not have left CCSS if she had taken the other position which would have placed her at another school. She did not feel supported by the administrators in her school when it came to student discipline issues, parent complaints, or the workload. She began to suffer physically and emotionally from the stress. She knew she would have to take a cut in pay to go somewhere else but felt that if she could get her health back to normal it would be worth it. Marta suffered from diabetes and the stress of trying to perform her job in such a negative environment put her health at serious risk. Marta recounted one of her visits with her doctor:

> One Thursday I saw my doctor and he told me how bad my blood sugars were. Things were not in good shape. He told me that I was threatening all kinds of health issues. He warned that I was at risk of damaging my kidneys so badly that I would never be able to have kids. I said to myself, 'You know what, the decision is made. It is not worth it. Decision made.' I knew I had to get out of that environment. That is when I began looking for another job.

A negative climate contributed greatly to teachers' decisions to leave the system. One participant stated in the exit interview, "I will never come back to this school. I would prefer a different place to work. One with a more positive climate."

Student Discipline.

Another factor that was frequently mentioned and that has been found in previous studies as contributing to teachers' reasons for moving or leaving was student discipline. The critical piece of information I discovered in my research was that it was rarely student discipline that was the factor in an individual's decision, rather it was how administration handled the discipline problems. Ivy is one example of this.

Ivy taught for one year in CCSS before moving to a system closer to her home. Ivy, like many of the interviewees, grew up knowing she wanted to be a teacher. She was a successful student in school and loved her teachers. She always wanted to be like the teachers who taught her. One challenge Ivy faced in CCSS was that the school she was hired to teach in was very different from the elementary school she attended and from the school where she completed her student teaching. It was much larger and the student population was substantially more diverse and less affluent. She struggled to adjust from the image she had of being a teacher to the reality of her position. She had difficulty with classroom management and often found herself in tears feeling incompetent at the end of the day. Ivy asked for help from her mentor and her administrators but felt like she did not receive the support she needed. She rarely saw her administrators and they came to her classroom infrequently. When Ivy sent students to the office, they were often returned to her classroom with few consequences for their behavior. Ivy tried to reach out to parents but found little support there as well. She resigned at the end of the year and applied in a school system further north of CCSS. She expressed great relief at finding a position that more closely paralleled her school experiences.

Ivy reported she was leaving because of the discipline problems she encountered in her classroom. Ivy admitted that she had difficulty relating to her students and forming a bond with her class. She did not know how to handle her students' behavior and often felt she did not have the strategies to reach them. Initially, Ivy was afraid to ask for assistance from the administrators in her school but she finally got to a point where she felt she could not take it any longer. Although her principal gave her some tips, she put full responsibility for getting the class together on Ivy's shoulders. When Ivy sent students to the office, they rarely received significant consequences and were often returned to her classroom shortly after the incident. Ivy believed that sent a message to the other students in her class that they could get away with their misbehavior and their behaviors continued to get worse. Ivy made the decision to look for another job the day she broke down in tears in front of her class.

The administrator's handling of student discipline was mentioned a number of times by both movers and leavers in exit interviews. Some comments made during the interviews included: "I would be willing to take a 25 percent pay cut to have administrators and parents who supported student discipline"; "Student behavior at my school was fair despite, in my opinion, the lack of consequences and follow through from administration"; "Student discipline referrals to the office were a joke"; "I did not feel supported in relationship to discipline situations. The outcome was a lower school morale"; and "Classroom discipline was not supported by administration. Sending children to the office was joke. If a teacher couldn't handle their classroom, administration would basically leave the teacher out on a limb."

Although Ari's main reason for moving to another system was her frustration with being moved to a new school each year, she also expressed great frustration with how her administrators handled discipline in her last school. Ari completed her first six years of teaching in CCSS. Throughout her six years in the system, she taught at three different schools and in two grade levels. She came to CCSS straight out of college because she could get a job teaching kindergarten. During her first year of teaching, she was moved from one school to another because there were too few students in kindergarten to support her class. The next year she returned to her original school and taught kindergarten for four years. The following year she was moved to another school for the second time due to low numbers. In addition to moving schools, she also had to teach at a new grade level.

Ari admitted that she hated the school she was moved to during the 2006-2007 school year. She was fearful of her school principal and felt everyone was out to protect themselves instead of lending a hand to others. She knew by mid-year that unless she could be guaranteed a position in the school she was moved from, she would not return to CCSS the next year. She left the system because she knew she could not remain at the school where she last taught. She felt unsupported by the administration when it came to student discipline issues. She took a cut in salary when she moved to a neighboring system but that was not as important to her as being able to teach kindergarten again in a school with supportive administrators. She knew other teachers at the school she moved to and they assured her that the school principal was supportive and kind. Ari would consider returning to CCSS if there was a guarantee that she would not be transferred

from school to school and if she could teach kindergarten. When I asked Ari why she felt she needed to leave the school she had been teaching at she stated:

> I definitely couldn't stay at the school I was last at. There was no student discipline. It was like the students ran the school and the teachers were expected to make everything look fine. If we sent students to the office they usually came right back and then were worse because they knew nothing would happen to them. I had students get in fistfights and there would be no consequences. I just dealt with my problems myself as much as I could but it interrupted the learning of other students who were in the classroom.

Time and Workload.

Time and workload are difficult to separate. My research showed that if one was a problem the other was as well. If teachers did not feel like they had the time to do the job, they also reported that the workload was overwhelming. Those who said they were overwhelmed with the amount of work also complained about time. Time concerns typically fell into two areas: time for planning and time for family.

One teacher, Mary, reported that needing to spend more time at home with her family was the greatest factor in her decision to leave the profession. Mary came to this decision after 16 years in the classroom. In part, her decision was due to the increasing demands of her family as she had a son who was struggling to complete high school but she also felt that the time required on a daily basis for her to do her job had increased substantially. She stated, "I knew there was no way I could do this job the way I do it and pay enough attention to my son. There was no way I could do it." When I probed

further into the time required for her to do her job, she reported that she put in 11 hours a day almost every day. Much of this time was spent on paperwork, bureaucracy, meetings, and trainings that she did not feel benefited her. She also related the issue to the lack of planning time within the school day. Mary stated:

> Our planning time was..was..it was not dedicated planning time. We never could depend on our planning time, because they (administrators) pulled us. They had this meeting or that meeting or you had to get this done or this paperwork done or you had to turn in this report and so much more since the new administrators came to the school. Before that I didn't feel so stressed to get everything done.

Others reiterated Mary's concerns in the exit interviews.

Interviewees reported frequently that they were frustrated that planning time could not be used for planning. They stated that planning time was often taken up with meetings, trainings, and paperwork. As one teacher stated in the exit interview, "I often felt overwhelmed with paperwork, deadlines, and assignments. There wasn't enough time at the end of my planning time to actually plan." The frustration expressed with a lack of planning time grew when teachers referenced losing time with their families.

Alexa talked frequently in her interview about having to miss events in her own child's life in order to attend meetings, complete paperwork, and plan lessons that she should have been able to do at school if her planning time was protected. When probed about what she considered to be protected planning time, she stated:

> Protected planning time is the time when my students are with another teacher for another class like art, music or PE (physical education) when I

> should be able to plan for lessons, correct papers, and meet with my team without interruption from things the administration wants us to do--things like meeting with them or other people in the school, training, or a report that they should be writing.

Alexa continued to comment on how the lack of protected planning time impacted her and her family:

> We should have had planning time everyday and at the same time with our grade level. My grade level couldn't find time during school hours to meet because we all had different planning times or no planning on some days or planning time that was not protected from tasks assigned to us by our administrators. We usually had to meet as a team after school and sometimes these meetings were after other meetings held at school. Many days I did not leave school until 6:00 or later. That was time I should have been spending with my family. My husband often felt like a single parent because I never seemed to be home some weeks and when I was home I still had work to do. I couldn't keep doing that to my husband or to my son.

For one teacher who participated in an exit interview, having protected planning time free from meetings and staff development was a priority. She commented that the reason she accepted the position at her new school was because they guaranteed her planning time everyday. Rey was also guaranteed protected planning time at the school to which she moved. Rey began her teaching career in CCSS as an elementary school teacher. During her four years with the system, she taught at two different schools. She

had been relatively happy teaching but felt overwhelmed by the amount of time she was spending on her job. She had recently gotten married and her husband grew frustrated with the amount of time she spent on schoolwork. She felt CCSS was continuously implementing new initiatives and changing direction. Rey stated that each year made her feel like she was still a new teacher because everything kept changing. She moved from one school to another in the system hoping that would help. She finally decided to move to another system after talking with a neighbor who taught in that system. Her neighbor told her she did not spend nearly as much time working as Rey did. Rey stated:

> At the school I transferred to I have fewer initiatives and more time for focusing my energy on classroom instruction. I was guaranteed protected planning time that would allow me to work in my classroom uninterrupted without being pulled for meetings, staff development, or additional requests. That was number one in my book. What that meant to me was less time I had to work before and after school and on my weekends. When my new principal promised me protected planning time everyday I immediately felt a weight lifted. There was hope that things would get better.

The need for uninterrupted, protected planning time was a concern expressed by movers and leavers equally at both the elementary and secondary levels.

Another time issue that was mentioned frequently in both the exit interviews and the semi-structured interviews was the many interruptions teachers had to deal with during their instructional time with students. The teachers expressed that they felt they did not have enough time to teach everything and this was made worse when their

instructional time was interrupted by calls over the intercom, parents coming to the classroom for impromptu conferences, school assemblies, and other events. Again, many of these interruptions were blamed on a lack of administrative support for instruction. Rosa commented:

> There were a lot of intercom interruptions during the school day. Phone calls and parents showing up in my room with little warning that they were coming caused instructional interruptions. Parents brought young children and babies to my room during class. Often these parents were brought to my room by my principal or AP (assistant principal) even though we were told at the beginning of the year that they respected our instructional time and would protect us from parent interruptions they did not. You can say you respect someone's time but when you bring the interruptions to someone's room you are definitely showing them you do not. Then at the end of the year when your students do not do well on the test, who are they going to blame? Not themselves for keeping me from being able to teach. They would blame me.

Others reiterated the frustration with frequent interruptions: "The intercom was used frequently during instructional time creating too many interruptions"; "Office and parent calls were allowed to interrupt instruction frequently. Some days you couldn't get through a single lesson without interruption"; "My instructional time was interrupted regularly during the day with announcements and assemblies"; "I needed more time to focus on instructional time. DARE, 4-H, music rehearsals, and other programs interfered

with instruction frequently"; and "Instruction was interrupted almost on a weekly basis due to assemblies, various programs, the intercom, etc."

Time and workload were significant issues for teachers in this study. Teachers in both the exit and semi-structured interviews often referred to conversations they had with teachers in other schools within the system and teachers who taught in other systems. Often these conversations were about time and the amount of work others had to take home in the evening or over the weekend. Five movers who participated in the semi-structured interviews--Rosa, Rey, Priti, Ivy, and Marta--referenced these conversations with other teachers when they talked about how and when they began making the decision to move to another school system. When these teachers discovered that planning time in other systems was protected, teachers had daily planning, and the workload was such that teachers were not taking a lot of work home, they began thinking about transferring to these other systems. This was especially true for teachers with families.

Priti was the first mover I interviewed. At the time of the interview she had taught for 15 years. During this time she moved around a great deal. She began teaching in the Northeast and taught in two different systems there before moving to CCSS. During her seven years in CCSS, she had taught at three different elementary schools. Like many of the movers I interviewed, Priti had to take a cut in salary for her new position. She decided she wanted to move from teaching regular education to teaching special education and she was also interested in making a change from elementary to middle school. Although there were special education positions available at the middle school in CCSS, she was concerned that she would inherit a large caseload in a large

middle school with a challenging student population. She had heard from others that one of the neighboring school systems provided special education teachers with more support so she applied there. She accepted a position in that system at a small middle school that served the students in the neighborhood where she lived. Priti commented that one of the main reasons she did not want to teach special education at the middle school in CCSS was because she knew her caseload would be much larger than the caseloads of teachers in the neighboring system to which she transferred. When Priti talked about her decision to move she said:

> The big influence that I had in making my decision was once I had kind of decided I wanted to go into special education is from talking to people who had come into CCSS and those who had gone into special education in [neighboring system] and the support that was offered there. I was told there would be, ah, there were significantly more teachers in the building, more special education teachers, so I would have a smaller caseload. There are only 800 students in the middle school I am at and there are 13 interrelated teachers. It is a much lower ratio of special ed. students to teachers at my new school. When I talked to special ed. teachers at the middle school in CCSS they complained about how many students they had and how it was almost impossible to get to them all. I knew I did not want that kind of stress so I decided to take the job in [neighboring system].

New Initiatives.

Closely related to the issue of time and workload is the introduction of new initiatives at either the school or the system level. Teachers at the elementary, middle, and high school levels spoke about the numerous new initiatives the system or their schools had put in place over the course of the past few years. The concerns were not the initiatives themselves as teachers shared the positive outcomes they had seen from some of the initiatives. The frustrations came from a lack of time to properly implement various initiatives and, from the teachers' perspective, the continuous implementation of different initiatives before one is allowed the proper amount of time to become institutionalized or to be able to show results.

In the exit interviews both movers and leavers commented on the number of initiatives being implemented simultaneously. One leaver noted, "It would be nice to do a great job on a few initiatives rather than a poor job on so many." Other leavers stated similar thoughts: "With multiple initiatives presented at a time there was never time to master or excel in what was being taught and it was extremely overwhelming"; "It would have been easier to juggle fewer instructional initiatives and do an outstanding job on each rather than an average job on many"; "Directions were changed at the school and the system without having time to apply knowledge and new initiatives before starting something totally new"; and "It would have been more effective if we would have had more time to implement initiatives before new ones were introduced." From these comments it appeared that teachers were not opposed to new initiatives but were overwhelmed when so many were initiated in quick succession.

Movers shared similar sentiments. One mover stated, “There are too many initiatives and not enough time to learn and plan for them. Meetings, trainings, and more meetings on initiatives that only last a year or two--too much.” Another indicated that her choice in her new school was based on this issue, “At the school I am transferring to I will have fewer initiatives and more time for focusing my energy on classroom instruction. I made sure of that before accepting the job.” Teachers indicated that they felt overwhelmed and ineffective in the face of numerous initiatives as this mover commented:

> I think I would have been more effective if we would have had more time to implement initiatives before new ones were introduced. I felt I was always behind and always learning something new that we would use for a little while and then leave behind for something new.

Another mover expressed similar frustrations, “We had scarcely gotten through training for one initiative when something else was introduced. While many were meaningful, we had no time to fully incorporate any of the initiatives. I never felt effective with any of them.” Teachers did not express frustrations with any of the specific initiatives and indicated that certain ones were worthwhile. The issues were the amount of time available to implement them and feelings of ineffectiveness when trying to do so much at once.

These feelings were most profound for teachers in their first few years of teaching. In her semi-structured interview, Meredith talked about her frustrations with so much happening at one time. Meredith was a first year teacher in a new program in a school that was also implementing a new instructional initiative. She was required to

participate in training and meetings for the smaller program she was involved with as well as the school-wide initiative. She felt overwhelmed from the beginning even though she readily admitted that she was prepared for the position. Meredith commented, "I had good teaching skills, strong content knowledge, and good classroom management--so I was prepared in that way." Meredith did take some proactive steps in the beginning to let her administrators know she was feeling overwhelmed trying to learn both new programs:

> I made an appointment with the administrator of the other program at the other school and sat down with him and told him it was overwhelming. He gave me a pep talk, but that is not what I needed. I felt like I was dodging bullets. I finally quit taking the online class I was required to take for the program. I know people were not happy about that but I couldn't do it all and I knew at that point I was not going to be coming back. That class really tipped it over the edge. That did it, because I thought, 'There is just no way I can do this too.' I felt that if they did not take that into consideration for a new teacher in a new program in that kind of atmosphere I thought, 'I don't think this is a system I want to be with.' So that kind of did it. I was trying to learn a new job, in a new system, with two new programs, and I had a family. I just felt that there needed to be some kind of teacher sensitivity--some sensitivity toward the teacher because it is already hard enough in the classroom.

For Meredith, her feelings of being overwhelmed and a lack of sensitivity to teachers were the main factors for leaving the profession after her first year. Her experience was

significant enough that she does not intend to return to the teaching profession again in the future.

Frank had a similar story. Frank taught math at the high school for 11 years. During his first nine years of teaching he really enjoyed the work he did. He liked the students and the other teachers he worked with until his school saw a change in administration over two years. He no longer felt he had the support or respect that he did with the previous administration. The new principal came in with many new ideas and instituted some new initiatives. He expressed concerns about some of the new ideas and had a verbal altercation with the new principal during the summer. The next fall he was assigned to teach mostly Algebra I and repeater algebra classes. He was expecting to teach the advanced math courses he had been teaching the past few years. When he asked his principal about the change she said she needed experienced teachers in the most challenging classes and felt he was the best person to implement the new program aimed at increasing the success rate of Algebra I students. He was never fully trained in the new program, did not agree with the new initiative, and went home feeling overwhelmed and ineffective for the first time in his teaching career. He returned the next year to find himself in the same position. The school had another new plan to address the failure rate of students in Algebra I and he was again appointed to carry out the new program. He voiced his frustrations when he stated:

> My view of education and my role as an educator changed completely the last two years. I no longer felt that I had control of what or how I taught. Each year we were jumping on something new and had to be retrained and change what we were doing. Nothing was ever given enough time to

> work. If only the principal had taken the time to talk to teachers perhaps we would have had more buy-in for the new initiatives. I knew I could not go through it another year and I did not believe it was going to change for the better.

Frank, like Meredith, decided to leave the profession and also does not have any plans to return in the future.

Although many movers and leavers complained about a lack of support from administrators when it came to student discipline, time, workload, and the school climate, a few teachers' experiences with their administrators were alarming. These teachers spoke of harassing behaviors toward them from school or system administrators.

Harassment.

Some of the stories I heard from teachers in the semi-structured interviews spoke of very negative interactions with school and system level administrators. Sara, Rosa, and Jennifer each told stories where they indicated they felt they were being harassed by an administrator. Sara's story began when she was asked to add a student to her special education caseload because system administrators had been having problems with the student's parent and felt she could help the situation. The parent was very thankful for all Sara was doing for his son and expressed his appreciation through emails sent to her and central office staff. He also made a significant financial donation to the teacher after he heard she had adopted some families from the school and was helping them with Christmas expenses.

After the emails and the donations, two administrators from central office made an appointment with Sara on the day before the winter break was to begin. Sara was sure

she was being fired for some reason but had no idea why. Instead of being fired, she was accused of having a sexual affair with the parent. Sara was horrified by the accusation as she considered herself to be a very moral, ethical teacher. Both central office administrators continued to question her about her relationship with the parent and accuse her of having an affair. Sara finally ran from the meeting and collapsed in the bathroom. She lay on the floor crying hysterically until her principal came to get her. Throughout the next couple of months, she continued to receive questions and believed there was an active investigation.

Sara finally contacted the local educators association and spent hours documenting all that happened and detailing the injustices she felt she had endured. After not hearing anything for a bit, she contacted one of the central office administrators about the issue and was told that it had not yet been resolved. No one ever came to her with any resolution or with an apology. After this incident Sara knew she could not longer stay in CCSS even if she had to take a decrease in her pay. She knew she had to leave. When I asked her at the end of the interview if she would be able to recommend the system to anyone in the future she said:

> Absolutely not—no, I would not recommend the system to anyone I cared about. They don't take care of their teachers. They are not professional and will hound and harass you until you leave if they have decided they don't want you to stay. I don't even know what I did for them to not want me any longer but it was obvious they didn't and that they would stay on me until I left. I feel like the system was allowed to harass me and get away with it. It is still painful for me to talk about it.

Sara cried frequently during the interview and became very angry during the retelling of the incident with the two central office administrators. She stated that the main reason she decided to move to another system was because of this incident.

Both Rosa and Jennifer also talked about incidents they described as being harassment by their local school principals. Rosa taught middle school math and had been very happy with her position until the most current principal was hired. Rosa felt the principal took an instant dislike to her. She acknowledged that she was not totally blameless in her principal's negative feelings toward her because she was outspoken and would often question decisions that were made. Nevertheless, she did not believe this gave her principal the right to treat her the way she did. Shortly after the principal began working at the school, Rosa set up a meeting to discuss some issues with her. Rosa was an advocate for the students who typically struggled in school. She felt strongly that many of these students' needs were not being attended to and that the school was allowing them to fail. Rosa knew that her concerns were not well received during the meeting but never anticipated the reaction she got from her principal. Rosa believed that from the time the meeting ended to the time she filed her letter of resignation a few weeks later she was, in her words, "in the crosshairs of a very large weapon." She was frequently called into conferences with the principal where she was yelled at and made to feel incompetent. She was written up for things that other teachers were not. Every time the principal came to her room, she knew she would get negative feedback about something.

Rosa did not let these interactions keep her from fighting for her students. She continued to bring up her concerns during meetings and through emails but this only

caused more ire from her principal. On a number of occasions, Rosa was reduced to tears. She began to fear work and many mornings did not want to get out of bed to face the situation. Rosa, like Sara, finally contacted the local educators association but did not pursue this avenue as she was afraid it would make things worse. Sara finally decided she could not continue and gave her principal a letter of resignation effective at the end of the school year. This occurred after an especially tense meeting when the principal threatened to fire her for insubordination. According to Rosa:

> The principal was out of control in this meeting. All because I asked her again if I could start meeting with students in my class to tutor them in the morning. She once again said I could not tutor my own students--that it was against policy. I told her I had looked at the policy and that it said I could not tutor my own students for money. I was not charging the students money. She frequently screamed at me in the meeting, stuck her finger in my face, and slammed her fists on her desk. I was truly afraid at times that she was going to hurt me. As much as I loved working with the student population at the school, I knew I could no longer teach there. Since there was not another school with sixth grade students in the system, I knew I would have to go teach somewhere else.

Rosa's story is very similar to Jennifer's.

Jennifer stated early in her interview, "The reason I left was harassment." When I asked who was harassing her she stated, "The principal was harassing me. I was cornered, she sent people in to spy on me." Jennifer, with 18 years of experience, was early into her first year at her new school when she began reporting harassing incidents

from her principal. Jennifer was hired July 30, 2006, and began her position August 1. She missed much of the new teacher orientation and had very little time to do any work in advance to the start of the new school year. She had many questions and sought answers to these. In her own words:

> I started going to my English department head and school mentor asking questions and I was not getting answers so I went to the assistant principal and I think they thought I was incompetent because I was asking questions so they started coming in my room once or twice a week which freaked me out. My mentor, the department chair, the assistant principal, and the principal were coming in my room all the time so there was this constant influx and interruption going through my room. And then I would get called to the principal. And there was always a barrage of people in her room waiting for me. I was usually called in on my lunch hour. I missed lunch and they were very accusatory. The tone was not supportive. They kept calling me into these meetings where they would chastise me over and over again and I would be crying. And then I would not be able to have lunch and I would have to go back to my class and I would be crying. There were altercations with them in front of my kids. They started doing things to undermine me in the classroom. One day the principal said, "I can fire you right now for disobeying me." She said this in front of some of my students. I finally wrote a letter to human resources and they got me some support from central office.

After writing the letter, the school principal was no longer allowed to meet with Jennifer without a central office staff member being present. Jennifer acknowledged that she received tremendous support from central office and that she would not have made it through the school year without that support. She decided to write a letter of resignation in November in hopes that the principal would stop the frequent observations and harassing behavior. Jennifer continued to endure both until the end of the year. After leaving the system, Jennifer began teaching at another middle school and received accolades for her instructional strategies and relationships with students and other staff in her school.

The role that the school principal and other school and system administrators play in teachers' decisions to move or leave is significant. Every participant in the exit and semi-structured interviews referred to administrative support. A few of these references were positive but for most study participants the lack of support was referenced as being critical to their decision to move from the system or leave the profession. The exceptions to this were the teachers who left to pursue other opportunities.

Opportunity

Three participants in the semi-structured interviews reported that they left to seek new opportunities. Two of these, Gwen and Steven, felt they would have greater chances of moving into administration if they moved to a larger school system. Steven taught high school English for eight years in CCSS. He moved to another system because he wanted to pursue a leadership position. He felt he would not have an opportunity for a leadership position in CCSS because of the small size of the system and because he did not feel he had the support of school or system level administrators. Although he had

expressed an interest and earned a degree in school leadership, he had not been given many opportunities to serve in this capacity. He believed that certain people were tapped for these positions based on how well they are liked by school and system administrators. In the past, he had been critical of certain school and system processes and believed this was why he had not been given leadership roles such as department head or committee chair. This was the main reason he moved to a neighboring, larger system. He enjoyed the students and other colleagues he worked with in CCSS and had great respect for the educational program offered in the system and at the high school.

Although both Gwen and Steven expressed concerns with other aspects of their positions in CCSS, both made it clear that they would have stayed if they believed they would have had an opportunity to move into administration within the system. Although a number of interviewees reported that the small size of the system was what attracted them to CCSS and was what they missed when they left, for Gwen and Steven it was a hindrance.

The other teacher who left for another opportunity, Kevin, was looking for greater freedom to teach. Kevin had begun to feel frustrated with the constraints of the state-required curriculum. He was offered a position at a prestigious private school that would allow him to make more decision about what and how he taught. He stated:

> The one thing I really liked about the offer from [the private school] was really the chance to tailor your curriculum more for your audience, your community, your parents, your students. Uhm, I felt like the curriculum comes more from the classroom there than from the, from some lofty position--like, here is what you need to do. Because they (the private

> school) do not follow the same state curriculum. The chance to have more control over your curriculum, I liked that.

The private school also offered much smaller class sizes, which was attractive to Kevin:

> At [the private school] I have 14-17 students in a class. So it pretty much cuts the class size in half. And that, you can ask any math teacher, that is the equal to dangling a $10,000 bill. That is worth something. That is really attractive. It's just from a teacher perspective you want to get to every student. You want to know when they leave the class that they understand this. And with 15 kids you feel like you can really tailor instruction a little bit better with 15 than with 30.

For Kevin, Gwen, and Steven, their decisions to move were rooted less in dissatisfaction with their school or the school system than it was with the opportunity to pursue other experiences.

No Child Left Behind

Although the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) was rarely mentioned by movers or leavers and they never specifically attributed NCLB to their decisions to move or leave, it does appear to factor into teachers' decisions. When I asked participants specifically about NCLB, they did not indicate that this was the source of their dissatisfaction or the reason they made the decision to move from or leave the school system. One reason for this could be the fact that so many of the interview participants entered into the teaching profession either shortly before NCLB was implemented or after NCLB went into effect. It is possible that these participants, since they have little pre-NCLB experience, were not able to identify its impact on the teaching profession.

Despite the fact that many of the teachers did not identify NCLB as contributing to their decisions, many of the reasons cited by these teachers for moving or leaving have been linked to NCLB such as a narrowing of the curriculum, continually changing educational programs, increased teacher stress and lower staff morale (Rentner, et al., 2006), lack of planning time, and decreased time for instruction (Hamilton, et al., 2007). It is also possible that the increased demands and expectations placed on school administrators by NCLB could be contributing to teachers' perceptions of a lack of support from these leaders. What was evident throughout the analysis of the data was that even though several reasons for leaving seemed consistent with the effects of NCLB, teachers, by and large, did not identify these as being related to the legislation.

Only three semi-structured interview participants mentioned NCLB and only one thought it had any significant influence on her as a teacher. Mary said she did not think NCLB had an effect on her as a teacher because she had always held herself accountable for the achievement of her students. She was always one to collect a great deal of data on her students to closely monitor their growth and intervene as necessary.

Beth also talked about NCLB but did not think the act itself was to blame for changes in her school. Instead, she faulted her school administrators for their punitive reaction to test scores. She said the school administrators would berate teachers that they blamed for the school not making AYP some years. Beth also said the administration encouraged the teachers to teach to the test, which she was opposed to philosophically.

Alexa referred to increased mandates at the federal level in her interview although she did not specifically name NCLB. She was the only interviewee to link changes at the federal level to changes at the state and local levels. When I asked her if she had

considered transferring to another school instead of leaving the profession, she said that she knew and talked to many other teachers in schools both in and out of the system and that she did not feel the situation would be much better in another building. She stated:

> Everything in education just seems to be peaking--the workload, testing, frustrations--and I think it goes back to accountability at the national level and then the state has to react and then the system has to react and then the schools have to react and I think it has just escalated and elevated everything to such a degree that we're killing ourselves.

Non-factors

Two issues that previous research on teacher attrition indicated were typically factors in teachers' decisions to move or leave did not figure into the decisions teachers in this study made. These two issues are salary and student diversity.

Many studies have found a correlation between low salaries and higher rates of teacher attrition (Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, et al., 1997; Brewer, 1996; Grissmer & Kirby, 1992; Gritz & Theobald, 1996; Hanushek et al., 2004; Imazeki, 2005; Ingersoll, 2001b; Ingersoll & Alsalam, 1997; Kirby et al., 1999; Krieg, 2006, Lankford et al., 2002; Liu & Ramsey, 2008; Mont & Rees, 1996; Murnane & Olsen, 1990; Murnane et al., 1989; Murnane et al., 1991; Rumberger, 1987; Stinebrickner, 1998; Theobald, 1990; Weiss, 1999). Yet, salary was a factor in only one teacher's-Frank's-decision to move or leave CCSS.

CCSS has one of the highest compensation packages in the area. In the semi-structured interviews, I asked each mover about the change in pay from their previous position to their current one. Every teacher who decided to move from CCSS to another

system or to a private school received a lower or, in one case, a comparable salary in their new position. I also asked if a decrease in their pay had caused them to rethink their decision at any time. All denied that salary was a factor in their decision and one said they were willing to give up salary to be at a school with a more positive climate. When asked about her change in salary with her new position Marta said:

> I did take a position in a system that pays lower than CCSS. I know it is not typical to go to a lower paying job but I didn't really have any other options. I had to get out of my position and there was not anything else available for me in the system. But, you know, we can make our bills. I'm not someone who is really concerned about having the glitzy. I mean, if I can pay my rent, if I can put food on my table, and take a reasonably nice vacation every year--it is what it is. To be in a position where I feel more supported, fulfilled, like I am making a difference is hands down more important to me than my salary. Without a doubt, it is worth it. They (CCSS) enforced the $1000 penalty for me for releasing me from my contract after the last date. I was like, give me a break--my health and well-being is far more important.

Not only was it worth it to Marta to take a cut in pay she was also agreeable to paying $1000 to get out of her contract with CCSS in order to find a position that was a better fit for her.

Ari had a similar response when I asked her about her salary:

> I did take a pay cut in my new position, but not much less--a couple thousand dollars less. It was worth it to me though to know I would be

> teaching kindergarten again and to know I wouldn't have to worry about being moved around from school to school each year. The system (CCSS) could not have paid me enough to keep me at my last school.

Frank is the only teacher who decided to leave the profession for a higher salary. In Frank's case, he was going to be the only financial support for his family and he felt that if he was going to work as hard as he was, he deserved to get paid for it. Although the reasons he left CCSS were because he no longer had the support of his principal and the changes to his position required him to work much longer hours with less fulfillment, he decided to leave education altogether for a higher paying position in the business field. As the sole salary earner for the family, he felt compelled to move to a position with a greater income. For most of the teachers in this study though, being satisfied with their school and their position was more important than salary.

Recent studies (Ingersoll, 2001b; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Lankford et al., 2002; Hanushek et al., 2004) have found a correlation between greater percentages of poor and minority students to higher rates of teacher attrition. Student diversity was mentioned as a factor in only one teacher's decision to move or leave in this study. Ivy admitted she had difficulty relating to her students. She was surprised at how different her students were from the student she was and from those she interacted with during student teaching at a more middle class, less diverse school.

More often, the teachers in the interviews noted the student diversity of CCSS as a positive. A few participants from the semi-structured interviews noted that the diversity of the student population in the system was what attracted them to CCSS and a number of movers took positions at schools with similar student populations. Jennifer commented

that what drew her to CCSS was the diverse student population. These students are what made it difficult for her to leave the school at the end of the year as she felt she had so much to offer them. Having grown up in poverty herself, she felt she understood her students better than many teachers would. After Jennifer resigned, she began looking for another teaching position in a school with a similar student population. She was able to find a teaching job in another middle school with significant student diversity.

Kevin also stated that what initially attracted him to CCSS was the student diversity. Previously, he had been at a small, private school with a homogeneous student population. He did express a concern about returning to a private school but when he made his selection between the two private schools that offered him positions, he intentionally chose the school with greater diversity and with a strong scholarship program for students of poverty. Mary also intentionally sought to teach at a school in CCSS with a diverse student population and if she returns to teaching in the future she will seek a school with similar student demographics. Not only was student diversity not a significant factor in teachers' decisions to move or leave, it actually served to attract a number of teachers to the school system.

As part of the data analysis, I created separate data displays (Miles & Huberman, 1994) for each of the groups, movers and leavers. The reasons cited by movers and leavers for making their decision to exit the system were very similar. Both groups credited a lack of administrative support and poor working conditions as the reasons they moved or left. The greatest difference between the two groups was that movers ultimately believed that working conditions would improve in a different setting whereas leavers believed that working conditions

would not vary significantly anywhere they went. Movers retained hope in a brighter future in the profession whereas leavers saw no prospects for change that would provide a rationale for hope.

Why Movers Move and Leavers Leave

Although there were few differences between the reasons movers and leavers cited as influencing their decisions to no longer stay with CCSS, there was a compelling reason why movers moved to other systems and leavers left the profession. This reason was hope. Movers felt hopeful and confident that transferring to another system would improve the conditions they identified as the reasons for moving. Conversely, leavers were much more negative about the educational system in general and did not believe that things would improve by moving to another school or school system. When I asked movers if they had considered leaving the profession, they consistently stated that they had not or if they had, it was for only a brief period. Leavers almost never considered moving to another teaching position. When leavers made the decision to exit CCSS it was because they made the decision to stop teaching altogether.

Beth made the decision to leave the profession after seven years of teaching science in the same middle school in CCSS. She was attracted to CCSS by what she saw happening in the classrooms when she came for her interview. The students were engaged and well-behaved and the teachers were interacting positively with the students in their classrooms. This was not the reality of the situation when Beth began teaching the next year. In some ways, Beth felt that she was not provided an accurate picture of the challenges she would face teaching in her school and the school system. She believed that administrators painted a rosy picture during their interviews to get teachers to

commit to working in the school but that the reality of the job and the needs of the students served were quite different. She grew increasingly frustrated at the lack of support for handling student discipline and what she perceived as a lack of concern for certain groups of students, specifically Hispanic and African American children. Beth made the decision to leave the teaching profession to begin her own company. She does not plan to return to teaching. When I asked Beth, a leaver, if she considered moving to another school or system she said:

> I did consider another school briefly but I know the grass is not always greener on the other side so it was just, like, let me go out now. Let me go out now. I knew I couldn't stay in education forever so I made the decision to just leave now rather than later. I truly did not think things would be significantly different in other places. I knew I would have the same frustrations so I just needed to go out on my own.

Beth's greatest frustration was that she did not feel the education system met the needs of all students. She felt that some students, especially minority students, were being allowed to fall through the cracks year after year. She indicated that she did not feel this was indicative only of CCSS but was true of the public education system as a whole. She decided to start her own tutoring business that would target the needs of students who typically did not find success in public schools.

Both Meredith and Sue left the profession after their first teaching experience. Both had a difficult first year of teaching, and like Beth, did not feel that the issues were limited to the school where they taught or the system as a whole. At the time of their

interviews, neither planned on returning to teaching and both were undecided about what career track they would seek next. Sue commented:

> Having my own classroom was just not what I expected. The stress was too much. The students were out of control and I could not get any help with dealing with them. I never had enough time and was always working late at night and on the weekends. Other teachers with a lot of experience were having the same problems so I really didn't think it would get any better. Why would I invest any more time in something I hated everyday?

Frank, Iris and Mary all left the profession after many years of experience, 11, 19 and 16 years respectively. Although each had experienced some positive years of teaching, their most recent experiences left them feeling they could no longer continue in the profession. All three spoke negatively about their school administrators and felt that teachers were no longer treated as professionals. For Iris and Mary, they did not have to work to financially sustain their families. Once the job ceased to be fulfilling, they left.

Iris taught elementary school for 19 years in CCSS. Although the majority of her time in the system was positive, she had moved to a new school for her last two years and had a very negative experience. She was overwhelmed with paperwork and the workload. She did not feel she had administrative support when dealing with parent concerns or student discipline issues. The school climate was negative and fearful. The stress began to take a toll on her physical health. She lost over 30 pounds during the last year she taught, had sleep problems, and began suffering from depression for the first time in her life. At the time of the interview, she had not returned to teaching and was

not sure that she ever would. Her husband had retired recently and they were currently enjoying life without work.

The movers I interviewed were much more positive about the teaching profession and felt that if they moved to another system the situation would improve. Many of these individuals talked about their relationships with students and other teachers. They enjoyed the sense of community they found in teaching and wanted to continue to be a positive influence on the lives of children. When asked if she had considered leaving the profession at any time, Jennifer stated, "No, I love education and teaching. I knew I would find another teaching job somewhere else. It knew it could be better and I would be happier." This sentiment was shared with the majority of movers I spoke with in the semi-structured interviews. Ari also stated that she never considered leaving the profession when she decided to move to another school system:

> No, I couldn't leave teaching. I love teaching and it just comes naturally. I love working with the kids. Teaching just seems to be natural to me and I just, I don't think I could be the type of person who works in an office. I think that would bore me all day long. I love what I do.

Priti reiterated the same feeling, "People ask me all the time, 'When are you going into administration? Why don't you teach at a university?' But I can't leave teaching. It is what I love to do."

Many movers referred to the positive experiences they had in other schools as their reasons for moving and not leaving. Marta said:

> I did not consider leaving the profession. I think I had a good enough experience my first five years that it was just a matter of finding a better

> school and a better fit for me. I knew well enough that I knew, yeah, I've had enough good from the past five years that it was enough to overcome this one bad year. Again, I came from a pretty positive experience although there have always been challenges. That's what gives me the advantage. I know how good it can be.

Even though both Lana and Sara admitted to briefly considering leaving the profession, like Marta, they relied on their earlier, more positive experiences to make the decision to stay in the profession. Lana started her teaching career in CCSS and taught special education at three different schools in the system. She moved to a neighboring school system after eight years. Although the majority of her time in CCSS had been positive, her last year was very difficult. She left because of the poor treatment she and others on the staff received from the school principal. She felt unsupported, disrespected, and fearful of reprisal. She began to hate coming to work and would feel sick to her stomach as she drove in each morning. When I asked Lana if she considered leaving the profession, she commented:

> Oh yeah, I thought about it. I just have such passion for teaching. I know I have made a difference in students' lives. Maybe not this year but in the past I made a difference. Just the days when you see the kids and you go, 'Wow. This is great!' The days when you really reach a kid or when they come back to see you and thank you for having been their teacher. That is what teaching is all about for me, the kids. I couldn't leave them.

Sara admitted that she considered leaving the profession after her altercation with administration in December. At that time, she found the strength to continue teaching in

her thoughts about and memories of her students and her commitment to not letting them down. Sara not only relied on her memories of her positive teaching experiences, she also decided to go back to the school where she felt the most success as a teacher. At the time of the interview, she was teaching in the same position and in the same classroom she left seven years earlier when she transferred to CCSS.

Increasing Teacher Retention

The teachers who moved or left CCSS at the end of the 2006-2007 school year made recommendations to encourage increased teacher retention. As with the reasons teachers chose to leave, there were no significant differences in the recommendations movers and leavers had for ways the system could decrease teacher attrition.

Teaching Conditions

The state of North Carolina investigated teaching conditions at schools throughout out the state through the use of a survey. The authors of the survey identified five domains that combine to create the conditions within which teachers work. These domains are time, empowerment, leadership, professional development, and facilities and resources (Hirsch, Emerick, Church & Fuller, 2007). Figure 2 on the next page presents a model of these five teaching condition domains. Three of these domains--time, empowerment, and leadership--were noted in this study as reasons teachers moved from or left the system. In both the exit and semi-structured interviews, these three domains also figured predominately as ways the system could have kept teachers from leaving.

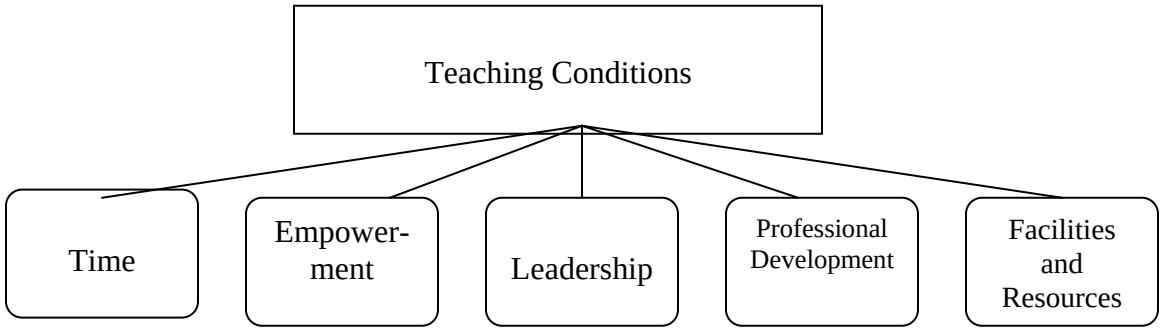

Figure 2. The Five Teaching Conditions Domains

One item on the CCSS exit interview asked teachers to "Indicate the degree to which the following modifications could influence you to return to [Central City Schools System]." The modifications teachers were asked to rate were: focus on fewer instructional initiatives at a time; smaller classes; less paperwork; more supplies; better facilities; more planning time; protected planning time; more support from parents; more support from school-based administrators; more recognition for dedication, effectiveness, and commitment to the profession; higher pay; and better benefits. Participants were to rate each modification as highly influential, influential, neutral, or little/none. Five of the modifications had significantly greater ratings as highly influential and influential than neutral or little/none. The five domains that were ranked as having the most influence on participants' return to the system were: protected planning time, more planning time, less paperwork, focus on fewer instructional initiatives at a time, and more support from school-based administrators. The first four of these indicators are related to the teaching condition domain referred to as "Time". The final one is related to the teaching condition of "Leadership". Table 2 on the next page ranks each modification from the most influential to the least influential.

Table 2.

Rank Order of the Degree Modifications Could Influence Teachers to Return to CCSS

Rank	Modification
1	Focus on fewer instructional initiatives at a time (tie)
1	Protected planning time (tie)
1	Less paperwork (tie)
2	More support from school based administrators
3	More planning time
4	More support from parents
5	Smaller classes
6	More recognition for dedication, effectiveness, and commitment to the profession
7	Higher pay
8	More supplies
9	Better benefits
10	Better facilities

In addition to rating the indicators of time and leadership as domains that would need to be modified in order for teachers to return to the system, many participants also commented on these two issues. Planning time was mentioned most frequently with comments such as: “As a grade level, we did not have common planning time. We needed that time to have grade level meetings and better communication”; “We did not have planning time everyday and it was taken away by grade level meeting and in-service trainings”; “Teachers do not have planning time every day and that is a necessity”;

"Teachers should have protected planning everyday so they can plan for instruction instead of having to do it on their own time"; and "Often planning time was taken away for other meetings. I would need to be guaranteed protected planning time if I were to return."

Others commented on workload and the number of new initiatives: "Lightening my load would result in increasing my effectiveness, which would result in greater intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction"; Fewer initiatives and less paperwork would allow me to focus my energy on my classroom instruction.; "We need to implement fewer various initiatives so we have time to implement them effectively"; "It would be more effective if we would have had more time to implement initiatives before new ones were introduced"; and "Paperwork needs to streamlined and decreased so we can plan."

Leadership was also the topic of comments: "I would need to work with more supportive administrators if I returned"; "A principal that really cared about what was happening in the classroom and how they could help me would be key to me returning"; "Less micromanagement and more support from my administrators is important"; and "Having administrative support with student discipline and angry parents."

Participants in the semi-structured interviews also noted the domains of time and leadership frequently as ways the system could have kept them from moving or leaving. Each participant in the semi-structured interview was asked, "What could the school system have done that would have prevented you from moving/leaving this year?". Most participants gave more than one response to the question and most referred to one of the five teaching condition domains usually time, leadership, or empowerment. Mary responded to the question with a response that touched on each of these three domains:

> Stop micromanaging the teachers and trust the professionals to do the job--to do what he or she knows to be right. [School principal] was a micromanager. She was always checking up on us and always making us complete this form or report or respond to how we had done something to make sure we did it. If she had gotten out of her office and come to our rooms more often she would have seen what we were doing instead of making us spend our time justifying what we were doing, how we were doing it, and when we were doing it. Perhaps if she trusted teachers and allowed us to just do what we knew we needed to do, she wouldn't feel the need to check up all the time. Either she did not trust us to do it or she did not have faith that we were good enough to do what needed to be done. I'm not sure which.

Mary continued to talk about the need for teacher empowerment when I asked if there was anything else she wanted to share with me about her decision to leave the profession. She stated:

> Teaching is no longer a professional profession. Administrators look down their noses at teachers. How can these people get in that position and all of a sudden they think they know what is best for everybody without asking anybody? Teachers need to be the top of the pyramid. They don't need to be the base holding everybody else up. They need to be the ones looked toward when making decisions because they are bearing the brunt of the responsibility, the job, the kids. They don't. It's like they (teachers) are treated like slaves. And it is a slave mentality

> because we are told what we can and can't do. They don't ask us or if they do, they don't listen to us.

Alexa also referred to the lack of administrative support and the frustration of not having a voice. When asked what could have kept her from leaving she stated, "Administrative support at the school level." She talked about how her principal often said she had an open-door policy but that it was not apparent to anyone as the door was usually closed and you always had to go through the principal's secretary to talk to her. Typically, you had to make an appointment to see the principal. Alexa echoed Mary's frustrations about a lack of empowerment and commented that the teachers in her school did not have a voice. They were to follow directions, do what they were told, and not question the principal.

Frank, another leaver, also reported that time, leadership, and empowerment would have made a difference in his decision:

> What would have kept me in the system would have been to keep the principal I used to work with. He understood teachers and respected our opinions and our time. With the new principal I felt like all I did was work, work, work doing all this stuff the principal wanted us to do that really made no difference in the classroom. All that other work took away from how I planned for my class. I was exhausted from all the work but felt ineffective because the work wasn't for my students, it was for my principal. She always wanted us to look good, rather than really be good. A number of us spoke up but then you got on her bad side. Not only did things not change but then you were treated like crap.

Like leavers, movers also commented frequently on how better teaching conditions would have made a difference in their decision to stay in the system or leave.

When asked what the system could have done to keep him from moving, Clay was very clear that the only thing that needed to be done was to change his principal and put someone at the school who supported teachers. He stated:

> I would have stayed if central office would have changed the principal at [the school]. I would have stayed if I could have had some administrative support. I know that not all situations the teacher can be supported but for the most part, you are a professional and you should be supported. You need to know that someone has your back. And I felt as though, most times, my administrators did not have my back. I think the key to slowing the movement of teachers out of [the school] is going to be the administration either changes or that others are aware of how bad it is and work on the problems with the administration at the school.

Marta also said that administrative support would have made a difference in her decision. She felt that the administrators at her school were out of touch because they were not around the teachers enough. She commented, "If an administrator would have just walked down the hallway at 4:00 they would have heard the grumblings. They would have heard how upset we were--how angry, how hurt, how overwhelmed." As a first year teacher to a new program, Marta said support from her administrators would have made a difference in her decision to leave. She enjoyed her co-workers and students and believed strongly in the program but could not continue to work without support. As with Marta, other movers and leavers commented on how difficult it was to leave their

co-workers. A strong sense of community and collegiality were other themes that emerged when asked what could have kept teachers from moving or leaving.

Collegiality

When teachers were asked in the exit interviews what they liked about their job, nearly every respondent mentioned the other staff members they worked with or the students they taught. A majority of respondents mentioned both. Because teachers spend most of their day working with students, staff members, and parents, it was not surprising that relationships with others in the teaching and learning environment were important to teachers in both the exit and the semi-structured interviews. One participant from an exit interview said, "I have found some great relationships with students and teachers over the years. That is what I will miss." This sentiment was reiterated in the semi-structured interviews. Thirteen of the participants in the semi-structured interviews referred to the difficulties they had leaving co-workers and students. Many of these teachers said this was the most difficult part of making the decision to move or leave.

Teachers frequently noted close relationships with other staff members as one thing they liked about their job. Interviewees referred to colleagues as family and frequently referenced the relationships they had formed with other teachers. One mover stated, "It felt like family. We all supported each other and the students we shared." Another mover commented, "I have enjoyed getting to know my colleagues immensely and collaborating with them on a daily basis was very important." Leavers also acknowledged the importance of relationships with other staff. When asked what she liked best about her job, one leaver stated, "The people--I love my colleagues like family and will miss them greatly."

Participants in the semi-structured interviews often became emotional when they talked about the staff members they left when they made the decision to move from or leave the system. Jennifer stated:

> If it had not been for [two colleagues] I don't know what I would have done. I don't know what I would have done without them. They were both such a blessing. They were both very supportive and I hated to leave them. I had only been there a year but these people were very important to me. I had a great team. We worked together well for the most part. It was one of the things that helped me to make it through. Like the first or second time the principal called me in to her office. One of my team members took my classroom and [team leader] just let me cry. She supported me. It was good to have someone I could depend on. My team was my blessing. If I had felt that sense of collegiality with others in the school, I may have stayed.

Sue echoed the importance of collegiality in her decision:

> One thing that I think would have helped me to stay would have been to feel like I had friends I could depend on in the school. I did not feel like I had anyone to go to or anyone I could lean on or cry with. I was alone and that was a horrible feeling. It was as if everyone was working so hard to keep the principal off their backs that they did not have time for anyone else. Everyone was always so busy doing what they needed to do that I hated to bother them with my problems. Even my own grade level didn't get along. People always ended up fighting or arguing if we did have a

> meeting so we kind of ended up not having them. I did not keep in touch with anyone from the school and have no desire to.

Jennifer and Sue both indicated that although they did not get support from the school administration, if the school climate had been more collegial, they would have considered not leaving.

Two other interviewees, Alexa and Gwen, shared that they had seriously considered leaving or moving the previous year but chose to stay specifically because they did not want to leave their co-workers. Both struggled with their decisions the next year for the same reasons but eventually came to decide that these relationships were no longer enough to keep them in their position. Alexa, who decided to leave the profession, stated:

> I actually spoke to [another principal in the system] the year before about possibly transferring over there, but I loved the people I worked with at [the school] and it's…that's the one thing I knew I was going to really, really miss is all of them. That was the thing that was keeping me there the most was all my friends, my team. I just didn't want to leave them. I think because working at [the school] was so hard and so emotional that the teachers all grew really close. We had to support each other. They were enough to keep me for one more year but then it just became too much and I had to go.

Gwen also admitted that she had considered moving to another system the previous year and began the application process in some neighboring systems before changing her mind. She recollected:

> I had known for a while that I was probably going to have to go to another system if I was going to get a job in administration but it seemed to get harder each year. I had a great principal and loved my co-workers. I am still very close to many of them. I got as far as completing some applications in some systems the year before but never followed up. It scared me to death to think about starting all over at a new school with no friends and not knowing what the school would be like. This last year though, I knew it was time. I was getting a bit bored with teaching and really want to become a principal some day. I wasn't getting any younger so even though it tore my heart out to leave my friends, I knew it was time.

In addition to the informal support offered by colleagues, movers and leavers also talked about the need for more formal support as a means of decreasing teacher attrition including mentors and teacher advocates.

Mentors

Teachers in both the exit and semi-structured interviews spoke about the need for more formal support systems such as mentors and teacher advocates. Both of these were mentioned as a factor that could have kept them from moving or leaving.

In CCSS, teachers new to the profession and those new to the system are assigned a school level mentor and also receive support from one of two system-wide mentors. Each of the new teachers who participated in a semi-structured interview spoke about both the school and system-level mentors. Although most of these references concerning the system-wide mentors were positive, four of the six teachers who had one or fewer

years with the system discussed a negative or nearly non-existent relationship with their school mentor. This was noted by each as contributing to their decision to leave the system at the end of the year. In Jennifer's case, not only was her mentor not helpful to her, she believed that this mentor was providing the school principal with negative information about her. Jennifer stated:

> I did not get along with my mentor at the school. It was pretty obvious from the beginning that she did not like me. I firmly believe that she went to the principal complaining about me and that is where most of my problems started. Information I had said in confidence in prior conversations with my mentor was apparently taken to her [the principal] because she brought it up and the only way she could have known was talking to my mentor. The principal started sending my mentor in to observe me and her comments were so negative about everything. I asked to switch mentors at one point but was told that would not happen. I could not trust her. If I had had a different mentor, I think my year would have started differently, and then, maybe ended very differently as well. She made things more difficult, not easier for me.

Ivy also reported that she and her mentor did not get along and that she felt like a burden to her mentor. Her mentor was much older than she was and Ivy did not believe her mentor understood her or the struggles she was having. Ivy stated, "Every time I went to her she told me how I should do things but she was very old-school, very traditional and that did not work for me." Ivy said her mentor scolded her once in a similar manner as she did her students because Ivy did not take her suggestion. After that, Ivy stopped

going to her mentor for support but then felt like she did not have anyone to turn to for help.

Sue and Meredith had less negative interactions with their mentors but both believed they were promised something as new teachers that they did not receive. Both said that part of their decision to come to CCSS was the strong mentoring program they were told the system had in place. Neither felt they received much, if any, support from their mentor at the school level. When asked about her mentor, Meredith said:

> One of my team members was assigned as my mentor but she was not as much support as I thought she would be. She would basically tell me where to find things and where to put things which was useful because you need little things like that but as far as advice or guidance there was none of that. She did not teach the same subject that I did so that was probably part of it. Plus, she was as overwhelmed as everyone else so she didn't really have time for me and I hated to keep asking her things because I could tell it stressed her out more. It was disappointing though as I knew when I took the job I was going to need some help.

The other two teachers new to the system, Clay and Marta, spoke positively of the support they received from their mentors and how much they depended on this relationship to get through the year. Clay openly admitted that he would not have stayed through the year if not for his mentor. They formed a close relationship and his mentor gave him tremendous support even meeting him at his house to help with lesson planning, grading, and other paperwork. At one point, Clay told his mentor he did not think he would make it through the year. His mentor convinced him to stay. Clay

reported that the only reason he stayed through the year was because he did not want to let his mentor down.

As with Clay, Marta had a similar, positive relationship with her mentor and commented that without her mentor her year would have been much worse. "I could not imagine what my year would have been like without [her mentor], my mentor. She was my ray of hope, my support, and my cheerleader." When Marta found out that her mentor was leaving at the end of the year because her husband had been transferred, Marta also made the final decision to leave. She was not sure whether she would have stayed if her mentor had, but she knew she would not stay without her.

The school system also provides system-wide mentors for teachers new to the profession or new to the system. System-wide mentors do not have any teaching duties so they are able to spend all their time in the role of mentor as opposed to the school mentors who also have full teaching loads. Each of the six new teachers mentioned the positive relationship they had with their system-wide mentor. Jennifer, Clay, and Marta all noted that without this support they may not have made it through the school year. In Jennifer's situation, the system mentor became her advocate and helped her to get the attention and support of central office administrators when she began having problems with her school principal. With her system-wide mentor's help, Jennifer was able to have a central office administrator present at all meetings with the school principal. Teacher advocates were another type of support teachers stated could have helped to retain them in CCSS.

Teacher Advocates

A number of interviewees said that a teacher advocate could have helped to keep them from moving or leaving at the end of the school year. These teachers spoke about the need to have someone on their side and to have a person who could take their concerns to a higher level, typically central office. Some teachers sought assistance from the local educators association but chose not to pursue this as a solution to their problems. Each felt it would make the situation more adversarial. With the help of the association, Sara had collected significant amounts of documentation before deciding to drop the case:

> I talked to [the educator's association] when I felt like the school system was harassing me and accusing me of things I did not do. They wanted me to be totally proactive and write all this stuff up so their lawyers could get very involved. I spent hours documenting all this stuff, you know, the injustices that I felt the school system did toward me but then I just got tired of it. I did not want a big fight. I just wanted to be left alone and I wanted an apology. The association's lawyers weren't going to get that for me and that was most important to me. What I wanted more than a fight was someone to go to bat for me. I wanted someone who could be with me when central office came to talk to me. One time, my principal said she would come to the meeting with me and it made a difference. They were not as ugly to me then. Teachers need someone who can advocate for them in these situations, not lawyers, but advocates.

Six other teachers also recommended teacher advocates as a means of decreasing teacher attrition in the system. Lana expressed her desire for a teacher advocate when I asked her what could have kept her from moving to another system, "An advocate may have helped me keep from leaving the system. I wanted an advocate sitting in the meetings with the principal with me." When asked what could have kept her from leaving the profession, Mary also stated that having some type of advocate for teachers may have made a difference. She talked about a system of communication that her school had used in the past prior to her new principal. Various teachers would lead groups once a month. The purpose of the groups was to share about what was and what was not going well and what needed to change. Each group leader then took the anonymous information back to the school leadership team. The leadership team would then work to improve what was not working well. According to Mary, when a new principal came to the school, she stopped these groups after her first year. Without these groups Mary felt teachers did not have an avenue to express their frustrations or a means to advocate for themselves.

Clay, Iris, Rosa, and Ari also expressed the need for a teacher advocate that could act on teachers' behalves when they had disagreements or altercations with administration. Iris stated:

> I loved teaching, but when I started having problems with my principal, I had no one to turn to. There was no one there to intercede. It was me against the principal and the principal controls everything so I knew who would win. I cut my losses and left instead.

Summary

The data collected indicated that teachers made the decision to move from or leave CCSS for a variety of reasons. The most compelling and consistent reason noted by both movers and leavers was a lack of administrative support from their school level administrators, primarily the school principal. The lack of support was defined by interviewees through a number of administrative factors including: administrator visibility, communication, school climate, student discipline, time and workload, and harassment from administrators. Teachers who moved or left also noted concerns with an abundance of new initiatives. This contributed to their issues with a lack of time to commit to their classrooms and the need to consistently take work home in the evenings and on weekends. Others who moved or left did so to pursue other opportunities. Some of these individuals did point to the difficulties of pursuing other career paths within such a small system.

The biggest difference between movers and leavers was that movers maintained hope that things would be better in another system. Most movers had previous positive experiences so they knew they could find a better situation if they were not happy where they were. Conversely, many leavers did not believe things would improve in a new situation. They were much more negative about the teaching profession in general and believed they would have the same problems wherever they went.

Study participants reported three factors that could have kept them from leaving or moving. The first of these was better working conditions including issues of time, empowerment, and leadership. Greater collegiality with co-workers was the second item noted. The final factor was increased support through mentors and teacher advocates.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the reasons why teachers choose to leave the profession (leavers) or move to another school (movers) from one year to the next. A qualitative case study was conducted to explore the reasons teachers from one urban-suburban school system voluntarily resigned at the end of one school year and what changes could have been made to keep these teachers from leaving. The study answered three research questions:

1. What are the reasons movers leave their current school or system? What are the reasons leavers exit the teaching profession? What are the similarities and differences between the reasons given by movers and leavers?
2. Why do movers move rather than leave? Why do leavers leave rather than move?
3. What do movers report could have been done to keep them in their current position? What do leavers report could have been done to keep them in the teaching profession? What are the similarities and differences between the reasons given by movers and leavers?

Interpretation of Findings

The results of this study indicate that the school principal is one of the most persuasive factors in a teacher's decision to move or leave. The majority of teachers in the study stated that they made the decision to move or leave because they did not feel

they were supported by school administration. Both movers and leavers mentioned a number of issues that factored into their decisions to leave such as time, workload, communication, school climate, student discipline, and new initiatives but with each of these, interviewees noted that the issues were made worse by the lack of school level administrative support. The association between teacher attrition and administrative support in this study confirms the findings of other studies that examined the role of school principals in teachers' decisions to move or leave (Ingersoll & Alsalam, 1997; Ingersoll, 2001b; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Luekens et al., 2004; Shen, 1997). What is most significant about the results of this study in relation to administrative support is how teachers' perceptions of their principals' level of support relates to other working conditions such as time and empowerment and how much more essential this support is than other factors such as collegiality, salary, and school and student characteristics.

Although recent studies have investigated the impact of working conditions on teacher attrition, few have established a strong link between administrative support and teachers' perceptions of the conditions within which they work (Futernick, 2007; Hirsch et al., 2007; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005; Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990). In his work, Futernick (2007) discusses bureaucratic impediments such as too much paperwork and too many meetings that were cited by teachers as reasons for leaving and he recommends that school leaders focus on providing high-quality teaching and learning conditions. Although Futernick acknowledges the need for principals to create more positive working environments, he does not specifically associate the two. He does not implicate school principals for the existence of poor working conditions. Instead, he places the blame for negative working conditions on state and district bureaucracies. This differs from the

results of my study. Teachers in my study acknowledged bureaucratic impediments at the district, state, and national level but strongly believed that the role of the school principal was to protect them from these obstacles. When teachers felt a lack of support, they also indicated problems with other working conditions, especially time and empowerment. This finding aligns with the results of a study on workplace conditions and teacher commitment conducted by Rosenholtz and Simpson (1990).

Rosenholtz and Simpson (1990) investigated the role of "principal buffering" on teachers' perceptions of workplace conditions and their commitments to their jobs. The researchers defined "principal buffering" as protecting teachers from non-instructional activities such as classroom interruptions and managerial tasks. This is similar to how teachers in this study defined administrative support. As with my study, greater levels of "principal buffering" or support were associated with more positive perceptions of teacher autonomy and discretion over their work which was associated with higher levels of commitment by teachers to their jobs.

The lack of administrative support and negative perceptions of working conditions were found to be stronger determinants in this study than factors other researchers found previously such as collegiality, salary, and school and student characteristics. The lack of support from school principals in my study superseded one of the main factors teachers cited for staying in Futerick's (2007) study, collegial support. Study participants often referenced the strong relationships they had with other staff members. Although they indicated that these relationships made it more difficult to leave, without support from the school principal, strong collegiality was not enough to keep teachers from moving or leaving. The results indicate that although collegial

support and strong relationships with others are important to teachers, if they do not also have that support from the school administrators, it increases the likelihood that they will leave.

Many previous studies also have found a correlation between low salaries and higher rates of teacher attrition (Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, et al., 1997; Brewer, 1996; Grissmer & Kirby, 1992; Gritz & Theobald, 1996; Hanushek et al., 2004; Imazeki, 2005; Ingersoll, 2001b; Ingersoll & Alsalam, 1997; Kirby et al., 1999; Krieg, 2006, Lankford et al., 2002; Liu & Ramsey, 2008; Mont & Rees, 1996; Murnane & Olsen, 1990; Murnane et al., 1989; Murnane et al., 1991; Rumberger, 1987; Stinebrickner, 1998; Theobald, 1990; Weiss, 1999). The results of this case study found that salary was not a factor in teachers' decisions to move or leave. CCSS is one of the highest paying school systems in the area and has often relied on its pay scale as a means to attract and retain teachers. Although a number of study participants stated that the high salary did attract them to CCSS, most were willing to take a reduction in pay--significant for some--in order to find a teaching position in a school where they felt supported and where working conditions were improved. This finding supports that of Ingersoll and Alsalam (1997) and Futernick (2007) who found that other factors were more important to teachers than salary.

Ingersoll and Alsalam (1997) determined that the level of teacher autonomy and support for new teachers had a greater impact on teachers' decisions to stay, move, or leave than did salary. Similarly, Futernick (2007) found that teachers are not as concerned with compensation as they are with the variables that create their work environment. In addition, he found that poor working conditions actually impact

teachers' perceptions of their salary. When working conditions were poor, teachers saw their salary as inadequate; but when teachers where satisfied with the learning and teaching environment they were also satisfied with their compensation.

Previous studies on teacher attrition have also found correlations between the percentage of minority and poverty students and the rate of teacher attrition (Hanushek et al., 2004; Ingersoll, 2001b; Johnson and Birkeland, 2003; Lankford et al., 2002). These researchers found that teachers tended to leave schools with high percentages of minority and poverty students to teach in more affluent, white schools. The assumption made by many of these researchers is that teachers leave these schools to teach in schools that are more similar to those they attended. In this study, I did not find that the demographics of the student population had an effect on teachers' decisions to move or leave. Many of the teachers chose the school system because of the diverse student population and mentioned that they were saddened by the thought of leaving students they taught in the system. In fact, some of these teachers intentionally sought positions in schools with high minority and poverty percentages after leaving CCSS. This indicates that hiring supportive principals who positively impact the working conditions of schools could increase the retention rate of teachers in even the most challenging schools.

Another critical finding from this study is how important it is that teachers new to the profession have positive experiences in environments where they feel supported. Most of the teachers in this study who decided to leave the profession were those new to teaching. Since many of these teachers had negative first experiences, they believed that their concerns were indicative of the profession and were less hopeful that their situation would be considerably different in another school. Leavers typically had less hope than

movers that things would be better elsewhere. This was particularly true for those in their first years of teaching. This is significant because typically vacant teaching positions are filled with teachers new to the profession. If a school suffers from a high rate of attrition, it will most likely have a greater number of new teachers each year. If poor administrative support and working conditions are contributing to the attrition rates in these schools, these new teachers are more likely to have negative first experiences and could be more likely to leave the profession. Not only can the profession not afford this loss of teachers, it also a betrayal to those who have long dreamed to teach.

The results of this study are significant for a number of reasons. First, the factor identified as being most influential in teachers' decisions to leave their current position--support from the school principal--has not been investigated to a great extent. Much of the earlier research into teacher attrition focused on characteristics specific to teachers (gender, age, experience, ethnicity, and subject area), students (ethnicity, achievement, motivation, and poverty level) and schools (setting, size, and level). Only recently have researchers begun to examine the role of the school principal and the conditions within which teachers are expected to work. These are both areas in need of additional research if school systems are going to decrease the rate of teacher attrition in their schools.

Implications

A significant implication of this study is the crucial need for school districts to investigate means of increasing administrative support and improving teaching conditions. Teaching conditions include leadership, time, empowerment, professional learning, and resources and facilities. The results of this study indicate that leadership is a crucial element of teaching conditions as it can have the most influence on the

remaining domains. The training, supervision, and evaluation of principals need to include how they positively and negatively affect these conditions. Most specific to this study is how administrative support influences teachers' levels of empowerment and autonomy and how teachers' time is utilized.

The first step to improving teaching conditions is to evaluate the current conditions in each school. A few states have created school staff surveys that measure satisfaction of the five teaching condition domains: leadership, time, empowerment, professional learning, and resources and facilities. The results of these surveys should be shared with school principals and other staff members. Schools should then implement a plan of action for improving any conditions that are rated as a concern. The results of these surveys should also be used to plan professional development in areas of needed improvement for school principals especially if improvements need to be made in the areas of leadership, time, or empowerment. This process will help to raise principals' awareness of their influence on teaching conditions and teacher attrition rates.

It is also critical that principals be expected to be more supportive of teachers. This includes being visible and available to staff. Being visible increases interactions and both formal and informal conversations between staff and administrators allowing both parties to build relationships and increase understandings of each other. Principals need to know who their teachers are not only as professionals but also as individuals. Principals who gain a greater understanding of who their staff members are can use this information when interacting with them. If a principal knows a staff member is going through a difficult period, this will help the principal know how to approach this person respectfully if a concern arises that affects the teacher's performance.

Encouraging staff interactions may also serve to improve relationships with colleagues which were noted as being very important to study participants. Having close, personal ties to others and a positive school climate create environments where people enjoy each other, feel cared for, and feel comfortable. Principals can encourage staff interactions and relationships by modeling this behavior, making time for team building activities, encouraging socialization, and celebrating successes. Study participants noted that some principals relied heavily on email for communication. These teachers preferred more face-to-face communication from their school principals. Regular staff meetings are one way principals can open lines of communication and increase personal interactions with staff members.

Increasing visibility, open communication, and more personal interactions can also lead to greater teacher empowerment and autonomy. Both have been linked to increased teacher retention (Ingersoll, 2001b; Ingersoll & Alsalam, 1997; Luekens et al., 2004; Pearson and Moomaw, 2005; Shen, 1997). Improvements in both could be made with additional training for principals on teacher empowerment, autonomy, and shared leadership. Teachers need to be encouraged and allowed to play a greater role in the decisions that are made that influence the work they do. They often know better than others in the school the needs of their students and what hinders and advances the achievement of their students (Blase & Kirby, 1999). When teachers are empowered and encouraged to express their opinions, they tend to take greater responsibility for the decisions and the school organization (Marks & Louis, 1999).

Another significant area of concern expressed by teachers in this study was the amount of time they were expected to expend beyond the school day due to loss of

planning, the amount of paperwork, and the demands of new initiatives. Seeking teacher input into decisions that affect their time will help to improve teaching conditions and, ideally, decrease the amount of extra time teachers are expected to commit to their jobs. Teachers are more likely to implement decisions and initiatives that they have been involved in making (Marks & Louis, 1999).

Another important implication of this study is the impact of salary on teachers' decisions. CCSS has long sought to remain competitive with other systems with regard to teacher salaries. Currently, CCSS is one of the highest paying systems in the area yet all but one of the teachers who moved to another system or to a private school in this study are receiving lower salaries, and in several cases the differences are significant. None of the teachers felt compelled to remain in CCSS because of the salary and none of the teachers mentioned an increased salary as something that could have encouraged them to stay. Although a greater salary may attract more teachers to a system, this study raises questions about whether or not it is enough to keep teachers who are considering leaving because they are dissatisfied with their working conditions. System funds may be better spent on improving teaching conditions through better administrator preparation and training than on increasing teacher salaries.

The school system also invests a significant amount of funds in its mentoring program. In addition to school mentors, typically other teachers in the school who are assigned to new teachers, the system also retains two system-wide mentors. The system-wide mentors do not have other teaching duties so they are able to spend all their time working with teachers new to the profession and new to the system. System funds are used to pay stipends to school mentors and to pay salary and benefits for the two system

mentors. Some teachers in the study spoke highly of the support and guidance they received from both mentors but for others the mentoring program did not meet their expectations and left them feeling unsupported. In order for new teachers to reap the benefits of a mentoring program, the program needs to be well developed, mentors need to receive training, and expectations for support need to be communicated and monitored.

An additional system of support that could be developed to decrease teacher turnover is that of teacher advocates. Three teachers in the study reported that they were victims of harassment by school or system administrators. Only one of these three was able to acquire some advocacy from a central office employee who agreed to attend meetings with her and act as a mediator between the teacher and the administrator. Several teachers recommended that the system have teacher advocates in place for teachers if they are having problems with school or system administrators. The teachers in this study would have preferred the support of an advocate instead of involving the local teachers association. Although teachers may have been dissatisfied with the way they were treated, the level of administrative support they received, or the climate of the school, they spoke of not wanting to get anyone in trouble by involving the local teachers association or their lawyers. They would have preferred to have a person who could mediate and act as a buffer between the administration and themselves.

Teacher advocates could also assist in communicating directly with central office administrators about problems that are pervasive in certain schools. In both the exit and semi-structured interviews, teachers expressed frustration that they did not believe administrators at central office knew or cared about what was happening in their schools. At some schools, where there was reported to be a good deal of conflict between

administrators and staff, interview participants found it hard to believe that no one at central office knew about the problems they were having. This lack of communication led to the assumptions that no one cared enough to do anything about their situation. If the school system had teacher advocates in place who could communicate between teachers and central office personnel concerning problems at their schools, central office administrators could intervene early and provide guidance and feedback to the school principal. A number of teachers who participated in the semi-structured interviews had made the decision to leave or move early in the school year. It is possible that if there had been some intervention between these teachers and the administrators they were in conflict with, these teachers may have stayed. Instead, believing that no one cared and things would not change, they made the decision to leave.

The small size of the system attracted a number of the study participants to CCSS but for some teachers the size of the system was a problem. Since the system has only one sixth grade academy, one middle school, and one high school, teachers at these levels who felt they could no longer remain at their school had few options other than moving out of the system. Some of the teachers from the middle and high school levels indicated they would have preferred to stay in the system but there were no other alternatives within the system. If a high school or middle school teacher wants another opportunity at a different school they have no options in CCSS since there is only one high school and one middle school. In these cases, the school system's small size was a deterrent to teacher retention.

The small size of the system also was a factor for two teachers who were interested in moving into administration. Because the system has so few schools and the

turnover of administrators is minimal, these two teachers decided to move to a larger system where they believed they could increase their chances of moving into administration. One solution to this would be for CCSS to create career ladders for teachers interested in moving into administration. If teachers expressed an interest in administration, the system could have a process in place to offer these teachers an internship, some specific school level leadership duties, or enroll them in a system-created leadership course. Perhaps if these teachers knew that the system was interested in providing them opportunities for training and implementation of their leadership skills, they may have been more apt to remain with the system.

Another implication of this study is the importance of collecting data on teachers who leave the system at the end of the year. Teachers who move or leave should be given the opportunity to anonymously report information and concerns about their school, the system, and their reasons for leaving. Those who would like to follow up the anonymous report with an exit interview could also be given the opportunity to do so. If certain schools have unusually high rates of teacher attrition or are consistently losing teachers each year, the system should conduct in-depth interviews of individuals who are leaving or have left in order to get a comprehensive picture of the reasons for their decisions. School systems must be willing to ask the questions, truly listen to the responses, and implement actions where necessary in order to improve conditions for teachers. School systems cannot watch idly as teachers stream out of their systems. Allowing problems to persist that cause teachers to contemplate whether to stay or leave and allowing conditions to exist that put students in a position of having new teachers year after year is irresponsible and neglectful.

Suggestions for Further Research

The results of this study pose many additional questions. This study was completed in one school district from one state but this study could just as well have been conducted in districts throughout the United States that contend with the effects of teacher attrition. How would the results of this study compare to the findings if this study was completed in a system similar in size and student demographics? Would systems that are significantly different from CCSS in size, geographic location, and the student demographics produce significantly different results; or are teaching conditions within systems more consistent than other factors such as size, location, and student populations? Are the reasons teachers move or leave public school systems similar to the reasons teachers give for leaving private schools? In addition to completing similar studies in different systems, there are other areas of study that this one uncovers. Therefore, further research is recommended in areas listed below.

1. This study included participants who left the system either because they exited the profession or they moved to another system. It did not include teachers who transferred from one school to another within the system. Teacher transfers within system could be predictors of problems in the schools they transfer from. In-system transfers create the same issues for the schools that teachers leave as do those who leave the system. Do teachers transfer between schools within a system for the same reasons teachers transfer to other systems or for the same reasons they leave the profession? What do they perceive as being the benefits of transferring from one school to another in the same system?

2. Additional research is also needed to further investigate the role of school principals on teacher retention and attrition rates. How do different principals interpret their roles in the school, specifically, their role in retaining teachers? Are there factors in certain schools that hinder principals' abilities to be more supportive of teachers? Are their specific interventions or training opportunities that can increase the support provided by principals to teachers?
4. In this study, teacher perceptions of their working conditions played a significant role in their decisions to move or leave. More research is needed to gain insights into the relationship between teaching conditions and teacher attrition rates. Are there correlations between the results of teaching condition surveys similar to the one used in North Carolina and rates of teacher retention and attrition? Are there certain domains that correlate more closely to rates of teacher attrition than others? How do the results of teacher working conditions surveys affect the conditions within schools over time?
5. Teachers in this study did not specifically correlate NCLB with their reasons for move or leaving, yet many of their reasons can be associated with negative consequences of the act. These include a narrowing of the curriculum, continually changing educational programs, increased teacher stress and lower staff morale (Rentner, et al., 2006), lack of planning time, and decreased time for instruction (Hamilton, et al., 2007). More research should be conducted on the impact of NCLB on teacher attrition, the role of the school principal, and the work of teachers. Has NCLB had an impact on the ability of

principals to support teachers? Has NCLB changed the amounts and types of work teachers and principals are required to do?

4. In addition to knowing why teachers move or leave, it would be beneficial to know why certain teachers stay. This would be especially critical in schools that suffer from high rates of teacher attrition. What factors keep these teachers from leaving? Do these teachers view their schools and their principals in ways similar to those who leave the school?
5. For some teachers in this study, this was not the first time they had moved to a new system or left the profession. Studies should be conducted that collect longitudinal data on the movement of teachers. Why do some teachers remain at certain schools for many years--some for their entire careers? Do movers eventually become leavers? Do leavers return and if they do, why?

Conclusion

I saw myself 20 years ago in many of the stories the participants of this study told about their decisions to move or leave. I identified with their difficulties in making the decision and empathized with the range of emotions they felt. What continued to echo in my own mind as I listened to the many personal stories was how reprehensible some of the situations are that teachers endure. For many of the teachers in the study, they had dreamed of teaching since they were young. To allow others to spoil this dream is unconscionable. School systems must actively investigate the reasons teachers leave and take immediate action to rectify conditions that exist that compel teachers to make decisions to move or leave. Allowing these conditions to exist not only distresses teachers it

also negatively affects the education of the students in the schools. When students are exposed to new teachers year after year or attend schools with conditions that cause teachers to leave, it can be detrimental to their achievement and lessen their opportunities in life.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A
EMPLOYEE EXIT QUESTIONNAIRE

CENTRAL CITY SCHOOL SYSTEM

As an employee leaving our system, you can be a valuable source of information regarding various working conditions observed during your period of employment. We hope that you will be candid with your answers to the attached questions so we may gain from your experience.

Please be assured that your questionnaire will be anonymous and your comments will in no way affect your re-employment possibilities.

We are striving to maintain a positive work environment and hope that your suggestions, comments, and observations will aid us in accomplishing this goal.

We have set aside an area for your comments regarding specific questions.

---

1. Was your **primary decision** to leave Central City School System influenced by any of the following? Please check one or more appropriate responses.

_____ Retirement

_____ Accepted Position with Other School System

_____ Family

_____ Reduction in Force

_____ Advanced Study

_____ Failure to Meet Certification/HiQ Requirements

_____ Non-renewal of Contract

_____ Career Change/Leaving Profession

_____ Medical/Health Concerns

_____ Resignation

Comments/Other Reasons: _____

_____

_____

2. Was your **secondary decision** to leave Central City School System influenced by any of the following? Please check one or more appropriate responses.

_____ Salary

_____ Benefits

_____ Workload

_____ School Climate

_____ Burnout

_____ Travel/Work Closer to Home

_____ Moving from Area

_____ Lack of Parental Support/Student Discipline

_____ Lack of Administrative Support

_____ Maternity/Paternity-Raising Children

Comments/Other Reasons: _____

_____

_____

3. Please check the length of service in your most recent position with Central City School System.

_____ Less than 1 year

_____ 1-3 years

_____ 4-7 years

_____ 8-12 years

_____ 13-18 years

_____ 19+ years

4. Please check the job category of your most recent position with the Central City School System.

_____ Certified Teacher

_____ Paraprofessional

_____ Custodian

_____ Bus Driver/Monitor

_____ Technical Assistant/Specialist

_____ Maintenance/Grounds

_____ Administrator

_____ Secretary/Bookkeeper/Clerk

_____ Skilled Trades

_____ Food Service

_____ Skilled Trades

_____ Other (please list)_____

5. Would you recommend Central City School System as an employer to other persons in your field?

_____ Yes _____ No _____ Undecided

Comments/Other Reasons: _____

_____

_____

6. What practices, benefits or strengths do you attribute to Central City School System?

_____

_____

_____

7. Would you consider employment with Central City School System again?

_____ Yes _____ No _____ Undecided

Comments_____

_____

_____

8. Do you have any suggestions to make Central City School System a better place in which to work?

_____

_____

_____

Please use the self-addressed, stamped envelope to return your response. Thank you for your participation in this optional anonymous employee exit interview questionnaire.

APPENDIX B
EXIT INTERVIEW

CENTRAL CITY SCHOOL SYSTEM
Certified Staff Exit Interview

SCHOOL	
POSITION	
YEARS of EXPERIENCE	
GENDER	
Reside in what county?	
Leaving during contract year?	
Date of EXIT Interview	
Interviewer	

Indicate the reasons you are leaving the Central City School System (Circle all that apply)		
1. Relocating	5. Health reasons/Illness	9. Student discipline
2. Trying another career	6. Raising a family/ Maternity	10. Better teaching opportunity
3. Returning to school	7. Lack of administrative support	8. Promotion (Assistant Principal/Principal)
4. Lengthy commute	8. Lack of Parental support	12. Higher salary/Better benefits
Comments:		

System-Level Services	**4 Excellent**	**3 Good**	**2 Fair**	**1 Poor**
New teacher orientation to the school system				
Training and staff development opportunities				
Communication within system				
Salary				
Benefits				
Comments:				

Last school in which you worked	**4 Excellent**	**3 Good**	**2 Fair**	**1 Poor**	**No Opinion**
Initial orientation to your school					
Received adequate support and guidance to perform my duties and responsibilities					
Physical condition of classroom					
Student behavior					
Teaching schedule was reasonable					
Interruptions were minimized during instructional time					
Workload was manageable					
Evaluation procedures and feedback (GTEP) were clear and fair					
Grading system was appropriate					
School climate was positive					
Comments:					

Administrative practices at the school in which you worked **The Administrative Team:**	**4 Excellent**	**3 Good**	**2 Fair**	**1 Poor**	**No Opinion**
Supported me in my job					
Modeled positive behaviors					
Treated staff professionally					
Fostered high morale among staff					
Was accessible to staff					
Managed student discipline					
Was organized					
Communicated expectations					
Provided guidance and direction					
Gave staff opportunities to voice opinions/concerns					
Was receptive to staff opinions/concerns					
Attended school meetings and events					
Comments:					

Indicate the degree to which the following modifications could influence you to <u>return</u> to Central City Schools	**4 Highly Influential**	**3 Influential**	**2 Neutral**	**1 Little/No Influence**
Focus on fewer instructional initiatives at a time				
Smaller classes				
Less paperwork				
More supplies				
Better facilities				
More planning time				
More support from parents				
More support from school-based administrators				
Moe recognition for dedication, effectiveness, and commitment to the profession				
Higher pay				
Better benefits				
Comments:				

Other information		
Where did you complete your undergraduate degree? Graduate degree?		
	Yes	**No**
Did the Central City Schools meet your expectations as a staff member?		
Did you college/university properly prepare you for the position you held?		
If not, what was missing from your college/university preparation program?		
List two things about your job you really liked 1. 2.		
List two ways in which your job situation could have been improved 1. 2.		

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me your story about becoming a teacher.

2. What initially attracted you to the Central City School System?

3. What did you find to be positive or valuable in your position? What did you find to be positive or valuable in your school?

4. How did you decide to move/leave CCSS at the end of the 2006-07 school year?

5. Tell me about the process you went through in making your decision. When did you begin thinking about leaving? Was there a specific incident that initiated your move/exit? What factors contributed to your decision? Were some factors more important than others?

6. a) What factors led you to decide to leave the profession rather than move to another position?

   or

   b) What factors led you to decide to move to another position rather than leave the profession?

7. Did you receive any induction or mentoring when you first began teaching? How would you evaluate the induction program? How would you evaluate the mentoring you received?

8. What changes could the system have made to keep you from moving/leaving? What changes could your school have made to keep you from moving/leaving?

9. What changes/factors could entice you to return to CCSS in the future?

10. What would you be able to recommend to others about CCSS? What factors would keep you from recommending CCSS to others?

11. What would you be able to recommend to others about the teaching profession? What factors would keep you from recommending CCSS to others?